
Conference Report

Iraqi women call for end to UN sanctions, endorse new Silk Road

As the sanctions regime imposed by the United Nations on Iraq enters its tenth year, it is urgent that the question uppermost in every Iraqi's mind, be thrust into the political arena in Europe and the United States for immediate action: When will this insane embargo end? This question was at the center of the 16th general conference of the General Federation of Iraqi Women (GWIF), held in Baghdad, the capital of Iraq, on Nov. 8-10. The broad international representation at the meeting, with delegations from countries in Asia, Africa, Europe (east and west), and the Americas, signalled the growing solidarity with the Iraqi population under siege, as well as political support for lifting the genocidal sanctions.

But how?

One initiative presented to the conference and endorsed by the GWIF and several other organizations present, proposed the overthrow of the sanctions regime within the context of a radical reversal in global economic and strategic policy. The idea, presented by *EIR* editor Muriel Mirak-Weissbach, was to redefine Iraq policy, from the standpoint of the need to integrate this crucial, industrially advanced country into the vast infrastructure project of the Eurasian Land-Bridge, or new Silk Road. To the extent that this policy option becomes dominant, promoted and developed especially by nation-states like China, Russia, and India, a new dynamic can be unleashed. Concretely, she presented a call, issued exactly one year earlier, for the formation of a Women's Commission for the new Silk Road. The call had been launched by Schiller Institute founder Helga Zepp-LaRouche, in November 1998, just prior to President Clinton's decision to call off air strikes against Iraq, and had gained the support of leading political figures and intellectuals from around the world. Following Clinton's reversal in December, and the subsequent new war against Iraq, organizing for the commission took on a new urgency.

Two policy alternatives

In her speech, Mirak-Weissbach developed the concept that the aggression against Iraq, a "turning point in postwar history," had been decided in the context of the collapse of communism, when the West had two policy alternatives:

"The nations of France, Italy, a united Germany, and perhaps even the United States, could have launched a program for East-West economic cooperation development and integration," she said. "They could have joined with the People's Republic of China to rebuild the ancient caravan routes known as the Silk Road across Eurasia, with modern transportation technologies, or, forces in the West could seek to destroy the economies and nations of eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, seize control over their raw materials, and establish a dictatorship of the Anglo-American financial oligarchy and its instrument, the so-called 'new' NATO, over the world."

Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm made clear that the latter policy, of the financial oligarchy, had prevailed. It targeted Iraq, she said, "as the vanguard nation of the developing sector," which, having successfully pursued a policy of investing oil revenues for real economic and social development, was a "take-off" nation, on the verge of full industrialization.

At the same time, the same financial oligarchy moved to destroy the economies of eastern Europe, through International Monetary Fund conditionalities and "shock therapy," and set up the dictatorship of the "new" NATO, which was consolidated in the war last spring against Yugoslavia. The new NATO doctrine, she said, means "that the British and their allies in the U.S. administration can move militarily, unilaterally anywhere in the world on the pretext of human rights violations, that they can bomb embassies of sovereign nations, destroy national sovereignty, violate territorial integrity, and break up nations."

Now, she said, this entire madness must be undone, and can be undone. "Largely as a result of this drive toward world dictatorship, China, Russia, and India have joined in a strategic triangle, to counterpose economic and strategic cooperation to these attacks. Other nations, such as Malaysia, have moved to defend their economies and their nations from this danger. Most important, key figures in these and other nations have realized, that the financial and monetary system of the financial oligarchy, finds itself today in a terminal breakdown crisis, largely as a result of its failed policies." She said that,



EIR's Muriel Mirak-Weissbach and Intisar Pierce (second and third from right) pose with a delegation of women from India, in a museum in Baghdad, during the Nov. 8-10 conference of the General Federation of Iraqi Women.

although the breakdown of the system was fraught with danger, still it represents an “historical opportunity, because the financial structures on which the oligarchy basis its power, will collapse. It represents an opportunity, therefore, for forces united around a program to radically change the entire monetary and economic structures and to reorganize economic and foreign relations among nations on principles which respect the dignity of man.”

It is in this strategic perspective, she said, that the Schiller Institute believes it can mobilize forces throughout the world to act, “and it is most appropriate that the battle to liberate Iraq from the genocidal sanctions regime, should be the spearhead for this effort.” She concluded her remarks by reading the text of the call for a Women’s Commission.

Dr. Manal Younis Abdul Razzaq, president of the GFIW, announced at the conclusion of the speech that the GFIW would join the committee. Among the other organizations which signed the call thereafter, are the following: Azerbaijan Women’s Association; Women’s Liberal Association of the Republic of Belarus; National Federation of Indian Women; The Ceylon Moor Ladies Union (Sri Lanka); Lebanese Women’s Council; General Federation of Jordanian Women; Jordanian Women’s Union; and a journalist from Malaysia.

No compromises

Diametrically opposed to this perspective, is the position of the British government, which has been circulating a new

draft proposal for consideration at the United Nations Security Council. The resolution, written as a joint British-Dutch effort, is a total fraud. It claims to be a step toward lifting the sanctions, but in reality, it is merely a plan to maintain the sanctions and inspections regime, under a more palatable name. In essence, the resolution proposes the reestablishment of a UN inspections team, which would carry out the same kind of intrusive inspections done by the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM), the notorious espionage operation run by Richard Butler. After 100 days, if the team’s rapporteur were to issue a positive report on Iraq’s compliance, then the sanctions would be “suspended,” but subject to reimposition, as soon as a negative report were to appear.

Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Dr. Tariq Aziz, who has been the leading Iraqi government official to deal with the UN scoundrels, delivered a speech to the GFIW conference, in which he unequivocally rejected any such fraud.

Dr. Aziz began by polemicizing with Arab governments, who have been de facto respecting the embargo, though many have verbally expressed their distaste for it. Dr. Aziz pointed out that if they so desired, they could use Article 50 of the UN Charter, to conduct trade with Iraq. He asked why the Arabs were following the sanctions, instead of pursuing their own interests in trade with Iraq. “Is it to make Madame [U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine] Albright happy?” he asked. “Or to get weapons, tanks, to defend against the enemy?” He then asked, “Who is the enemy anyway?” He emphasized the point

that, unlike the sanctions against Libya, those imposed on Iraq do not forbid airline travel, at least of non-Iraqi aircraft, and asked why the Arabs do not simply fly into Baghdad.

The main point he developed, at great length and in detail, was his government's response to the recent British-Dutch resolution. He explained, that the new committee would be sent to Baghdad for two months and reinstall the inspections regime. Then, after a period, the committee would draw up a list of what Iraq would have to do on disarmament. In four months, Iraq would have to "fully cooperate." What this means, Aziz explained by relating how, during his 18 months of dealings with the inspectors, UNSCOM demanded "full cooperation" by demanding access to any location, demanding documents of all sorts, and so on. After ten months of the new procedures, he said, if the chairman of the new committee, the new Richard Butler of the situation, were to issue a report to the UN Security Council saying that Iraq had not "fully cooperated," then within five days, the UN Security Council could move against Iraq.

The 'new Gengis Khan'

Dr. Aziz characterized the role and power of this single person, as the "new Gengis Khan," who would "have power over 23 million people." This, he said, was unacceptable, and therefore Iraq had announced that it would not accept the British resolution.

Dr. Aziz also denied the assertion, in the resolution, that Iraq would be allowed to export oil. "We export already," he said, referring to the oil-for-food program, "so this is nothing new." Furthermore, he said, under the current arrangement, Iraq receives only 52% of the oil revenues, the rest being taken for "reparations" and payments to the UN. When the Iraqi government places orders for food and medicine, it is often told by the UN committee that such goods are not allowed. Even Secretary General Kofi Annan, he reported, had had difficulties with the UN committee.

"The new British resolution," he concluded, "is the worst; in dealing with the UN Security Council, this is the worst." The French amendments, he said, "don't add or change anything, and we reject it." He said that Iraq is "ready to negotiate. But to use deception, to make fools of us, no."

Just days following the conference, a report was circulated in the international press, to the effect that the French, who had opposed the resolution, were now coming around, following certain undefined U.S. concessions. U.S. officials were reported by the *International Herald Tribune* to have said, they were confident that Russia would also agree, and, in turn, China. Up to the present, Russia and China have supported the Iraqi view, that the sanctions must be lifted, while France has been playing the middle of the road. The same unidentified U.S. officials reportedly said, that they believed that the Iraqi leadership, faced with a unified Security Council, would not be able to resist the Anglo-Dutch proposal.

Instead, Iraq did just that. In a statement reported in the official newspaper *Al Jumhuriya* on Nov. 17, Iraqi Member of Parliament Khaled ad-Duri reiterated that his government would reject any resolution which did not entail lifting the sanctions. "We have a position of principle, we reject all decisions or all resolutions that do not lead to a lifting of the embargo." He said that the revised British-Dutch resolution, which is the basis of alleged "compromises" between the United States and France, would simply prolong the sanctions, and that therefore Iraq "categorically rejects it."

The Iraqi government's position is rooted in its commitment to defend national sovereignty at all costs. It is not the single items of the UN regime which are objectionable—although they are all violations of international law—but the fact that the sanctions regime violates territorial integrity and national sovereignty, which makes them unacceptable.

Living with sanctions

The living conditions for the Iraqi population, under the sanctions regime, have become unbelievable. Although food is available on the market, the prices are out of the reach of normal citizens. The currency has been thoroughly debased. Before the war, one Iraqi dinar used to be worth \$3; now, \$1 will buy 1,900 dinars. Average wages are the equivalent on a couple of dollars a month. The middle class, which used to be very numerous and prosperous, in Iraq's growing economy before the war, has nearly disappeared. Families have sold off anything of value they might have had—jewelry, antiques, books, appliances—for cash, for food. Medicines are very scarce. Hospitals do not have the bare necessities, like sheets, syringes, or bandages, not to mention adequate food for patients. Schools have deteriorated over ten years, and nothing has been replaced; desks are falling apart, there is a lack of chairs. Children have no books, no paper, no pencils, and no chalk.

Anyone in the UN bureaucracy who speaks up about this dramatic picture, is censored. Hans von Sponeck, for example, the UN coordinator for Iraq, who has just been confirmed by UN Secretary General Annan for another year, has come under massive attack by the United Kingdom and United States, which demanded that he be ousted. Von Sponeck's major crime seems to be, that he has not joined the black propaganda campaign against Iraq.

In an interview with the German daily *Frankfurter Rundschau* on Nov. 16, von Sponeck denied allegations that his team had not been distributing humanitarian goods. He said that because Iraqis are very poor, some of them sell part of their rations to buy other goods. He flatly denied the story, that Iraq had delivered shiploads of humanitarian goods to other Persian Gulf states. He also denied that the Iraqi government is hoarding food and medicine. He said that the UN compiled supply reports, according to which 88.8% of all goods received, and 68% of all medicine, had been distrib-

uted. The remaining amounts were kept in storage, he said, in accordance with World Health Organization norms. Von Sponeck said that the demonized image of the Iraqi government did not correspond to reality.

Regarding the supply situation, von Sponeck said that since Iraq had been allowed to increase its sales of oil for food, the food and medicine supplies had increased somewhat, but that the education sector was suffering. He stated that necessary school supplies are nowhere to be found. Iraq has no access to the Internet, thus it is shut off from the rest of the world. He said that his greatest worry was that as a result of the sanctions, "a whole population was being placed in the icebox."

In such a situation, merely coping is a victory. As became clear through the three days of deliberations by the delegates of the GFIW at their conference, it is through the activities of such organizations that, in fact, the population has managed to survive at all. The GFIW is a mass-based organization, with 41 branches, 244 sections, and 1,700 sectors or centers, in urban areas. Its membership represents 37% of the total female population.

Part of the policymaking process

As was evident in the course of the conference, this organization is actually part of the policymaking process in Iraq. For, in their internal session, dedicated to passing resolutions and recommendations, they articulated a number of specific proposals, whose implementation would require relevant action by government ministries.

The working sessions dealt with urgent social problems which Iraq is facing as a result of the sanctions regime. The resolutions and recommendations voted up, agreed on measures, for example, to guarantee free natal care for women, on grounds that childbirth under such conditions constitutes a "medical emergency." Birth rates have plummeted since the sanctions were introduced, as families fear that they cannot provide for children. The divorce rate has skyrocketed, again, reflecting the enormous social and economic strains created by the embargo. Marriage rates have also collapsed.

One of the resolutions passed by the GFIW, therefore, dealt with measures to facilitate marriage. It was resolved to provide interest-free loans for returning POWs, Iraqis who had been captured by Iran during the 1980-88 war, through the socialist banks, in order to make it possible for them to face the financial burdens involved in contracting marriage. Another resolution called for the expansion of evening courses in vocational training for girls, to enhance their employment opportunities. It was decided to expand the existing program for clothing production at the cottage industry level; loans will be provided to families, to start clothing production—textiles will be provided, as well as sewing machines.

The organization also decided to restart publication of its

women's magazine, which it had had to terminate due to lack of paper, now on a quarterly basis, and to start issuing a scientific magazine every six months. A new university will be opened, as well as culture centers. To implement these measures, the Ministries of Health and Education will be called upon to provide facilities.

Without organizations like the GFIW, it is difficult to imagine how the population could continue to resist. The GFIW has not only developed the social network of institutions, to provide assistance on a daily basis to the population in various spheres of activity, but has engaged in an effort, like that of the conference, to mobilize support internationally, from women's organizations throughout the world.

At the conclusion of the conference, delegates held a demonstration in front of the UN headquarters in Baghdad, and presented their final resolution, which demanded: the "immediate and unconditional lifting of all sanctions against Iraq; the immediate cancellation of the so-called no-fly zones in the north and south of Iraq; the cessation of American and British air strikes; full respect for Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity; immediate United Nations action to establish an international commitment to prevent any further unilateral military action against Iraq."

The Way Out of The Crisis



A 90-minute video of highlights from *EIR's* April 21, 1999 seminar in Bonn, Germany.

Lyndon LaRouche was the keynote speaker, in a dialogue with distinguished international panelists: **Wilhelm Hankel**, professor of economics and a former banker from Germany; **Stanislav Menshikov**, a Russian economist and journalist; Schiller Institute founder **Helga Zepp-LaRouche** from Germany; **Devendra Kaushik**, professor of Central Asian Studies from India; **Qian Jing**, international affairs analyst from China; **Natalya Vitrenko**, economist and parliamentarian from Ukraine.



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