

Specter of More War Shows in Iraq

After the much-celebrated fall of Baghdad, the continuing conflict inside the country threatens to assume a new character, with the involvement of forces from neighboring countries. First, there is the problem of the Iraqi “opposition,” supposed to become a new government. Although Ahmed Chalabi, leader of the Iraqi National Congress (INC), has been chosen by Defense Secretary Rumsfeld as a figurehead to run a government for the U.S. military, he is neither acknowledged by the rest of the opposition nor by the people. A leading Shi’ite group and others were refusing to take part in an April 12 meeting in Nasiriya, with American “free Iraq pro-consul” Zalmay Khalilzad and “Viceroy of Baghdad” Gen. Jay Garner. Hamid al-Bayati, London representative of the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), announced April 9, “We are not going to take part in this meeting in Nasiriya. We think this is part of General Garner’s rule of Iraq.” Ayatollah Mohammed Bakr Hakim, chairman of SCIRI, in confirming its opposition, referred back to pre-war discussions among the opposition groups, which were characterized by the illusion that they would be free to elect their own government, without U.S. military presence. The Shi’ites represent the majority religious group in Iraq. Although they have opposed the Saddam Hussein regime militantly in the past, they oppose an American occupation force as much.

The supreme religious leader of the Shi’ites is Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, based in the holy city of Najaf, Iraq. In March, al-Sistani issued a *fatwa*, banning any cooperation with the invading forces; later he called on Iraqi Shi’ites to “defend the homeland against the invaders.”

Needing a compliant Shi’ite, the Anglo-Americans recruited Abdul Majid al-Kho’i, son of the former religious leader of Najaf, who entered Iraq alongside British and American forces, and immediately claimed that al-Sistani had called for Iraqis to stop resisting. This was denounced as a lie by al-Sistani’s office, which issued a further *fatwa*

for the defense of Iraq “against the enemies of Allah and the enemies of humanity.” Al-Kho’i was denounced by other leading religious figures, including Ayatollah Mohammed Mahdi al-Asefi, who stated: “Both Saddam and the U.S.-U.K. invaders are evil. The Iraqi people are trapped in a holocaust. They should not be drawn into it. However, if the Americans attempt to occupy the country, then Iraq’s people should resist them. The U.S. is not in Iraq to bring to the Iraqi people a political project for freedom.” One Iraqi source in Iran told *EIR* that any American military administration “would have to face an uprising from the Iraqis in the South,” and the outcome could be civil war.

Al-Kho’i paid for his collaborationism with death. On April 10, he together with another Shi’ite Haidar al-Kadar, were stabbed with knives and swords, inside the mosque in Najaf which houses the holy shrine of Imam Ali.

On April 10, the status quo in the North of Iraq was challenged, as Kurdish forces, who have been working with the Americans, entered Kirkuk. Turkish Foreign Minister Abdallah Gul immediately called Secretary of State Powell, who reportedly reassured him that the United States would remove Kurdish forces from Kirkuk. But Gul announced that Turkey was sending “military observers” to the city. Kurdish control over Kirkuk has been defined by Turkey as the “red line,” which, once crossed, would trigger deployment of Turkish troops there. Prime Minister Recep Erdogan, on April 7, stated that “Entering northern Iraq will not be on the agenda as long as Iraq’s territorial integrity is preserved and there is no move aimed at seizing the oil of Mosul and Kirkuk.” Now the red line has been crossed; direct conflict cannot be ruled out.

Kirkuk is surrounded by the richest oil fields in the area, which have been supplying Turkey, as well as other consumers. Its pipelines to Turkey’s Mediterranean port of Ceyhan carried 1 million barrels of crude per day in 2002. The Kurds claim Kirkuk as their historic “capital” for an independent Kurdistan, and their street celebrations, when the Iraqi regime fell in Baghdad, resounded with cries of “On to Kirkuk!” Were the Kurds to move to control Kirkuk or to establish an independent entity, not only would Turkey move rapidly; so would Iran and Syria, which have significant Kurdish populations.—*Muriel Mirak-Weissbach and Hussein Askary*