

The LaRouche Doctrine Debated in Egypt

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

As soon as the LaRouche Doctrine proposal for establishing peace in Iraq and Palestine was issued April 17, it was warmly welcomed in intellectual and political circles in the Arab and Islamic world. Among the first to endorse the idea of a new U.S. policy for Southwest Asia outlined by Lyndon LaRouche, was Prof. Mohammed Seyyed Selim, of the Center for Asian Studies, University of Cairo. Weeks later, this author was invited to present the proposal at the Center's annual conference.

Prof. Selim, in introductory remarks, was outspoken in his praise of LaRouche's policies. Characterizing him as "the most pro-Arab" American political figure, Selim stressed LaRouche's courage, citing the fact that, after the second Palestinian Intifada began, LaRouche had supported it, "even when many Arabs did not." He also highlighted LaRouche's role in leading the opposition inside the United States to prevent the Iraq war, and lauded his "credible solutions" for the Iraq crisis, focussing on reviving the Iraqi Constitution of 1958.

As the overall theme of the conference was "The Rise of China," the author located LaRouche's Southwest Asia doctrine in the context of a much-needed new U.S. policy for Asia as a whole. In direct opposition to the current neo-con commitment to a strategy of "permanent wars," including the use of nuclear weapons, against countries "perceived" to constitute a threat to U.S. hegemony, the LaRouche policy defines American strategic interest in terms of securing stability across the Eurasian continent, through an economic development perspective. For Southwest Asia, the LaRouche Doctrine means introducing massive infrastructure projects across the region, as bounded by Syria, Turkey, Iran, and Egypt. The creation of new sources of fresh water, through large-scale desalination plants, is the backbone of LaRouche's economic cooperation plan for Palestinian-Israeli peace (see *EIR*, April 30).

After defining the proposal, the presentation focussed on the means of forcing it through in Washington: The more support garnered for the proposal in the Arab and Islamic world, the more power it will gain inside the United States, in the ongoing primary election process. The world cannot wait until November for a new U.S. policy.

The audience of professors, students, diplomats, and press questioned specific aspects of the doctrine (when the occupy-

ing forces should withdraw, how U.S. credibility for a Palestinian-Israeli peace could be established, etc.), as well as broader U.S. foreign policy (on U.S.-European relations, U.S.-Chinese relations, the structure of trade relations). But the main focus was on the political process inside the United States. One questioner stated his support for LaRouche's ideas, and "wished that more people in the U.S. would do so." What are LaRouche's chances in the elections? How do John Kerry's policies differ from those of the Republican Party (if they do)? If Kerry were to be elected, would that end the reign of the neo-cons? What would LaRouche's role be? Will the failure in Iraq lead to Bush's defeat? If a change is implemented in U.S. policy before November, would that mean Bush's re-election?

The answers to these and related questions stressed that nothing is fixed or predetermined in United States policy or politics. Anything can happen, as the faction fight inside the institutions of the United States—military, diplomatic, Congressional, and press—is demonstrating. One must understand the central role that LaRouche has been playing, which continues to define the dynamic and directionality of the fight.

The Abu Ghraib Factor

One pointed question came from a visibly agitated participant: What really happened at Abu Ghraib? This question captures the essence of the phase shift that has taken place in public opinion in the Arab and Islamic world. If, prior to the revelations of systematic torture of prisoners, the view had been that the war was illegal, based on manufactured lies, had nothing to do with democracy, but with establishing an empire through permanent wars, and so on; after the revelations, it became clear that the character of the war party was nothing short of Satanic, and that Dick Cheney et al. can only be understood as beast-men. Participants at the conference had no difficulty in grasping this major point, and were eager to read LaRouche's *Children of Satan* pamphlets explaining it.

Abu Ghraib represents a watershed for the entire region. No one believes that young soldiers were solely responsible; such practices represent policy, which is defined at the top, by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, et al., who yet remain in office and in power. Abu Ghraib also signalled to these circles that the "clash of civilizations" policy is being pursued, not only with overwhelming military might, but with expertly developed psychological warfare methods, devised to violate the fundamental tenets of a world religion, Islam. Finally, Abu Ghraib dramatized the fact that, unless the war in Iraq—and in Palestine—is stopped, and the LaRouche Doctrine implemented, there will be a new Dark Age; nothing more graphic than the photos of that Iraqi prison, could bring this point home.

It is in this context that the escalation of conflict inside

Iraq, focussed on Shi'ite centers, must be seen. Fighting has been escalating in Najaf and Kerbala, the two holiest cities for Shi'ites—but revered by all Muslims—between the occupation forces and the militias of radical Shi'ite Moqtadar al-Sadr. Instead of seeking an arrangement like the one struck in the Sunni center of Fallujah, whereby Iraqi military took over control of security, the United States has stubbornly pursued its confrontationist drive, demanding that al-Sadr be arrested or killed. The Coalition Provisional Authority of Paul Bremer maintains that al-Sadr was responsible for the killing of another Shi'ite cleric, allied to the British and Americans, one year ago. Leading Shi'ite figures, both political and religious, have told the occupation authorities that the al-Sadr case should be dropped, until such time as a legitimate Iraqi government comes into being, at which time, it may decide whether to press charges or not. The same array of forces, from both Iraq and neighboring Iran, have insisted the entire al-Sadr problem should be left to the religious leadership. This, the United States has roundly rejected.

After the revelations of torture at Abu Ghraib, al-Sadr's forces could only gain support. The radical militia leader issued a call to Shi'ites everywhere to converge on the two cities, to join their resistance. In response, the highest Shi'ite authority, Ayatollah Ali Husseini al-Sistani issued a statement with the opposite message: "The office of Ayatollah Sistani calls on citizens in all of the cities and governorates not to head to holy Najaf due to the dangerous circumstances that the holy city is passing through." It said peaceful demonstrations could be held at mosques in other city centers to "protest the violation of the sanctity of the two holy cities" and "the houses of the grand ayatollahs." This last reference is to the fact that al-Sistani's house was reportedly fired upon. The statement continues: "It's permissible . . . to demand the withdrawal of all military vestiges from the two cities and allow the police and tribal forces to perform their role in preserving security and order."

In short, al-Sistani was calling for an arrangement to be worked out, along the lines of the Fallujah model, and coherent with the approach outlined in the LaRouche Doctrine: the occupation forces must disengage from conflict with the Iraqi population, and hand over responsibility for security to the local Iraqi forces. Al-Sistani's intervention came at a point where the armed conflict inside Najaf and Kerbala threatened to violate the sanctity of the Shi'ite shrines. According to reports, fighting occurred on May 18 just 100 meters from the shrines, as fighters launched rocket-propelled grenades at U.S. tanks which had moved into the area. On May 20, it was reported that U.S. helicopters had fired missiles at al-Sadr forces located between two holy shrines in Kerbala. Heavy fighting continued that day also in Najaf. If the shrines were to be affected, al-Sistani would have no choice but to support armed resistance, and the war would enter a new phase, engaging regional powers as well.

Al-Sistani's passive resistance aims to force the United States to end the occupation, through a process coherent with international law. Thus, he has accepted the transfer plan for June 30, in point of fact, without legitimizing it; he has specified that any interim government would have limited powers, and only a democratically elected government can effectively rule. The Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), the leading Shi'ite political group inside the Iraqi Governing Council, has been mapping out its political relationship with the occupation, according to the guidance provided by al-Sistani.

Iran, which hosted the SCIRI during its years of exile, has also been attempting to de-escalate the conflict with al-Sadr's militias. Ayatollah Haeri, the mentor of al-Sadr, recently left his residence in the Iranian theological center in Qom, to return to Iraq, in order to set up an office in Najaf, from which location he could exert influence over al-Sadr. Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi reiterated throughout his European tour in early May, that the United States should desist from attacking al-Sadr. Kharrazi demanded that they should leave the situation in the hands of the religious authorities, who could deal with it.

Mass Protests Break Out

The convergence of the Abu Ghraib revelations and the upsurge in fighting in the Shi'ite holy cities—flanked by the Israeli atrocities in Gaza—have unleashed a new wave of mass protests across the region. In Tehran, Qom, Isfahan, and Mashhad, Iranians took to the streets beginning on May 16, and staged protests against the occupation, particularly focussed on the violation of the sanctity of the holy places. In Tehran, thousands protested on May 19, and about 3,000 gathered in front of the British Embassy, (as there is no U.S. Embassy) to throw molotov cocktails and bricks. At Inghelab Square, protestors burned Israeli, American, and British flags.

At the same time, though unnoticed by major Western press, demonstrations swept cities in Turkey and in Egypt. On May 20, Hisbollah leader Sheikh Nasrallah called on Muslims everywhere to demonstrate. In Cairo, massive police deployments could be seen, especially outside the university, after students organized protest demonstrations. On May 18, it was announced that 54 members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt had been arrested, following raids against their offices in several cities. The opposition movement, which has been tolerated by the government, had been active in organizing protest demonstrations against Israeli and U.S. policy.

Such demonstrations are merely the foretaste of things to come, if a political solution for Southwest Asia is not forthcoming, from America. As rage spreads through Arab populations, government circles, intellectuals, and mass media are turning new attention to the LaRouche Doctrine, as a source of hope.