

The lower House of Congress had not been scheduled to vote on the impeachment until April 7. But, swayed by the emotional impact of Argaña's murder, it voted to impeach Cubas on March 24, and the Senate then called him to appear on March 25 to be tried. Trade unionists shut down the capital in a general strike; schools and shops were closed, transportation stopped, and rioting students and peasants clashed with police in front of the Congress. By Saturday, March 27, six student demonstrators had been killed by snipers positioned on top of buildings close to the Congress. "We are on the brink of civil war," warned Angel Seifart, a former Vice President and defender of President Cubas.

All the marks of a British operation

For all the attempts to portray this as a spontaneous response to Argaña's murder by an enraged populace, this total institutional chaos did not come about by chance. Events which occurred on and after March 23 bore all the marks of a classical British "third force" operation, right down to the professional hit-squad which murdered Argaña, and the unidentified snipers whose killings were blamed on Oviedo and Cubas.

The same forces which mobilized against Oviedo in 1996 were at the center of what were euphemistically called "mediating" efforts to force Cubas's ouster. Fearing that Oviedo would mobilize his own broad base among the country's peasantry and within the Armed Forces, U.S. Ambassador Maura Harty, joined by the papal nuncio and the ambassadors of Brazil and Argentina, threatened Cubas that if he chose to stay on and fight, as several diplomatic sources had reported, he would lose the backing of the "international community." According to reports in the Argentine press, it was Harty who armtwisted the commanders of Paraguay's Armed Forces into agreeing to support the new government.

Brazilian President Fernando Henrique Cardoso was the other heavyweight brought in. He called Cubas several times during March 26-27, telling him, among other things, that if he didn't accept a negotiated solution, Paraguay would be expelled from Mercosur for violating its "democracy" clause. Because Paraguay is economically dependent on Brazil and Argentina, that threat carried considerable weight. It was at that point that Cubas resigned and González Macchi was inaugurated as the new President.

But, given the unstable regional situation stemming from Brazil's financial meltdown, Paraguay's new government isn't likely to last long. González Macchi's announcement that he intends to serve out the remaining four years of Cubas's term has already blown holes in the "democracy" facade, as the Constitution calls for only a six-month term followed by new elections. The Cardoso government is said to be "uncomfortable" about that fact, and according to the daily *O Globo*, has been left holding "a hot potato."

Interview: Gilles Munier

A French perspective on the war vs. Iraq

Mr. Munier has been Secretary General of the Franco-Iraqi Friendship Society since 1986. He was interviewed in Paris by Christine Bierre, in mid-March.

EIR: You have just returned from Iraq. Can you tell us about the military and political impact of the Anglo-American air raids against Iraq?

Munier: I came back from Iraq about a month ago. (My previous trip went back to four days before the Anglo-American bombings of last December.) I went with a group of French senators who also wanted to see for themselves what the situation is.

I have known Iraq for around 30 years; I go there five to six times a year. I'm well placed, therefore, to evaluate the evolution, or, the degradation, of the situation.

The air raids in December did not demoralize the population, even though this was their purported aim. The Anglo-Americans thought that they would be able to push the population to demonstrate against the regime. Not only did that not happen, but, according to different eye-witness reports which I gathered, the population reacted more against the spectacle of the thing. Even though they were furious at having to impotently watch the destruction of their infrastructure, they did not lock themselves up, nor did they escape to the countryside. Many were up on the roofs watching the missiles drop. People preferred to witness for themselves the brutality of the attack. . . . They don't have CNN. . . .

Those air raids had no impact on the morale of the Iraqis. Quite the contrary, Saddam Hussein has been reinforced, because he is perceived as a resistance fighter, a modern-day Saladin.

EIR: Where are the Anglo-Americans concentrating the bombings? In this undeclared war, which has been going on since December, where the density of daily sorties and air raids has already surpassed that of last December, what has been the impact on infrastructure and human lives?

Munier: Americans are concentrating their attack on the two no-fly zones, following two scenarios. The first, is to re-run the attempted land invasion scheduled to be launched

from Kurdistan, an invasion which was short-circuited by the Iraqi offensive on Erbil of September 1996, carried out at the request of Massoud Barzani [leader of the Democratic Party of Kurdistan]. The CIA is trying to lead the Kurds into an adventure in which they want no part.

The second scenario aims at constituting a so-called liberated zone in the south of Iraq, with Basra as its capital. That scenario had failed during the 1991 Gulf War, because the Iranians did not want to leave to the West the control of a region that they consider theirs. Today, Washington backs the pro-Iranian Shi'ite option. But the Iraqis of the south will greet the new invaders as they greeted Khomeini's troops. I would not bet much on their skins.

The infrastructure has perhaps been destroyed, but one cannot remain in a country where the population is hostile to you. In the south, there is the Iraqi Army, the popular army of the Baath Party, and the tribes. A foreign expeditionary body will not be sufficient to counter that.

EIR: Let's talk about the Iraqi opposition that Washington and London are trying to build up against Saddam Hussein. Are these forces real? Do they have the capacity to launch an assault against Baghdad?

Munier: The Kurdish opposition movements are practically the only ones that represent something real, because they are engaged in a nationalist struggle. Whether one is favorable or not to Jalal Talabani [head of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan] or Massoud Barzani, they nonetheless have a base, be it that of their own tribes or religious confraternities.

The opponents based in Iran within the Mohamed Bakr Al Hakim-led Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), represent different tendencies of pro-Iranian Shi'ism. Those people have been well-provisioned and armed by the Iranians for ten years, and it's not guaranteed that they will be willing to risk their lives on the other side of the border. They would rather reap the harvest of an operation carried out by others. To go and get shot in Basra for the greater happiness of the Americans, is a different story. . . .

Then there is the so-called London opposition. Ahmed Chalabi is one of the pillars of this tendency. [See *EIR*, Jan. 29, 1999, p. 38.] He is wanted for fraud. It's sufficient to go to Interpol to consult his background. He is responsible for the bankruptcy of the Petrabank in Jordan in 1989. He escaped from that country to avoid being prosecuted. The CIA has now propelled him into the leadership of the Iraqi National Congress, and he is received by the American Congress. It's totally crazy! You don't put a crook at the head of a movement which claims to liberate a country.

Among groups financed through the Iraq Liberation Act, there are also royalists who fled Iraq in 1958. They speak Arabic with an English accent. A prince, presently in Great Britain, calls himself the descendant of the Iraqi Hashemites,

when in reality he descends not from King Faisal II, murdered in July 1958, but from the regent Abdullillah, a British hand and a hated personality who was the source of the general discontent that pervaded Iraq at the time.

EIR: Let's talk about the Kurds. They represent one of the few solid movements of this resistance, but everyone knows that they also have agreements with Saddam which they don't want to give up. In that light, what could be the attitude of Kurds in the coming conflict?

Munier: When Saddam Hussein was Vice President of the Republic [in the 1970s], he was the one who granted a relative autonomy to Iraqi Kurdistan. Massoud Barzani has known Saddam for a long time, and also knows the value of American promises. Not only did he live through the collapse of the resistance activities led by his father, Mustapha, after he was dumped by Kissinger, but he remembers the way in which they were treated in the United States, where they sought refuge.

Numerous wars have set Iraqi Kurds in opposition to the central power, but the thread of the relationship was never broken. Mustapha Barzani used to send his sons to Baghdad, to discuss the cease-fires, and they were always treated with dignity. That seems incredible to Westerners, who speculate on the hatred sown by their secret services in that region.

In Iran, the negotiations proposed by the Islamic regime were all traps. The Iranian Kurd leader Gassemlou lost his life in that context. Iraq is the place where the Kurds have the most rights, and paradoxically, it is Iraq which is under the greatest attack for the way in which the Kurds are treated. In Turkey, a member of NATO, the Kurds are simply considered outlaws. The CIA and the Mossad helped Ankara capture Ocalan. There are double standards in all this, and, what is certain, is that the Kurds are always being cheated by everybody.

EIR: When Abdullah Ocalan, the head of the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) was arrested, there was some talk about an existing collaboration between the Kurdish movements in northern Iraq and the Turkish government on the basis of their one common interest: an alliance against the PKK. Would it not be possible from there, to woo the Kurds into accepting the creation of an autonomous state in northern Iraq—with support from the Turks—in exchange for a stronger alliance against Saddam?

Munier: Some say that in order to counter the Kurdish TV which currently transmits out of Sweden or some other country and is close to the PKK, Turkey is encouraging the creation of a new Kurdish TV network at Erbil [in Iraq]. Barzani, who controls this area, plays a multiple game: with the Iraqi government, with the Americans, but also with the Turks. What is at stake for him, is the ability to contain the influence of the PKK, a Marxist-type movement, as was also the case

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with the former Maoist, Talabani.

Barzani needs Turkey, not least, because that country controls the roads over which the trucks carry Iraqi oil to the Asia Minor ports, and upon which he collects a toll. The sum collected is considerable. That caused the civil war between him and Talabani, who was demanding a piece of the cake. The Americans have gotten them to reconcile—but for how long? Jalal Talabani, nicknamed, throughout the Middle East, the “king of mercenaries,” is not exactly trustworthy.

EIR: But the Turks are totally opposed to the creation of a Kurdish state in the north of Iraq?

Munier: They are totally against it, because it would create a pole of attraction for Turkish Kurdistan. For a Kurd state to exist in the north of Iraq, the different tribes and local clans would have to come to terms with each other. Since antiquity, this has never really happened.

On the other hand, it is known now—although, unfortunately, the Western press has not made it widely known—that when Al Hakim went to pray at [the Shiite Iranian holy city] Qom, some ten days ago, he was met by hostile movements at the mosque’s entrance. Tomatoes and shoes were thrown at him, and he was accused of being responsible for the murder of Imam Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr. The Iranian security services then arrested some 150 demonstrators, some of whom belonged to the front that he leads. The Western press made it a point of not covering this information. [The Iraqi cleric had been murdered in February in Najaf, Iraq, sparking protests by Shiites, who automatically blamed Baghdad for the assassination—ed.]

EIR: What is the Iranian position vis-à-vis a new Anglo-American escalation against Iraq? During his recent trip to Rome, President Seyyed Mohammad Khatami denounced the air raids and the unliteralism of that position. . . .

Munier: The problem of the Iranian leaders is their deep-rooted hatred against Saddam Hussein. But, they reflect and wonder if they would not themselves become the American target, once Baghdad will have fallen. They tell themselves, therefore, that it is better to contain the Americans, and not to do anything decisive which might help the West install a regime under their control in Iraq.

They are rather worried themselves. During the December bombings, some stray missiles landed on Iran. Was it a warn-

ing or not—I don’t know. In Iraq, certain “stray” missiles were aimed at the houses of personalities. . . . It was not a coincidence. . . .

EIR: Faced with this extremely difficult situation, what is Iraq’s strategy? The UN Security Council is divided: China and Russia denounce the war openly; France does too, even if less vehemently. What is the Iraqi strategy vis-à-vis those countries?

Munier: For the Iraqis, even the softer French position is good. In their situation, they can’t exactly be picky. I think also that [French President Jacques] Chirac follows American domestic politics closely. He thinks Clinton is not as bad as some say, and that he should not be put a worse position with respect to the warhawks like [Vice President] Al Gore, [Secretary of Defense] William Cohen, and [Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff] Gen. [Henry H.] Shelton. There are some very dangerous people within the Clinton administration.

Concerning the French initiative in the United Nations, it’s simple: The Iraqis applaud the part that calls for lifting the embargo. But, they find totally unacceptable the idea of putting their economy under international trusteeship. I think, at any rate, that this plan cannot be achieved. The UN surveillance team would rapidly show its ineffectiveness. It would be corrupted by Western mafias attracted by the contracts. It’s already the case for the present sanctions committee.

I wonder why France continues to defend its project. The American warhawks reject any talk about lifting the embargo. It seems to me that this project is still-born. In an attempt to overprotect Clinton, France is, in reality, going against its own interests and its Arab policy.

Faced with this situation, Iraqi diplomacy is not inactive. President Saddam Hussein launched the proposal for an international front against the “imperial policies of the United States,” a vast design which meets that of the strategic partnership between China, Russia, and India.

India could compete with the West in the Near East. Its capacities are immense and it is not perceived as a danger. It has strong ties to Mesopotamia going back to antiquity. During the Abbassid epoch [the humanist Baghdad-based caliphate in the 8th-13th centuries], the port of Basra traded with the Indian ports. Under the British mandate, when

Iraq depended on the Empire of the Indias, relations grew between Arab nationalists and Indians. They were strengthened when Nehru gave impetus to the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Iraqis think that we have to relaunch the Non-Aligned Movement, or to create a new and more vigorous structure. The front proposed by Saddam Hussein is not reserved for Third World countries, nor to former communist regimes. It could bring together those who, in Europe and in the United States, oppose present American policies. That includes a lot of people. There is no reason why such a current of opinion could not carry weight in the future of the world.

EIR: And China?

Munier: China is in a better position than Russia. It could give a determining impulse to that new movement. The Russians make beautiful declarations but cannot follow their ideas through to the end. They have to compromise. I think their President [Boris Yeltsin] is at the end of his rope, and that [Prime Minister Yevgeni] Primakov needs the IMF [International Monetary Fund] and American credits too much to be able to act freely.

EIR: Many people expect a massive escalation of the war against Iraq in April, including even the deployment of special forces and ground troops.

Munier: There is much talk about that, indeed. The scenarios we have spoken about could be activated, but to intervene outside of the exclusion zones, is a different affair.

There have been projects to intervene in Baghdad by mobilizing British SAS [Special Air Services] to capture Saddam Hussein, or to eliminate him. Certain people say that the Americans do not want to kill Saddam; they are wrong. Just during the Gulf War, the American Air Force set up 240 operations to kill him. It was delusional! Following false information peddled by the Iraqi opponents in London, hundreds of Iraqi families who had taken refuge in the Amariyah bunker in Baghdad, were massacred. Aircraft were programmed to search for a certain type of vehicle used by Saddam Hussein. Perhaps more than 100 people who had the bad luck of owning the same type of vehicle, were killed.

I think that those Americans who are preparing the final "land offensive" do not know what trap they are getting into. They should remember the deplorable outcome of Carter's attempt to liberate the hostages [in Iran] which flopped. If Bush didn't go all the way to Baghdad, it's because he knew very well that there would be heavy human losses and that American public opinion would not accept it.

EIR: Beyond the situation in Iraq, the whole Middle East is currently a powderkeg. Political forces, whole countries are being pushed, their back against the wall, into extreme situations which heighten the war danger. There is Israel,

with an election coming up which [Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu would like to postpone at all costs in order to eliminate whatever is left of the Middle East peace plan. There is the situation of southern Lebanon: Israel wants to withdraw without having to give the Golan Heights back to Syria, something which is intolerable for Syria. There are also difficult transition periods in Jordan, but also in Syria. In that context of extreme tensions, certain people fear that conflicts might explode where tactical nuclear weapons could be deployed. What do you think of that possibility?

Munier: From the American side, one can expect anything at this point, considering the warhawks who are leading their efforts at the military level. An American Air Force general declared recently that on the day and at the hour chosen by the Chief of Staff, the U.S. response to the Iraqi anti-aircraft fire will be disproportionate to the act committed. Was he thinking about the utilization of tactical nuclear weapons? Anything is possible.

At any rate, the United States is carrying out military experiments in Iraq. During my last trip to Baghdad, I was joined by a French friend who, at 6 p.m., made a stop at the Kilometer 250 gas station in the desert, between the Jordanian border and Baghdad. It was night. He then left, accompanied by other vehicles. Suddenly, about ten kilometers out, the desert was lit all up around him. On his left, at approximately 300 meters, he saw an enormous ball of fire and heard an explosion. All the cars stopped. What was it? Nobody knows. There is no military base or target in this area. This eye-witness report, however, confirms those of other Iraqis about other surprising events elsewhere in Iraq. One has the impression that Iraqi territory is being used to test new weapons.

EIR: Would you like to add something for the American population?

Munier: The American people should be more interested in what is happening abroad. I would be worried if I were them. Their leaders are provoking a revolt of the great majority of the world's peoples against the United States.

I know neither the American establishment nor the American people. And the problem is also that one knows little, or not at all, about those who constitute a countercurrent in that country. Lyndon LaRouche is known, because he has an international network through which he can communicate his ideas: His press played an important role in unmasking George Bush. Ramsey Clark saved the honor of the United States by denouncing this war and the massacre of Iraqi children by the embargo. Noam Chomsky denounced the New World Order, and issued calls which received good responses from intellectuals. They are not the only ones with courage the United States, that's obvious. Who are the others? What are they doing? I think that one of the interests of creating a new non-aligned front will be to find the American dissidents.