

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