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## Eyewitness Report

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# The Tragedy Seen From Within Iraq

by Our Special Correspondent

A visit to the region by an *EIR* special correspondent gave useful firsthand experience of the situation inside and around Iraq. In discussions with members of Iraqi political factions and other citizens, one discovers the agonizing process which the Iraqi people went through before, during, and after the invasion of Iraq by the U.S.-British led coalition. However, the worst is not over yet. The plans of the U.S.-British occupation's Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and its "Imperial Proconsul" Paul Bremer, will further lead living conditions of the Iraqi population and the political situation into the current little "dark age."

One could simultaneously see the great desire and also despair for a change in U.S. and international policy, in order to rid this tormented nation and region from the scourge of war and destruction.

For a large part of the Iraqi population, especially in southern Iraq and the Kurdish region, who considered themselves as victims of Saddam Hussein's regime, the fall of that regime came as some sort of relief. This, in spite of the fact that there is a unanimous rejection of the occupation of Iraq by the U.S.-British coalition. Iraqis point to the irony that the most fierce resistance to the invasion of Iraq in March-April took place in the Shi'ite part of Iraq in the south, an area which was known for its total opposition to Saddam Hussein's regime. At the same time, Saddam's most loyal forces, such as the Republican Guard and Special Forces, fled the battlefield and totally left the capital Baghdad unguarded, to be taken without fighting by the U.S. troops. All cities and towns in the region north and northwest of Baghdad, which is the tribal support base for Saddam Hussein, surrendered without any fighting. After the fall of Saddam's regime and the end of the major military operations, this region was reactivated to become the center of armed operations against the U.S. occupation forces, while the South is showing much restraint and calm.

The Shi'ite population in most parts of the capital and in all southern Iraq has become organized around the religious institutions represented by different personalities in the religious school of al-Najaf, rather than around political parties. Even the most active political force, the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), was organized on a religious basis under the leadership of Mohammed Baqir al-Hakim, who was killed in a car bombing in late August, and now his brother Abdul Aziz. Both belong to the Najafi family

of religious scholar al-Hakim. The Islamic Daawa Party is also a Shi'ite political movement. Both of these forces are represented in the U.S./British-chosen Iraqi Governing Council (IGC). The SCIRI and other Iraqi Shi'ite groups, who refused to back the war against Iraq, chose to participate in the political process under the occupation, with the idea that they should take advantage of the political vacuum created after the fall of the Saddam regime. The leaders, including al-Hakim, stated from the beginning that they rejected the idea of the U.S. occupation of Iraq, but would give the U.S. and British governments a chance to make good on their promises: bringing democracy, allowing the election of an independent government, and starting the process of genuine reconstruction.

Of course, people in Iraq are realizing that this is not really the intention of the U.S. Administration. Therefore, the situation in southern Iraq is a ticking bomb, ready for a repeat of the 1920 armed revolt against the British, who reneged on their promises of granting independence for Iraq after World War I. The Shi'ite scholars in al-Najaf played a major role in that uprising, which was coordinated with the Kurdish population in the north. In that revolt, Kurdish villages were bombed with chemical weapons for the first time by the British Royal Air Force, using mustard gas.

## Lawlessness Remains

The current armed attacks against the U.S. troops in Baghdad itself, and to the west of the capital (Falluja and Ramadi) and north (al-Khalis, Baquba, Beiji, and Tikrit—the home city of Saddam) are reportedly being carried out by members and supporters of the former regime, but also by clans inhabiting these areas. These clans are concerned that they would be subjected to actions of revenge and ethnic cleansing if they laid down their weapons and showed signs of weakness. Indeed, there have been calls for such "cleansing" action, including by Ahmed Chalabi, the puppet of the U.S. neo-conservatives and member of the IGC, who recently represented Iraq in the United Nations General Assembly meetings (see below).

This resistance is increasing in intensity and efficiency. It is well financed and heavily equipped. New techniques are being introduced into the operations, such as car bombs and remote-controlled mines and traps. Iraqis state that these techniques are not indigenous, but were introduced into the country after the fall of the former regime. The faulty U.S. policies after the war, and the demolishing of all signs of order and sovereignty (such as the discharge of all 400,000 Iraqi Army personnel, police, and security staff upon orders from CPA head Paul Bremer) turned Iraq into an open field for all kinds of terrorist groups and extremist movements. Even drugs originating from U.S.-occupied Afghanistan found their way—for the first time in modern history—into the country, which has lost all control over its borders.

The state of lawlessness and rampant criminality, although not being reported by international media as

## Repeat of 1920 Iraqi Revolt?

With the Oct. 9-10 breakout of clashes between U.S. troops and Shi'ite residents of the Al-Sadr City in Baghdad, the 1920 Iraqi revolt against the British occupation forces came back to mind. Then, as now, Shi'ite religious scholars led the revolt after a long period of self-restraint. Then, the British were dragging their feet on granting the Iraqi people full independence.

The British army was mobilized to invade Iraq in late 1917, following a previous attempt by the British India army, which was crushed in 1915-16 in the city of Kut Al-Amara in southern Iraq. A British army under the leadership of Major-General Stanley Maud captured Baghdad on March 11, 1917. Then, as now, the invaders proclaimed that they came to Iraq to "liberate" the Iraqi people—from Ottoman imperial tyranny—and promised independence and the right to choose a sovereign government as soon as the war was over. Of course that was not the intention of the British Empire. The secretly-drawn Sykes-Picot agreement with the French, dividing Ottoman spoils, played the role of today's neo-conservatives' "Clean Break" plan for redrawing the map of the Middle East.

The Iraqi resistance was initially a passive one, whereby they attempted to persuade the British to fulfill their promises. When British Consul in Iraq Arnold Wilson and his assistant, Arab Bureau agent Gertrude Bell, per-

sisted in their rejection of Iraqi demands and required "direct rule," active armed attacks started against British army posts, first in October 1919 in the Kurdish area in northern Iraq. In the South, where the population and the tribes rallied around the religious leadership of the Hawza in Karbala and Al-Najaf, they were met with violence and arrests, and the exile of leading tribal and religious leaders. The exiles included the son of highest religious personality in Karbala, Sheikh Mohammed Taqi Al-Shirazi, who emerged as the political leader during the revolt. Al-Shirazi issued a *fatwa*, or religious decree, prohibiting Iraqis from any cooperation with the British occupation, while still demanding restraint.

In July, the protests turned into a full-fledged armed revolt in many parts of Iraq. The British army used all the brutal force it had available, including using chemical weapons (mustard gas bombs) against Kurdish villages. The revolt was not fully put down before October 1920. The British reportedly suffered 2,000 casualties, including 450 dead. It was estimated that more than 15,000 Iraqis were killed.

This revolt forced the British to modify their plans from direct colonial rule, to establishing an Iraqi government under a British mandate. Although the revolt did not achieve all its objectives for a true independence, it became a reference point in the modern history of Iraq, which Iraqis proudly teach in their schools. If the lessons of this history are not learned quickly by the Bush Administration, a repeat of that revolt could become inevitable.

frequently as in the immediate aftermath of the military operations, has not diminished at all. The lack of adequate police forces has turned the 5-million-inhabitant city of Baghdad into a ghost town by night. Robbery, kidnapping, assassinations, and revenge actions have become familiar incidents in the country. Even in broad daylight, such acts take place. People resort to tribal arbitration to solve disputes and legal affairs, including serious matters related to murder and rape. The tribe and the religious institution have become the resort for security and justice, rather than the law and its institutions.

The stubborn refusal by the occupation authorities headed by Bremer to transfer powers to the Iraqis, in order to establish the rule of law; or to reconstruct the mechanisms of a functioning justice system, by allocating more resources and recruiting and financing enough police and security forces; has made the situation even more difficult and frustrating. Even such demands by the members of the IGC, who work under the control of Bremer himself, are being rejected. This adds to the suspicions of the Iraqi people about the real intentions of the Occupation.

## There Is Nothing Left To Steal

Replying to *EIR* about the proposals pushed by the U.S. Administration to privatize Iraqi industrial and engineering companies and open them for takeover by Western interests, an Iraqi engineer replied with bitter sarcasm: "Don't worry. This will not happen, because these companies do not exist anymore. They have been looted and stripped to the bone." These formerly state-owned companies—the military industrial plants and the construction and engineering companies that independently rebuilt major parts of Iraq's infrastructure which was destroyed during the 1991 Gulf War—are the other backbone of Iraq's national economy, besides the petroleum wealth. They employed the best engineers and scientists of the country.

An eyewitness described to *EIR* how modern, computerized CNC lathes were pulled from the factories by looters, under the passive eyes of American troops after the fall of Baghdad, never to be seen again. Computers and crucial parts of the Iraqi machine-tool production capability were destroyed and stolen, to be later sold as "scrap metal" by the kilo and the ton, because they can't be sold on the markets as

machines. Whole factories were dismantled to be sold as scrap. There is no semblance in the country of any modern industrial capability anymore. Observers refer to then-Secretary of State James Baker III's warning to the Iraqi Foreign Minister in 1991, that Iraq could be bombed "back to the Stone Age," as a fulfilled prophecy.

According to official statistics, 70-80% of the Iraqi labor force is currently unemployed. There is no perspective for how this labor would be deployed. Almost all the 22 million population is on "welfare" benefits. Every state employee receives \$120 per month. The retired and unemployed receive \$60. Former Iraqi Army personnel have started receiving monthly payments equal to that of the state employees. Bremer's CPA had denied them these payments, but reversed its decision after bloody riots and protests. All the above categories are idle, except for teachers and education ministry officials who went back to their jobs with the start of new school year on Oct. 1. Students still use old books, and many schools have not been rebuilt or refurbished after the war and looting.

Although the sums of money being paid to Iraqis now seem to be better than nothing, the devil is lurking for the Iraqi people, to take away their food and health care. Under the previous Iraqi-UN agreement called "Oil for Food," which was started in 1996, Iraqi citizens would get food rations and medicine almost for free. This kept the population alive, even though under severe food deprivation and poor health conditions. Now Bremer's CPA is planning to stop this rationing system, stating that it is a remnant of Saddam's regime, introducing instead the "free market," where Iraqis will buy their food and medicine at international market prices. This would mean that each family would need about \$1,500 to pay for food, health care, and vital household goods. That is ten times the amount of money being paid to Iraqis now. The "free market" plan is to be introduced by the end of October. Iraqis think this is a joke, because if it were implemented, it would lead to an armed uprising all over Iraq.

The money for these payments is now coming from two sources: the almost-depleted \$11 billion Iraqi frozen assets and income deposited in the "Oil for Food" accounts; and the CPA's own budget, derived from money received from American taxpayers through the U.S. Administration's allocations.

### **The Illusion of Iraqi Petroleum Wealth**

It is true that Iraq is estimated to contain the second largest reserves of oil in the world. However, it is a pipe-dream to believe that Iraqi oil production would sustain the reconstruction



*A waiting line in southern Iraq for World Food Programme rations of food and basic commodities; the WFP's local agent sits at the right. Paul Bremer's occupation's announcement that "free market" purchases will replace this ration system at the end of October, could be the latest in a series of gross mistakes. "The Iraqi people remain a ticking time bomb waiting to explode."*

tion and occupation costs. U.S. Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz and Iraqi Oil Minister Ibrahim Bahr-ul Uloom are living in a different universe, than the physical universe in which Iraq is situated. As *EIR* reported recently, Vice President Dick Cheney's group of energy pirates harbors intentions to plunder Iraq's petroleum wealth, but without having to produce oil. That would happen through mortgaging Iraq's underground reserves and making money from selling oil futures. *But there is no intention of physically producing oil.*

The production of oil in Iraq requires heavy investments in equipment and technology and hard work to restore pre-war oil production and start toward new levels. Bahr-ul Uloom, who seems to have no knowledge in the energy sector, stated a few days ago that Iraq's pre-war oil-exporting capacity of 2.2 million barrels per day (bpd) would be restored within four months, and argued that production of 5 million bpd could be realized in 18 months. Iraqi energy experts told *EIR* that this is a physical impossibility, even if security is achieved in Iraq. Iraq's capability to increase its production to 5 million bpd could be reached, even under ideal conditions, only by 2010. Currently, Iraqi oil exports are almost non-existent. However, there is an active smuggling operation from the southern port of Basrah, which is totally controlled by British and American troops. Iraqi oil experts argue that this could not be done without the consent of British and American officers.

### **The Reconstruction Hoax**

What is going on Iraq is a process of "bribing" the population into silence; however, this is not going to last long. While

consumers are being kept alive, the energy, transport, water management, and health-care infrastructure is collapsing. Nothing is being done to repair the infrastructure that was destroyed during the war. Only one minor highway bridge was rebuilt on the Baghdad-Falluja highway. Most of the construction contracts so far have been related to securing and providing for the comfort of the U.S.-British occupation forces, such as work at the Baghdad and Basrah airports and major military bases. Many Iraqi subcontractors are unable to operate in remote areas for lack of security, thus concentrating their activities in areas close to American and British army bases.

The CPA has been paying Iraqi small contractors to collect garbage and clean the streets in Baghdad. Other such small projects are being activated to absorb thousands of unemployed persons, and to give the impression that the reconstruction has started.

Electricity and water supplies have not improved much since the end of the war in April. People report that the CPA announces regularly through the local media that electricity would be restored full-time. Indeed, electricity comes “full-time” in one part of Baghdad for example, but it disappears again, and comes back in short intervals as usual. The reason given for the interruption is that “Saddam Hussein’s saboteurs destroyed the supply lines.” Everything can be blamed on Saddam Hussein nowadays.

In the meantime, the CPA and other Iraqi media continue to bomb the Iraqi population with documentation of the atrocities committed by the former Iraqi regime. Videotapes recording the torture and mass killing of Iraqi opposition figures and innocent civilians, are being sold on the streets. Mass graves are being found every week. Saddam and his Caligula-like sons, Uday and Qusay, and their regime committed horrifying atrocities, and did not shrink from recording them audiovisually. Hundreds of thousands vanished during the 30-year Saddam Hussein regime. Nonetheless, the current psychological warfare being directed against the Iraqi population is serving the purposes of diverting the rage against an invisible enemy, and convincing the frustrated citizenry that “anything is better than the former regime.” Therefore, the visitor to Baghdad sees signs written on walls stating, “A thousand American, rather than one Tikriti,” as if the choice were between Nero and Caligula.

This psychological warfare could lead to catastrophic consequences, especially if it is manipulated during the coming period of the deterioration of the economic conditions in the country. The neo-cons and their Synarchist controllers, who are intending to drown the whole Middle East in an inferno of wars, using Israeli war criminal Ariel Sharon’s plans to bomb Syria and Iran, would also resort to the chaos scenario in Iraq to avoid accountability for the disasters they created and the lies they used to start the war there. One “brilliant” example of how this could be manipulated, is the idea being circulated within Iraq to start a civil war.

Ahmed Chalabi, protégé of the Straussian neo-cons Paul Wolfowitz and Albert Wohlstetter, is demanding a blood purge to solve the security problems the U.S. occupation forces are facing. Below is a translation of part of an op-ed written by Chalabi and published in *Asharq al-Awsat* on Sept. 1, under the title “A Viewpoint From Iraq”:

“There are steps that the United States needs to take immediately to eradicate Saddam Hussein’s network and improve the security conditions: 1) Directing blows to the supporters of Saddam all over the country; the coalition forces need to move swiftly to arrest and interrogate thousand of Baathists, Saddam’s Fedayeen fighters, former members of the security forces and the army, in addition to their brothers, their sons, their nephews, and their cousins. The Iraqi National Conference [Chalabi’s own political party] and other groups that support the coalition can provide lists of these persons and their locations and help in interrogating them. 2) A comprehensive security scanning of all the towns and villages where the resistance is centered; the coalition forces must surround these towns and give their inhabitants an ultimatum of 48 hours as a last date for surrendering all illegal weapons, after the which an intensive house-to-house search should be conducted. If weapons depots are found in a house, all male residents between the ages of 15 and 55 in that household must be arrested. These search operations would be useful for finding wanted criminals.”

These Nazi SS and Israeli methods proposed by Chalabi are a perfect recipe for ethnic cleansing and prolonged, bloody civil war.

The U.S. neo-con fascist war faction has created a Roman Circus, where no one knows his role or his term in the action. Not even the U.S. civilian authority in the country or the White House itself seems to be aware of what they have created. When you ask people in Iraq about the future, their thoughts go to the next weeks, not any longer than that. No sane Iraqi trusts the intentions of the Bush Administration. However, restraint is driven by the idea among Iraqis that they can’t take another war. They are hoping that reason would prevail, that the U.S. Administration would resort to help from the international community to restore normal living conditions, elect a truly independent government, and start the reconstruction and development process. In the meantime, the Iraqi people remain a ticking bomb waiting to explode, unless an urgent solution is introduced to defuse that bomb.

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DIALOGUE OF CULTURES

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