
Interview: Dr. Sa'adoon Hammadi

There is no basis for maintaining the UN sanctions against Iraq

Dr. Sa'adoon Hammadi is the Speaker of the Iraqi National Assembly (Parliament). He held this post during 1984-85, and his current mandate started in 1996. Dr. Hammadi has served as Iraqi Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs. He gave the following interview to Muriel Mirak-Weissbach on Oct. 13 in Berlin, where he led an Iraqi delegation to the Interparliamentary Union conference.

EIR: Dr. Hammadi, how is the situation in Iraq?

Hammadi: After nine years of sanctions, the negative effects are accumulating, especially adverse effects on health and nutrition. The situation is tragic. Of course, it is the general population that is hurt, especially the lower-income groups. Not only are there immense negative material effects, but these have also taken a toll on family conditions: Young men who would like to marry, find that they are not in a position to do so. Children are not able to benefit wholly from education. I have visited a number of schools and seen, they have no benches to sit on, they sit on the floor. Glass windows in their schools have been broken and not repaired, in winter the classrooms are cold, and so forth. So, their ability to absorb ideas is diminished. In addition, many children have to work, to help the family, and therefore cannot attend school.

So, the indirect social effects are not any less important than the direct material effects.

That said, we are determined to resist, to withstand the pressure. We must be very patient. The population is strong and is united. There is no basis whatsoever for maintaining the sanctions, given that all the legal requirements of [United Nations] Resolution 687 have been met.

EIR: The British, with the Dutch, have presented a new resolution to the UN, which would actually aggravate the sanctions regime, and the Security Council is split on it, with Russia and China opposed, and France not in favor of it. The British succeeded in getting the United States to support it. Just as, in 1990, it was Margaret Thatcher who went to the United States, to convince George Bush to launch a war against Iraq. Now, there are indications that the British-American front could be split as well. For example, there was a delegation in Iraq, in August, of aides of members of the U.S. Congress. That was the first such visit by a group of American

elected officials, or, their representatives, since 1990. What did they do there?

Hammadi: They visited towns and cities in the south; they visited hospitals, factories, and schools. So, they were able to gather first-hand information, which was limited, of course, by the time they could spend there. But it indicates that, if a good chance is given to world public opinion, to know what is going on, then there will be a storm of protest against the sanctions. If more such delegations were to visit Iraq from the U.S., if the media were to reflect their findings honestly for just one week, of the negative impact of the sanctions, then there would be a huge public outcry, and U.S. policy would have no chance to continue.

EIR: What was the impact of the delegation's visit, inside the United States?

Hammadi: It was positive. We hear that people were taken by surprise, to see that a group of Americans went to Iraq, and came back with this distressing information. To us, it is no surprise, but it shows how much disinformation has been circulating.

EIR: What about the planned visit of Pope John Paul II? His itinerary, for this pilgrimage on the occasion of the millennium, was supposed to start with a visit to Ur, the biblical city of Abraham. First, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright intervened, warning the Vatican against the trip; then she was followed by British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook; then, the U.S.-U.K. planes bombed Ur, which had earlier not been a target in the so-called "no fly zone." What is the status of the trip now? Has it been postponed?

Hammadi: I do not have the latest information, but I can say this: I expect the visit of the Pope to be useful, to bring good results, because this important religious personality will have to see with his own eyes what is going on in Iraq, and the media accompanying him will also have this chance. So, this shows again, that the situation in Iraq is being hidden, or the chance is not being given to see it.

It would be unfortunate if the Pope's trip were postponed. We believe that such a religious man, with the prestige and standing of the Pope, should not be swayed by political considerations. The Vatican should be neutral. Everyone expects this religious institution to be neutral, and humanitarian.



The embargo against Iraq has taken a high toll, dramatically increasing the death rate, especially among children, because of lack of food and medicine.

EIR: There was a report in the press here, about a group of Iraqi intellectuals, who had issued a letter protesting the visit of the Pope.

Hammadi: The letter was not an attack on the Pope's visit. It was urging the Church to do more for Iraq, where the sanctions are nine years old, and to expand the initiatives it has taken, to be more active and comprehensive. It was *not* protesting the visit of the Pope.

EIR: We are hoping that the visit will take place soon.

Hammadi: Let me take this opportunity to give you some facts and figures that I don't think many people know. These figures concern the Special Commission of the UN, UNSCOM. The Special Commission sent to Iraq 264 inspection missions, which included 3,558 experts in the teams. UNSCOM visited 386 sites in Iraq, for a total of 6,938 visits. In addition, a permanent monitoring system was established covering 386 sites in Iraq, monitored by 129 sophisticated cameras and 27 other sophisticated monitoring units.

Despite this, UNSCOM said that they still had doubts about the armaments of Iraq. If a country allows for this amount of work to be done by UNSCOM, and opens the doors for this huge number of visits and sites and experts, and yet they say Iraq is not cooperating with UNSCOM; if UNSCOM carried on all these activities over nine years, and nothing is found, what else can Iraq do?

EIR: There was a report in the press, that King Abdallah of Jordan was carrying a message from Iraq to President Clinton.

Is it a fiction?

Hammadi: I have no information either way. I heard of the report, on the plane coming here, together with the Jordanian delegation. One of them told me that BBC had broadcast this news. This is because Mr. Tariq Aziz made a visit to Jordan, and that's the connection they made.

EIR: What are the relations of Iraq with nations in the region? For example, the process of reconciliation with Iran, exchange of prisoners of war, and so on.

Hammadi: At the time Rafsanjani was President of Iran, twice Iraq conveyed the message at the highest level, that Iraq was ready to resolve all outstanding issues, in the form of package deals: We said, we and you will list all complaints, and we will sit down and solve them, one by one, until they are all solved, and relations are normalized. Mr. Rafsanjani was very cordial. I visited Iran more than once. They spoke positively, but no

decision was taken; they did not say yes or no. Things dragged on. On the prisoners of war, we agreed that we would release all Iranian POWs and Iran would release all Iraqi POWs. We started the process, and Iran followed the procedure of one to one, whereas, after the war with the U.S., both sides released all prisoners of the other side. Now, there are more Iraqis in Iran than Iranians in Iraq, so this is a pending issue.

Contacts are going on. There have been a number of Iraqi missions to Iran, they have made some visits, but fewer. They released token numbers of Iraqi POWs on religious occasions. They wanted us to hand over to them the Mujahideen al Qalk [MKO], which are in Iraq. We said, if we come to an agreement, we will tell the MKO that they can stay in Iraq only on condition that they do not undertake any hostile acts against Iran. And Iran would have to do the same, with the Iraqi opposition there.

When Mr. Khatami came in as President, there was a new atmosphere of understanding. He stated that he wanted to normalize relations, and there were several meetings, inside and outside Iraq, to discuss it. It was clear, there were two trends: The administration of Khatami was more lenient and wanted to solve the issues, but the hard-liners, in the army, intelligence, and, it seems, in Parliament, are against it. So, there is a conflict within Iran. It seems that Mr. Khatami is not ready to overrule the opposition. As far as we are concerned, we were and still are ready to solve all outstanding issues. Many gestures have been made: We opened the borders to Iran, to allow Iranians to enter Iraq; the heads of state have exchanged telegrams of congratulations and statements

of courtesy, etc. The number of visits has increased; in international forums, we are on speaking terms, etc. So, there has been an improvement since Khatami has come in.

EIR: In the context of the activities of many countries in Eurasia—China, the Central Asian Republics, India, and others—to rebuild the historic Silk Road, what is Iraq’s position? We have promoted an initiative, in the form of a committee for the Silk Road, to redefine policy, especially in the United States, toward Iraq, by bringing Iraq into this perspective. Given its economic potential and strategic location, Iraq must be a part of this Eurasian Land-Bridge.

Hammadi: The bilateral relations with China, Russia, and many Asian countries are improving a great deal. Day by day we see more missions and visits. We have joint committees, at the ministerial level, which functioned before, but stopped after the war. Now, they have resumed their work. I have made visits to China, we have strong contacts with China, economically, and there is nothing we can complain about at all. So in relations with China, we are making great strides. At the same time, with Russia, and the Southeast Asian countries, with India, Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan, we are making immense progress, restoring our bilateral relations, most recently with Pakistan.

EIR: Do you see any positive signs in Europe?

Hammadi: With Germany, we explained to them the foundations of bilateral relations, saying that there is complementarity and mutual advantages—Iraq needs the industrial capabilities of Germany for its reconstruction program, and Germany is an energy-importing country. We had a successful experience before, so it is wise to resume our bilateral relations. They understand that very well and are eager to reactivate them. But, I think that they are overly cautious. They have appointed a chargé d’affaires to reopen their embassy; we discussed this yesterday, and discussed trade relations. He is active, energetic, will go to Amman first, then to Baghdad, to survey the possibility of opening the embassy. He was very eager to exchange economic delegations between the two countries. But they are not as forthcoming as France. They are over-cautious; they don’t hide that, and say they have to take into account the American position.

EIR: Do you differentiate between the British position and the stance of President Clinton? You remember that Clinton at first resisted the British, and their co-thinkers—Albright, Defense Secretary William Cohen, and others—back in November, when they wanted to start bombing Iraq? Then, in December, while Clinton was in the Mideast, the decision was made to go with the British drive for aggression, based on the fraudulent report by UNSCOM Director Richard Butler.

Hammadi: In intellectual circles, there is the opposite impression, that if the U.S. goes 100 steps, the British will go 98. That’s not true. Of course, an important element in

America, is the Zionists. They would like to destroy not only Iraq, but the region. The most extremist Zionists want to dominate there.

But, again, as you mentioned, Britain has the historical conflict with Iraq. Iraq was the first to nationalize oil. The British were the first to come to Iraq, with pipelines, to get oil concessions, then they were the first to be nationalized. The British are much more cold-blooded, calculating, for their self-interests. There are these differences.

And, as you have said, it was Mrs. Thatcher who steered toward war in 1990-91. But I’m not sure it is always the British in the lead; to us in Iraq, it looks as though the Americans are in the lead for the sanctions.

EIR: What is your view of the Middle East situation, including Arab-Israeli relations, since the formal revival of the negotiations?

Hammadi: We, as a political party, believe that Zionism is an imperial power, which uses religion as a pretext. Palestine was colonized, and the Palestinians were expelled by the British, who had the mandate. That’s an ideological factor.

As for the practical aspect, we believe there will be no positive outcome, unless there is a balance of power between the two sides, which does not exist at present. The Palestinians are not being given what they should, on their merits, but have to beg. If there is to be peace, it must be based on justice, which is not the case now.

EIR: What else would you like to say to our readers?

Hammadi: In this IPU [Interparliamentary Union] conference, we are hearing lectures about “human rights and democracy.” There are a number of countries represented here, from the Third World, who say the issue is not “human rights and democracy,” but that there are economic issues, there is military pressure on them, outside interference, problems of injustice. We Arabs believe injustice has been done to us, and there are many African and Asian countries which share this view. When we see Western countries hammering on “human rights and democracy,” we see this is not a universal approach. Their credibility would be addressed if they were to address this in the world as a whole. Chancellor [Gerhard] Schröder and President [Johannes] Rau, in their speeches here, talked about “human rights and democracy,” but with no reference to problems in the world: no reference to sanctions—I don’t mean Iraq, but sanctions policy—no reference to military interference into the internal affairs of a country. Mrs. Johnson, from the Human Rights Commission of the UN, made a reference in a speech about ministers who come to talk to her about human rights abuses, always in “other countries,” and she received a lot of applause.

So, if “human rights and democracy” are being used as a cover for interference, then the West, in promoting this, has no credibility in the developing sector countries. If a Palestinian refugee, for 50 years, has been living on the equivalent of 7¢ a day, where are human rights?