
Interview: Dr. Abdul Majeed al-Raf'i

'What the West is doing to Iraq is disastrous for the human race'

Dr. al-Raf'i is a member of the leadership of the Ba'ath Party and a Member of Parliament in Lebanon. He was interviewed in Baghdad in July by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach.

EIR: What lies behind the merciless onslaught against the nation of Iraq?

Dr. al-Raf'i: The Middle East is suffering the effects of a conspiracy which dates back to the turn of the century: a conspiracy which intended to achieve the partition of the Arab world, to introduce a foreign state into the population and the region—the state of Israel—and to achieve Western supremacy over the region. This region is at the crossroads of three continents of the Old World—a strategic site for the West. It floats on top of a great lake of oil, which is necessary for the industrial machine of the West, and for its war industry. This region is a vast market, nearly the most extended market in the world, supplying the West with exorbitant sums of money, by way of all the commodities the West exports to the area.

In a country like Saudi Arabia or Kuwait or the Emirates, they buy from the West everything from sewing needles to cars, and even foodstuffs. In Jedda, in a department store, and even in Amman, I have seen that all the food products come from the West, particularly the United States. In a country like Jordan, where there is agricultural abundance, I see piles and piles of beans "Made in U.S.A."

The Middle East is also a region where the investments of great Western enterprises, American, feed their fill. The region is thus the object of the lust and greed of the capitalist forces of the world, and in chief, the U.S.A. We have been, since the turn of the century, victims of a conspiracy whereby Westerners seek to establish their hegemony over the entire region. Since 1948, the state of Israel has been imposed in the middle of the Arab world, and the Palestinian question has become the center of our liberation struggle. For the liberation of Palestine we are capable of unifying our forces, to free our will, to advance in all areas—above all, the area of science.

This is at the same time, a struggle for liberation, a strug-

gle for unification, and a struggle for progress. Up till now, we have not been unified; we have lost some battles, but we fight for the liberation of our land in Palestine. As long as there is division in the Arab world, we will not be able to liberate a square foot of Palestine.

At the same time, we must advance in the progress of civilization, where we have been backward for a certain period of time. Since the conquest of Baghdad in 1258, the Arab world has been sunk in ignorance.

EIR: What is the program of the Ba'ath for unifying the Arab world, particularly in the economic area?

Dr. al-Raf'i: Iraq began with coordination with three other Arab countries, to set up a small common market which could be extended to the other Arab countries, encouraging solidarity and economic cooperation, and avoiding economic disputes which could divert from the objectives of unification.

The program is based on democratic socialism, which outlaws usurpation, which outlaws the exploitation of the means of economic production for the sole profit of one social class. The oil fields, or the mineral resources, for example, must not remain in the hands of private companies—these are a national patrimony. Nonetheless, in some Arab countries we find foreign enterprises, countries in which one royal or princely family rules everything.

This common market we call the Council of Arab Cooperation—Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, Yemen. There is a certain appearance of complementarity in these four countries, and Iraq is working so that this appearance may become a reality. It is necessary to extend this system to the other Arab countries, to the point that we arrive at the goal of Arab economic union.

EIR: What about Egypt, which joined the anti-Iraq coalition?

Dr. al-Raf'i: Egypt has taken a point of view and a position which seem completely opposed to coordination and cooperation, and politically opposed to what the Arab nation would

want to achieve. In any case, it is absurd to speak of cooperation, or non-cooperation, in this situation, because Iraq was told to withdraw to her frontiers, and the embargo was imposed. It is all the more absurd to speak of this, because the western world in general, the U.S.A. in particular, and Israel ten times more so, have worked and acted to stop this march toward economic unity.

Yet it has been Americans, and Frenchmen, who organized a committee to judge the war crimes committed against Iraq. This is very important, because there was a meeting in Egypt. Even though Egypt was on the American side, there exist in Egypt good people who are combatting that policy.

The Americans and the English, Bush and Co., consider that it is a question of their national security that they control all the oil fields, all the resources, all the means of communication, and that they stop the emancipation of all countries, above all the Arab countries. Iraq was the flagrant example of this attempt to stop progress.

The U.S.A. considered that Iraq, from the moment when it tried to advance in the domain of technology, of commerce, of industry, had no right to develop, to augment its population and manpower. Ten years ago, Iraq had 16 million inhabitants. Today, we are 18 million, and 20 years ago, we had but 14 million. That advance goes to show that there was progress in all sectors: agricultural, economic, industrial, technological—but also in the military sector.

The military sector is a necessity for Iraq, because on all sides there are greedy designs. Iran shouts from the rooftops that they want to export their revolution. They say that Iraq is a part of Iran. The islands which they have occupied—since '71, I believe—are “Iranian” islands, Bahrain is “Iranian.” There are designs from the East, and Israeli designs, with a view to creating a Greater Israel which would extend from the banks of the Euphrates to the banks of the Nile. For a long time, one could read above the portals of the Knesset: “The frontiers of Israel reach from the Euphrates to the Nile,” and the Euphrates is in the middle of Iraq. Because there are dangers on all sides, Iraq must have an army, which is not pleasing to westerners. Iraq did not suffer what she has suffered because she wanted to regain a part of her territory which is Kuwait—territory taken hostage by the English, where, later, they established an emirate in what is nothing but a district of Basra.

The United States recognizes, England recognizes, the state of Israel, which occupies territory in Syria, in Palestine, and in Lebanon. All that dates from 1967, and has gone on for 24 years, yet no one reacts against it. Why? Israel is a western project. . . .

Yet in the Middle East, it is seen as an “infraction of American law” to want to take direct control of all the oil fields of the Arab world. Kuwait represents perhaps 9% of the known oil resources of the world, and it is for that reason that the reaction was so strong.

If Iraq can no longer export her oil, how will she buy

food? How will she buy medicine, or everything that is necessary to rebuild Iraq? How buy what is necessary to rebuild the factories, the bridges? In one region alone, for example—in Najaf—161 schools were demolished totally or in part. Fifty-two petroleum facilities were destroyed, either the refineries or the wells. This embargo is the most inhuman thing ever perpetrated against any country in the world. . . .

The coalition then provoked the events in the south; coalition members encouraged the Kurds to cause tremors. Today, the Kurdish question has become a question on a world scale. The Kurds want to be reconciled with the Iraqi state; they want to unify with it. So, America and the English find other pretexts to remain militarily. When they see that the discussions between the Iraqi state and the Kurds are going well, they begin to start things up again in the south, saying that the Shiites are second-class citizens, that the Shiites are going to be attacked by hundreds of thousands of Iraqi soldiers. They claim that hundreds of thousands are taking refuge in swamplands of the south. Fortunately, there are people there who can see: Yesterday, there was a journalist from *Al-Ahram* visiting the south, who saw that the swamplands could not contain 600,000 people, as the English and Americans pretend, and that the inhabitants have left to acclaim Saddam Hussein.

The conspiracy will continue until there is one Arab nation which aims at emancipation, which aims at a renaissance of its cultural patrimony; this struggle will continue as long as we remain a divided country—countries in which there rules another will than our own; as long as we remain countries in [the middle of] which is planted a state which is not homogeneous, and which intends to expand at our expense.

EIR: You referred to the Kurdish rebellion as having been fomented, drawing on your experience in Lebanon. How would you compare the two situations?

Dr. al-Rafi: The conspiracy means to divide the Arab countries into micro-states on a religious and/or ethnic basis, states which are adversaries of one another, and whose boundaries are religious or ethnic boundaries. This conspiracy is very visible in Lebanon, with 10,100 square kilometers, in which live different religions and groups that are now divided into six parts. Lebanon is, today, in appearance, reunited, but it is reunited while being divided, and the religious groups which promoted the Taif Resolution are there. The deputies are chosen (and not elected by the people) on the basis of religion; the ministers too. There is no longer free passage to the center of Lebanon; everything is run by the Syrian state, which is an integral part of the conspiracy, and under the very watchful eye of Israel. Lebanon is no longer the Lebanon we once knew, where Lebanese could go without difficulty from one region to another, from a region which was majority Christian, to one which was majority Muslim or Druze, or Shiite. Nowadays, no one dares go to another area, for fear of being eliminated.

In the same way, they are trying to divide Iraq into three parts: the Shiite, the Kurdish, and the central part, where there is a Sunni majority. But Iraq has been very firm.

Bush announced the cease-fire on the evening of Feb. 2. The troubles at Basra began the evening of March 2, all prepared in advance. That went on for several days in each region. Iran had her role to play, profiting from the state of affairs which prevailed just after the end of the hostilities. This conspiracy continues, and one sees it notably in Sudan, which they want to divide between north and south; in Algeria, where they preach the division between Arabs and Berbers; in Mauritania, where they preach division. . . .

What we can do to advance along the road of the Arab renaissance, we must do for the patrimony of the Arab people. The Arab world has always been open to dialogue; it is not we who have avoided dialogue. When the West enters into a dialogue, it does so purely from a usurper's point of view, wanting to profit from the economic resources of the Arab world, to make of the Arab world a market, an area for investment for the great corporations, to build highways, factories, construction. It is in this sense that they understand dialogue, even though we want a dialogue from all points of view, not simply economic, but also cultural.

What is happening now in Iraq is truly inhumane. Not only from the American side, but from all the western countries which contributed to this attack. They want to make of the Iraqi people a people of starvation and sloth; to push them back into the condition they were in 70 years ago, before industrialization. Despite the fact that Iraq has the will to reconstruct the country, and cherishes this goal, there are things which cannot be done with will power alone.

How to rebuild the factory which produces infant formula? Basic products are necessary. How to reconstruct the electrical grid, the water purification system, the sewage system, without being able to sell oil? You have seen the people, in the streets and in the hospitals, who are suffering from malnutrition. It is 47°C here; 44° last week: you can figure out for yourself at what point this dehydrates the elderly and the infants.

The embargo is inhumane.

I lived for seven years in Europe, to study morality, equality, fraternity, humanism. Here, Europe and the West are acting contrary to all that beautiful etiquette, coming from having repressed liberties among themselves. Look how they act to stop the media from telling the truth. No one speaks of the famine, because it is supposedly "not very apparent." But, even in Ethiopia, even in southern Sudan, the starving do not fill the streets; they are in camps, in their houses, in hospitals. . . .

To all those who love freedom, we raise an appeal that they put pressure on the U.S.A. and England, to lift the embargo and let our people live. The allies find a new pretext, every time, for maintaining the embargo. First it was weapons—they wanted to look for and examine the weapons.

The weapons were destroyed. Now, they speak of atomic weapons. But Iraq is a party to the International Atomic Energy Association, and every six months, a committee has been to check up. Seven people are here now. Iraq has contracts with France and Russia for atomic science in areas of civilian application. The whole world knows how much Iraq has, of the products which could be used in nuclear reactions, and they know that it is for civilian application.

Nonetheless, Mr. Bush said three days ago, that Iraq must destroy it all. And he called on the Iraqi Army to overthrow Saddam Hussein. That is interference in the internal affairs of another country.

The U.S.A. is a state which preaches hegemony over the 15 other states of the Security Council—it is, then, a totalitarian state. Most of the members of the Security Council are in favor of lifting the embargo. But the U.S.A. and England are against it; they apply pressure, and everyone does what Mr. Bush wants.

This is the third time that [U.N. envoy] Sadruddin Aga Khan has come here since the war, and I believe that he is hopeful; his reports are always helpful to Iraq, very impartial, and full of humanism. No one has wanted to listen to his reports. Does he carry much weight, in the face of Mr. Bush and Mr. Major? I don't think so.

For five months, with all the humanitarian aid, we have received barely two days' worth of flour—for a population of 18 million who eat lots of bread. In two months, less than 150 tons has arrived.

Most of the positions in the complicated chains of command, above all in the Security Council, are controlled by the U.S.A. The group which imposed the embargo, and which is charged with studying the question of lifting the embargo, has recommended that it be lifted, above all in regard to funds which are deposited in 31 countries of the world. The U.S.A. has said no, and there are at most one or two countries which have agreed to unblock the funds. And yet, the sums deposited in banks or funds, add up to \$3.5 billion—practically nothing, when such a large population is involved, in a situation where so much infrastructure is destroyed.

The western states don't care in the least about the catastrophe which is taking place; an inhuman indifference which makes me sad. I am sure that the common run of men are not like that, but these are the multinationals, and the "great ones" like Bush and Major. They say there is an opposition between considerations of humanity and politics. And yet, politics is the power to make things better for the world and for humanity. But what the Westerners are doing to Iraq is disastrous for the future of the whole human race. It is essential to struggle against this ferocity of Mr. Bush and Mr. Major. They even want to interfere in demography! Is that just?

We salute your presence here, in connection with the Committee, and we are thankful; we hope to achieve, through you and with you, a better world.