



Paulo Casaca THE **HIDDEN** **INVASION** OF **IRAQ**



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Member of the Socialist Party, he has been an elected member of the Azorean Regional Parliament, of the Portuguese Parliament and of the European Parliament, where has been representing Azores, since 1999.

The Hidden Invasion of Iraq

Paulo Casaca

Member of the European Parliament

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Foreword

“But why are you so interested in Iran and Iraq?” This question has been put before me time and again, and oddly enough, not by those outside the political and diplomatic circles, but by those within. In response, I would always come up with a counter-question: “But how can you work in politics or foreign affairs without being interested in Iran and Iraq?”

This went on till my colleague and friend, the late Fausto Correia, persuaded me to settle the debate once and for all—by way of writing a book that would provide a true picture of the situation in Iran and Iraq; a book that would bring to fore my political reasoning in the light of my personal experiences.

Talking about experiences, after interacting with those who had stayed in Iraq for a while, including some of my colleagues in the European Parliament, I realised that there were sharp differences between the views of those who had spent some time in the *Red Zone* and those who had seldom ventured outside the *Green Zone*.

In the subsequent pages, I shall be referring to several books written by American journalists and former British civil servants, which provide a first-hand account of the prevailing situation in the Red Zone and analyze the peculiar relationship between religious fanaticism and Western policies. Much to our disadvantage, the US military personnel, easily the most reliable source of information,

are not yet permitted to publish or narrate their experiences.

To put things in perspective, the invasion of Iraq, anticipated to be the starting point of a democratic revolution, actually turned out to be the starting point of an Islamic revolution. It brought to power a sectarian government, resulting in civil war in the country, and triggering a wave of ethnic cleansing that led to thousands of killings and millions of displacements.

The country is in shambles, with a crumbling state, society and economy. Far from serving as an example for the entire Gulf region, the political developments in Iraq have made people of the region more sceptical than ever before towards democratic experiments.

The seeds of Islamic revolution in Iraq were sown in the year 1982, when the late Ayatollah Khomeini passed an edict to establish an institution, whose aim was defined in its very name—the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI). Towards the beginning of 2007, the council decided to rename itself to “Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council” as it believed that the objectives of the revolution had been attained, and now Iran needed to consolidate its grip over Iraq, under its supreme leader’s strict command.

Only time will tell whether the analysis of Iranian theocracy was correct or it was over-optimistic. For the time being, I shall focus my attention on the question of why the Western coalition, in the name of war against terrorism, allowed reigns of power slip into the



*Children picking wood for the fire in the outskirts of Al-Khalis
Photo Sameerah Shibli (January 11, 2007)*

hands of organisations condemned as the “earliest examples of religious, suicidal terrorist organisations” in the specialized literature on the subject.

The Western governments and media have chosen to overlook the fact that in the shadow of Allied forces, a much more sinister invasion force came from Iran to Iraq, with a radically different agenda.

The fact remains that this “hidden invasion” that drove the country into disaster had started much earlier—right in the heart of the decision-making process in the Western capitals.

Several actors of this book fell victims of terrorist attacks, or managed to escape Iraq often only after imprisonment and torture in the hands of more or less politically organised thugs. This book, in its entirety, is dedicated to them.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Paulo Casaca'. The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Paulo' and last name 'Casaca' clearly distinguishable.

Paulo Casaca
Member of the European Parliament

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Chapter 1

APPROACHING THE MIDDLE EAST

Chapter 1

Approaching the Middle East

a) Iran

My love affair with Iran started on a sunny October afternoon in 1982, while I was hitch-hiking around Italy's Tyrrhenian coast, on my way back from Sicily to Portugal.

Stopping by a motorway cafeteria, I saw a stunningly beautiful woman asking for a glass of water using a somehow affected English. It apparently did not impress the barman who turned her down in Italian.

I tried not to look too out-of-purpose while offering the lady a bottle of mineral water and a glass. She hardly took a sip, but warmly thanked me for the gesture. Being an experienced hitch-hiker, my eyes followed her, only to realise she was travelling in a fully packed car with two other passengers and a lot of luggage in the back seat. Tough luck!

However, as she spotted me coming out of the cafeteria with my rucksack, I heard her now familiar voice behind my back, insisting that I should get into the car. I felt quite embarrassed for causing so much trouble, but nevertheless took the offer.

As the journey progressed, the conversation picked up. I was with an Iranian couple who were exiled in London, and were accompanied by a cousin who had escaped from Iraq by bribing border guards on either side.

In the next few hours, I became familiar with the values, perspectives, and experiences that were not much different from my own, except for one crucial point. Iran, instead of witnessing a revolution to gain freedom, like the one I experienced in Portugal, witnessed the opposite of it; the country being sent back to the

Medieval Age by a bunch of sick fanatics claiming to act in the name of religion.

By the time the journey came to an end, my world view had been considerably transformed: the dictators I had known, the evils of capitalism, reactionary fellow citizens whom I had come across, all of them seemed to be “harmless doves” compared with the clerics that had taken hold of this country.

Previously, the Iranians did not have political freedom, but after the Islamic Revolution they did not have any kind of freedom. The account of Iranian theocracy’s sophisticated brutality, sadist torture, and crime that my hosts narrated sent shivers down my spine, and made me remember the horror stories of the Inquisition in my own country.

My Iranian hosts were driving down to Lisbon (which was my destination as well to catch a flight to Ponta Delgada in the Azores). The purpose of their journey, as I came to know, was that Portugal was about the only country where an Iranian refugee still had a chance of being accepted, even if merely as a tourist. I also became aware of the ethnic complexity of the country when my hosts insisted on their Azerbaijani ethnic origin rather than their Iranian nationality.

Portugal was the last European country slamming its doors on Iranian refugees, not for some humanitarian or political reasons, but probably because it was least likely to be chosen by the Iranians trying to escape the Islamic revolution that had devastated their homeland.

Poor and distant, Portugal was merely a lost chapter in the 16th century history of Iran and was “the country of oranges,” like everywhere else in the region. So, there was no particular reason for the Iranians to visit it.

Few months later, I wrote a lengthy letter to the Editor of *O Jornal*, protesting against the Portuguese government's intention of shutting the last European door on the Iranian refugees. The letter was titled *Solidarity with the Iranian refugee* and was published on 11 March, 1983.

That encounter with those Iranian people opened my eyes towards one of the ugliest realities of our times. It helped me equate the revolutionary promises and deeds of extreme leftist groups such as the one I had embraced during the Portuguese revolution (a Maoist one) and the promises and deeds of Ayatollah Khomeini. To my discomfort, I could see disturbing similarities.

I suspect that a comparative analysis of Mao Zedong and Ayatollah Khomeini, as the one of Lenin, Stalin and Hitler¹ is likely to throw up more similarities than differences.

Although the four of us had the same destination, we could travel together only till Genoa. France had refused them a "through-visa" and they had no choice but to take a ferry from Genoa to Barcelona, and then resume their journey to Lisbon.

Thereafter, I lost contact with them. I assume they did not stay in Lisbon for long, and I hope they found a way to circumvent Europe's legal barriers against refugees. With the exception of North African Maghrebians, these were the first people I ever met from the Greater Middle East, and they left an ever-lasting impression on me.

It was more than 20 years later that I met Iranians again, and this was at the European Parliament, where the National Council of Resistance of Iran (Iranian umbrella organisation that comprises several opposition organisations, the most important of which is

¹ Gellately, Robert, *Lenin, Stalin and Hitler - the Age of Social Catastrophe*, Alfred A. Knopf, 2007, ISBN 978-I-4000-4005-6

the People's Mujahedin of Iran, PMOI) maintains a significant presence up to this day.

As I was to understand later, the PMOI was going through a difficult political period because the Western powers were taking President Khatami's promise of democratisation seriously and were helping him persecute the opposition, namely the PMOI.

Furthermore, the tendency to see Iraq as the most dangerous outcast country in the region made the PMOI a collateral victim. In 1986, after Jacques Chirac was nominated as the Prime Minister, France expelled the PMOI leadership from the country. Subsequently, these people decided to move to Iraq, where they built an underground army to defy the Iranian regime.

It appears to me that the Western perspective, which is mainly the American perspective later adopted by the United Kingdom and the rest of Europe and its allies, had an awkward logic from the start.

If there were liberalisation perspectives or possibilities within the Iranian ruling class, the way to encourage and to test them was the opposite of what was being done, they should have been pressed to come to terms with their opposition; not being helped with their persecution.

Actually, the differences brought to the Iranian political life by Khatami were more cosmetic than substantial. The West seemed to be geared at accepting the theocratic regime as such and wanting to exploit its economic or diplomatic opportunities, the "reformism" of Khatami being more a convenient excuse than a serious reason to change policies towards Iran.

In particular, after the second election of Khatami in 2001, when those Iranians who believed in the possibility of a reform from within lost their illusions, the European diplomacy could hardly

hide its preference for someone clearly aligned with Khamenei—the “spiritual” leader and, to all effects, the number one of the regime—in the Iranian Presidency who would put a halt to this tiresome exercise of trying to find what was the real official Iranian position.

The relation I had with my new Iranian friends reminded me of my previous encounter. My simple gestures towards them, defending their right to resist a tyrannical regime, listening to their points of view, refusing to refuse to believe the immense set of propaganda made of hear-say and slander against them without even hearing their arguments, was greeted in such a disproportionate way, that I often thought of my offering of a glass of water to an Iranian lady in an Italian motorway.

I started to learn a bit about the Iranian character, mostly reserved and polite, very sensitive to small gestures (either positive or negative) as well as about their very high cultural level. Even the Iranian diplomats, who for some time tried to discourage me from having contacts with such dangerous opposition people till they considered me a lost case, showed sophistication to an unexpected level.

I followed with care the events that eventually led to the invasion of Iraq in 2003, including the attack and destruction of facilities and the killing of dozens of PMOI members in this country. Although the PMOI was based in Iraq, the organisation announced, according to their independent policies, that they would remain neutral in the war and they actually never shot a bullet at the Allied Forces.

The vicious attack on the Iranian opposition political group that had stated by all possible means—I actually was one of the conveyers of the message—their willingness not to interfere with the Allied Forces, without even asking for their surrender before

shooting, was a war crime from any point of view, and a telling sign of the nature of the intervention in Iraq.

Some months later, on June 17, France followed the same pattern of intervention, launching a large scale military assault on the facilities of the Iranian Resistance in Auvers-sur-Oise, in the surroundings of Paris, arresting more than a hundred people and causing severe material damages with bogus arguments that were later rejected by the French justice.

I closely accompanied these events and participated in several protests demanding the liberation of the Iranian Resistance leaders, namely the President of the Iranian Resistance, Maryam Rajavi.

By then, I was getting more and more conscious of the close relationship between a series of events in Iraq, involving Western powers including France, which opposed the military intervention, and the shadow of the Iranian influence. It was however only in July 2007, when a British Court ruling forced the United Kingdom to reveal classified documentation that I obtained a better perspective of a close understanding between the United Kingdom and Iran on the Iraqi operation. The Iranian-Western understanding is, I do believe now, the key to understand the Iraqi tragedy.

b) Israel

Being part of a German Marshall Fund programme in the US for six weeks in 1990, I had the opportunity to learn in both an intensive and extensive way about the political, economic and social reality of the US, and to fully admire it.

In 1994, I was in the US for the third time, then as a guest of the US Embassy in Portugal. This month-long tour of the US also included Puerto Rico at my request, as I was keen to learn about the relationship of the US with a semi-independent insular reality.

I got there from New York, wearing tennis shoes and other sportive



*With Maryam Rajavi during a Press Conference
at the European Parliament
Photo European Parliament (July 5, 2006)*

gear, but my luggage with my formal clothing did not. I was welcomed by a high-ranking official of the Government, responsible for external relations, who happened to be Jewish. He insisted that I should accompany him to a Passover celebration, an invitation to which I resisted as much as I could, not for any religious or political reasons, but for the embarrassment of being so casually dressed.

The participation in this Passover was the most vivid religious experience in my life. To my relief, my hosts from the US-Jewish Community, who happened to be casually dressed as well, got me in the ceremony as if I was playing the role of the “Good Samaritan” that I loosely recalled from Christian Masses.

The Talmud was read in a “Hebrew- English” version, rotating between everyone at the table - me included - and it was speaking about the well-known episodes of the Jewish Diaspora through the desert. The ceremonial food consisted of things like lamb ribs and unleavened bread.

After the ceremonial part had ended, more food was served and the conversation became relaxed; jokes on Jews were told endlessly.

To my surprise, I realised that the day of the Passover was not the same for all the Jewish communities, apparently, because of disputes on the exact timing of the original Passover meal that is transferred to different days because of the time lag between Israel and the Caribbean. So, the next day, I was presented with another Passover celebration. This time, it was a Jewish community driven out of Cuba after the Castro revolution.

One of my hosts was actually a nephew of León Bronstein, the famous Trotsky, and a man of great knowledge and wisdom. Many Jews from Eastern Europe tried to escape the repeated pogroms that took place there in the beginning of the XX th century by migrating to America,

exactly at the time when the migration policy of the country changed and made it much more difficult.

Mexico, as well as Cuba, became therefore second choice destinations, perceived as places from where jumping to the US would be easier, and this is the reason why relatives of Trotsky migrated to Mexico and why Puerto Rico became the last destination for a part of this community.

In none of these celebrations, with a lot of historical weight and sense, I was asked about my religious or any other sort of convictions; they just accepted me. One of the several things that I have always disliked in Christian celebrations is the nonsense of worshipping the history of a people (the Jews) that is at the same time presented as evil (the crucifiers of Christ) and that actually suffered tremendous persecutions from Christians.

My first contacts with Israelis had actually taken place in 1978, in Norway. I met one at a youth hostel and helped him to stay there incognito, as he was unable to pay for his accommodation. According to him, he had been a captain in the Israeli Army, and for some reason was facing financial hardship.

He was not spared my lectures on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, at the time 100% in favour of the latter and against the former, and I was surprised by the patience he displayed in listening to me. Still in Norway, I met an Israeli hitch-hiker in the North Cape on the first October 1980 and travelled for some time along with him. He was a student and much more circumspect on political issues.

When I was first elected to the European Parliament in 1999, I met there my good friend Olivier Dupuis (whom I knew from Rome and Brussels) and, although he is Belgian, elected as an Italian “radical” MEP. At the time he was also the secretary general of the “*Transnational Transpartisan Radical Party*” a party to which I registered myself in the nineties as a Portuguese socialist.

He invited me to a meeting with a Jewish-American delegation visiting Europe. I decided to take advantage of the occasion to confront the delegation with the latest accusations I came across against Israel, uprooting olive trees supposedly to destroy the Palestinians' way of living, an accusation that was taken care of by an Israeli diplomat. Later on, I added a film showing a Palestinian apparently being murdered cold-bloodedly.

I got comprehensive and logic explanations for both episodes. In the first case, the Israeli authorities flatly denied any policy of punishment through the destruction of trees, similar to the one they followed regarding the destruction of housing. This particular olive grove had served, apparently, as a hide-out for Intifada attacks on Israel. Regarding the killing, this was a suicide bomber, and apparently the Israeli officials at the control post found no other way to put an end to the threat he posed.

This was the time when I started to have a more balanced and global approach to the creation of the State of Israel and the nature of the conflict between Israel and the Arab World, and began to understand that Israel is part of the solution rather than the problem of the Greater Middle East.

Becoming a friend of Israel did not mean that I got less concerned about and friendly towards the Palestinian plight. I came to understand much better the main deep-rooted reason of the problem: the unwillingness of the region's autocratic regimes to give a breathing space to Jewish people, a community that had been nearly universally persecuted.

In its essence, the problem of the creation of Israel is not different from so many other intermingled ethnic/religious conflicts around the world - where minorities like Jews are the usual victims - and does not call for different types of solutions.

To start with, rather than the local conflict that it seems to be because of

the dimension and the scale of issues, it is a regional scale conflict embracing the whole of the Arab World. Whereas Northern Ireland was never perceived as a problem between European Catholic and Protestant communities, and the Balkan conflict was only marginally seen as a conflict of Muslim versus diverse Christian schools, or a conflict of Slav Orthodox versus the others, the war against Israel was waged directly by the bulk of the Arab nations and it involved the eviction of an estimated total of about one million Jews from Arab countries since 1948.

This ethnic cleansing is often forgotten, although it certainly was bigger and more dramatic than the migration of Palestinians from Israel's occupied territories after the wars waged against them by their Arab neighbours.²

After the first Islamic Revolution of 1979 in Iran, however, Israel became more a leit-motif to feed the fanatic religious agenda than a question in itself. The fanatic agenda, contrary to what seems to be the perception of most in the West, beyond the destruction of Israel, aims at dominating the Arab World as a first step to wage a global scale challenge to the world order.

If we were to believe in the image presented by the mainstream media, the only systematic oppression existing in the whole of the region is the Israeli oppression on Palestinians, and this oppression is the fault of the former. This completely distorted image is particularly shocking when coming from people that lived for a long time in the region and reported extensively on it, but show very biased appreciations of events (Robert Fisk is, by far, the worst example)³.

² Rahmani, Moïse, *Réfugiés juifs des pays arabes - L'exode oublié*, Éditions Luc Pire, 2006, ISBN 978-2-874-15636-6

³ Fisk, Robert, *The Great War for Civilisation, The conquest of the Middle East*, Fourth Estate, 2005, ISBN 1-84115-007-X

My engagement as a founding member of the “European Friends of Israel” got ever more firm when confronted with the generalised blindness that seems to prevail.

My first visit to Israel took place after I had toured neighbouring countries, allowing me therefore to have a better perspective of the country and the region. The mainstay of my visit was security and defence issues, as I was at that time chairing the European Parliament delegation for the relations with the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, and included extensive travel around the Israeli border with Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, and discussions and visits to the fence between Israel and Palestine.

However, as I was to recall later, the most outstanding event on that visit happened while I was having lunch at a restaurant in the Sea of Galilee. Some 10-15 schoolgirls, with a median age of around sixteen, were playing close to the departing harbour of the ferry across the lake. The girls were doing what girls everywhere normally do at this age: running, screaming, laughing, and yet I found the scene very peculiar. The way they were dressed, told you immediately they were Muslims wearing head-scarves, and this was the thing that was different from what I was accustomed to see: Muslim girls in Israel were behaving as freely as any other girls in this country, not in the circumspect attitude you find elsewhere in strict Muslim areas.

Although I have read a number of books on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I have never come across anyone mentioning the liberation of women as at least a particularly important subject.

To my knowledge, only the PMOI made it an issue, perhaps the central one, in its struggle against the Islamic fanaticism to show there is an alternative vision of Islam that is not misogynous.

The prevailing view seems to be a mix of condescension towards inequality of gender in Muslim societies—because Muslim or Arab women should be intrinsically inferior to their Western counterparts—

and the reasoning that because these societies are thought to be less developed, women are prone to acquire the same levels of respect when the “right time” comes.

I believe that reality should be read in the opposite direction: the condition for the change of Muslim societies is indeed the full participation of women in the process of change. This will not be possible while women are viewed as second class citizens. This is, among others, a very positive role that Israel can play in the Greater Middle East: to show the way forward in gender equality.

This point of view was considerably reinforced some months afterwards, when I visited another country that plays a somehow similar role in a different area of the Globe: Taiwan.

From some crucial viewpoints I found Taiwan to be the most “Western” society I know: a mix of “free entrepreneurship”, religious and political tolerance and hard work. Nevertheless it certainly did not show any “Protestant ethics” to explain its spirit of capitalism.

To cut it short, seeing Taiwanese reality convinced me that the way forward for the modern values of our civilization is not necessarily attached to a certain religion, a certain culture, a certain history or geography; therefore, I believe what what worked for Israel may also apply elsewhere in the region.

In any case, I am convinced that under the leadership of moderate and truly Palestinian leaders like Mahmoud Abass, Palestinians will eventually come back to a peace process that will be committed to find peace, development, democracy and stability to all peoples involved instead of being manipulated by extreme nationalistic or fanatic interests as it has unfortunately been the case.

c) Lebanon

Lebanese are perhaps the most ubiquitous people in the World, and you can hardly miss them when travelling around, but only while working



*Here with Nasrallah Sfeir, Patriarch of Lebanon
(February 26, 2006)*

in the European Parliament did I get into a deep relationship with a Lebanese-born through an Italian friend working for the European Foundation for Democracy, Roberta Bonazzi, and this Lebanese was no other than Prof. Walid Phares, a leading academic in the study of the phenomena of Jihadism.

Walid Phares is a Lebanese-born, French-educated American citizen who sits over three different and very important cultures of our civilization. I learned extensively on the Middle East from him and I got deeply involved with a new set of people that he introduced me to.

I met them in the wake of the Cedars Revolution, a strongly lived period of liberation of the Lebanese, where they found again what united them and embarked seriously in a democratisation process.

By the hand of Walid Phares I became a member of the “*International Lebanese Committee for the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559*” - Committee 1559 in short - a committee that aimed at the full application of this UNSCR. This, I believe, was an honour for the first time attributed to a non-Lebanese without any known blood relations in the country.

The Lebanese I happened to meet are nearly indistinguishable from any Southern-Europeans, perhaps except for the fact that they happen to be more business-oriented, and therefore, I feel more at home while with them than with other Middle Eastern people.

Although the first Lebanese expatriates I met came from Southern Lebanese Shiia communities, I was taken by surprise when confronted with the Hezbollah strong-holds around Beirut, in Southern Lebanon or in the Bekaa Valley, filled up with posters of the Iranian political leadership.

Lebanon is considered to be a good mix of the region, and it



With Toni Nissi, on behalf of The Lebanese Committee for UNSCR 1559, and Joseph Sokhon, Member of the National Council for the Cedars Revolution, Anjar, Lebanon, former Syrian Secret Services Headquarters where numerous skeletons were found (February 26, 2006)

probably is. Syrian leadership relation with Lebanon is at least as traumatic as Iraqi relations were with Kuwait or Iranian relations have been with Bahrain, with the significant difference that Syria did indeed occupy its smaller neighbour for quite some time. Syrian leadership does not seem to accept that Lebanon might go its own way, and to this day it does not even recognise its independence.

Actually, the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, following UNSCR 1559, was not complete, and its forces, or the armed forces of affiliated groups, have kept a military presence inside the Lebanese territory.

In February 2006, I participated in a fact finding mission of Committee 1559 to the Lebanese-Syrian border along the Bekaa Valley, alongside with the most important leaders of the committee and under the protection of Lebanese security forces, and we did verify the presence of Syrian posts within Lebanese territory.

The security measures my hosts provided for me were absolutely impressive and started from the moment I stepped out of the airplane at Beirut airport and was immediately taken to a black Mercedes that speeded between airplanes out of the place. “Security” of the airport was (and still is) in the hands of Hezbollah, so they wanted to make sure that no accident would take place over there.

My hosts wanted to take utmost care that I would not be another victim of the series of terrorist attacks that assassinated Rafik Hariri and afterwards a series of Lebanese prominent leaders, including members of Committee 1559.

While I was in Lebanon, I had always had a team of four armed men around me and I was not allowed to enter any place (even a toilet) without a previous inspection to detect any hidden explosive devices. Agenda and itineraries were kept secret.

In the middle of our mission, when we were going through a village



*Signing a book in honour of Rafik Hariri in Beirut
(February 27, 2006)*

divided between Syria and Lebanon where the border was a small stream that you could cross quite easily, we went through very tense moments, when Syrian soldiers and our own Lebanese security people got face-to-face within a few meters with guns ready to shoot and pointing at each other in the middle of a terrifying silence. I guessed if someone had screamed shooting would have started with unpredictable results.

Only afterwards, when I visited Iraq for the third time, did I see an even tighter security framework. Then, I was surrounded by sixteen armed men and it was out of the question to use mobiles or to stop by the road.

A second mission of committee 1559 in May 2007, not only confirmed our earlier findings but produced a very substantial report which estimated that nearly 4% of the Lebanese territory were occupied by the Syrian Army, Palestinian Military or Iranian Revolutionary Guards Camps, just along the Bekaa valley border between Lebanon and Syria⁴.

However, Hezbollah has managed to persuade many in the international public opinion that the occupying forces in Lebanon are the Israelis, rather than the Iranian military forces and its allies, and justified the attack on Israel in the summer of 2006 with this occupation.

The argument is that there is a small strip of land along a huge mountain (when I saw it from the Lebanese side, in February, it was covered with snow and seemed perfect for skiing), known as the Sheba farms.

According to the above mentioned report, Sheba farms were Lebanese territory occupied by Syria in 1958, and in practice were annexed to its Golan Heights territories which came into the possession of Israel in the war of 1967.

⁴ <http://www.cedarsrevolution.net/docs/ILC-WCCR-Border-Document.pdf>



*Here with General Michel Suleiman, in our days
Lebanon's President (February 27, 2006)*

If there is an international agreement attributing the Sheba farms to Lebanon, and if this strip of land is properly monitored by the Lebanese army or UNIFIL, there is no reason to believe that Israel will not withdraw from it.

As it stands, being recognised by the international community as Syrian territory, though, Israel cannot consider the Sheba farms in any other context than the one of the Golan Heights.

Lebanon and Iraq are close parts of the same geopolitical scenario. In 1982, the Iranian regime decided to organise its presence in both Lebanon and Iraq establishing two military-political-religious movements under the sponsorship of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, Hezbollah for Lebanon and “the Superior Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq” (SCIRI) with the armed wing being known as “Badr Brigade” from 1984 onwards.

While Hezbollah is now engaged in a struggle to get absolute control of the Lebanese Government and get hold of power, its twin brother, the SCIRI, renamed SIIC in May 2007, is already the number one political force in the Iraqi Government, as a direct consequence of the Allied operation in Iraq.

As an exiled Iranian Ahwazi (Ahwazis are ethnic Arabs coming from Ahwaz, also known formerly as Arabistan and in modern times as Khuzestan) opposition leader, Karim Abdian explained to me that the two organisations had training facilities located side by side in Ahwaz. The forces of the two groups were militarily trained and ideologically indoctrinated by the same officials of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards who would circulate freely from one side to the other.

Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroodi was the first leader of SCIRI, but Ayatollah Khomeini transferred him to the Head of the Iranian Judiciary and after replacing him by Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir Al-Hakim, who remained in the post until 2003, when he

was himself victim of a terrorist attack, and was then replaced by his half-brother, Abdul Aziz Al-Hakim.

Ayatollah Baqir Al-Hakim's functions extended over his strict duties for Iraq, as he was also chairman of the World Forum for the Proximity of Islamic School of Thoughts and member of the Supreme Council in Ahl Al-Beit World Assembly.

Actually, the most important historic leaders of Hezbollah (Hassan Nazrallah) and the SCIRI (the late Ayatollah Baqir Al-Hakim) were first-degree cousins. This fact helps to explain the umbilical relation between these two major offspring of the Iranian terrorist network "Pasdaran" (IRGC).

If any difference can be established between both organisations, it is just on the level of integration of SCIRI into the revolutionary guards apparatus, considerably bigger than the one of the Lebanese Hezbollah. For instance, the SCIRI/Badr brigade command structure is controlled by 400 personal representatives of the Iranian spiritual leader.

According to a complaint presented in August 2007 by the PMOI to the Allied forces, the IRGC established a list with 8331 names of Iraqis to be executed by the "death angels" of the Badr brigade. A very large number of the names on the list of Iraqi personalities were indeed those of the ones who were executed.

d) Jordan

I arrived in Amman on 5 April 2004 to start a visit to the PMOI camp named Ashraf in Iraq where I was to participate in a conference organised by the National Association of the Iraqi Tribes. I had no domain of Arabic and scarce information on what I was going to find.

My old friend José Lamego, then acting as the Portuguese representative at the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), tried

to dissuade me from this mission while I was already at Paris Airport, informing me about a severe degradation of the security conditions in Iraq, but at that time I did not realise how precise his information was.

As I would learn later on, that day was the beginning of the major US operation in Al-Falluja, right in the middle of my planned route, marking a turning point in the whole Iraqi situation with an unprecedented growth of violence and systematic kidnappings of foreigners.

At Amman's airport, I was received by a child holding a sign with my name, who invited me to follow him to a white Chevrolet pick-up van with a sleeping driver whom he had to wake up.

We drove into Amman where, to my surprise, I was introduced to two Palestinian gentlemen who, although English-speaking and polite, were very circumspect, giving me no explanation whatsoever of what was going on or indeed the reason and objectives of my meeting with them. They took me to see the city, the Roman ruins, to small gift-shops where I was offered maps of Palestine with no Israel, to dinner, and even a night-club, actually situated in the tower that Al-Qaeda attacked some months afterwards.

The "tourist tour" ended only after midnight when I was taken back to my Iraqi driver, and we got out of Amman in the direction of Baghdad. By then, I had already formed an idea of a very Westernised Amman that would be strengthened in my following trips.

We arrived at the Iraqi border by dawn after calmly travelling along a road crowded with small restaurants and small shops open in the middle of the night, which we often visited, and where my driver always seemed to know a lot of people. Signs of the passage of many Western journalists abounded through messages written on

placards. As we approached the border, I could notice an ever higher concentration of Iraqi vehicles similar to our own.

Though not being able to understand Arabic, I realised that my driver was listening to different European radio emissions in Arabic (from Germany, United Kingdom and France) that spoke about the political situation in Iraq.

Whenever he gathered with friends, he also often discussed politics. Once, when he was with around a dozen people, someone mentioned the name “Chalabi”, and there was a spontaneous collective laughing.

By the terms used in their conversations I could understand that people were discussing basic political concepts, which reminded me of Portugal after the democratic revolution in 1974.

Only when I arrived in Iraq, did I understand the reason for my tourist tour in Amman: to allow us to get to the Iraqi border by dawn, where a sort of informal convoy was formed. This was a basic security action: to get into Iraq in a sufficiently big group and only during daylight.

Chapter 2

IRAQ BY APRIL

Chapter 2

Iraq by April

a) Travelling in Iraq without a map

The motorway to Baghdad had a beautiful tarmac cover, enabling us to drive comfortably at over 160 km an hour. This was, however, about the only positive thing to say about it. Sandstorms covered parts of it; cars would eventually decide to take the opposite side of the motorway for a good reason or with no reason whatsoever; the metal used for road marks had been almost completely scrapped; resting stations were in a terrible condition, even by third world standards; carcasses of attacked vehicles, mostly oil-carrying trucks, could be seen everywhere.

As we were coming closer to Baghdad, an Iraqi-Australian, travelling in one of the cars of the caravan updated me with the news about Fallujah: the city was under siege. Violent combats were going on, and there was no way we could go through. He thought I should reassess my travelling plans.

Approaching the town, US tanks were indeed cutting the highway, and I could see the traffic getting out of the road and going in different directions. I lost the other cars of the caravan from sight, as our own got into crowded streets that formed a continuum which eventually accompanied us up to Baghdad.

After we had left the motorway, I never saw again any geographic indication again, and I realised that we did not lose our way only because the driver knew the whole region so well.

Before I left for Iraq, I insisted that I wanted to have one car only from Amman to the PMOI camp, as I did not feel like searching for a different car in Baghdad. As I was to understand, this had not been a very wise request. Drivers were accustomed to certain areas

of the country and they could get as lost as anybody else if they drove beyond those areas.

Only after this journey, did I read “Baghdad without a map” by Tony Horwitz¹ and I finally realised that this was a deliberate policy of Saddam’s regime, which considered any map or geographic indication to be sensitive information, and therefore, would forbid its public access.

If I did well understand correctly, we got into the house of some relatives of my driver, where people treated me very courteously. The house was quite similar to most of the ones I saw across the city, with a lot of scrap metal in the forefront.

We moved on to the North, following the main road on the left bank of the Tigris towards Kirkuk, till Al-Khalis. There, I finally became aware that neither did my driver know where I was heading for, nor was I able to explain to him what my destination was.

Secrecy was not only Saddam Hussein’s paranoia. As I was to learn in subsequent trips, utmost discretion is a basic rule to be followed in Iraq, where the dissemination of this type of information into wrong hands can easily be fatal.

However, here secrecy had reached its ultimate stage, since none of us knew where we were going to, and this was indeed a security hazard.

Al-Khalis is the capital of one of the six districts composing the Diyala Province. In the centre of Al-Khalis, one could feel that we were in a highly jobless area, as an impressive number of young men stayed seated in the sidewalks in the middle of the day.

As it was now clear, Ashraf, the official name of the PMOI camp,

¹ Horwitz, Tony, *Baghdad without a map and other misadventures in Arabia*, Plum, 1992, ISBN 978-0-452267459

actually the name of the first wife of the PMOI historical leader, Massoud Rajavi, killed early in the Islamic Revolution of Iran, was not widely known. Possibly, as both my Palestinian hosts and myself did not want to give a lot of side information on my political destination, we did not describe it to my Iraqi driver as the “Iranian Mujahedin” site (camp, or city) which was the name people used to refer to it.

In the meantime, a crowd had formed around us and, even without knowing that the foreigner kidnapping season had started, I could feel I was in trouble.

In this male-dominated environment, a woman appeared and made me follow her, leaving behind the driver without giving him any explanations. She got me into the headquarters of the Al-Khalis Women Association. There, surrounded by several other women, the lady who had taken the initiative of pulling me out of the trouble-spot introduced herself as the president of the Association, Sameerah al-Shibli, a school-teacher, journalist (editor) women activist and, as I was later to understand, a poet.

God knows what could have happened if I had stayed in the crowd. After we tried unsuccessfully to call Ashraf (mobile coverage had not yet reached the city), Sameerah just forgot about the rest and began enthusiastically to explain her newspaper and association to me when my Iraqi driver arrived together with an interpreter working for the US forces—Haider Al-Sady.

As I came to realise, Haider Al-Sady was not in the least sympathetic to the US but rather a devoted follower of the Iranian political-religious leadership (there is no way to distinguish one from the other) and was no fan of the PMOI.

He had actually nothing concrete to say against the organisation, but he believed that if they were good Shiia, they would have obeyed the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini and his followers.



*Sameerah Shibli in the garden of her house in Al-Khalis
(November 27, 2006)*

I realised he was carrying a revolver only when we got to the US Army check-point of the Ashraf camp.

At this moment, I had to disclose the name of my host, a member of the PMOI, who had lived in Italy.

The US soldier told me that the name which I provided was not in the list, and after asking instructions by radio, he announced, just like in the movies, I had sixty seconds to get out of there.

We got out of there, and waited on the other side of the road, hoping that someone would see us. By that time, I realised my interpreter and guide was the prototype of the fanatic with whom rational argument does not lead you very far, and I felt quite uneasy at the prospect of getting back to Al-Khalis under his supervision.

After half an hour, the PMOI people who had spotted us from the camp accompanied by a US Army escort, got there to fetch us. Apparently, I had only presented the shortened version of the PMOI gentleman's name, not the full spelling used in the names list.

PMOI members had been able to negotiate with the US forces (technically, they were still considered to be more like prisoners than protected persons by the US forces, a statute they would acquire afterwards) to search for me outside the camp, and then managed to convince them I was fit to get in. I was searched to my bones by the US troops, and they confiscated my laptop, handing me a receipt for a "weapon apprehension".

b) Iraqi Oasis

According to Professor Daniel M. Zucker, the biggest department of the Ministry of Intelligence and Security of Iran (MOIS, or VEVAK, following the Farsi wording) is the Department of Disinformation (Nefaq in Farsi)², and its main task is to fabricate slander against the regime's opponents.

Acting accordingly with the old KGB formula (do not use more than 20% of the communication space for disinformation, leave the rest as real information to give some credibility) VEVAK supports a plethora of “opposition dissidents”, “human rights organisations” or “civil society NGOs” acting through websites, newsletters, books and conferences aimed at discrediting their opponents, most of the time, the PMOI or its allies at the Iranian Resistance.

To its credit, VEVAK can show an impressive amount of disinformation, most of the times ridiculous statements that can only be trusted by those with bad faith or sheer ignorance on the subject which it manages to publish in the press, in books and organisation reports. The most spectacular success were statements and reports of the organisation “Human Rights Watch” organisation that, to my knowledge, showed the highest existing rate of false, outlandish and absurd accusations (for its credit, the only positive thing to say is that it does not respect the 20% maximum rule), on which I co-authored a full report³.

Although I certainly did not consider credible most of the accusations I read on the PMOI previously to my journey there, I was prepared to find a ruthless organisation when I arrived at the huge military compound of Ashraf, not an Oasis of peace, law, order and culture, in complete contrast with everything I saw in Iraq.

Completely disarmed, the PMOI members kept an impressive order all over the camp (with a small diplomatic department). If we are to

² Zucker, Daniel M., *Disinformation Campaign in Overdrive: Iran's VEVAK in High Gear*, Global Politician, 03/09/2007, <http://www.globalpolitician.com/23386-vevak-iran>

³ Brie, André; Casaca, Paulo and Zabeti, Azadeh, *People's Mojahedin of Iran Mission Report*, L'Harmattan, 2005, ISBN 2-7475-9381-9

take account of the fact that Ashraf has a by far superior and functioning offer in higher education, health, culture, basic services like water, sanitation or electricity or even in commerce than whatever can be seen elsewhere in Iraq out of Kurdistan, then we understand why Ashraf lately became known by Iraqis as city of Ashraf (Medina Ashraf).

Actually, Ashraf city was the only area in Iraq where speed limits existed and were enforced by a traffic police that did not seem prone to be lenient or take bribes, which symbolises the spirit of the place.

If it were not for the photographic evidence, it would be hard to believe that the camp had been bombed and completely destroyed during the invasion, as the reconstruction was very much advanced.

Virtually thousands of Iraqis could be found within the camp, either as service providers—many of them had been hired for rebuilding or as Iraqi political, tribal and civil society leaders (and I really wondered why the US forces had decided to pick only on me when I wanted to get in there...).

The real Green Zone of Iraq has for a long time been Ashraf City, and this has been especially true for ordinary Iraqis who, regardless of the situation in Baghdad's Green Zone, can not only can get access, but find medical and other support facilities that Iraq is so much devoid of.

Ashraf City has been virtually the only place where Iraqis have been able to gather and discuss freely, without fear of being bombed or shot, on the issues of their will.

With the exception of the Iranian regime allies, proxies and its terrorist outfits, I interacted with nearly all sectors of the Iraqi political establishment and society, even those from the South of the country, through Ashraf city.

One of the biggest lessons from my presence in Ashraf was to realise that the image conveyed by the mainstream public opinion on the South of Iraq as a monolith Shiite community supporting Iranian Revolutionary Guards and sponsored armed groups was nothing but an impressive act of disinformation.

In November 2007, the international press published a manifesto signed by 300.000 Shiite and headed by 600 sheiks and 14 important clergy members calling on the United Nations to send a delegation to Southern Iraq to investigate the “terrorist crimes committed by Iran and its proxies” (that is SCIRI and others)⁴.

As an answer, in the second half of November 2007, the “International Crisis Group” produced a report, suggestively called “Shiite Politics in Iraq: The role of the Supreme Council”⁵ aimed at painting the terrorist Iranian offspring as the representation of the “Shiite merchant elite”, in what can be described as nothing else but a piece of outlandish propaganda with the objective of hiding reality and not allowing the international community to know about the terror imposed by SCIRI.

The PMOI (with the exception of some ethnic or religious minorities, and civil society organisations, that have in the meantime been ferociously persecuted, silenced or disappeared) is virtually the only non-armed organisation in Iraq. Furthermore, the PMOI used the best of their influence to dissuade all Iraqis from exerting any violence against the Allied forces or civilians and to get involved in the political process. However, they were and are the only organisation existing in Iraq (with the exception

⁴ see, for instance, Washington Post, November 22, 2007, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/11/21/AR2007112102190.html>

⁵ <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=5158>

of Al-Qaeda) listed as a terrorist organisation both by the US and the EU.

It seemed almost hilarious to me that the only organisation existing in Iraq that did not use violence is classified as “terrorist” by the West. If we are to measure the state of lunacy of the Western understanding of Iraq, this might be the best indicator.

Actually, one of the most impressive museums of Ashraf city is the “*Museum on Terrorism*” that dwarfs its equivalents I know in Israel. The PMOI listed 139 terrorist attacks that it suffered, most of them in Iraq, carried out by the SCIRI/Badr Brigade, the main Iranian terrorist outfit in Iraq.

As time went by and the Iranian influence grew all over the country, Ashraf city was ever more targeted by terrorist groups who bombed buses transporting Iraqi workers to Ashraf city, destroyed water and electricity supplies, sent missiles on the compound and murdered visitors travelling there.

The Government of Maliki, neither endorsing nor condemning these terrorist attacks, complemented their aim by trying to blockade supplies and threatening to take legal action against anybody who established ties with the PMOI.

As I was to understand in this context, one of the main arguments against Saddam Hussein’s regime—its supposed links with the international terrorism—was a misrepresentation of reality.

Prior to the Allied intervention, Iraq was heavily targeted by Iranian sponsored terrorist groups that did indeed focus on Iranian oppositionists like the PMOI members, but did not spare Iraqi State structures and personnel or indeed civilians.

Along with the bulk of the radical Muslim public opinion, Iraq very often boasted of supporting terrorism against Israel, but has been unable to do much in this regard in recent times.



*Museum of Terrorism in Ashraf City
Photo Ana Isabel Alves (June 14, 2008)*

Al-Zarqawi's biography⁶ shows in detail that his connections were with both Iran, where he recovered from his wounds returning from Afghanistan, and Syria, where he started the training of his terrorist operatives.

It might be assumed that his presence in Baghdad shortly before the US invasion was not strange to Saddam Hussein's regime, although this is questionable as a proof of any connection, either strategic or tactic, between Al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein.

As we have seen, there was a constant and effective terrorist presence in Iraq targeting Iraqi or Iranian oppositionists since the Islamic Revolution in Iran, and this was certainly in spite of the tough Iraqi repression; therefore, there is not enough evidence to assume that Al-Zarqawi's presence in Baghdad was tolerated by the Iraqi regime.

Even if it was so, that is, even if Saddam Hussein was already preparing the response to the invasion by fuelling all possible means of mass terror, this does not invalidate the fact that the link of Saddam with international terrorism could not have existed as a reason to justify the invasion.

Saddam Hussein's regime was totalitarian and expansionist; his ideology made of racist extreme Arab nationalism; he answered any sort of attack with collective punishments - in this regard it was certainly not exceptional in the region - and every democrat would like to see its end, unless it was to be replaced by another regime even worse regarding respect for human rights and strategically much more dangerous. However, this was what happened, unfortunately.

Otherwise, as the time went by, it became consensual among most of the Iraqis, including the genuine Iraqi insurgents, that is, those

⁶ Brisard, Jean-Charles, Zarkaoui, *Le nouveau visage d'Al-Qaida*, Fayard, 2005, ISBN 2-213-62241-8

who did not act on behalf of any foreign power, that Al-Qaeda was an instrument of Teheran.

As recently as 30 December 2007, Abu Ahmad Baghdadi, spokesman of one of the most known insurgent groups, “Jeish Al-Mujahedeen” declared on Al-Jazeera TV:

“Animosity towards US is enough for us... but we are not compromising with the Iranian occupation. The Iranian occupation is more dangerous and the Al-Qaeda is nothing but a tool in the hands of Iran.”

Most of my time in Ashraf city I spent speaking with Iraqis, leaders of political parties. At that time you would find political parties everywhere—religious or tribal leaders.

A delegation of young lawyers explained to me that they had all been debarred for being members of the Baath Party. In reality, to be a member of the Baath Party was a pre-condition to be inscribed in the Bar Association, as it was the case for most of the high-ranking public professions.

The suicidal de-Baathification policy engineered by Iranian regime stooges and blessed by the West destroyed the social fabric of Iraq and ensured the replacement of civil servants and qualified people by Government Party puppets or forced those who would like to keep their jobs to be under their strict protection.

Thomas E. Ricks account of the Iraqi tragedy⁷ regards this as a consequence of Chalabi’s influence in the US Administration which in this case, managed to overcome what appeared to be the intention of President Bush himself. Thomas E. Ricks perceives the influence of Chalabi or any other Iranian proxy each time the US made an outlandish estimate or a suicidal policy decision.

⁷ Ricks, Thomas E., *Fiasco - The American Military Adventure in Iraq*, Penguin Books, 2006, ISBN 978-0-141-02850-7



*Working meeting with Iraqi leaders
Photo Ana Isabel Alves (June 14, 2008)*

This was the start of the mass cleansing of the Iraqi elites that was to continue in a much more bloody way afterwards, when murder by shooting or bombing became the institutionalised way of getting rid of Iraqi professionals. Over a period of time, the arguments were broadened from being Baathist to being of whatever non-conforming religious or ethnic upbringing. Shiites were and are as likely to be killed as any other by the so-called Shiite militia if they happen not to agree with them, or by Al-Qaeda, when they happen to be in the minority.

A delegation of peasants from East Diyala who happened to be Shiite also asked to see me. I was told they were evicted from their lands by Kurdish Pershmerga, who claimed these lands were originally Kurdish and their original owners had been expelled by the Arabisation policies of Saddam (or even from before Saddam).

My hosts explained to me that poor peasants from the South might have been shepherds in these Kurdish areas, so creating this kind of situation.

The most important meeting, however, was organised by the “National Association of Iraqi Tribes”. A provincial leader of Diyala, Sheikh Fayez Lafta Aliwi, a very important leader of the Al-Obeidi tribe was also present, as well as around a hundred political, religious and tribal leaders. He gave me a preliminary insight into the Iraqi political situation.

My first intervention defending the US and the Coalition Forces as the main hope for freedom, democracy and development in Iraq had a glacial reception from the audience.

My hopes that a democratisation process could be on its way in Iraq were severely dashed during the meeting, where complaints about the prevailing chaos, usurpation of the political power by militia, imposition of Muslim extreme fanaticism, communal

conflicts and complaints against what they called the “occupation forces” abounded.

A Muslim Scholar from Al-Fallujah guaranteed that the Allied forces had committed acts of indiscriminate violence against civilians, and the prospect of normal relations was therefore destroyed.

I told him that the burning of human beings and the mutilation of their bodies, as I saw in Al-Fallujah on the television screens, was indefensible in whatever circumstances, and he agreed. He then offered me an engraving with the first verse of the Koran that I still keep.

He was the first Muslim Scholar to impress me in a very positive way.

Several of the Southern sheiks complained that wherever the Iranian Revolutionary Guards arrived, drugs arrived with them. At the time, this seemed to be the most important complaint they had against the Iranian interference in Iraq.

At the end of the meeting, I was very concerned with the poor prospects for a free and democratic Iraq, although I was far from imagining how badly things would develop in the future.

The weather was fantastic (I understood later how exceptional that was), the food in Ashraf was delicious, people were very warm-hearted, and I enjoyed immensely discussing politics with my hosts, who showed a much better understanding and knowledge of current international political events than most in the West.

The stay in Ashraf would therefore have been quite pleasant if it had not been for the shock of understanding how bad the course of events was in Iraq.

c) Parlez-vous français?

My Iranian hosts thought it was not a good idea for me to look for Sameerah in Al-Khalis. As she was in a majority Shiite-town, dressed in an almost military uniform and with a very orthodox head-scarf, I assumed erroneously she was also a Shiia and possibly under the Iranian ruling religious-political patronage and I did not insist on the request. However, we would re-establish contacts later on, first by e-mail and afterwards by mobile phone when I returned to Europe.

My return was, if anything, more eventful than my arrival in Iraq. This time, a driver came from Baghdad to take me to the Green Zone. He spoke fluent English and ferociously opposed the occupier. From his perspective, the only thing worse than the US, was Iran, a point of view that I found to be very widespread in Iraq.

When I asked him about his religious beliefs, he gave me the standard answer of the cultivated Iraqi:

“My religious affiliation is an affair between God and me; it does not concern anybody else.”

He had a never-ending list of complaints against the US occupation, but was by no means antithetic to democracy or the West, on which he spoke at length and with insight. He explained he was an admirer of De Gaulle, and he thought Iraq needed someone like the historic French leader.

He reacted in a very contained way when I dared to criticise Saddam Hussein and just stated:

“Yes you are right: Saddam was stupid.”

When he left me at the gates of the Green Zone, he asked me to open the car's documents box, to get the paper at the top and to



Sameerah Shibli with some of her pupils (March 17, 2005)

read it. It was a Red Cross declaration, confirming that the holder of the document had been a prisoner of war in Iran for twenty one years. Then he said:

“Do you know why they never freed me? Because they wanted me to attack Saddam Hussein and I refused. He might have been stupid, but he was the President of Iraq, and as such I respected him.”

It took me sometime to find José Lamego. He was supposed to drive me around, but the parking lot where he had left the car was closed because a bomb had been found there. I understood that even by that time, life in the Green Zone was already exhausting with security-paranoia, and full concentration on working was difficult.

José Lamego was in charge of refugees in the CPA and therefore, the ideal person for a discussion on the situation at the PMOI camp. Although he was adamant in rejecting any attempt to give in to the demands of the Iranian regime, he was not very constructive on the issue, I believe because he was not agreeing with the broad picture that I was already forming of the PMOI situation:

“the West had bombed, killed, imprisoned and labelled as “terrorists” those who wanted to work with the West to establish a democratic society in Iran, at the same time the West invited the Iraqi branch of the Iranian Regime to take hold of the country, where it developed a policy of mass terror and genocide, that went beyond all the excesses of the Islamic revolution as it first was developed in Iran.”

Besides José Lamego I met Sheikh Aliwi and some other of my Iraqi hosts from the “National Association of Iraqi Tribes” who had organised the conference held in Ashraf City. They were patiently trying to explain to CPA officials that an agreement with the Iraqi tribes was the only possibility for a manageable, if certainly

not a fully democratic Iraq. He eventually succeeded, and became a strong ally of the US military establishment in 2007, after General Petraeus applied a new policy to the country.

Sheikh Aliwi, alongside with three other sheikhs, was murdered on 9 November 2007, in a neighbouring village of Al-Khalis. The PMOI attributed the murder to a special operations team of the Iranian Pasdaran. They covered a young child with explosives and sent him towards Sheikh Aliwi, making him explode by remote control.

Dissuading the Coalition from giving any importance to the tribes was a fundamental objective of the Iranians, as they rightly understood that, after destroying the Army and the State, tribes would be the major obstacle left for the complete takeover of the country by Iranian representatives.

Rory Stewart, a high-ranking UK diplomat who was deputy Governor in the CPA for two provinces in the South, Maysan and Dhi Qar, published a book⁸ that describes the way that the Coalition did not prevent but actively contributed to give the control of the South of Iraq to the Iranian backed groups (under the names of SCIRI, Badr Brigade, Hezbollah, Al-Dawa, that the author rightly shortens up to the general designation of “Iranians”).

According to Stewart, during the first formal meeting he held with an “Iranian” delegation, as then acting Governor of Maysan, capital city Amara, they told him that:

“We want to make Amara a modern society and take it away from the influence of the tribes. It is not true that the heads of the tribes control the tribes. To give a role to the heads of the tribes is a mistake.”⁹

⁸ Stewart, Rory, *Occupational Hazards*, Picador, 2006, ISBN 978-0-330-44050-9

⁹ Stewart, Rory, *Op. cit.*, page 66

The same idea is repeated elsewhere by the same people

“Why the sheiks? We are modern people. We reject the tribes.”¹⁰

Paul Bremer, the US representative, repeated this kind of nonsense, apparently not understanding that this “modernisation” that the Iranians referred to was nothing other than the imposition of the theocratic dictatorship.

The same holds true for the “de-Baathification” policy, which was always asked as the first demand by the “Iranians” and that the CPA did its best to accomplish.

Bremer and the CPA did not want to understand that in a totalitarian state like Iraq you were either a member of the Baath party or you could not aspire to have any relevant role in the economy or the society (the religious structures being the most obvious exception). To expel the Baathists or to force them to go through a screening process dominated by the “Iranians” was tantamount to destroy the Iraqi social fabric or to transform its remains into a theocratic tool.

The dismissal of the Iraqi Army was the most famous act of the Western suicide policy in Iraq, but unfortunately not the only one.

Apparently, it took three years and the descent of Iraq into total chaos for the US heavy administration structures to understand how foolish this policy had been and to try to reverse it. However, it proved to a large extent difficult or impossible to do so in most of the cases, as Iran became the major partner in the Iraqi national government and in most of the South.

The glimpse of the “Green Zone atmosphere” I got, before I went to the meeting-point where a driver was supposed to meet me to

¹⁰ Stewart, Rory, *Op. cit.*, page 103

take me back to Amman, convinced me that it would be difficult to make something relevant out of there on behalf of Iraq.

The conflict in Al-Fallujah was still quite alive, therefore I did not find it strange to see my driver take the direction of Tikrit out of Baghdad by the road that goes along the West bank of the Tigris.

As the highway reached a crossroad near the canal that links the Tigris with the Tharthar Lake, an American check-point was bringing the traffic to a complete standstill. There, I saw a busload full of young Iraqis (a European type of bus, not the Korean minibus typical in Iraq and several developing countries) being arrested by a couple of American soldiers.

The prison was completely improvised and consisted of a circle made of “chicken fence” and could certainly not resist any resolute escape attempt. One of the soldiers was conducting the people out of the bus and the other one ushering them into the fence.

The latter seemed to be a sixteen-year-old kid who had stolen his father’s uniform: tense and rigorous, as was the case with all the American soldiers I have been in contact with, I thought it was a miracle the Iraqi young men did not decide to resist and the whole scene did not turn into a violent confrontation.

We turned left, to the road that lounges the canal to the Southwest, where yet another small group of US soldiers was taking care of another improvised prison, but from where we kept a respectful distance. As we waited for a long while, I thought about going down to the stream, but the driver stopped me. In fact, the soldiers could have taken this as an escape attempt.

Finally we were allowed to go. The road followed the canal for quite some time, but eventually separated from it and we got into a sort of roundabout. The driver either did not know where to go or wasn’t sure which was the secure road. He got around, spoke with a by-standing

kid and then chose a road that led us right to the Tharthar Lake.

The shining blue lake at the edge of the desert was a fantastic view, and the place would have been outstanding if it had not been for the fact that the buildings by the lake (a former tourist resort, I was later told) were completely ransacked.

As we approached the lake, the driver tried to warn me by gestures, speaking half-Arabic half-English that resistance fighters were ahead, and that I should pretend to be French.

I really do not know how he saw them, but, in a bend of the road, a group of black-uniformed well-armed young Iraqis surrounded the car.

I put on the best of my smiles, started to speak French, showing my passport—where the name of Portugal, actually one of the “coalition of the willing” members, was well engraved—and looked at the driver, who never stopped speaking in an agitated way. I presume the soldiers could not read our Latin alphabet, and believed I was a Frenchman working for an NGO.

They never threatened me; they did not touch me or my possessions and actually treated me more kindly than some border guards do. They apparently believed what my driver was telling them, and after a long period, they just let us go.

I suppose if they had known I was a politician from one of the occupying countries, furthermore, chairman of the European Parliament delegation to NATO Parliamentary Assembly, they would not have let me go as they did.

As Ambassador Sadoon Al-Zubaydi would explain to me later, I had fallen into the hands of a Fedayeen unit from Saddam’s regime, that was still intact, one year after the military operation, and I had

been very lucky for this fact. If I had been captured by an Islamist or pure gangster group, things would have turned out differently.

Soon afterwards we got to the surroundings of Al-Ramadi and found the highway to Damascus and Amman.

When we stopped in a resting station by the highway and I went to the toilet, a second apparently minor detail caught my attention. As it happens in all those toilets, there is a child taking care of the place to whom you pay a small fee. As I did not even have Iraqi dinars with me, I paid him generously in Jordanian currency, and returned to the car.

When the driver went to the toilet, the child refused to accept his money, pointing out to me and explaining I had already paid sufficiently for both of us.

Both these encounters, as actually all the others I had with Iraqis, conveyed to me the same impression of honesty, politeness and pride, that has nothing to do with the image of bloodthirsty looters which had been transmitted to us.

Notwithstanding, I realised Iraqis can also be very surprising indeed. When we were about Al-Rutbah we met an American military convoy. As I learned soon after I got into Iraq, the first rule regarding American military forces is to always keep a safe distance and be sure that you approach them only when they allow you to do so. Military convoys use the middle lane of the highway and therefore you have to keep at a safe distance behind them.

My driver, who certainly should know this better than myself, and who had sorted us out brilliantly of previous encounters with both the insurgents and the US troops, seemed to have lost his mind, or got tired of rolling slowly and approached the American convoy.

I still remember the US soldier of the last vehicle raising from his position and putting the rifle on his shoulder (he was a tall Afro-

American). I screamed and thought this time all was really over. The driver put his foot on the brakes as vehemently as possible so the distance between us increased.

I had survived another dangerous situation, this time the last one before we reached the border with Jordan. I realised I had risked several times not to complete my journey, but I also thought I had lived through a week which contributed essentially to reshape my ideas about Iraq and the Middle East.

I concluded then that Iraq was clearly on the path of disaster—I spoke about the Vietnam parallel at the press in Portugal immediately after my return—but I could not fathom how great this disaster would prove to be.

As Hossein Madani, one of the PMOI officers I had been with in Ashraf and who had lived through the first Islamic Revolution (in Iran), told me: Iraq was going through a mimic of the original Iranian Islamic Revolution, much more radical, violent and fanatic than the original one, though.

This was the main assumed tactical objective of the Iranian theocracy in its strategy to export its Islamic revolution to the whole of the Middle East right back from 1979. Whoever accompanied the relevant literature on the issue or for that matter, read the speeches of the Iranian leaders, or just took notice of war slogans like *to Quds through Karbala* should have understood this.

That such an obvious fact could have been completely forgotten by the Coalition Powers to the point that they acted in Iraq like the blind instrument of the Iranian Imperial Strategy, became the most intriguing question to me; the missing square in the Iraqi square puzzle that I was to grasp.

Chapter 3

THE UNFOLDING IRAQI DRAMA

Chapter 3

The unfolding Iraqi drama

a) Lost in translation

My mind kept hooked on to memories of Iraq, even after I got back to Europe. Though the general security and political situation was steadily deteriorating, mobile phone and e-mail connections were improving, and I was soon in contact with a whole set of people whom I got to know in Iraq or whom I got in contact with through someone I met in Iraq, actually covering the full Iraqi political spectrum, with the exception of the pro-Iranian factions.

Saleh Al-Mutlaq, leader of one of the secular Arab political forces, put me in contact with the Iraqi former Ambassador Sadoon Al-Zubaydi, a very bright man with a PHD in Shakespeare earned in the UK and formerly responsible for the Iraqi interpretation and translation services, as well as for the edition of some of the literary work of Saddam Hussein.

I invited him to give a talk at the European Parliament in March 2006 and to have conversations with diplomats and politicians in Brussels and we kept close contact for quite some time. Afterwards, we communicated by e-mail and he accepted my invitation for the participation in a conference on Iraq that I sponsored in Brussels in January 2007, but he actually did not show up and I could not reach him afterwards for a very long time.

I finally got a message from him in March 2008, informing me he had taken refuge in Jordan, and he was still recovering from his wounds, which were inflicted on him while he was for a long time being held captive by Jaish Al-Mahdi (JAM) militia gang¹ that

¹ JAM is related to the Al-Sadr Movement and to Mukhtada Al-Sadr in person. As the time went by it became ever more infiltrated by the IRGC and or pure criminal gangs, and Al-Sadr Movement lost to a large extent any hold on activities developed under its name.

only freed him after receiving a high ransom. This was indeed the typical situation of an impressive number of Iraqis who took refuge in one of the neighbouring countries.

Sadoon Al-Zubaydi had been purged from the state—he was forcibly sent back from his post in Jakarta and stripped of his diplomatic credentials—in 2002, one year before the military intervention in Iraq, as he was regarded to be closely associated with Tariq Aziz, the vice-Prime Minister and former Foreign Affairs Minister of Iraq, the man who tried to organise a visit of the Pope to Iraq as a means to stop the invasion plans.

The “Tikrit clan”—the bunch of close relatives of Saddam coming from his native village of Awja, South of Tikrit—torpedoed the plan, claiming it was an international conspiracy against Iraq. Although they did not arrest Tariq Aziz, they arrested or harassed some of his closest relatives and political associates, such as Sadoon Al-Zubaydi, and placed them under political quarantine.

Indeed, the plan of the Pope’s trip engineered by Tariq Aziz was a chance of avoiding a Western invasion, but apparently the clan viewed the softening of the regime as more dangerous than a military intervention.

After the invasion of Iraq, like most of the Iraqis, Sadoon Al-Zubaydi lived obsessed with protecting his family from the sectarian killings—in his case, mainly his two daughters—as he and his family were a prime target (being a high ranking official in the State, highly educated and an Arab Sunni was quite a dangerous combination).

His main literary project was to write “*Interpreting Saddam*” which was meant to be a game of words with what he professionally did for most of his working life and with his knowledge of the person and the regime. It also meant to be his political memories. The

last time I spoke with him he was considering to abandon the project, as it might endanger his family's chances of survival.

As I realised after I had met him, his brilliance and knowledge had not escaped general media attention, and he has often been quoted to explain critical moments of Saddam's decision-making process in major international crisis. Having had the opportunity to meet Al-Zubaydi was crucial for my understanding of Iraq.

Although he kept some of the general political features of pan-Arabist doctrine—always ready to suspect Zionist conspiracies, blaming the US as a general scapegoat—I learned a lot due to his rich insight of what had happened in Iraq with Saddam.

In his view Saddam's regime was crumbling from inside, narrowing ever more his social basis—by 2003 reduced to the Tikrit clan—and unable to face any of its challenges.

In the last years before his fall, Saddam Hussein himself had no more patience for governing, as he was concentrating on his emotional life and producing romantic novels—the literary quality of which Sadoon Al-Zubaydi tried to improve—the real power being in the hands of the Tikrit clan.

The end of Saddam's regime was in his view inevitable; the only question was how it would end and what would replace it.

Ambassador Al-Zubaydi had been Saddam's personal interpreter during the whole of the crisis that led to the disastrous invasion of Kuwait, and he spent the best part of a dinner we had in Brussels giving a fascinating account of the famous meeting held on 25 July 1990 between Saddam and April Glaspie, the recently appointed US Ambassador.

Although Saddam had been publicly mounting the pressure on Kuwait since May, with an escalation of attacks in July—he accused

Kuwait of stealing Iraqi oil from the border region—the US did not seem to understand the gravity of what might be coming.

The real content of the whole of the conversations is still open to major disputes, even in the US. There are those who try to justify the US diplomacy attitude claiming it was only normal for the US to respond to Saddam's threats to invade Kuwait with a "the US does not have a position on Arab-Arab conflict", and leaving for holidays afterwards. Otherwise, they claim Saddam just thought he could win a war against the US and, as we know was often the case, he miscalculated.

On the other hand, there are those who think that the US organised a plot to convince Saddam that the US would not use its full strength if he dared to invade Kuwait.

Needless to say that Ambassador Al-Zubaydi was a partisan of the second interpretation, and I suppose this episode will occupy an important part in his book if he ever publishes it.

Wherever the truth lies, it seems clear that the US State Department felt comfortable by transforming the US diplomatic blunder into a personal problem of a single Ambassador, as if the Ambassador had not sent a detailed and accurate report to Washington D.C. and as if she was not given permission for leaving on holidays just before the war started, and as if she did not represent US diplomacy.

According to Andrew I. Killgore, a retired Foreign Service officer and former U.S. ambassador to Qatar, and publisher of the Washington Report on Middle East Affairs:

"In 1993, then-U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Madeleine Albright struck a gratuitously cruel blow against Glaspie when she ordered Ambassador Glaspie to be out of her office at the U.S.

² <http://www.wrmea.com/archives/august2002/0208049.html>

Mission in New York, where Glaspie was then assigned, by the end of that day.”²

It might not have been such a gratuitous blow as Andrew Killgore thought, but rather the convenient way to find a scapegoat and to avoid a critical analysis of what was not going well already at that time.

Although Ambassador Al-Zubaydi is an excellent language interpreter himself, my hearing of his version of events—especially comparing it with the version of those who think that Saddam was just stupid and thought he could win a war against the US, like Kenneth Pollack³—gives me the clear impression of a long standing problem of being “lost in translation”.

For the Iraqi side, the very low profile US attention to their threats could only be read as a yellow light. To start with, they did not take the ambassador very seriously because she was apparently very soft spoken and she left on holiday just after the meeting. In any case, it was the complete absence of reaction from the US to the communication of Saddam’s intentions to invade Kuwait, which led the Iraqi leadership to draw their conclusions, not Ambassador’s Glaspie attitudes.

From the US perspective, it seemed impossible that the superpower would tolerate a major destabilising military aggression in the heart of the Arab Oil World. Therefore, Saddam knew what he was doing and he just miscalculated his chances of success.

Both sides never got to properly communicate with one another, never managed to understand each other, and they developed a massive misunderstanding that kept growing afterwards, till we got to the full disaster of our day.

³ Pollack, Kenneth M., *The Threatening Storm - The Case for Invading Iraq*, Random House, 2002, ISBN 0-375-50928-3, page 261

Ambassador Zubaydi's wife was a Shiite. He told me he only became conscious his wife was Shiia when the couple attended the funeral of his wife's uncle and he realised the religious celebrations followed the Shiia rituals.

Most of the Iraqis I met had stories of this kind. Sameerah, for instance, told me she only heard about the existence of the religious differences at school, when she was already eighteen. Only then did she ask her father what her religious affiliation was and she learned she was a Sunni.

From these experiences it is easy to understand why one of the biggest resentments Iraqis felt regarding the US invasion was to have been catalogued immediately according to their religious affiliation rather than as Iraqis.

b) Human Rights Watch under watch

My second trip to Iraq was in July 2005, in the company of my colleague Andre Brie, a German Member of the European Parliament from the Party of Democratic Socialism, PDS and by the British lawyer Azadeh Zabeti, in the context of a "Friends of a Free Iran Mission". In security terms it was rather uneventful, especially in comparison with the former one. We flew to Baghdad, as the airport was then already opened to normal commercial flights, where someone picked us up and drove us directly to camp Ashraf.

However, the deterioration of the normal Iraqi life was quite apparent, from nearly every point of view, security included. Still, the situation in Ashraf camp seemed to be more relaxed, reflecting the fact that after exhausting investigations by several US departments it was impossible to find any evidence to back the US State Department 1997 claim that the PMOI was a "terrorist organisation".

The US had therefore started a relation with the PMOI where, on



Together with André Brie in Baghdad's Central Cemetery (Ghazili) depositing flowers at a child's grave, victim of a terrorist attack (July 19, 2005)

the one hand, it concluded that none of the over 3.800 PMOI members could ever be regarded as having any relation with terrorism, and knowing that the PMOI was the most certain ally they could find in the fight against terrorism and in the promotion of a dialogue between Iraqis and Americans, but on the other hand there was the State Department listing the PMOI as a terrorist organisation, on the grounds of bogus arguments and accusations, that would never survive a decent objective scrutiny.

In Ashraf, I had the opportunity to participate in an Iraqi conference. Based on my proposal, the conference decided to pay homage to one of the victims of the bombing that took place while we were arriving in Baghdad, where the explosion of an oil-carrying truck killed nearly a hundred civilians, including a large number of children, near a Shiite Mosque. A delegation from the conference went to Baghdad, brought flowers, and went to the grave of an unknown child, buried without identification, in Ghazilli, central West Baghdad.

This was a fundamental moment in my relation with Iraq. Some of those who accompanied me in that ceremony later had to flee the country.

Contrarily to my former journey, where Iraq was the core issue, I was there with the purpose of investigating thoroughly the accusations made previously in a report by “Human Rights Watch” on the PMOI, the result of which was later published.⁴

The time we spent there was mostly filled with exhaustive inquiries to people who had been accused by the HRW report or close relatives of HRW witnesses, as well as on-the-spot inspections to places and to people who somehow figured in this report.

⁴ Brie, André; Casaca, Paulo and Zabeti, Azadeh, *People's Mojahedin of Iran Mission Report*, L'Harmattan, 2005, ISBN 2-7475-9381-9



Together with Azadeh Zabeti, Behzad Saffari and Hossein Madani in bungalow 48 of Hotel Iran, Ashraf City, where most of the interviews for People's Mojahedin of Iran Mission Report were conducted (July 16, 2005)

We worked night and day, with small pauses. In bungalow 48 of Hotel Iran, where we conducted most of the interviews, there were several TV screens. We were at the apex of our work when I saw on an official Iranian TV channel no other than Gary Sick, the Chair of HRW Middle-East Advisory Committee, making laudatory remarks on the electoral procedure of the President of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadi-Nejad, and criticising those who accused the procedure of being flawed.

Sick made no secret of the partisan aims of the HRW report, by sending it to several people with the express indication that it would be an instrument to darken the image of PMOI.

This was a report that broke all the basic rules and conventions on human rights investigations, namely the Istanbul Protocol, of which HRW was a participating organisation, that refused to visit the place where the events it referred to allegedly happened, that refused to hear the accused people or the relatives of the so-called victims, that solely relied on the testimonies of supposed dissidents, previously identified as VEVAK's agents which were found to be bogus by the US military forces and commissioned by someone who was openly making PR business for what he claimed were "democratic rules and results" in Iranian Presidential elections.

When I started the investigation, I assumed that something in the report had to correspond to reality, namely, that those who the PMOI thought were working for the Iranian regime should have been taken care of.

When the key person responsible for the Ashraf camp—at the time Madam Parsaei—assured me that their policy was to release from duty whoever was found to be breaking the rules or were suspected of betrayal, I had difficulties in believing her.

However, after visiting all the places where HRW claimed prisons had existed or assassinations had taken place (under our request,

and made on the spot), after interviewing dozens of people, confronting their stories, actually using sometimes tough inquiry methods, I found no evidence opposing her words.

Furthermore, it became obvious that if one could find so many so-called “dissidents” willing to attack the PMOI, this could only be explained by the systematic policy of the PMOI to release those who were not trustworthy.

Actually, the number of those who were in the PMOI camps in Iraq and are now living in the West is immense. Only a small number of those make the outlandish claims publicised by HRW. Why did HRW always refuse to hear those who would not corroborate the Iranian authority’s propaganda?

When we returned to Europe and decided to complete the research, I was taken aback by discovering evident signs of the previous alignment of HRW with the Iranian authorities’ objectives and misinformation.

In a Canadian journal, *The Ottawa Citizen*, of 17 September 2001, HRW, together with a group of so-called “PMOI dissidents”, had already made public the location of the famous Weapons of Mass Destruction: stored in underground caves in at least five PMOI camps⁵.

The allegations of HRW were actually very close to the ones made by personalities with strong ties with the Iranian authorities, such as Ahmed Chalabi. Although we asked HRW to justify the reason for such false allegations which caused so much death and destruction, and which gave us the image of an organisation completely at odds with its claimed goals of human rights, the organisation’s reply never gave any sort of explanations on the issue.

⁵ Brie, André; Casaca, Paulo and Zabeti, Azadeh, *Op. cit.*, page 29

Without apologising for the previous fabrication on WMD harboured by the PMOI in Iraq, HRW ran to the next deceit solely to counteract the findings of US research bodies proving how unfounded the accusations against the PMOI were.

Furthermore, I was flabbergasted by the refusal of this organisation to accountancy for its own acts as well as the mockery of answer they provided to our research book.

c) Democracy, Iranian style

This was the first time I met Abdulla Aljubori, a British dentist surgeon, former Iraqi exiled, who had returned to his hometown in Al-Muqdadiya after the overthrow of Saddam's regime, who first became elected mayor of his town and then Governor of his province and who tried to contend the January 2005 elections with a political platform he had created—ELITE—but his list mysteriously disappeared from the ballots on election day.

In fact, in Diyala, the Iranian proxies dominating the chains of power made their main rivals disappear from the ballot, much in the same way as they guarantee victory in Iranian “elections” by assuring that only “trustworthy” people appear as candidates.

Some months afterwards for the December elections, the technique used to ensure that Abdulla Aljubori would not pose a problem was a bit harsher, as he was sent to prison for the whole electoral period. This was in fact done to hundreds of political leaders of the Province not affiliated with the Iranian forces with the aim to ensure that a province where Shiite are a minority would give an overwhelming majority to the pro-Iranian parties.

By the time I met him Abdulla already had the reputation of enjoying some sort of immortality, as he had survived thirteen attempts on his life during his time as Governor with only minor injuries,

although losing almost twenty relatives and bodyguards in the process.

Even though we met only briefly then, and just by chance again at the airport, we became close friends after I did all I could to obtain his release later that year. When he was given a copy of all the letters I had sent to everyone I knew in the US establishment demanding his release, he called me to say that he regarded me as a brother.

Abdulla is an incurable optimist, and he can always find a way out when I see no possibilities whatsoever. As he has been travelling back and forth from Europe and the US to Iraq, he has been my guest in the European Parliament a number of times and he also visited the Azores with me, where he participated in the festivities of a Holy Spirit Brotherhood in the island of São Jorge, as well as an ecumenical religious service in Angra, organised by our friend Prof. Tomaz Dentinho.

He has been my guide to the Iraqi politics ever since, and he was the one who prepared my travel arrangements to Iraq in January 2007 and in June 2008.

The elections of December 2005 were severely rigged, most notably in the South of the country, where the pro-Iranian coalition swept the large majority of the votes.

With the title “Iran’s Revolutionary Diplomacy Won Over Westernism in Iraq” the website Baztab⁶ quoted the former revolutionary guard’s commander and secretary of Iran’s State Expediency Council, Mohsen Reza’ii, concluding:

“The successful holding of Iraq’s National Assembly elections and the gaining of two-thirds of its seats by Islamist Shiites and Kurds, who are considered close friends of the Iranian nation, is the sweet

⁶ www.baztab.com, December 30, 2005

fruit of three years of implementing revolutionary diplomacy in Iraq.”

Actually, the Iranian regime miscalculated here somehow for as the time went by, an ever larger part of the so-called Shiite list turned against the Iranian linked leadership as well.

The Support Committee for Free Elections in Iraq, from which I draw this text, produced an impressive amount of evidence on vote rigging, and published dozens of press releases which I still keep.

At this time secular and Sunni political forces joined together to promote numerous demonstrations in Baghdad and other areas. When the official results were announced months afterwards, they were much more balanced than early provisional results indicated.

This was when I became very much involved with most of the Iraqi political parties, and when I worked closely with Ambassador Al-Zubaydi.

Shortly after the declaration of the official results, assuring that Iranian proxies would get the most important political posts in the Government, the Samarra shrine bombing triggered open and widespread sectarian violence all over the country.

This would mark the speeding of the carnage not only by large bomb attacks against the population and, as it happened since January 2005, commanded by pro-Iranian Ministers in Government, but also by horrendous and massive massacres committed by militia and terrorist groups.

d) Iraq with A Future

I invited both my friends Sadoon Al-Zubaydi and Abdulla Aljubori to Brussels where they stayed for about a week, with a public conference on 8 March 2006 under the title “For a secular, democratic Iraq; widespread rigging in the December election in Iraq; terrorism, namely developed by armed militias in the Interior

Ministry; secret prisons, death squads and torture; interference by foreign powers”.

At that point I started to think about creating a “Euro-Iraqi” discussion forum, an idea that would be formalised by the end of that year. In June, I invited Sameerah al-Shibli to the European Parliament where she made a debate titled “The challenges for Women in Iraq”.

In the context of Friends of a Free Iran (FOFI), an informal organisation of the European Parliament which I co-chair with Struan Stevenson, a Scottish conservative MEP, I hosted a conference on 12 September 2006 with two Iraqi parliamentarians, Mohammad Al-Awadh and Falah Hassan on “The Iranian regime and Camp Ashraf in Iraq”.

Both of them were members of Mr. Saleh Al-Mutlaq party and both of them openly praised the PMOI in Ashraf, denouncing the Iranian regime as the main sponsor of mayhem in general and terrorism in particular in Iraq.

Mohammad Al-Awadh was impressive both by his tall physical appearance and by his political message. He completely shared the view with our Iranian friends and me that Iraq was following step-by-step the former Iranian Islamic Revolution, and that the undeclared Iranian occupation was a much more serious issue than the declared occupation of the Allied Forces.

He was the main friend of the PMOI in the Iraqi Parliament and also the most outspoken critic of the Iranian regime.

Although it was then (as it is now) impossible to address the situation in Iraq without speaking about the role of Iran in it, the presence of my Iraqi parliamentary colleagues gave a new impetus for the creation of a specific platform to address Iraq-specific issues with Iraqi and European politicians.

Thereafter, I discussed the idea of the platform with my personal friend and colleague of the University of the Azores Tomaz Dentinho, who would later accompany me to Iraq. The name for this platform was actually suggested by Struan Stevenson, who, along with Andre Brie, became my closest partner on the issue, after the “IF - Iraq with A Future” initiative was launched.

By this time I was trying by all possible means to call European and international attention to the genocide developing in Iraq, and I wrote letters and promoted meetings with several institutions and, with the help of Abdulla Aljubori, I began to prepare my next mission to Iraq.

The meetings I organised afterwards were done under the logo “IF - Iraq with A Future”, the first official action of the platform being a conference by Ammar Al-Shahbander, a young and bright Iraqi fellow of the “Foundation for the Defence of Democracies”.

In the following three months, IF promoted a great number of discussions on Iraq with Iraqi personalities as well as a mission to Iraq, my third one, where we visited Erbil and Diyala.

The platform manifesto was drafted in November 2006 and discussed mainly in January 2007 in Iraq, Jordan and Brussels, and read like this:

A group of European Parliamentarians felt they could not remain indifferent to the on-going massacre of the Iraqi civil population, and the dashing of their hopes for a free, just, peaceful and democratic society. They decided to answer the appeal of several Iraqi political and civil society leaders, to get together and act for the defence of the integrity of human life and the basic rights of the people of Iraq.

*We, political and civil society leaders in Europe and Iraq, decided to launch “**IF - Iraq with A Future**” an informal political platform*

for all of those who agree with the following three basic objectives:

- 1. Attaining security and the respect of basic human rights for the Iraqi population, namely by:*
 - a) Ending the undeclared occupation of Iraq by the anti-democratic and anti-Iraqi forces, through the disbanding of militia and terrorist groups, and also through curbing the influence of totalitarian neighbouring countries, either official or non-official;*
 - b) Purging the Iraqi Armed and Security Forces of all Mafia-type gangs, members of militias, criminals and agents of foreign powers, replacing them by hiring and promoting independent and honest Iraqi security and army professionals;*
 - c) Supporting forces working to establish a democratic society in Iraq, in which the share and role of all elements of Iraqi society are safeguarded;*
 - d) Revising the Iraqi Constitution with the aim of securing Iraq's unity and establishing democracy, human rights in that country and recognizing international laws and conventions; and to safeguard the rights of individuals and minority groups;*
 - e) Depending on the success of the four former points, a total withdrawal of other foreign forces present in Iraq;*
- 2. Working to form a non-sectarian front through cooperation with forces of freedom, democracy and tolerance to help build an Iraq where all Iraqis, regardless of being Arab, Kurds or Turcomen, Muslim*



*Meeting Fadhil Merani, Secretary-General of the
Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) together with
Abdulla Rasheed Aljubori
(June 16, 2008)*

or Christian, Sunni or Shiite, may live in peace and have their basic civil rights respected.

3. *Working together to achieve an economic co-operation framework that will allow Iraq to recover from the destruction that decades of neglect, mass terror and dictatorship have caused, and to become again proud of its social, educational and scientific achievements.*

On my third journey to Iraq I visited Kurdistan, where we were treated as VIPs by the regional Kurdish authorities. Abdulla Aljubori was our guide, and we were accompanied by a close friend of his—Mohammed Kader—a Kurdish Iraqi from Baghdad established as a businessman in the UAE, my friend from the Azores, Professor Tomaz Dentinho as well as my previous travelling partner, André Brie.

I was tremendously impressed by what I saw in Iraqi Kurdistan, especially when I remembered how dreadful the situation in most of Iraq was.

A lot of services were functioning, the politicians seemed to be sincerely interested in sorting out problems and developing their land, many Kurds who had returned from the West were helping in the administration and I heard more about projects for the future than recriminations on the past.

Travelling within Iraq along the road from Erbil down South in the direction of Baghdad was at that time a significant security hazard, and Abdulla Aljubori gathered an impressive force of sixteen policemen who he personally trusted to escort us on the road to Ashraf city.

As usual, our timing and trajectory were not disclosed and Abdulla asked us not to use our mobiles. He got behind the wheel of the first vehicle where he stood for most of the journey. He got the



*With Abdulla Rasheed Aljubori observing the localization of
Kurdish villages bombed by Iranian artillery
(June 16, 2008)*

way wrong in a roundabout in Kirkuk, but otherwise drove us smoothly to our destination.

Since my last trip the scenery had suffered an immense degradation. A “de facto” sunset curfew was observed and we rapidly found ourselves alone on the road, military convoys being the only vehicles within sight.

We had waited for a long time when we saw a convoy, which we thought to be American, stopping ahead of us. We did not want to approach them before we were sure that they would not shoot. As one of the vehicles came towards us, we realised that it was an Iraqi military convoy escorting lorries carrying enormous cement road blockers—the only obvious Iraqi production those days—that halted after a lorry tyre had blown up.

After we understood the *quid pro quo* we advanced again just to find another military convoy stopped. This time it was an American convoy searching for explosive devices by the side of the road.

As I was in the front vehicle of our convoy with Abdulla, I realised how difficult it was to communicate with the US military, as we could not understand if the American commander was yelling at his men or at us, wanting us to go or to stop. The sound of nearby shooting did not help the conversation, although Abdulla calmed me down: it was the standard means of communication and it was coming from the neighbouring friendly Iraqi check-point.

After some hesitation, we decided to go, which apparently was exactly what the US troops wanted us to do.

We were received in apotheosis in Ashraf city by the PMOI, who decided to broadcast all of our presence by television. This would later give rise to an aggressive documentary produced by the Iranian secret services agency “Iraneayandeh” which they called “Dancing

with terrorists”, referring to my rather clumsy participation in a popular Kurdish dancing performed by Kurdish Iranians.

Most of our stay was filled with meetings with Iraqi political leaders (by the end of our stay we participated in a mass gathering of thousands) and with common Iraqi citizens who wanted either to give us evidence and complaints on assassinations and torture suffered by themselves or their relatives or ask us to help them escape the country.⁷

Most of the people we got in contact with carried evident signs of post-traumatic disorders and were in difficult, sometimes desperate, situations.

The US Army military leaders in Ashraf city also courteously received us, but declined to give us any protection for a visit to Baghdad, as they were very short of resources themselves.

Abdulla said he would not dare to face check-points of the Shiite militia spreading out of Sadr-city to the North with less than a hundred armed men, and therefore we had to give up reaching Baghdad.

However, thousands of Iraqis had come a long way unescorted to reach us. They came from nearly every province in the deep South of the country, but then again, although Christians, Sunni Arabs and all sorts of people from minorities managed to come from Baghdad and elsewhere, the vast majority of the visitors from out of Diyala were Shiite Arabs.

We returned by road to Erbil and then flew to Amman, where we had several meetings with various Iraqi political leaders (both Shiite and Sunni) who were de facto exiled people, even if some of them were actually elected members of the Iraqi Parliament.

⁷ A full report of our stay at <http://www.paulocasaca.net/relatorios/relatorioiraque.pdf>

The full picture we got, in particular after the Amman meetings, was that a substantial number of Iraqi leaders, Shiite as well as Sunni, had finally understood that the Iranian regime and its puppets, both within the Iraqi Government and in the terrorist outfits such as Al-Qaeda in Iraq, were a far bigger enemy than the US.

I realised then the existence of political conditions for the emergence of both the alliance between the former Sunni insurgents and the US and for the truce between Al-Sadr movement and the US.

By the end of January, dozens of Iraqis, including members of the Iraqi Parliament and leaders of the civil society, from the so-called Lay and Sunni parties as well as Kurdish leaders in the regional parliament came through Brussels.

Among others we could find Kamal Kirkuki, deputy speaker of the Kurdish Parliament; Saleh Al-Mutlaq, President of the Iraqi National Dialogue Front; Adnan Al-Dulaimi and Khalaf A. Khalaf leaders of the so-called Sunni coalition.

My friend Mohammad Al-Awadh (member of Saleh Al-Mutlaq platform), for some reason, did not come to Europe and he was not in this meeting.

Being in the company of such a large number of Iraqi personalities, I decided to utilise the opportunity to organise a conference of IF in the European Parliament. Actually, a number of unattended guests came to the conference, such as representatives of Turcoman and Arab Shiite organisations.

A group of four individuals claiming to represent an “Iraqi human-rights NGO” in the Netherlands also showed up, and as I refused to give them the floor in face of the huge number of requests, they re-identified themselves as the representatives of SCIRI, the biggest party in the Iraqi Parliament and the closest associate of the Iranian regime.



Meeting at the European Parliament in Brussels with members of the Iraqi Parliament and leaders of the civil society, from the so-called Lay and Sunni parties as well as Kurdish leaders in the regional parliament (January 30, 2007)

They were dressed and presented themselves exactly as the rank and file Iranian operatives I had met before, and their speech was exactly along the very same lines I was accustomed to hearing. If I had not already known that the SCIRI was a construction fully in the hands of the Iranian regime, I would have guessed it then.

Iranians had not only successfully infiltrated human rights organisations like HRW but created a plethora of so-called [Government] “human rights NGO” that I have learned to identify pretty well.

Although I managed to get a group photograph of all the initial participants, the conference itself was more a display of the deep differences between the various groups present than a construction of a peaceful alternative to the civil war situation ravaging the country.

The task of repairing the social fabric, left tattered after the Iraqi dictatorship crumbled, and of preventing the creation of a satellite state of Iran, was just too complex to envisage without the means that were well beyond my capacities.



*A Muslim Scholar from Al-Fallujah offering an engraving
of the first verse of Koran
(April 7, 2004)*

Chapter 4

TALES OF THE LIVES OF TWO BROTHERS, ALI AND OMAR

Chapter 4

Tales of the lives of two brothers, Ali and Omar

a) The Iraqi Western mirror

In January 2007, during the course of my third trip to Iraq, I was sitting in the lobby of Hotel “Erbil’s Sheraton” (the hotel has nothing to do with the Sheraton hotel chain, but having the style and superficial look of a big chain first class hotel made it to be widely known as the Sheraton) and was reading a local English newspaper called “Soma”.

On page three of the newspaper, an article reprinted from “Voices of Iraq” was titled “Advice on how to escape a multitude of ways to get killed has become cliché, but many Iraqis believe it could save lives; Iraqis find new rules of survival”.

The first bit of advice stated that “Names such as Ali or Omar could indicate a certain Muslim sect, making the bearer therefore being likely to get killed in the escalating wave of sectarian killings that has engulfed Iraq since the bombing of a sacred Shiite shrine in Samarra last February”.

The whole article sounded geared to go smoothly along the way in which events in Iraq were being portrayed by the international media, rather than to explain how different the real Iraq was from the one you could read about in the media.

The suggestion made in the article that you could be killed for being named Omar—someone clearly identified with the Sunni but not the Shiite religious tradition, or Ali —someone clearly identified with the Shiite tradition, but also well accepted in the Sunni tradition, caught my eye as the symbol of this attitude.

For those readers who are not acquainted with the basics of the most important schism in Islam, one has to explain that Shiia

believe that the successor of the Prophet Muhammad should have been Ali, the husband of his daughter Fatima and the closest adult male relative of the Prophet. Fatima never recognised Abu Bakr to be the legitimate successor. Omar - who succeeded Abu Bakr, already after Fatima's death - is by the Shiite tradition accused of offending physically and verbally both Fatima and Ali, and is seen as the worst of the early successors of the Prophet.

As eventually Ali succeeded Abu Bakr, with Omar and Othman in between, and the Sunni consider those four to be all legitimate caliphs, it is quite typical of a Sunni family to name their male descendants exactly after the four first caliphs succeeding Muhammad, that is: Abu Bakr, Omar, Othman and Ali.

So, the question is that you may be sure that someone named Omar comes from a Sunni family, but you really do not know if someone named Ali is a Shiite or a Sunni. However, if you realise that Ali is a younger sibling of Omar, you may then be certain he comes from a Sunni family.

The article was therefore at odds with the basics of Muslim reality, and it was as well at odds with reality on the ground, where this type of selective murder by identity card was being perpetrated by Shiite militia and terrorist groups, whereas Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) was primarily murdering in bulk, or with specific targets not defined on the basis of identity cards.

The fairy tale of the Shiite Ali and the Sunni Omar was therefore particularly fitted to please the typical political correctness of the Western public opinion. I do not believe that an Iraqi journalist could ignore this and the article was most likely written in English for a Western audience to see an Iraq as it was assumed to be in a politically correct logic, rather than as it actually was.

On the other hand we have to bear in mind that in the previous wars journalists had never been looked upon as a major target as in this one,



German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the Iraqi journalist Zainab Ahmed shortly after been awarded with the Henri Nannen Award for Freedom of Press 2008 - Photo Carina Weirauch / stern (May 9, 2008)



Eqraa's Newspaper of which Sameerah Shibli was Director in Al-Khalis (September 9, 2004)

this being true for Western as well as local journalists. Political correctness in this context could also have been a way to escape reprisals from the murderers.

As I was reading the newspaper, I was thinking of the family of Sameerah's mother, slaughtered in Al-Muqdadiya on September 30, 2006, shortly after Sameerah, accompanied by her brother Othman, returned from a visit to the European Parliament.

Sameerah recalled the events very painfully, and she never gave me a full and sequenced description of them. As I am writing these lines, she is waiting to get her family out of Iraq, to find a publisher for the story and to press charges against the Iraqi Army General whom she believes engineered the massacre.

Her mother, Hamdah, never recovered from the pain of losing thirteen of her relatives murdered in the most barbaric way. One of Sameerah's aunts completely lost her mind after finding the remains of her four-year-old son attached to a rope which dogs were fighting about.

The story is not substantially different from those one can read on the Rwandan massacres, with the important difference that a proper international investigation on Iraq still remains to be made.

The persecution of any sort of independent journalism as well as the harassment of the coalition forces that cornered them more and more in their headquarters has helped create a lawless situation where all sorts of gangs terrorise the population.

The eldest of Sameerah's brothers is named Riyadh; the others are, as you may have guessed, Abu Bakr (he died during his childhood), Omar, Othman and Ali (sixteen-year old at the time of the events). Together, they had the task of defending their family's home in Al-Khalis from an attack like the one of Al-Muqdadiya.



View of the destruction of Sameerah Shibli's family house after militia attacks (March 23, 2008)

They were convinced that the family was being targeted for being Sunni and for the relative importance of the tasks and positions of some of them (persecution targeted professionals in particular and the elites in general).

I did my best to call the attention of everyone I knew in the US who could have some clout on Iraq to come to their rescue, but it was simply impossible in the prevailing chaos to convince whoever to turn their eyes to the specific situation of Sameerah's family.

I met Sameerah as I stayed for a few days in Ashraf city, coming from Iraqi Kurdistan, in January 2007. We had known each-other for nearly three years and I had saved an impressive amount of her electronic messages, mainly describing all sorts of terrorist attacks and brutalities she had witnessed.

She had been through unimaginable experiences. When I asked her about a bomb attack that caused over thirty casualties in the Al-Khalis police headquarters, in the vicinity of the headquarters of her women's association (the place where we first met), she answered that she still remembered the continuous screams of people being tortured in the police barracks which she heard all day.

On another occasion, she gave me an on-the-spot description over the phone of a massacre of civilians committed by the militia in the centre of the town, where neither the army nor the police intervened.

Finally, just before we met in January 2007, she told me she couldn't stand any longer getting out in the morning and systematically finding decapitated bodies in the streets. As a great number of the Iraqis I met she was on the verge of a total psychological collapse.

The official who acted as my bodyguard (and who would die in a terrorist attack targeting Abdulla on 1 April 2007) brought



*Terrorist attack in Al-Khalis - Photo Sameerah Shibli
(April 27, 2006)*

Sameerah to Ashraf city, but he warned us it would not be possible for him to make the way back before the next day, as the light was fading.

Sameerah stayed overnight in a feminine compound, and in the meantime we had some more time to talk. I understood that I had to rapidly take her out of Iraq if she was to survive.

b) Down to the Abyss

After my return to Europe and the “Iraq with A Future” conference, the situation deteriorated steadily, as I could understand by reading the reports and photographs that Sameerah kept sending.

Just in the backyard of Sameerah’s family house—perhaps less than a couple of kilometres away—one could find Abu Tamor, a Sunni majority village whose main sheiks I had been with in Ashraf in January, while they were trying to convene security agreements with the US military.

In February, an all too common set of events took place over there. First, an operational team of AQI, presumably coming from the provincial capital Baquba, at the time controlled by AQI and playing the role of headquarters of its “Islamic State of Iraq” (ISI), attacked Shiite families in the village.

Soon afterwards, the Iraqi Army fifth division retaliated, as usual, not on the AQI who withdrew after perpetrating the massacres, but on the village inhabitants. A group of people caught at random were put inside a hole and summarily executed, including the twelve-year old “Mahmoohd Abdolrsaq Hashem Al-Shibli”, direct cousin of Sameerah. After finishing the massacre, the Army withdrew and asked for the US army’s support to attack the alleged terrorists by way of gunning the village by helicopter.

The villagers of Abu Tamor, whose leaders had been doing their

best to secure peace, were attacked consecutively by AQI, the Iraqi Army and the US Army.

The US Army, confined to large military units completely cut off from reality was acting like a blind elephant, trusting the Iraqi Army for guidance. However, the Iraqi Army was not reliable and was heavily infiltrated by elements that did not want to produce any sort of peaceful solution, quite on the contrary, they just wanted to promote a sectarian civil war.

I did make a complaint to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions against Brig. Gen. Shakir Hulail Hussein Al-Kaabi, the military responsible for the fifth division of the Iraqi Army. I sent copies to US authorities.

Soon afterwards, the US forces launched a reasoned complaint against this general and forced his resignation from the post. They did not raise this specific case on the occasion though. Apparently the murder of the young Mahmoohd was not an exceptional event.

At the same time, Sameerah's driver was kidnapped, tortured in the most barbaric way and murdered. The way his body was tortured convinced Sameerah that it was the work of the same people who had previously attacked her family, that is, Iran-leaning gangs (the fact that the driver was himself a Shiia was irrelevant) with the ultimate aim of gathering the necessary information to go after her and all of her family and acquaintances.

This was the alarm bell for the escape. With the help of Susanne Fischer in Suleymania and the Brussels Embassies of Egypt and Jordan, I organised Sameerah's escape, through Iraqi Kurdistan and Jordan to Cairo. At the last minute, she decided to take her younger brother and sister, Ali and Shemh, with her as well as her father.

The rest of the family was to join her later, as we thought then that it would not be difficult to get the necessary permission from the

Egyptian authorities. Future proved this to have been a gross miscalculation.

Otherwise, nearly all the people I got to know have tried to leave or have already left the country and desperately need help in Amman, Damascus, Aleppo or elsewhere.

Abdulla suffered another terrorist attack on 1 April 2007 by a suicide bomber that ran against him while his car stopped in the crossroad near his house. Miraculously, he survived this fourteenth attempt on his life, although one could hardly understand how, considering the number of people killed and the damages done to the vehicle.

A few days later, his house in Al-Muqdadiya was attacked and completely destroyed. Although his house was not far from an American military compound and the fight lasted for a long time, nobody dared to face the AQI commandoes. However, the US Army rescued and took care of the injured men who fought in the defence of Abdulla's house. Abdulla took his mother and other relatives to Iraqi Kurdistan, where they became part of the ever-increasing number of IDP (Internally Displaced People).

On 12 April, AQI sent a suicide bomber to the Iraqi Parliament premises to assassinate my friend and co-founder of IF, the Member of the Iraqi Parliament Mohammad Al-Awadh. My main Iraqi political partner was murdered! This was a major blow for me, personally as well as politically.

Few weeks back, the US Army had transferred the security of the Iraqi Parliament to the Iraqi authorities, and the security of the Parliament became the responsibility of its Security Committee, presided by Al-Ameri, the leader of the Badr Brigade.

For unexplained reasons, metal detectors were off-work from the eve till the attack took place in the Iraqi Parliament. The suicide-



Here with Iraqi MP's Mohammad Hossein Al-Awadh (murdered on April 12, 2007 in the Iraqi Parliament) and Falah Hassan at the European Parliament in Brussels (October 3, 2006)

bomber got inside the building using its main entrance around one o'clock in the afternoon, went through the crowded lobby along stairs and corridors to the place where he exploded himself against Mohammad, injuring severely several of his parliamentary colleagues and friends who were around him.

The press reports about the assassination were completely distorted. They failed to mention that the attack could not be seen as a random attack, since it did not target the most crowded and easily accessible places; they transmitted emphatically the message that the victims were from different political groups, as if a scratch in the hand of someone dozens of meters from the explosion could be seen as equivalent to the serious injuries suffered by people within a range of two meters of the scene of the events.

Once again, the very same political correctness, which had been used in the description of the challenges raised to brothers Ali and Omar, was evident.

Some days later, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, operational leader of Al-Qaeda, publicised a film celebrating the assassination.

As far as the leader of the Badr Brigade, Al-Ameri, is concerned, who was responsible for the security, he made dismissive declarations of the importance of the attack and never explained how such a complete failure in security conditions could have taken place.

Two days later, however, Al-Ameri and the spokesperson of the Maliki government, Ali Al-Dabbagh, both of them of indisputable and proven faith to the Iranian regime, accused the PMOI of colluding with AQI and to be somehow responsible for the attack.

So, one was to believe that the PMOI organised an attack in the Iraqi Parliament, together with AQI, to assassinate the member of the Iraqi Parliament who was best known for his constant support

of the PMOI, either in Iraq, in Brussels or in Geneva. Conversely, we should also believe that the head of the Badr Brigade just forgot to assure metal detection on the fateful day of the killing. The fact that he is as close as one can be to the Teheran regime should be seen as a coincidence as well.

To me, the murder of the most outspoken critic of the undeclared occupation of Iraq by Iran within the Iraqi Parliament was the ultimate proof of the close cooperation between AQI and the Iranian regime, confirming the firm opinion of the entire so-called Sunni and Lay political spectrum on this issue.

By the end of January, I had already visited in Geneva my former leader in the socialist party and now “United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees” (UNHCR), António Guterres, to express my concerns on the situation of the Iraqi refugees as well as on the Iranian Resistance refugees in Iraq.

There I developed the best of the relations with UNHCR that tried to help as much as it could to ease the situation of the ever growing number of people whom I was trying to get out of Iraq or who were already in neighbouring countries.

I organised a dinner event with the Arab diplomatic community in Brussels on the need to promote solidarity with Iraqi refugees. The event was a major success with the attendance of the overwhelming majority of the ambassadors of Arab countries. However, the Iraqi representative was conspicuous by his absence. Ambassadors of Syria, Egypt and Jordan took the floor and made very good interventions.

In the meantime, the Iraqi Ambassador, with whom I enjoyed good relations at the start, became more and more hostile as I became more and more critical of the state of affairs in his country.

Afterwards, I got acquainted and well related with both

Ambassadors from Jordan and Egypt and became a close friend of an Egyptian diplomat, Maged Aboulmagd.

After seeing Iraqi main politicians not tied to Teheran either assassinated, terrorised or unable to act together to end the civil war and stop the country from being transformed into an Iranian outpost, I thought Arab countries would be easier to be mobilised to that end.

Arab countries' diplomats showed in private, and sometimes even in public, a good understanding of the theocratic Iranian expansionist agenda, the strict dependence of the Iraqi authorities on it and the challenge it posed to the security of their countries.

In this respect, they are generally better informed and have a much better view on the situation of Iraq than the US or, for that matter, any other Western diplomat or politician, Israel being only partially an exception. Saudi Arabia and several of the Gulf countries were among the most far-sighted critics of Iran's threatening overtures.

However, as time went by, the US did not seem capable of leading the way for an alternative and the Iranian influence in Iraq consolidated. The Arab countries apparently decided to give up helping Iraq and to bet on the containment of the Iraqi disease by ignoring it. At the same time, they tried to isolate Syria and to give a moderate support to the Lebanese real resistance occupation, that is, the reverse of the fake resistance of Hezbollah and its allies, against the Iranian backed forces.

The Iraqi refugees were the main victims of this policy evolution because as for the Arab countries' establishments they became a nuisance to be ignored rather than people who could be useful to be supported from the perspective of a return of Iraq to independence.

It is worth noting that Syria, regardless of its political dependence

on Iran, was by far the country that admitted more Iraqi refugees and that supported the biggest burden, Jordan occupying the same position in relative terms.

The change of Arab states' mindset was all too obvious with Egypt. Whereas it had been comparatively easy to obtain a visa for Sameerah and the first part of the family, it became virtually impossible to get visas for the others.

Those of Sameerah's family who remained in Iraq had to leave shortly after Sameerah's escape, as the family house and the neighbouring homes of Sunni families were ethnically cleansed. Two of Sameerah's sisters are married and have young children (nine kids in all, from few months to eight-years old). They started a dramatic saga that has lasted for over one year and, and as I am writing these lines is continuing.

Chased from Al-Khalis, they went to Kirkuk, where they were chased and returned to Al-Khalis to be chased again. When the family lost hope of a resettlement in Cairo, they tried Aleppo, once again sending a first group to look after housing and other arrangements.

The family was once more split, as the Syrian policy of admitting Iraqi refugees also changed and the rest of the family was stopped at the border twice. Finally, those who were in Aleppo (two of the brothers) were also forced to leave, and they themselves joined again the wandering back into Iraq.

At a certain point they hid in the ruins of a brick factory in Al-Khalis that lies close to the main road Baghdad-Kirkuk. One of the members of the city Council, although affiliated in a pro-Iranian party, agreed to secretly provide them with water and food, which probably saved the lives of the weakest members of the family.

Al-Khalis, a city with a Shiia majority in Diyala, has always been controlled by the Iran-leaning forces, SCIRI and Iran-leaning Al-



Sunni Arab survivors of ethnic cleansing in villages surrounding Al-Khalis, shortly after arriving in town. Male adults from these villages were kidnapped and later assassinated. The survivors would be forced to leave as well afterwards. - Photo by Sameerah Shibli (February 15, 2007)

From the following comment, we can understand the US authorities knew about this crime against humanity:

“No,” Rice said, “there is also a Shia problem, and you must recognize that. Look, we’ve got reports - people going into villages, killing all the men and sending the women into exile. Are you telling me that’s not true? None of Maliki’s aides challenged her”

(Woodward, Bob, The War Within, A secret white House history 2006-2008, Simon & Schuster, 2008, ISBN 978-1-4165-5897-2, page 256)

Dawa factions, and is a town where ethnic cleansing forced 4.500 families to leave and where sectarian violence has been the worst.

In the meantime, Iraqi refugees in general became my main political priority, and I promoted several parliamentary initiatives asking for solidarity with them, namely two resolutions of the European Parliament¹ and several parliamentary questions².

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- ¹ European Parliament resolution on refugees from Iraq, 15/02/2007, P6_TA(2007)0056, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2007-0056+0+DOC+XML+V0/EN&language=EN>;
European Parliament resolution on the humanitarian situation of Iraqi refugees, 12/07/2007, P6_TA(2007)0357, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2007-0357+0+DOC+XML+V0/EN&language=EN>
- ² E-0416/07 - Emergency humanitarian aid for Iraqi refugees
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+WQ+E-2007-0416+0+DOC+XML+V0/EN&language=EN>;
E-2222/07 - Alleged ill-treatment and fear of forcible deportation of refugees in the EU
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+WQ+E-2007-2222+0+DOC+XML+V0/EN&language=EN>;
P-2287/08 - Verification of United Nations contributions
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+WQ+P-2008-2287+0+DOC+XML+V0/EN&language=EN>;
E-3323/08 - Verification of United Nations contributions by EuropeAid
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+WQ+E-2008-3323+0+DOC+XML+V0/EN&language=EN>
- ³ 2008 Budgetary Procedure - adoption of two budgetary amendments in the European Parliament first reading of the budget: amendments 955 and 952 to budgetary lines 19 10 03 and 19 01 01 01. These amendments, numbered 242 and 212, for the vote in second reading placed part of the appropriations in reserve. The conditions for the releasing of both reserves were that “*Commission is invited to present to Parliament an exhaustive overview of the use of funds (in 2006, 2007 and planned for 2008) in Iraq, specifying, which projects have been financed / co-financed the framework of the Iraqi reconstruction process with exact indications on the geographical location and contractors per project (where already defined)*”.
http://www.europarl.europa.eu/compa/budg/budg2008/2008_en.htm

I introduced the topic as an important subject both in Budget³ and Budget Control⁴ Committees and for some time managed to keep the subject alive in the European political agenda.

The tide was turning against Iraqi refugees in Europe as well, not necessarily out of any negative concern from the public opinion, but by pure lack of political interest, the negative logic of the European asylum system and the hostility of the European Commission, that was not at all co-operative, to say the least.

In Europe the logic seems to be simple: (1) Iraq has major oil reserves; (2) the Iraqi government appears to be solid, since it is backed by both enemies Iran and US; (3) the Iraqi government does not want to hear about refugees; (4) to sum up, Europe should not speak about Iraqi refugees and should do its best to support the Iraqi Government.

The tide suddenly turned against me in the European Parliament as well. As I was out of the Foreign Affairs committee, there was little I could do to prevent the approval of an intelligently drafted report hiding all the inconvenient truths and difficult-to-answer questions on Iraq, tainted with the politically convenient dose of anti-Americanism, painting a rosy picture of Iraq and opening the way for a triumphant arrival of Prime Minister Maliki in Europe.

Soon after the approval of the European Parliament report⁵, we could read a joint statement of Prime-Minister Maliki and President Barroso that referred to nothing else but oil⁶. The European

⁴ 2005 Discharge Procedure - Written questions for the Hearing Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner before the Budgetary Control Committee and questions during the hearing itself, 23/01/2007, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/activities/committees/editoDisplay.do?jsessionid=7CFD4CEC6441F5FF82F2395B89C6AA79.node2?language= EN&menuId=2035&id=1&body=CONT>

⁵ European Parliament recommendation to the Council of 13 March 2008 on the European Union's role in Iraq P6_TA-PROV(2008)0100

Parliament report played a crucial role in creating the conditions for this to happen.

c) New hopes

By the end of 2007 I hosted former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi and the veteran of Iraqi diplomacy, Adnan Al-Pachachi, in Brussels, both of them brought by Abdulla Aljubori. Ayad Allawi agreed to join the political platform “Iraq with A Future”.

I noticed that he was by far the most brilliant Iraqi politician I had met. Allawi raised my hopes again for a suitable solution for Iraq, and I thought about getting him together with the most reliable and far-sighted political leaders in the Arab World, and that meant the Egyptians.

At the same time, the results of the brilliant strategy of General David Petraeus regarding Iraq were finally showing. He sorted out two of the most complex political issues in Iraq. He made peace with the Sunni population and established a co-operation framework with its leaders to fight Al-Qaeda in Iraq. He managed to achieve a truce with the most important Shiite organisation, the Al-Sadr movement. Although heavily infiltrated and directly influenced by the Iranian regime, Al-Sadr movement could not be seen just as an instrument of Teheran like SCIRI/Badr Brigade.

Quite awkwardly the Western press tried frantically to convey the inverse impression by the beginning of 2008: Al-Sadr movement was pictured as an Iranian regime tool and the SCIRI was pictured as less-aligned with Teheran. Anyone who knows something about the Iraqi reality could not believe anything of that sort, so I wondered what the purpose of this new charade was.

⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/iraq/docs/press_meeting_0408_en.pdf



*With Ayad Allawi, former Prime Minister of Iraq, Adnan Al-Pachachi, former Foreign Affairs Minister of Iraq, Abdulla Rasheed Aljubori and Mogens Camre, Member of the European Parliament, in a meeting with Ambassadors to the EU of several Arab countries
(October 16, 2007)*

Since the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war two camps were formed in the Shiia clergy. One gathered around the Al-Sadr clan, to whom Saddam was horrendous, but the Shiia were Iraqi, therefore they had to be on the Iraqi side of a war. The other was built around the Al-Hakim clan, to whom the Shiia had to follow the spiritual leadership of the Iranian theocracy in any circumstance, and therefore, they had to be on the Iranian side of the war. Needless to say, the situation was not suddenly reversed in the beginning of 2008.

Moreover, David Petraeus got the Iraqi government security forces under close scrutiny, correcting or avoiding some of its biggest attempts to promote sectarian violence.

Nevertheless, as a military leader he could not by himself persuade the US diplomatic machine to change the erroneous policy of appeasement with Teheran.

Although the US was winning points in the internal Iraqi war, it was losing in the international arena, since it broadly kept the same policies.

Ayad Allawi, unfortunately, could not come to Cairo. Yet Abdulla and I decided to go there in December 2007.

We had some meetings in the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and we evaluated the conditions for Egypt to become the leading force for the driving Arab forces for a positive solution in Iraq. At the same time, we hoped to be able to persuade the Egyptian authorities to be more helpful towards the reunification of Sameerah's family in Cairo. The results on both issues were not encouraging.

I came back to Cairo some months later, as I was invited to participate in an Islamic conference promoted by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs. At the time I was received by the Foreign Affairs

Minister, as well as by high-level personalities in the Senate and the Human Rights Council. Politically, this second trip was far more successful, and I established strong emotional ties with the country.

During my stay in Cairo, on both occasions, Sameerah guided me around, acting sometimes as my language interpreter and always helping me to understand Egypt as seen through the eyes of an Iraqi.

I found Cairo the most buoyant city in the Mediterranean, definitely marked by mass poverty but with tremendous business dynamics. I assume that Cairo could become the economic centre in the whole region if the right economic policies would be implemented and if the country could overcome the totalitarian threats impending upon it.

Egypt is the cultural and political centre of the Arab World, and also an important centre for Islam. Egypt was the cradle of Ancient civilization but, in modern times, it hosts both Arab nationalism and modern Islamic fanatic ideologies.

The Egyptian political leadership understood better than any other in the region (not to mention outside the region) the threats posed by both the totalitarian ideologies but felt unable to confront them, as its legitimacy ultimately depends on them.

The Arab extreme nationalism and in particular its most awful characteristic, that is anti-Semitism, continues to play a crucial role and, although the State has outlawed the Islamic Brotherhood and other fanatic movements, Egypt was to a large extent forced to absorb its ideology, abandoning crucial principles of laicism.

The problem faced by the Egyptian leadership is to embrace modernity, which necessarily implies political democratisation,

while keeping the fanatic threat at bay. Especially after the Iraqi disaster no one contemplates the perspective of repeating the logic of inviting Islamic fanatics to bring democracy, which in Egypt would translate into inviting the Muslim Brotherhood to take care of the Government. This would be tantamount to replacing an authoritarian government by a totalitarian one.

I understood then that the two epicentres in the developing scenario of the confrontation in the Greater Middle East are Cairo and Teheran, the latter seen more and more as the one that can successfully challenge the West, the first seen either as the most solid bastion against the theocratic imperialism or as a government kept by Western support but with an ever more dwindling internal social and political basis and therefore ripe for an Islamic Revolution.

There is no other region where modernisation attempts failed more persistently than in the Middle East and therefore the temptation to think that there is nothing to be done is understandably high.

As I learned more about the region, some points became increasingly clearer to me. The first is that Egypt is a crucial country to be engaged in the fight for modernisation. One can argue that Israel (the only fully fledged democracy), Jordan, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon or several of the Gulf States are at least as close to a modern and liberal lay state as Egypt and that actually transformations in any of them would be easier to promote. However, transformations in any of these countries, despite their importance, will not have as far-reaching impact on the Arab World as transformations in Egypt will.

Egypt has some other very important advantages, namely the relatively high level of its political and cultural elite and the fact that it does not have significant oil reserves.



*Internal displaced people queuing in Baquba for food supplies
Photo Sameerah Shibli (October 27, 2006)*

Oil, or oil and gas, or indeed any other scarce natural resource, is normally perceived as a blessing but should better be seen as a problem. It either creates covetousness from others or makes every move seen in the light of potential interests. It destroys the need to act.

Far from being a gift, oil and gas in the Greater Middle-East might actually be the main problem of the region.

Egypt is not particularly rich in either of these natural resources, and therefore it is forced to rely on its most significant resource, its people, to develop itself.

Regarding its institutions, I was quite impressed by the level of independence of the Human Rights Council and the importance and maturity of its recommendations.

Summing up, I was convinced that an engagement strategy with Egypt on all levels of co-operation, from human rights to economic development, could be successful and present the best investment Europe can make to change the situation in the region.

The best surprise I had when coming back from Cairo to Brussels was to receive an invitation from the US acting Ambassador to the EU for a dinner in his house with Ambassador James Foley, Senior Coordinator for Iraqi Refugee Issues of the US Department of State.

To meet Ambassador Foley and to discuss the Iraqi refugees' situation in particular and Iraq in general with someone who is well-informed, intelligent and humane and entitled to act was even better.

He confirmed that no one seemed to be significantly concerned with refugees, the European Commission being the worst case in point. He had no illusions about the Maliki government either.

Maliki himself views refugees as either Baathists or traitors, and therefore he could not care less about them.

After my numerous attempts to find alternatives to US engagement, and in spite of all the misgivings, I gained the conviction that this country seems to be the only one who could produce people with the will and capacity to address such humanitarian issues.

With people like General David Petraeus and Ambassador James Foley around, I felt there could be a future for Iraq, for the Iraqi refugees, and for all of us.



*At the Naval Base of Port Heuneme, USA, thanking the
US Navy for its support to the rescue of the coastal village of
Ribeira Quente after a severe mud-slide
(May 19, 2005)*

Chapter 5

THE IRANIAN THEOCRACY AND THE DAWN OF A NEW ERA OF TERRORISM

Chapter 5

The Iranian theocracy and the dawn of a new era of terrorism

a) On Terrorism and Fanaticism

Let me begin this chapter with a quote of Walid Phares: The whole of United States, with the exception of a handful of visionaries, was taken aback on September 11 and could not help wondering: *why do they hate us?*

Quite obviously, the right answer to that question was not found, as the United States soon embarked on a disastrous path that led to the Iraqi operation and the subsequent reinforcement of the ideology and political forces that produced September 11.

To begin with, as the case is made by many analysts, the Islam does not have a monopoly over fanaticism, and fanaticism is not the sole preserve of religion for that matter. At times, non-religious ideologies—nationalist, racial, ethnical or purely political—have proven to be as fanatic as religion.

With the Oklahoma City bombing, we had clear evidence that the Christian religion could be claimed, the same way as the Muslim religion, as the driving force of mass murder, and we had to go only a bit back in time—to the aftermath of the withdrawal of the US from Indochina—to see a communist ideology serve as justification for mass murder on a genocide scale. More recently we witnessed an ethnic genocide in Rwanda and the multiple genocides of the Balkans on an ethnic or religious affiliation basis.

This fact, coupled with the misleading desire of not to offend the Muslim World, led the US to consider that it was dealing with a war on “terror”, as if September 11 could be understood as a simple act of terror, and as if terror could be a useful definition of whatever challenge we are facing.

The least dangerous form of violence acts through terror (or if you prefer intimidation), since violence, or the threat of violence, is a tool for conditioning the behaviour of others.

Only when violence seeks annihilation, that is, when violence is most fearful, does it not necessarily imply intimidation. To give an example: when an occupying army executes a resistant in public it aims at intimidating others not to resist; when it wipes out a whole population (most of the times secretly) it seeks the ultimate solution, to use the Nazi expression on the extermination of the Jewish and Gipsy populations.

When the police arrests someone for robbery, it is partially to prevent him from wrongdoing, partially to try to convince him that this is not a good thing to be done, but to a large extent the objective is to intimidate potential thieves. Needless to say, most of us think it would be far-fetched to classify this sort of action as terrorism. Notwithstanding police actions in totalitarian states can be clearly classified as “terrorism”.

The best and most credited author on terrorism, Bruce Hoffman¹, tries to give an operational definition of terrorism, and indeed, I think he produced quite an interesting and important work on the issue.

However, I think that the main conclusion to be drawn from his work is that there is no way we can make terrorism *per se* as an operational category that will allow us to any clear action, let alone a whole war as pretended by the announced US strategy.

As Bruce Hoffman explains, the term terrorism, or the policy of terror, was first used to describe the French revolution policy. It was not the first time that a State decided to use this sort of policy,

¹ Hoffman, Bruce, *Inside Terrorism*, Columbia University Press, 2006, ISBN 978-0-231-12699-1

for violence is inherent to any sort of State, but it was perhaps the first time that the society decided to categorise in a meaningful way one of the nastiest expressions of the coercive nature of the State.

Anarchists, and especially the Russian anarchists, became the most typical actors to be labelled as terrorists in the second half of the nineteenth century. It is noteworthy that there is little in common between both these types of terrorism, unless we consider that most of the potential victims were the same (aristocrats and the upper class). Otherwise, in the first case we have violence from the State and in the second violence against the State. Secondly and most importantly, we have the question of ethics, as Bruce Hoffman highlights:

“Even having selected their targets with great care and the utmost deliberation, group members still harbored profound regrets about taking the life of a fellow human being. Their unswerving adherence to this principle is perhaps best illustrated by the failed attempt on the life of Grand Duke Serge Alexandrovich made by a successor organization to the Narodnaya Volya in 1905. As the royal carriage came into view, the terrorist tasked with the assassination saw that the duke was unexpectedly accompanied by his children and therefore aborted his mission rather than risk harming the intended victim’s family (the duke was killed in a subsequent attack).”²

In sharp contrast to this action we have, as it is known, the intentional murder of the Tsar’s family under instructions of Lenin after the Russian Revolution. However, this was not considered to be a terrorist act simply because it was an act of State and not an act of insurgent forces.

² Hoffman, Bruce, *Op. cit.*, page 6

Considering this was an extermination policy rather than an intimidation policy, it could be taken as literally correct not to call the last action a terrorist one. However, the distinction between the two acts is due to the fact that the second was a State action while the murder of Grand Duke Alexandrovich was not.

So, if we were to apply the logic of the present “war on terrorism” to the beginning of the century in Russia we should persecute Narodnaya Volya and leave the Bolsheviks undisturbed, which, I think, will be consensually agreed makes no sense.

The Nazis created the third big wave of “terrorist” labelling, and they applied it liberally to anyone who resisted them. This concept of terrorism survived to our day, and when the Council of the European Union created legislation on terrorism it made a “declaration” excluding those resistance acts committed during the Second World War from the definition of terrorism.

The fourth wave of terrorism labelling came with the Palestinian war against Israel. Here, it has been pointed out by several authors that those who created the State of Israel have used the same type of tactics that the Palestinians used against them afterwards. More to the point, I think it is remarkable that those who were the main accused of terrorism in the third wave (the Jews by the Nazis) then used this expression against their new opponents.

Bruce Hoffman considers the Palestinian violence, born out of the 1967 war, as the source of the modern type of terrorism, exemplified by the systematic use of hijacking of air or sea crafts or even individuals. In addition, Hoffman focuses on the extensive use of the global media as a distinctive factor of the contemporary terrorism,

³ Council of the European Union, 9958/02 REV 1ADD1, 16/07/2002, page 9, point 17. - We shall come back to it later. A declaration has no legal value, but it has political meaning. In this case, the political meaning is the most pure hypocrisy, since the declaration just proves that the definition of terrorism used is completely flawed.

and this actually started with the Palestinian violent actions.

I do not think this is a good choice for several reasons. Long before the Palestinians started hijacking air or sea vessels, this had already been done, for instance, by the Portuguese resistance to dictatorship, arguably in a less violent way.

The assassination of Israeli athletes in Munich during the 1972 Summer Olympic Games—an obviously horrendous crime—is in the border between targeted assassination of political opponents and the mass murder of modern terrorism since it is a targeted assassination, although focusing on citizens who happen to distinguish themselves for reasons that have nothing to do with the issues under dispute. However, this is not yet the contemporaneous terrorism.

On the other hand, it is true that this was a global media event, while the hijacking of the Portuguese Santa Maria passenger ship in the beginning of the sixties was not. Here the difference is more in the media presence than in the tactics. Santa Maria transported hundreds of passengers and it was first page in the Portuguese press for a long time. The difference between the Santa Maria hijacking and several subsequent actions of the PLO lies more in the globalisation of events by the media than in the actions themselves or the intentions of the actors.

As Bruce Hoffman clarifies, the Palestinian terrorism of the seventies stems from the ethno-nationalist insurrections typical of the post Second World War. They have nothing to do with the forces that created September 11. This amalgamation is very unhelpful to understand what we are dealing with.

To amalgamate ETA and the Muslim fanatics as the former Spanish Government did after March 11 is a typical example of what we should not do if we are to understand and to efficiently fight this tremendous enemy of ours.

To give the term “terrorism”, a term that has a clearly negative connotation, a useful meaning, “intimidating violence” is not enough.

I think we also have to give the intimidating violence a disproportionate and unreasonable (in short, fanatic) character, bearing in mind the definition of reasonable that John Rawls gave us.

“Persons are reasonable (...) when (...) they are ready to propose principles and standards as fair terms of cooperation and to abide by them willingly, given the assurance that others will likewise do so. Those norms they view as reasonable for everyone to accept and therefore justifiable to them; and they are ready to discuss the fair terms that others propose. The reasonable is an element of the idea of society as a system of fair cooperation and that its fair terms be reasonable for all to accept is part of its idea of reciprocity”⁴

Of course when we do so, we enter into the muddy and subjective territory of perception of violence, where theoretical classification efforts may prove elusive.

There are cases that can be understood in a straightforward manner. If Bask nationalists think that the majority of the population of their region want to be independent, they could just rely on the ballot, rather than on the bullet; therefore, we might classify their violent action as unreasonable and disproportionate.

Otherwise, when Jews resisted violently to the Nazis, who wanted to exterminate them, no one could say that whatever form of violence they used in response was unreasonable or disproportionate.

⁴ Rawls, John, *Political liberalism*, Columbia University Press, 1993, ISBN: 0231052480, lecture II, §1, “The Reasonable and the Rational”

Reality is seldom that straightforward, and there are several cases where a complex discussion on the issue cannot be ruled out.

Actually, if we stay on the domain of the concept of “terrorism” for what it might mean in purely logical terms, we will find that many violent attitudes still fit the concept but that they have actually nothing to do with our present concerns.

Someone who knocks down a neighbour who did not answer to a good morning greeting would certainly be using an unreasonable and disproportionate act of intimidation, but this is not the sort of issue we are dealing with.

We are dealing with mass social phenomena—political for short—where this type of violence is used. Furthermore, we are dealing with violent acts that stem from a particular ideology; an ideology where a specific religion serves as justification of all possible types of crime, mass murder of civilians included.

Terrorism is perhaps the nastier manifestation of this ideology, but it is not the ideology or political platform that now concerns us. We can qualify Mafia as a murderer organisation, but we will not be able to understand it and to effectively oppose it if we do not understand that murder is just an instrument of organisations with other aims than murder.

The celebration or worshiping of an ethnic, national or religious reality is certainly not an evil thing by itself. It only becomes a negative phenomenon when it conflicts with other ethnic, national, religious (or non-religious) realities and, in particular, when it becomes the source of a totalitarian attitude.

So, in my opinion, we are facing a totalitarian and fanatic ideology that claims to act in the name of Islam, an ideology that, among other things, uses the weapon of terrorism, and a specific sort of terrorism, which is suicidal and religious terrorism, first defined as such by Bruce Hoffman.

According to this author, the very first organisations that embraced this new type of religious terrorism were “the Iranian backed Shi’a organizations al-Dawa and the Committee for Safeguarding the Islamic Revolution”⁵.

Al-Dawa alongside with the Iranian offspring in Lebanon, Hezbollah, is identified by the author as the first suicidal organisation⁶.

Actually, Khomeini brought mass terrorism to the fanatic movement. According to an important Muslim scholar, it was Ayatollah Khomeini who broke the existing consensus among Islamic clerics that mass murder was against Islam.

As Ali bin Talal Al-Jahni states in an article published on December 11, 2007:

“Indeed, resistance that fails to distinguish between civilians, including children, the elderly, and the sick, and combatants is not legitimate. Such resistance [is nothing but] terrorism. Murdering human beings, even if politicians, both Sunni and Shiite, try to excuse it using the slogan of Islam, is forbidden. This was a consensus in all Islamic schools of thought until the arrival of [Ayatollah Ruhollah] Khomeini in Iran”⁷

The creation of modern terrorism, that is, the religious benediction of mass suicidal murder, is in fact a creation of the Iranian Islamic Revolution. Even the distant predecessors of modern terrorists,

⁵ Hoffman, Bruce, *Op. cit.*, page 85, the author means SCIRI, the most important Iranian terrorist outfit in Iraq. His first President is the present responsible for Judicial Affairs in Iran, Ayatollah Mahmud Hashemi Shahroodi, and he was replaced shortly afterwards by one of the members of the Al-Hakim clan

⁶ Hoffman, Bruce, *Op. cit.*, page 131

⁷ Saudi academic Ali bin Talal Al-Jahni in *Al-Hayat* (London), December 11, 2007 translated in MEMRI, Special Dispatch-Reform Project December 20, 2007 No. 1789

the famous Shiia assassins from Lebanon, targeted their victims and did not sponsor mass murder of civilians.

Iran itself, both through its Iraqi outfits SCIRI or the Iranian sponsored sectors of Al-Dawa, started promoting religious suicidal terrorism in Iraq as soon as the Iranian theocracy got to power. It actually used it on industrial scale during the war with Iraq. Later it specialised its Lebanese branch (Hezbollah) in the promotion of international terrorism using mainly, but not only, suicidal tactics.

According to Fred Halliday⁸,

“if there was *one* moment when the Iran-Iraq war became inevitable, when Iraqi strategy moved from angry, but episodic clashes to a decision to launch an actual war on the IRI, it was April 1980, following an attempted assassination of Deputy Premier Tariq Aziz on 1 April by an Iranian agent, Samir Nur Ghalam, while he was visiting the Mustansariyah University in Baghdad.”

The religious suicidal terrorist activities of Al-Dawa and SCIRI are not only referred to by academic books, but were also strongly publicised during the eighties, especially when they were targeting the US. State Department reports referred extensively to the terrorist activities of these groups⁹ and it is impossible to pretend they were not known by the US establishment.

The indictment by the Argentinean magistrates of the Iranian regime structure for the terrorist attack on the Jewish Cultural Centre of Buenos Aires in 1994 is a masterpiece on modern

⁸ Halliday, Fred, *The Middle East in International Relations*, Cambridge University Press, 2005, ISBN 0-521-59741-2, page 52, footnote 14

⁹ Mohaddessin, Mohammad, *Enemies of the Ayatollahs - The Iranian Opposition's War on Islamic Fundamentalism*, Zed Books, 2004, ISBN 978-1842-7753-18, chapter 8

terrorism and its organisation and procedures¹⁰.

Iran continues to openly promote and publicise movements of religious suicidal terrorists in its own country and is the main sponsor of this type of terrorist movements against Israel.

Apparently, Bruce Hoffman, confronted with the choice between following the public opinion meaning of “terrorism” and creating a theoretically coherent concept, decided for the former, because instead of describing the Iranian revolutionary regime as the creator of suicide and religious terrorism, he only refers to its Lebanese and Iraqi offsprings.

This may be more coherent with the day-to-day language, namely the notion of terrorism as being actions of non-State organisms, but it certainly makes us lose sight of the nature of what we are dealing with. It is crucial to understand the way this type of terrorism developed in relation to the Islamic fanaticism that commands it. Depending on the circumstances, terrorism may or may not be developed by the State, but this should not determine whether to classify an act as terrorist or not.

b) Islamic Fanaticism

Here, we can distinguish at least five types of approaches. The first is to consider Al-Qaeda and Bin Laden as something peculiar to the Islamic fundamentalism on the whole, and to identify the problem as a problem with this specific terrorist threat.

From this angle, *The Looming Tower, Al-Qaeda and the road to 9/11*¹¹ is the best book I have come across. It does put in perspective the closest predecessors and partners of Bin Laden. To a certain extent it correctly puts more emphasis on Al-Zawahiri and his Egyptian entourage than on Bin Laden; it gives a lot of important

¹⁰ Poder Judicial de la Nación, 05/03/2003, Causa 1.156, Autos y Vistos

personal and operational details, it is superbly written and reads like a novel; however, it does not aim at explaining the logic of this ideology.

The most standard approach, followed by most of the Orientalist establishments as formed in the US under the influence of Bernard Lewis, is to place the birth of the Muslim fanaticism on the fall of the Caliphate in 1924 and the birth of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in 1928, from where we can trace most of the fanatic movements, with the important exception of the so-called Shiia current.

This is namely Walid Phares' perspective, who has labelled the phenomenon as "jihadism" and made perhaps the most comprehensive approach existing. Being a Lebanese by birth, Walid Phares is very well placed to understand Hezbollah, the Iranian terrorist section in Lebanon, in his rightful words, that can hardly be seen as an offspring or somehow the reflection of the mainstream Muslim Brotherhood Islamist family.

However, in Walid Phares' theoretical construction "Khomeinism" appears as a sort of cousin—and not necessarily the worst in the family—of the jihadist threat.

A third variation presented by Robert Dreyfuss¹² places the birth of the phenomena with Jamal Eddine. This is indeed a very interesting character also known as "al-Afghani", a surname he apparently created with the aim to pretend he had been born in this country instead of having been born in Iran.

As the title of his book indicates, he sees the fundamentalist

¹¹ Wright, Lawrence, *The Looming Tower, Al-Qaeda and the road to 9/11*, Knopf, 2006, ISBN 0-375-41486-X

¹² Dreyfuss, Robert, *Devil's Game, How the United States helped unleash fundamentalist Islam*, Owl Books, 2005, 978-0-8050-8137-2

phenomenon more as a direct product of the Western action than as a reaction to the end of the Caliphate or whatever other setback suffered by the Muslim World.

Although the author makes a very interesting approach, which, among various other aspects, highlights the crucial role of the Shiia Clergy, both Iraqi and Iranian, on the establishment of Islamism as an ideological, diplomatic, political and economic system, he seems to be constrained by some ideological limitations on drawing the necessary consequences.

Robert Dreyfuss demonstrates at length the perennial, fanatic and anti-Western character of Muslim fanaticism, but by the end of the book he feels obliged to criticize the US global policy for not concentrating only on fighting Al-Qaeda, echoing all those who deny the existence of a global fanatic threat and equating those who think that this global fanatic threat exists as the partisans of the “Clash of civilizations”. This is a simplistic view that contradicts the findings in his own book.

If we exclude this passage—in chapter twelve—the book shows how dangerous Muslim fanaticism has been and how irresponsible the West has been favouring it over all nationalist and leftist tendencies in the Middle East.

To understand the Iraqi operation of 2003, it is essential to read not only Bob Woodward¹³, but Robert Dreyfuss as well. The fact that Saddam Hussein had nothing to do with Jihadism and was rather a product of the ethno-nationalist tendencies made him more prone to be the target for the Western establishment, however absurd this might seem.

In a yet different historical and conceptual approach to the

¹³ Woodward, Bob, *State of Denial: Bush at War, Part III*, Simon & Schuster, 2006, 978-0-7432-7223-0

phenomenon, Charles Allen¹⁴ centres his analysis on the Pashtun tribes of present Afghanistan and Pakistan, and their deeply rooted fanatic traditions in relation with Arabian most famous extremism, Wahhabism.

Based on different historical data and perspectives, the book confirms however the persistent fatal attraction of the West to Muslim fanaticism and questions the most official historical perspective of the fall of the Caliphate as the main source of present day surge of Islamic fanaticism. It is very useful to understand the roots and importance of fanaticism to the north of the Indian subcontinent, in order to have a broader perspective on the phenomena.

The fifth perspective is a Muslim perspective, and it is by far the best informed in terms of the Islamic doctrine. Mohammad Mohaddessin¹⁵, who is also the Foreign Affairs Committee Chair of the National Council of Resistance of Iran, stresses some points of utmost importance.

To start with, the author shows fundamentalism to have been a permanent feature present in Islam from the time of the Prophet and really not to have been invented in the aftermath of the Mogul invasions, the creation of Wahhabism, the appearance of Al-Afghani or the Muslim Brotherhood.

In doing so, he also characterises fanaticism as derived from fundamentalism, which is not an indisputable feature. As he quotes from Imam Ali in the beginning of his book¹⁶, on the controversy between him and the Kharajites (the fanatics of the time):

¹⁴ Allen, Charles, *God's Terrorists - The Wahhabi Cult and the Hidden Roots of Modern Jihad*, Abacus, 2006, ISBN 978-0-349-11879-6

¹⁵ Mohaddessin, Mohammad, *Islamic Fundamentalism - The new global threat*, Seven Locks Press, 1993, ISBN 0-929765-32-X

“They are the ones who use (some) words of truth to allow falsehood to prevail.”

Secondly, it highlights the importance of the conflict between fundamentalism and the living interpretation of Islam. According to the author, experts on Islam have been far too interested in differences between Sunni and Shiia and not as much as they should be in the differences between fundamentalists and evolutionists.

Here, I think, that though it is true that Islamic fanaticism extensively uses a fundamental reading of the scriptures to justify its choices, this is not always the case. For instance, there is no way that a fundamentalist reading of the Quran can justify suicidal religious terrorism because suicide is something that it literally and clearly forbids.

Islamic fanaticism is fundamentalist whenever it finds twisting the fundamentals the more convenient way (which happens most of the times), but it becomes evolutionist when a different reading of the scriptures is needed.

Regarding Islam, without getting into a theological discussion that would anyway go beyond my capacities, I believe the main confrontation is not between Islam and other faiths such as the Jewish or the Christian, or even between different currents within Islam such as Sunni and Shiia, it is between those Muslims who support a moderate, tolerant democratic reading of the religion and those who support a fanatic reading of the holy scripts, being either Sunni or Shiia.

Bruce Hoffman underlines the fact that the earliest religious suicide terrorists, like the contemporary ones, were Lebanese Shiia masterminded by Iran, which is indeed peculiar.

¹⁶ Mohaddessin, Mohammad, *Op. cit.*, page 4

The most important distinctive factor on contemporaneous Islamic fanaticism is the “Velayat-e-faqih” that is, the rule of the jurisprudent. This is a doctrine originated in Najaf, and its most famous interpreter was the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

The two most important historical families of Iraqi clerics—the Al-Sadr and the Al-Hakim—sponsored it and made very important contributions to its establishment.

According to Ali A. Allawi¹⁷, the Grand Ayatollah Ali A. Sistani (Iranian citizen, living in Iraq where he is now the most important Shiia cleric) is a sponsor of the very same perspective. Neither Saddam Hussein nor the United States seem to have understood this. Both Mohammad Al-Awadh and myself thought the perspective of Ayatollah Ali A. Sistani to be consistent with “Velayat-e-faqih”.

US intelligentsia created the myth of a “quietist” current within Islamic clerics of which Ayatollah Sistani would be the main representative, who opposed the radical ones and would be supporting democracy. Thomas Friedman went as far as proposing the Noble Peace Prize for Ayatollah Sistani.

One can agree that the role and objectives of Ayatollah Sistani are not obvious; however, I believe that most of the aura created by the US establishment around him, as well as the inflation of his political role, had the objective of hiding the blunder made by the US strategists giving the power to the ancient and most deep-rooted religious suicidal terrorist groups in Iraq, SCIRI and the Iranian leaning sections of Al-Dawa.

Whereas the traditional Islamic fundamentalism of the Muslim Brotherhood sort envisaged an executive power “bound by the

¹⁷ Allawi, Ali A., *The Occupation of Iraq - Winning the War, Losing the Peace*, Yale University Press, 2007, ISBN 978-0-300-11015-9

teaching of Islam and the will of the people”, Khomeini made a very important step further: the jurisprudent should himself be the ruler.

Although Ayatollah Khomeini did not create the dissimulation¹⁸ policy in Islam—several passages of the Koran might be interpreted as invitations to it—he excelled in the art of hiding his real intentions or plainly lying on the most important issues whenever it seemed convenient.

Another point missed by most of the Jihadist analysis is the relative importance of Iran as a country. Iran is not Afghanistan, Sudan or even Saudi Arabia. It is a fairly advanced country with substantial human resources that can play an important role on a global scale.

What most observers disregarded in the analysis of the global promotion of fanaticism by Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states after 1979, and, to a lesser extent, of other Muslim countries, is that it was an attempt to keep pace with the Iranian challenge.

When Saudi Arabia invested heavily in financing Jihadist fighters in Afghanistan, it was not only aiming at attacking the USSR, a goal it shared with the US and others; it was also trying to ensure that the Jihadist movement there would not fall in the hands of Teheran.

In the same way, regarding Jihad in Algeria, the biggest concern of Saudi Arabia was to ensure that it would not be overrun by the Iranian fundamentalist rivals.

If we now turn to Bin Laden’s organisation, Lawrence Wright¹⁹ explains that Bin Laden learned the suicidal doctrine and technique from the Iran-sponsored Lebanese Hezbollah. Al-Zawahiri, who is actually more important than Bin Laden (Bin Laden’s primary

¹⁸ Also known as Taqiyya, from the Arabic. See, for instance, Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taqiyya>

¹⁹ Wright, Lawrence, Op. cit., page 173

role was only due to his former fortune), was always very close to Teheran²⁰.

c) Teheran and Al-Qaeda

One of the most dramatic miscalculations of Saddam Hussein was on the US perception of his inflammatory declarations regarding 9/11, in deep contrast to the smart way how the Iranian leaders created the impression they had nothing to do with the attack, and that they could even be considered on the same side of the struggle.

This was probably what infuriated George Bush and gave him the determination to finish up with his old foe, disregarding evidence and strategic thinking.

Whoever reads Bob Woodward's "State of Denial"²¹ will certainly be horrified by the prevailing incompetence and mismanagement at the top of the US administration that certainly goes a long way to explain this state of affairs.

It took some time and some calm to see the Congress report on 9/11²² establishing that there was no connection between Saddam Hussein and 9/11 and that in reality the only connections (other than Afghanistan) which could be established were those between Iran and 9/11. Iran helped make disappear the traces of the passage of some of the 9/11 terrorists from Afghanistan to the US through Iran.

²⁰ Wright, Lawrence, Op. cit., namely page 174. Actually, an important Saudi diplomat assured me, in a bilateral meeting held by the end of 2006, that Al-Zawahiri was working based in Iran.

²¹ Woodward, Bob, Op. cit.

²² The Congress of the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report - Final Report of the National Commission on terrorist attacks upon the United States*, Norton, 2004, ISBN 0-393-32671-3



*American and Iraqi soldiers at the Al-Khalis Hospital
Photo Sameerah Shibli (December 12, 2006)*

This was the famous and most disastrous spelling mistake that was pictured by a very telling cartoon in the *Washington Post*²³ and that led to a joke told in Iraq by US soldiers “We got 75% right, that is, the three first letters of the name of the culprit”.

By this time, however, the damage was done, the oldest religious terrorist suicidal groups—the Iraqi Al-Dawa²⁴ and SCIRI—had been imposed in power in Iraq, hilariously in the name of the “war on terrorism” and the US was confronted with the impossible dilemma of acknowledging they had been duped or going on supporting their worst type of enemies.

According to recent polls, most of the US citizens still think that Saddam Hussein masterminded 9/11, a very telling sign of the power of the intoxication made on this event.

In this context, it is important to understand the relation of Al-Qaeda with Iran, for which Robert Dreyfuss is an important source of information.

The relation between Iran, then under the regime of the former Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, and the extreme Islamic forces in Afghanistan dates from 1974 and, after a brief interruption, was particularly reinforced by the theocratic regime.

According to Dreyfuss²⁵ Iran supported a hard-core Islamist organisation linked to the warlord Ismail Khan that launched a revolt in the Western half of the country, especially in Herat. During this period the CIA was providing Iran with intelligence on the USSR, Iraq and Afghanistan, a cooperation that was interrupted (temporarily) following the occupation of the US Embassy in Teheran.

²³ *Washington Post*, May 29, 2003

²⁴ Although the identification might bring confusion, the Iraqi Al-Dawa is the fraction closer to Iran

²⁵ Dreyfuss, Robert, *Op. cit.*, page 264

From March 1979 and during the eighties, Iran concentrated on developing influence through its role among the Shiia.

The mobilisation of Muslim fanatics all over the Arab World to what was dubiously called a “liberation” war in Afghanistan, but which could perhaps be better described as a barbaric Islamic revolution worse than the one that ravaged Iran, allowed the indoctrination and training of several thousand Arabs in the most extreme fanatic tendencies.

Their return was problematic everywhere, not least in Saudi Arabia. Although this country may be described as the earliest extreme Muslim regime in the contemporaneous World, it is quite different from Iran in several aspects, namely, on the fundamental issue of the “Velayat-e-faqih”.

In Saudi Arabia, a temporal royal family, who cannot be described as pious, uses its alliance with a fundamentalist clergy, giving it a lot of power, but not the power to occupy the centre stage.

The less than fundamentalist atmosphere of the Saudi royal family and the prevailing fundamentalist atmosphere in the country created a very tense situation that resulted in open rebellion from time to time.

On 20 November 1979, in a series of events which were certainly not unrelated to the ongoing Islamic revolution in Iran, an armed rebel group occupied the Grand Mosque of Mecca, demanding a stricter application of Muslim rules in the Kingdom, namely, the rupture of diplomatic relations with the West.

Although the rebellion was ultimately smashed, with unofficial accounts of casualties reaching 4.000²⁶, it certainly sowed the seeds of further revolt.

²⁶ Wright, Lawrence, *Op. cit.*, page 94

Osama Bin Laden, briefly arrested during the revolt apparently for casual reasons, would be quoted five years afterwards praising its leaders²⁷.

The clash of Bin Laden with the Saudi establishment was inevitable and parallel to similar clashes between other “Afghani Arabs” and their home countries when returning to them.

Both him and his long term partner Al-Zawahiri found themselves in Sudan, shortly after their return, and they stayed there up to the end of 1995 (Al-Zawahiri) and beginning of 1996 (Bin Laden).

The Buenos Aires indictment²⁸ analyses extensively the relation between Hezbollah and Al-Qaeda forerunners and concludes that the co-operation is intense and that Mugniyah inspired bin Laden on the suicidal, religious, and mass murder terrorism.

George Michael’s “The enemy of my Enemy”²⁹, a very detailed academic work full of data on the connections between the various Jihadist and extreme-right groups, has several references to the Iranian sponsorship of Al-Qaeda.

Namely, he refers to a terrorist summit convened in Teheran in 1996 that nominated a leading committee composed by the three most notorious terrorist leaders, Imad Mugniyah, on behalf of the Lebanese branch of “Islamic Jihad” (no other than Hezbollah), Ahmed Sala, representing Ayman Al-Zawahiri’s Egyptian branch of “Islamic Jihad” and Osama Bin Laden on behalf of Al-Qaeda.

This “terrorist international” was short-lived and would be shelved by the new reformist President Khatami according to the author.

²⁷ Wright, Lawrence, Op. cit.

²⁸ Poder Judicial de la Nación, 05/03/2003, Causa 1.156, Autos y Vistos, pages 478-482

²⁹ Michael, George, *The Enemy of My Enemy - The alarming convergence of militant Islam and the Extreme Right*, University Press of Kansas, 2006, ISBN 0-7006-1444-3

In my opinion, it is simply more realistic to conclude that this newly created “terrorist international” did not resist the eruption of the conflict of the two most important Islamist states supporting terrorism (Iran and Afghanistan).

Only in the aftermath of the fall of the Taliban, in 2002, would this terrorist international convene again in Teheran, at this point, without the presence of Osama Bin Laden but with several other figures of Al-Qaeda and of the Taliban.

Sudan became a revolutionary Islamic state after Iran and still before Afghanistan. Its power, however, cannot be compared with that of Iran; therefore, Sudan could not sustain the pressure of Saudi Arabia and Egypt, among others, to stop protecting the terrorists who were causing mayhem in the region.

The jump of the forerunners of Al-Qaeda to Afghanistan was quite logical, as this was the third revolutionary Islamic State to be formed. Under Taliban, Afghanistan had ideal conditions for sheltering guerrilla forces and it was ideologically closer to their extreme Jihadism.

Taliban had been created by the Pakistani secret services, the ISI, which seems to be a State within the State, and to that matter, quite close to the Jihadist doctrine. The main goal of the ISI was to have a fertile ground to establish and develop terrorist forces to act in Kashmir or to destabilise and attack India.

As Wright³⁰ claims, ISI saw Al-Qaeda as the perfect training body for Kashmir terrorists, and therefore was certainly very pleased with the move of those two exiled Jihadist leaders to Afghanistan.

This was certainly not the case of Saudi Arabia, which exerted as much pressure as it could on Afghanistan for the movements of these two to be curtailed.

³⁰ Wright, Lawrence, Op.cit.



*With Mahmoud Karem, Ambassador of the Arab Republic
of Egypt to the European Communities and the Kingdom
of Belgium, on the occasion of the Arab Ambassadors
solidarity dinner with Iraqi refugees
Photo European Parliament (March 27, 2007)*

Still, according to Wright, the Taliban were balancing between these two contradictory pressures up to 1999, when they finally chose to support Al-Qaeda instead of being supported by Saudi Arabia.

More important than this was the break of relationship between Afghanistan and Iran. This was quite difficult to understand, given the obvious ideological proximity of both regimes and the fact that Iran was the only alternative in case the other neighbours would become hostile, which as we know they did.

The break between Afghanistan and Iran was almost simultaneous with the Taliban power takeover. One can suspect that Saudi Arabia's financial support played an important role there, as did the fact that Iran was very much involved with pre-Taliban Muslim fanatics, as Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.

According to Dreyfuss, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar was the most atrocious of the leaders of the Islamic revolution in Afghanistan and certainly did not compare favourably to the Taliban, but he just became a rival.

As we have seen, Afghanistan's Taliban would also infuriate their main financial sponsor, Saudi Arabia, disobeying repeated calls from that country to stop Al-Qaeda from damaging its interests and reputation.

The Taliban in Afghanistan, in contrast to the Iranian, or for that matter the Sudanese leaders, seemed to lack realism. They took the doctrine of suicidal terrorism to an ultimate level, that is, they applied it to themselves, while the Iranian leaders were always able to combine a fanatic ideology with an extreme pragmatism. For the Iranian theocracy, suicidal terrorism was basically a recipe created for others, not for their own use.

Nine-eleven inevitably led to an Allied attack on Afghanistan, and Al-Qaeda's main leaders had to leave the country. A significant proportion of them, as we know, left for Iran and from there went on to Iraq.

Chapter 6

WMD AND TERRORISM: FICTION AND REALITY

Chapter 6

WMD and terrorism: Fiction and reality

a) The manipulation

A lot has been written about the fiction of Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction and its links with international terrorism. Besides the opprobrium which the US and other Western country leaders brought upon themselves for their responsibility in this fiction production is nearly unanimous.

However, the specialized literature on the issue, while acknowledging that Iran was actually the only country in the region that was actively engaged in a WMD programme and sponsoring international terrorism, and was the real winner that emerged out of the US-led operation against Iraq, seems to consider these facts as coincidences.

The US Administration's mishandling of the issue is certainly the main explanation for the Iraqi fiasco. One has to believe only a tiny fraction of what several books authored by American journalists state on the issue to be fully convinced of this fact.

The complete blunder of the Administration is particularly hard to understand as virtually all the main actors in the US Administration who held top positions in 2002 were already familiar with the ground reality in Iraq by virtue of their involvement in the first Gulf War that took place in 1991.

I erroneously assumed they had understood then that if the US deposed Saddam Hussein in a military operation without extreme preventive measures, they would put in power the very well organised Iraqi branches of the IRGC. This would explain the sudden US half turn, back in 1991.

Looking retrospectively, however, nothing of the sort seems to have happened. The US army turned back in the highway to Baghdad just because Saudi Arabia threatened the US with expulsion of its forces from the country but not because whoever in the US Administration had understood the consequences of delivering Iraq to Iranian control.

The Iraqi outfits of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards had been extensively engaged in terrorism in the region, namely against US targets. There was no sensible reason to believe that they had converted to any sort of democratic ideology. It goes beyond belief that someone with some responsibility in the US or the UK thought this to have been possible.

Al-Dawa became famous when its faction working from Iran organised the suicide bombings against US and French Embassies in Kuwait in 1983, in an action that mirrored the double suicide attack against the US and French military in Lebanon carried out by their sister organisation, the Lebanese Hezbollah. From 1984 onwards the armed operations of the Iraqi offspring of the IRGC came together under the Badr Brigade.

One of the key elements of this terrorist attack, Jamal Jaafar Muhammad, who was elected to the Iraqi parliament in 2005 as part of the SCIRI¹/Badr faction of the United Iraqi Alliance² (UIA), was sentenced to death in Kuwait for planning the bombings.

SCIRI—relabelled SIIC—is undistinguishable from the IRGC, as it was created as its first foreign branch. After 1984 and during the Iraqi-Iran war, SCIRI/Badr Brigade were the main section in charge of terrorism against both Iraq and the US. For instance,

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SCIRI>

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Iraqi_Alliance

on June 11, 1987, AP reported extensively the public threats issued by SCIRI on using suicide bombings against the US if it dared to attack Iran³.

However, these terrorist organisations were being propelled by massive public relations campaigns, promoted by organisations such as HRW to the point that they were accepted as the core power element, under the patronage of Chalabi, in the conferences which were preparing the replacement of Saddam Hussein.

Human Rights Watch was in fact not only “denouncing” the exact locations of WMD in Iraq, it was by far the most efficient campaigner for military action against Iraq through other arguments, although pretending otherwise, and openly being in support of SCIRI, the Iraqi main branch of the IRGC.

³ Associated Press, reporting on the 11th June 1987 from Teheran: “An Iranian Revolutionary Guards leader boasted Thursday that his fast gunboats could and would destroy any American warship that tried to attack islands off his nation’s coast.”

“Earlier, a Tehran-based Iraqi dissident group warned it would launch suicide operations against Americans if they carried out attacks in the Persian Gulf, Tehran radio reported.”

“Tehran radio said the military unit of the Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution of Iraq announced that in the event of any adventurist move in the Persian Gulf by world arrogance, the diehard Iraqi Mujahedeen will carry out martyrdom-seeking operations.”

“The term ‘world arrogance’ is used by the Iranian leaders to refer to the United States.

‘Whenever officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran give orders, we will turn the region into a graveyard for American soldiers and agents of arrogance,’ Tehran radio quoted the group as saying in a statement. The group is an umbrella organisation for several militant Shiite Moslem Iraqi opposition factions, including the Daawa party, responsible for the 1983 suicide bombings of U. S. and French Embassies in Kuwait. Seventeen of that group’s members are currently in jail in Kuwait. The group is financed and supported by Iran’s fundamentalist government. Followers fight alongside Iran in the war with Iraq”.

In a declaration issued in December 2002 called “Justice for Iraq”, still available at its web site, significantly both in Farsi and English⁴ languages but not in the Iraqi language that is Arabic, HRW pretended that it “takes no position on the advisability or legitimacy of the use of force against Iraq” but “as the possibility of armed conflict and a possible transition increases in Iraq, however, it is necessary to consider how such crimes should be brought to justice.”

In January, HRW continued its campaign to present the IRGC terrorist outfit in Iraq as a group of romantic freedom fighters risking their lives for the noble cause of the Arabs from the marshes, thus preparing the policy of allowing their hold to power that actually followed⁵.

HRW strongly stressed the point that there was a failure of the UN to act, this being the most important argument used for the US-led intervention, as we know.

Thanks to the disclosure of confidential documents of El Pays in September 2007 we now know that there was an on-going Arab states attempt to convince the US to allow a transitional government under the aegis of UN. Saddam Hussein would be exiled. The Iraqi dictator did not only agree with the proposal but was already discussing the money he could keep in his possession in exile.

So, HRW was most likely more afraid of the UN possible action than of its failure to act, since this action could bring in dissidents of the Baath regime, instead of Iran-leaning forces.

⁴ <http://www.hrw.org/backgroundunder/mena/iraq1217bg.htm>

⁵ “The Iraqi Government Assault on the Marsh Arabs”, A Human Rights Watch Briefing Paper, January 2003, <http://www.hrw.org/backgroundunder/mena/marsharabs1.htm>

By the end of November, an executive director of the Middle East and North Africa Division issued a declaration, significantly titled “U.S. Needs to Screen Iraqi Opposition Allies”⁶ in which he warned the Allied forces against using Baathist dissidents to depose Saddam Hussein.

Iran started planning the Iraqi takeover after the Western military operations as early as December 22, 2001 at the highest level, a Supreme National Security Council attended by Khamenei and Khatami⁷. As a U.S. military intelligence officer quoted by Thomas E. Ricks⁸ concluded “The difference between Tommy Francks and Tehran was that the Iranians had a good phase IV plan”⁹.

Charles Glass¹⁰ describes extensively how Chalabi forces, the supposedly Western allied forces, got into Iraqi Kurdistan months before the invasion, after being welcomed in Teheran and escorted to the border by IRGC troops. According to Glass¹¹, the SCIRI/Badr brigade forces which concentrated for the invasion in Iraqi Kurdistan, near Halabja, numbered 3000.

Most of IRGC commandos got into Iraq through the South, closely following the US Army advance¹².

⁶ <http://www.hrw.org/press/2002/11/iraq-denmark.htm>

⁷ Mohaddessin, Mohammad, *Enemies of the Ayatollahs - The Iranian Opposition's War on Islamic Fundamentalism*, Zed Books, 2004, ISBN 978-1842-7753-18, page 153

⁸ Ricks, Thomas E., *Fiasco - The American Military Adventure in Iraq*, Penguin Books, 2006, ISBN 978-0-141-02850-7, page 123

⁹ phase IV is the occupation phase

¹⁰ Glass, Charles, *The Northern Front - A Wartime Diary*, Saqi, 2006, ISBN 978-0-86356-770-4

¹¹ Glass, Charles, Op. cit., pages 185, 197

¹² Time Magazine, August 22, 2005, vol 166, n° 8

The Badr brigade came into Iraq without their tanks and other heavy equipment, but according to plans coordinated by the Iranian leadership. They ostensibly occupied several areas, but tried not to appear as an organised army.

Surprisingly, the US forces were not expecting the Iranian move and they even clashed directly with the IRGC when their military presence was ostensible.

As we were to learn later, American and Iranian diplomats negotiated in Geneva on the Iraqi intervention, and the US committed itself to bomb and destroy the Iranian opposition bases in Iraq, in return for Iran not invading Iraq.

The US duly bombed and arrested the PMOI members in Iraq, but that did not deter Iran from intervening in Iraq.

Contrary to the common belief in the endless might of the political power, international public opinion seemed to forget two essential points in the course of events that led to the Iraqi operation: (1) ignorant and incompetent political power is easily manipulated and (2) it would have been impossible for the US establishment to find the necessary support in the public opinion for the Iraqi operation without the campaign made within the “civil society” by organisations such as HRW.

In trying to understand the Iraqi disaster too much emphasis is placed on the Machiavellian responsibility of the US administration instead of on its incompetence that made it an easy prey for manipulation by vested interests that were not at all concerned with the well being of Iraqis or the strategic interests of the US.

The majority of the stories regarding WMD or Al-Qaeda links with Saddam Hussein’s regime were investigated by Thomas E.

Ricks¹³ and were all established as being spread by Ahmed Chalabi and his associates.

As the US forces seem to have understood too late, Ahmed Chalabi was working in close co-operation with the Iranian secret services.

However, it is useful to single out for analysis two stories about Saddam's WMD which made it to the front pages of the press and which, although less effective and damaging than HRW propaganda, also had a considerable impact.

The first famous story appeared in the "The New Yorker" on 25 March 2002 and is authored by Jeffrey Goldberg. It is worth reminding that this newspaper can hardly be labelled as the mouthpiece of frantic neo-conservatives in search of the good motive to punch at Saddam.

The source of the tale is an Iranian held by the secret services of the PUK in Suleymania. It also includes proof of the links between Saddam Hussein and Al-Qaeda.

The story and the informant were described as fabrications by Charles Glass¹⁴, Guy Dinmore (Financial Times, May 22, 2002) and Jason Burke (Observer, February 9, 2003).

The most famous of all the fabrications on WMD, not because of its relevance, but because it got into a Bush "State of the Union" speech, was the one of Saddam Hussein's purchasing of uranium in Niger.

As it was already established, the very same network that made the 1985 "Irangate", namely the Iranian agent Manucher

¹³ Ricks, Thomas E., Op. cit.

¹⁴ Glass, Charles, *The Northern Front - A Wartime Diary*, Saqi, 2006, ISBN 978-0-86356-770-4

Ghorbanifar, was responsible for this charade (the literature here is immense¹⁵).

For such outlandish fabrications to be able to pass the scrutiny of the vast majority of the public opinion of the US (and beyond), someone very competent must have been in charge of its dissemination.

Most likely, only a small proportion of those who have been promoting the Iranian agenda in the US act consciously as Iranian agents. Most do it out of ignorance or even out of pure lunacy.

According to Robert Dreyfuss¹⁶ some of the US sponsors of the intervention in Iraq, such as Richard Perle and David Frum, suggested mobilizing Shiia fundamentalists against the Saudi state.

“Because the Shiites are a powerful force along the shore of the Persian Gulf, where Saudi oil fields are, Perle and Frum note that the Saudis have long feared “that the Shiites might

¹⁵ see, for instance:

Hallmark, Clayton, *Karl Rove, Michael Ledeen Spies procured forged Niger documents*, 29/07/2005, BellaCiao,

http://www.bellaciao.org/en/article.php3?id_article=7256

Raimondo, Justin, *Niger Uranium Forgery Mystery Solved?*, 19/10/2005,

AntiWar.Com, <http://www.antiwar.com/justin/?articleid=7681>

Sale, Richard, *The Niger Forgeries*, 25/10/2005, Sic Semper Tyrannis,

http://turcopolier.typepad.com/sic_sempers_tyrannis/2005/10/the_niger_forge.html (contd. next page)

Alexandrovna, Larisa, *American who advised pentagon says he wrote for magazine that found forged Niger documents*, 17/01/2006, The Raw Story,

http://rawstory.com/news/2005/American_who_consulted_for_Pentagon_says_0117.html

Who is Manucher Ghorbanifar?, 16/10/2006, Letters Nobody Will Print,

<http://www.johnmitchell.org/blog/2006/10/who-is-manucher-ghorbanifar.html>

¹⁶ Dreyfuss, Robert, *Devil's Game, How the United States helped unleash fundamentalist Islam*, Owl Books, 2005, ISBN 978-0-8050-8137-2, pages 337-338

someday seek independence for the Eastern province - and its oil.” They add:

Independence for the Eastern Province would obviously be a catastrophic outcome for the Saudi state. But it might be a very good outcome for the United States. Certainly it’s an outcome to ponder.

Even more certainly, we would want the Saudis to know we are pondering it”

So, what has been the core strategic thinking of the Iranian Theocratic Imperialism aimed at conquering the Middle East and devastating the US influence is here presented by two of the best known ideologues promoters of the Iraqi operation as a very good step for the US. Furthermore, they felt it was necessary to give the idea to Saudi Arabia in particular and to the Arab World in general that the US might become a strategic partner for the Iranian takeover of the Greater Middle East.

This is perhaps the best piece of literature to understand how disastrous the reasoning of the US core advocates of the Iraqi intervention was.

In brief, there are two strong motifs for seeing Iran, and not the US administration, as the ultimate source of the Iraqi deliria. The first is that Iran is the only common denominator to all these stories, the second is that it was Iran, and not the US, that profited from these fabrications, all the other presumed culprits being ridiculed.

b) The challenges to the Rule of Law

The Iraqi drama of 2003, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, cannot be understood without considering the serious Allied Forces shortcomings on the understanding of the situation and actors. The organisations which founded what we should consider to be the “modern terrorism” (that is, religious, suicidal, mass murder

terrorism) were treated as “freedom fighters” whereas those who were the potential allies of the West were treated as enemies or even terrorists (PMOI).

As we have also seen in the previous part, this was additionally helped by a very successful deceiving campaign masterminded by Iran and those who, for whatever reason, acted consistently and repeatedly supporting it, such as HRW.

Furthermore, one also has to consider the historical Western bias in favour of religious fanaticism as exposed by Robert Dreyfuss, and especially concerning the US attitudes after 1979¹⁷.

As we all know, the West kept treating the most murderous terrorist fanatics in Afghanistan as “freedom fighters” in spite of the overwhelming evidence of their crimes and hate towards any of the Western values.

The same bias exists regarding the Iranian theocratic dictatorship, but that is less well known. Robert Dreyfuss reveals that the US cooperated with the Iranian regime from 1979 up to 1986. The hostage crisis only forced the cooperation to become covert, but did not halt it.

Apparently, in the run-up to the 1980 elections both the Reagan campaign chief in Paris and the Carter Administration in Athens negotiated secretly with Iran regarding the US hostages, promising arms in case the hostages were released after the elections (Reagan) or before the elections (Carter).¹⁸

As we know, the hostages were freed only after elections, which revealed the preference of the Iranian clerics for Reagan. Close, although discreet cooperation continued afterwards with Iran, the

¹⁷ Dreyfuss, Robert, *Op. cit.*, namely, pages 292 - 302

¹⁸ Unpublished records of the Iran contra committee found by reporter Robert Parry, publicised by Iranian opposition activist Banafsheh Zand-Bonazzi

Iran-contra affair being the most notorious episode of this long lasting affair.

By 1986, the US policy turned consistently against the Iranian push over Iraq. However, the aggressive moves of Saddam Hussein's regime in the region, namely his invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent Gulf War, created the conditions for a US reversal to the old policy regarding Teheran.

Although with different actors and logic we will see an appeasement policy towards Teheran to continue in the Clinton administration. This policy will flourish completely after 1997.

The election of a "reformist" cleric leader as President of the Islamic Republic in 1997, together with the growing dissent between Iran and the new fully-fledged Islamist state, Afghanistan, created the impression that there was an Iranian Islamic third way closer to democratic values than the extreme pan-Arabist Baathist regimes and the even more radical Sunni inspired Islamist states, such as Afghanistan.

Instead of understanding the course of these events as tactical rather than strategic changes in the region, most of the opinion leaders started seeing advantages of Shiia over Sunni religious fanaticism; an original Islamic way to democracy being discovered by the Iranian clergy; a strategic partnership existing between Iran and the West (or at least with Israel) because of thousands of old historical moves and so on.

It was this ideological environment that created the conditions for an Iraqi operation where Iran would not appear as the most important obstacle to democratic change in the region but rather as a Western ally. This applies to the so-called "neo-conservatives" as it does to whatever other main opinion trend in the US, not to mention Europe.

The Iranian diplomacy infiltration strategy in the West, already developed since the beginning of Khamenei's era, reached new heights with the arrival of a "reformist" president.

The fact that from that point onwards Iran stopped directly promoting terrorist actions in Western territory certainly also contributed to this situation.

This favourable "détente" moment with Iran was also the moment when the Clinton administration launched a new policy on terrorism that included the "Anti-terrorism Effective Death Penalty Act" (AEDPA) of 1996 modifying the "Immigration and Nationality Act" to form the legal basis for the "Foreign Terrorist Organisations List"¹⁹.

Although Iran was the major sponsor of international terrorism, and specifically religious mass suicide terrorism targeting Western countries or interests, it was very favourably treated by the 1997 US State Department terrorist list.

In 1997, neither the IRGC, nor its Iraqi branches (SCIRI/BADR and the Iranian factions of Al-Dawa), nor even Al-Qaeda were included in the black list, although they were by then the most obvious promoters of international terrorism. In 1999, Al-Qaeda was included in the list, and in 2007 the IRGC was also included, but the IRGC Iraqi sections never became part of the list.

However, the main Iranian political opposition group, the PMOI, was included in the terrorist list from the first moment and was never taken out, ostensibly, as a goodwill gesture towards the Iranian regime.

¹⁹ Tanter, Raymond and others, *Appeasing the Ayatollahs and Suppressing Democracy: U.S. Policy and the Iranian Opposition*, IPC - Iran Policy Committee, 2006, ISBN 1-59975-297-2, page 49



*In Paris, at an Iranian resistance gathering with
Iraqi political leaders
(June 30, 2007)*

The US legal framework would later be followed, in different ways, by most of the Western countries.

The so-called troika (United Kingdom, Germany and France), that for some reason spoke in the name of the EU, came to the point of officially publishing the offer to keep the PMOI in the European terrorist list in case the Iranian regime would suspend nuclear enrichment²⁰.

The political options of the US in 1997, in particular viewed a decade later, appear as a major symbol of what is wrong in the Western combat on terrorism.

The political circumstances when the list was first drafted certainly play a very important role in explaining its failures, but I believe the problem lies with its disrespect for the principle of separation of powers.

From the pure penal point of view I do not think it is a good idea to introduce the concept of terrorism in a society where all men are equal. A murder is a murder and a mass murder is a mass murder, as human lives are lost whatever the motifs behind the acts.

Therefore, I think there is a serious confusion on the way that terrorism has been dealt with. From the legal point of view, terrorism should be dealt with as any other crime shall be. Besides the legal issue terrorism has several other dimensions, starting with the political one; but this does not mean it should not be dealt with like any other crime.

²⁰ AFP, Preparatory text for European proposals on Iranian nuclear program, 21/10/2004

<http://www.iranfocus.com/fr/nucleaire/nucleaire-le-texte-preparatoire-des-propositions-des-europeens-liran.html>

and last paragraph of the Agreement as published by the EU High Representative for the CFSP, S0304/04, 15/11/2004

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/declarations/82680.pdf

It is true that international terrorism is a rather more complex issue than domestic terrorism, as indeed any form of international crime is more complex than domestic crime, but this does not mean that the police or judicial systems should be replaced by foreign affairs.

As mentioned in chapter 5, the best work on international terrorism that I have ever read is the indictment of the Iranian political leadership prepared by the Argentinean prosecutors²¹, and this was because of the rigour of the work, the fact that European information which had remained classified up to that date was used (unfortunately, the UK and the USA did not cooperate with the Argentinean authorities) and that there was no attempt to make “foreign affairs” out of it, only justice.

One can hardly think of anything more antonymic than “justice” and “affairs”. The idea of putting those who are responsible for the conduction of foreign affairs in the role of judges and prosecutors is a blatant contravention to the core principle of separation of powers that lies on the basis of democracy.

Why such an awful idea made its way in the US (and was then copied in most of the World, including by the UN) as it is clearly the country where the principle of separation of powers is more deep-rooted, goes beyond my comprehension.

The Middle East European Institute for Research (EUROMID) organised a Worldwide Security Conference on 22 February 2007 for which it produced a remarkable research paper that gives a thorough review of the subject and highlights the failures of the promoters of “war on terrorism” to separate what can be called legitimate “resistance” from “terrorism”²².

²¹ Poder Judicial de la Nación, 05/03/2003, Causa 1.156, Autos y Vistos

²² European Institute for Research on the Middle East (EUROMID), MANTOVANI, Eugenio, *Confronting Terrorism: assessing the legal and political challenge*, February 2007

In this regard, it is pathetic that the very same Council that approved a framework decision (2002/475/JHA) classifying as terrorism any threat or act of violence for political reasons, regardless of the political context, made an annex declaration to it, without legal value, stating that the decision:

“cannot be construed as to argue that the conduct of those who have acted in the interest of preserving or restoring these [described above] democratic values, as was notably the case in some Member States during the Second World War, could now be considered as “terrorist” acts.”²³

This pious declaration simply highlights the fact that those who acted using or threatening violence in the “interest of preserving or restoring democratic values” either during the second World War”, or indeed during the Portuguese 1974 revolution, are unequivocally labelled terrorists by this Council decision, and that at least some representatives in the Council had a bad conscience on the outrageous legal decision they took.

Emphasising the descriptive and non-normative nature of the EU definition of terrorism, the authors of the EUROMID research paper call the attention of the legal vacuum within the EU legal order, inconsistent with a Community based on the rule of law, caused by the lack of jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice on the Council third pillar rulings, legal vacuum that the European Court of First Instance, however, filled in its ruling of December 12, 2006, in case T-228/02 of the PMOI against the Council²⁴.

In this historical ruling, the European Court not only stated that

²³ Council of the European Union, Revised Addendum to the Draft Minutes of the 2436th Meeting of the Council Justice and Home Affairs and Civil Protection, point 17, 9958/02, JAI 138, 16 July 2002

²⁴ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2006:331:0028:0028:EN:PDF>

there must be a right to effective judicial protection that the Council disrespected, but also that other basics of the Rule of Law, namely the obligation to state reasons and the right to a fair hearing, have to be respected as well, contrary to the opinion of the Council.

The Council maintained during the process that it did not have an obligation to formulate its accusation since this information could be used by the defendant to his own benefit. To my knowledge, at least in Portugal, one would have to go back to the Inquisition to be confronted with this type of argument. Not since constitutional times, including the anti-democratic Constitution of 1933, could we find anything of the sort.

The whole of the European procedure on terrorism causes shivers to whoever has a notion of what is the Rule of Law. As it was the case with the PMOI, the Council feels entitled to blacklist an organisation, or for that matter any individual, on the basis of the following procedure:

1. An undisclosed national public authority makes the claim that Mr. A or organisation X is a terrorist;
2. The indictment is secret; the defendant has no right to know what he is accused of;
3. A secret committee whose existence has never been acknowledged and that is labelled the “clearing house” judges and condemns Mr. A or organisation X;
4. Mr. A or organisation X do not have the right to be heard, and of course even less to appeal, an impossibility since you cannot possibly defend yourself from an unknown accusation (Kafka is fully alive in European twenty first century, as we can see).
5. No Court has a judicial scrutiny on the whole of this process.

It is true that the whole of the situation should have been changed after the European Court of First Instance ruling in December 12,

2006. Although the Council did not appeal on the Court's ruling, it simply ignored it and stated through a civil servant days after the ruling that it would not enforce the Court's decision.

Only afterwards, through a mockery of "legal opinions" and actions that would have had to be taken before, not after the ruling, did the Council try to give the impression it was not dismissing the European Court.

I personally challenged the Council time after time, using my Parliamentary prerogatives, to give me an explanation or any motifs that could justify its condemnation of the PMOI and always got the same answer; in short: "none of your business."

I was therefore rather relieved when, at the public session of the procedure of the PMOI against the Council, I heard a judge summing up the answers of the Council to the Court regarding the basis for their blacklisting of PMOI exactly this way, "you are telling this Court: this is none of your business."

At least it was nothing personal against me; the European leaders who speak on behalf of fully democratic nations do not recognise Courts or Parliaments as limits to their power.

The European Court ruling annulling the blacklisting of the PMOI by the Council as a terrorist organisation is a landmark of the Rule of Law in Europe, but we still have a long way to go if we are to get this result, namely by compelling the European Institutions to respect Courts rulings.

The public session on this procedure also had another advantage: the Council acknowledged, for the first time, the country of origin of the mysterious public authority that had labelled the PMOI as terrorist: the United Kingdom.

This gave new impetus to a group of 35 members of the House of Commons and the House of Lords in the United Kingdom to

challenge the decision of the United Kingdom to blacklist the PMOI.

The UK authorities did not dare to deny to the British Court system the full procedure of the PMOI blacklisting, contrary to what the Council had done with the European Court. Therefore the British Justice could rule on the substance of the affair, contrary to the European one, and the ruling was unequivocal; it classified the British action as “perverse” and ordered the Government to annul the blacklisting of the PMOI.

One of the biggest misconceptions on the “fight against terrorism” is that there is a trade-off between being tough against terrorism versus following the principles of the Rule of Law.

Reality proves otherwise. The main terrorist conglomerate—IRGC and outfits—was never blacklisted in Europe since their terrorism is too effective and scares Europe out of blacklisting it.

Europe can have such an unfair and, ultimately, suicidal approach to terrorism because of the malfunctioning of the Rule of Law, not the other way round.

The existence of transparency mechanisms within the Rule of Law environment would never have allowed this to happen.

c) Containing Teheran

One of the reasons that led to the increased diplomatic pressure from Teheran over the European institutions to persecute the PMOI was the role of this opposition organisation in denouncing the Iranian nuclear plans, whose advances were extensively documented in an Iranian Resistance press conference held in August 2002.

Although the evidence on Iran’s nuclear plans was overwhelming and the US was ultimately forced to acknowledge its veracity, the

European Commission, in a written reply to my questions dated January 2003 on the nuclear issue stated that:

“While noting with satisfaction that Iran has adhered to the Non-proliferation Treaty, the Biological and Chemical Weapons Conventions, the Union continues to encourage Iran to join the International Atomic Energy Agency Additional Protocol for Nuclear Material Safeguards. It appears that Iran in general has been complying, including accepting inspections of its nuclear sites.”²⁵

Furthermore, the Commission stated that:

“Thus, while the situation in Iran still remains far from satisfactory on many fronts, the Commission continues to support the Union’s global approach towards that country, aiming to support the reformists. The Commission has been given the mandate to pursue negotiations for a Trade and Cooperation Agreement, negotiations that are linked to parallel negotiations on political dialogue and counter-terrorism (Council conclusions of 17 June 2002). These negotiations provide the Commission with an additional forum and give it added leverage as – even if there are no direct, explicit conditions - they are linked to expectations of progress in the areas of concern.”²⁶

Dated 19 December 2002, in a reply letter to my query of 21 November, Javier Solana acknowledged that:

“In the course of a meeting with me on 19 November 2002, Foreign Minister Kharrazi requested that the EU place the

²⁵ Chris Patten, H-0867/02, 14/01/2003
[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/
getDoc.do?type=CRE&reference=20030116&secondRef=ANN-
01&language=BG&detail=H-2002-0867&query=QUESTION](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=CRE&reference=20030116&secondRef=ANN-01&language=BG&detail=H-2002-0867&query=QUESTION)

²⁶ Chris Patten, Op. cit.

National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) on its list of terrorists. He handed over some documents which he said would support this request. I responded that the EU would look into the matter.”

These statements reflect the general tone of the Commission and Council appeasement attitude towards Iran in the crucial period that led to the Iraqi invasion, that extended to the persecution of Iranian internal opposition and “anti-terrorism” cooperation.

It is clear that the general attitude of the European institutions regarding the crucial question of who was the main sponsor of international terrorism and WMD was not ultimately different from that of the US.

Whereas the European Institutions as such did not approve of the tactics that led to the Iraqi military operation, their opposition was never done on geopolitical grounds, as they also dismissed all existing evidence of the Iranian extensive involvement with WMD and international terrorism.

As the US spokesperson of the National Council of Resistance of Iran, Alireza Jafarzadeh, clarified²⁷ the Iranian nuclear ambitions were not recent when they were photographically documented in 2002; they had been a priority of the regime at least from 1988 onwards.

As I wrote in the Jerusalem Post²⁸:

“The theocratic doctrine that came to light in the second half of the 20th century in the main Shi’ite school of Najaf in Iraq, later to be put in practice by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979 in Iran, introduced three devastating elements: (1) the

²⁷ Jafarzadeh, Alireza, *The Iran Threat, President Ahmadinejad and the coming nuclear crisis*, Palgrave, 2007, ISBN 978-1-4039-7664-2

²⁸ Jerusalem Post, Holding back imperial Iranian theocracy, May 3, 2008

principle of the rule of the religious authority; (2) suicidal terrorism as a major political-religious-military tool; and (3) world domination, the first step being “through Karbala to al-Quds [Jerusalem],” with the ultimate goal of “introducing the Islamic revolution to all of mankind”

The nuclear issue cannot be dealt with on a technical perspective, ignoring all the political factors that involve it. Iran’s bomb is part of an expansionist agenda, where the main tasks of the Islamic Republic of Iran are²⁹:

“By Grace of God, such a movement [culture and administrative structure reform] began as of the victory of the Islamic Revolution, despite the entire heavy obstacles and hindrances on its way, which have been removed one after the other, and the movement of the Islamic Revolution aimed at constructing a model society has kept on accelerating ever since then.

“Our nation’s second important mission is introducing the Islamic Revolution to the entire mankind. Today, the mankind has reached a point of dissatisfaction with the status quo of the social life and is so desperately in pursuit of better lives that the nation’s minds are quite ripe for grasping such truths.”

As I also wrote in the previously quoted Jerusalem Post article “the Iranian clergy’s traditional weapon of manipulation and dissimulation has so far proved more successful than any other”. However, from my point of view, Ahmadi-Nejad’s nomination for president is more relevant as a switch of communication strategy than as any real change of policy from the Iranian theocracy.

The nomination of Ahmadi-Nejad reflects a post-Saddam Iran

²⁹ Ahmadi-Nejad to Iran’s Assembly of Experts, IRNA, February 25, 2008, translated by MEMRI, Special Dispatch 1854, February 29, 2008

where, for its expansionist agenda, the Western cooperation or neutrality is not perceived as important as to keep the leadership of the global jihadist movement.

In Iraq, Iran has developed a dual strategy ever since the invasion. On the one hand it used its proxies, namely the SCIRI/Badr brigade, to get hold of power in the country through a lot of devious means but never confronting the Allied Forces. On the other hand, Iran sponsored all the forces that were willing to combat the Allied presence, both groups with links to the Iranian establishment, mainly JAM, but also Al-Qaeda in Iraq, as well as those who were actually foes of Iran, like former Baathists.

Iran bets on the evaporation of the US determination to keep its commitment in Iraq to happen sooner than any possible Iraqi independent political block will be able to get hold of the political power in the country.

If the US leaves Iraq with an Iraqi government aligned with Teheran, Iran will be much more immune to any pressure the West might try to exert, regarding the nuclear weapons or whatever else. Otherwise, an Iran-dominated Iraq will be an open gate to dominate the Gulf militarily, politically and economically and to get the necessary leverage to fix the oil price policies of OPEC and, consequently, of gas as well. In this regard, the strong presence of the Iranian Lebanese Hezbollah outfits in Western Africa and the alliance with Chavez will also be very convenient. With this tremendous influence on the West, the domination of the entire region by Teheran will be a strong possibility.

The strategy to confront Iranian Imperialism has to break with the dominant logic of appeasement policy applied by the West, but it cannot solely rely on military means either.

The first point of the strategy is to understand what the Islamic Republic of Iran is all about. Instead of referring to a plethora of

open or disguised Iranian regime publicists, the best way to understand the Islamic Republic of Iran is to read carefully the statements of its President, as he is the first high political responsible without specific clerical training in the arts of disguise and dissimulation.

It is also necessary to understand the political, cultural, economic and strategic dimension of the country, instead of patronising it as a developing or third World country (which in fact it is from a variety of points of view, but not from the most important ones to keep in mind here). In this context attention has to be paid to the proximity of the country to Western culture.

The second point is to bet on the Iranians to get rid of the Islamic Republic. It goes without saying that this means not only taking the PMOI from terrorist lists, but also to engage with it in order to have the biggest opposition organisation in Iran as a close ally. It also means engagement with all other democratic political forces of the country as well as with the civil society.

A particularly thorny issue is the nationalities issue. The West should draw lessons from what went wrong in the former-Yugoslavia and Iraq and try not to repeat the errors in Iran, which is a considerably larger nation. The full respect for the language, religious, and cultural rights of minorities together with a considerable degree of autonomy in several cases are inherent to any democratisation process. Then again, to incite ethnic/religious cleansings would be the biggest tragedy we could bring to the country.

The third point is to isolate Iran as much as possible, diplomatically and economically, without putting in jeopardy economic conditions of its people. Economic and diplomatic sanctions will work, if they are enforced in an intelligent way and if they are integrated in an intelligent strategy.



*Mohammad Hossein Al Awadh and Falah Hassan
in Geneva in solidarity with the PMOI
(October 4, 2006)*

The last point concerns a policy of containment of Iran, namely in its most important strategic objective, Iraq. This entails stabilising Iraq and assuring that Iraq has an Iraqi government, not an Iranian Embassy extension as is the present case.

Time is running out for this policy to be implemented. If we allow Iran to succeed in Iraq the situation will be completely different, and the West may then begin to realise how big the blunder of the Iraqi operation has proved to be.

Chapter 7

A NEW RELATION WITH THE ARAB WORLD IN THE CONTEXT OF A SOLID TRANSATLANTIC PARTNERSHIP

Chapter 7

A new relation with the Arab World in the context of a solid transatlantic partnership

a) Oil or democracy?

Francis Fukuyama's famous "end of history"¹ is perhaps more convenient as a beginning of our contemporary history, since the end of the Soviet Union was the starting point for a new era.

The crumbling of the Soviet Union surprised a vast majority of experts and observers, who had to struggle to find a convenient explanation for the sudden end of the longest war ever fought without a single shot (that is, if we only think of the main direct battlefield).

Some saw the wisdom in Ronald Reagan's tough stance, some others on the long containment policy, conveniently forgetting how disastrously it failed in Southeast Asia, Africa and the Middle East, and Fukuyama decided to amuse himself using the philosophical Hegelian dialectics of Marxism to explain the failure of Marxism.

What can only be read as an act of humour became the most significant masterpiece on the *post-Berlin wall* doctrine, and most in the West decided to believe in the charade that made the advent of democracy so dead certain as the socialism and communism had been in the historic determinism of the Hegel-Marx cocktail (whose main cook was Stalin).

So democracy was to rule everywhere, if you just allowed the forces of history to carry out their job.

In general terms, in the absence of any political strategy, democracy

¹ Fukuyama, Francis, *The end of history?*, The National Interest, Summer 1989, <http://www.wesjones.com/eoh.htm>

flourished where it had old roots but did not prevail where these roots did not exist.

Some important exceptions and qualifications however need to be highlighted.

The main successful exception was clearly in East-Asia, with Taiwan and South Korea becoming fully fledged democracies and several of their neighbouring countries making important steps in this direction.

The most important qualification has to do with India, and to a certain extent Mexico and Brazil, where democracy existed before, but was particularly reinforced afterwards.

Other successes can be pointed out; to me the most spectacular, perhaps because I know it personally, is Cape Verde. Although it is a very poor country with no natural resources whatsoever, the democratic system in this small archipelago state is first class.

Russia, Central Asia, nearly all of Sub-Saharan Africa, a large chunk of East Asia and a disturbingly important slice of Latin America have failed the democracy test.

Of particular importance was the democratic failure in China, as it is the clearer example of the failure of conventional wisdom. Here the historic deterministic logic assumed that one just had to wait for the average Chinese to get sufficiently rich for the totalitarian state to be abandoned like a snake abandons its old skin.

The possibility of this wealth becoming the motor of dictatorship, not only in China but also in the rest of the World, was never considered. But this was indeed what happened. Recent events confirming China as one of the champions of world's dictatorships from Burma to Zimbabwe reflect how wealth has become the driving force for dictatorship rather than democracy.

Even before the fall of the wall, but particularly afterwards, democracy had a no-go zone—the Greater Middle East.

Saudi Arabia and other conservative regimes in the area were believed to be the guarantee of the flow of oil to the World economy. The idea of destabilizing them, even in the name of democracy, was always a non-starter.

Secondly, the relation between Islam and democracy was and is not particularly well-understood. There was a vague idea that they could be incompatible or that there could be a sort of “Islamic democracy” as it existed in Iran, which actually is worse than all other existing dictatorships.

Thirdly, there is this preposterous idea that the main problem has to do with the Israeli-Arab conflict and that the solution for it (presumably by the extinction of the only democracy in the region) will somehow be a condition for establishing democracy.

In fact, I believe that, quite on the contrary, the intolerant attitude of the Arab world regarding the Jewish minority is perhaps the most important obstacle in the way to democracy.

It is impossible to understand the barbarity of Saddam Hussein’s ethnic cleansing of Kurds, Turcomen, and Arabs from the Marshes, amongst others, as well as the full-fledged ethnic cleansing that targeted eventually everyone after the fall of his regime, without looking carefully to the ethnic cleansing of Jews in 1941 and 1948, or indeed the ethnic cleansing of Armenians in the first World War and the Assyrian-Chaldeans in 1933.

The Jewish ethnic cleansing from the Arab World that followed the 1948 declaration of independence was particularly harsh in Iraq².

² Rahmani, Moïse, *Réfugiés juifs des pays arabes - L'exode oublié*, Éditions Luc Pire, 2006, ISBN 978-2-874-15636-6



*With Tzipi Livni, Israel Minister of Foreign Affairs
(May 24, 2006)*

The Western problem in this equation has systematically been oil, as the West seems ready to accept whatever goes on in the region, overlooking the xenophobic attacks on Israel being one of the first concessions, if only the flow of oil is not threatened.

September 11 brought an abrupt end to the Berlin dream of the “end of history”. Not only was history still going on but it had really very nasty actors in its making. After all, democracy did need a push to impose itself. The unique nature of Islam - in fact, the unique importance of the region’s oil rather than Islam - can not be accepted as a reason to keep the Greater Middle-East out of this democratic challenge.

The West, especially the US, suddenly found a renewed interest in promoting democracy and started acting accordingly.

However, as the Iraqi experience was to prove in the cruellest way, the West neither understood the nature of the problem it faced in the region, nor did it create an intelligent way to deal with the democratic challenge within it.

There were clever and pro-Western Iraqis, such as Adnan Al-Pachachi and Ayad Allawi, who explained the possible way forward for a Western intervention in Iraq.

They understood that the Baathist ideology had crumbled. Decades ago Iraq was perhaps the most advanced country in the Middle-East (with economic, social, and even some political indicators better than in my own country, Portugal) but it became a disaster with Saddam.

If not a fully-fledged democracy, it would at least have been possible to establish an authoritarian but benign state (like Egypt), which would not threaten its neighbours, would give a better life to its citizens, and could constitute a platform from which to face the fanatic beasts.

To do so, you did not need much. As they correctly assessed, the Tikrit clan was more isolated than ever, and the bulk of Iraq would feel relieved to get rid of Saddam Hussein.

US departments such as the CIA which have often been accused of being responsible for the major blunders of the country's foreign policy were backing this perspective, but their sound advice was ignored.

The Iraqi operation is the best example of what should not be done if one wants to bring democracy to the Greater Middle East. No tactical move based on common sense, however necessary, can replace the need for clear strategic thinking on the issue of democracy. As long as the authoritarian rulers will benefit from the open-ended clout of managing the oil wealth, as long as the Western policy will be seen only as an attempt to get oil on the best conditions, hiding it with cynic declarations on democracy and human rights, there will be no chances for a democratic challenge to the religious fascism or to the older nationalist extreme views for that matter.

The challenge is very hard to address as the most obvious alternatives to oil or gas are not sensible alternatives.

Nuclear energy technology is more and more difficult to keep apart from nuclear arms technology³. To sponsor the first will inevitably lead to sponsoring the second. In any circumstance, for the nuclear energy to make a difference, its use would have to be multiplied by several times, and this would mean the rapid disappearance of natural uranium⁴.

³ This is my personal conviction after participating in several seminars within the framework of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, namely those I had the opportunity to assist in the Lawrence Livermore Laboratories in the summer 2006.

⁴ There are several ways to provide nuclear alternatives to natural uranium used in fission process, but they have not been sufficiently tested yet.

Whether it is possible for nuclear fusion to replace nuclear fission, is something that remains to be seen and that does not seem to have an impact within the timing that the oil challenge has to be answered.

Agro-fuels have always been seen as a very odd alternative, but their inconvenience is now too obvious to be ignored. Will second or third generation bio-fuels be able to overcome the problems of the first generation? A big question mark exists here.

Coal is clearly a bad alternative because of the CO₂ levels and overall pollution it produces. Investigation on the ways to dramatically reduce its emissions is being carried but does not look too promising.

So, the World will have to think much more carefully about alternative energies used in more efficient ways.

The question here is not to get rid of oil and gas or to make an economic blockade against the Greater Middle East: it is just to ensure that there are sound enough alternatives to oil and gas so that access to the region's oil will not become an absolute condition for economic survival.

The appeasement policy, and sometimes even open cooperation, with the Iranian regime, the political epicentre of fanatic Islamism, which can only be understood in the continuation of the logic of cooperation with autocratic states to assure the flow of oil, is creating the conditions for a bigger oil shock than the ones we have seen in the past.

If the present policy continues Iran will have the leverage to dominate the whole of the Gulf area. Together with allies such as Chavez and some actors in Western Africa Iran will be able to command the prices of gas and oil in a manner that Saudi Arabia and the Arab World were never able to in the past.

So, if the West insists on its option of oil regardless of democracy, it will most likely end without either one.

b) Photo opportunity

One of the most interesting observations of Patrick Cockburn's account of his Iraqi experience regards the reconstruction:

“In the summer of 2005, a government-owned newspaper in Baghdad ran a laudatory article about reconstruction in the capital. The text highlighted new achievements and spoke hopefully of others planned. But the paper faced a delicate problem when it came to illustrating the piece. Despite billions of dollars supposedly spent on reconstructing the capital over the previous two-and-a-half years there were no cranes visible on the skyline. This was despite ‘the biggest rebuilding project since the post-war rebuilding of Europe in 1945’. When I took the lift to the flat roof of the Hamra Hotel to see where bombs had exploded I never saw any signs of old buildings being repaired or new ones under construction. The paper's editor proved equal to the challenge. When the article appeared it included a striking photograph of a large crane beside a half-completed building. My translator Haidar looked mystified when he first saw it and then, after examining it carefully, began to laugh. He pointed out to me, between guffaws, that the picture was indeed of a crane in Baghdad but one which had been standing abandoned since 2003 beside a giant mosque which Saddam Hussein had under construction when he was overthrown.”⁵

Being the spokesperson for the socialists of the Budgetary Control Committee, this is indeed my most important responsibility within

⁵ Cockburn, Patrick, *The Occupation, War and resistance in Iraq*, Verso, 2006, ISBN: 978-1-84467-100-7, page 172

the European Parliament. I was particularly interested to know the whereabouts of the 800 plus million Euro that had been approved within the European budget for the Iraqi reconstruction in the first five years of the post-Saddam era, and I was puzzled to realise that none of my Iraqi friends, members of the Parliament, Governors or former ministers, had ever heard of any European cooperation effort to Iraq.

Although modest in comparison with the bilateral budgetary efforts of the main Allied forces, the European budget is indeed the largest contributor to the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq (IRFFI) and this should be visible somehow.

This was my starting point for a query to the European Commission on what has happened with the European budget for Iraqi reconstruction. This would prove to be an exhausting and time-consuming task, but in the end rewarding. The Commission took several months ignoring my questions before answering with an eight-page- summary made in partnership with the Iraqi Government. I found this partnership rather awkward.

There I learned that the European Commission had hired a consultant who claimed to be an international organisation as a “global facility” for organising its action in Iraq, without tendering procedures with the argument of urgency (although the contract was established by the end of 2006, more than three years after the invasion).

I learned afterwards that contracts had been established with the very same company for similar tasks in Palestine and Lebanon, always without public tendering procedures.

The bulk of the European funds was attributed to the IRFFI and was managed by the UN and the World Bank. As for the rest, the Commission had made some bilateral contracts with UN agencies

and with the Iraqi authorities and substantially financed the Iraqi electoral process.

I could hardly believe that the European Commission had spent all this money on the Iraqi elections and would not even have invited the European Parliament to monitor the elections. Actually, the Commission did not make any thorough public appraisal of the electoral process and did not respond to the generalised criticism of the electoral failures. Given the general attitude of the Commission I would not have been surprised if they had not even bothered to make any sort of observation in spite of the 136 Million they invested in the electoral process⁶.

The answers we received from the UN or the World Bank regarding the funds used in a multilateral way were far from satisfactory, to say the least, and we decided to ask for on the spot controls of at least some of the huge numbers of schools, hospitals and all sorts of infrastructure that the European funds had presumably helped to build or rehabilitate.

The answers seemed confused and elusive and always hard to obtain. I asked to accompany the Commission in a mission to Baghdad to get a glimpse of what was going on over there, but the Commission turned down my request since it would not respect the independence of the institutions. Surprisingly, this explanation came from the very same European executive that answered the Parliamentary Budget Controls' queries in joint papers with the Iraqi Government.

Evidence on the lack of reliability of the Iraqi authorities regarding public funds was everywhere and could be seen in the main

⁶ This amount is indicated in a letter from Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner to Paulo Casaca, 14 December 2007, A/07/4271 - D/07/1985, Annex 1

European as well as American media. Iraq was indeed classified as the second most corrupt country in the World, only bypassed by Haiti. Anyway, I did my best to ensure the Commission could not argue with lack of information and handed them extensive media reports on the general Iraqi mismanagement.

Finally, the European Commission proposed the participation of COCOBU in an observation mission that would be organised by the World Bank. The World Bank duly met with COCOBU. By this time many of my colleagues were also very curious to find out what had happened to EU funds in Iraq.

A mission was organised to Nasyriah. The meeting point was at a hotel in Abu Dhabi, early in the morning of 18 May 2008. After we were supplied with helmets and bullet proof vests, we embarked in a military Italian aircraft to Tallil, the airfield of an enormous military complex in the Southern flank of Nasyriah.

As we got there, we were told that there would be no visits to the famous projects we had been so curious to see for security reasons. Actually, we never left the military compound during our stay, although it was huge and comprised, among other things, the ancient ruins of Ur with its famous Ziguratt.

The World Bank, which was supposed to have had the idea of the mission and which had prepared the participation of our committee for quite some time did not bother to show up or to give us an explanation in advance of its absence.

The team leader of the Dhi Qar Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) / Reconstruction Support Unit (RSU), Anna Prouse, a bright and active Italian lady, showed us a mobile surgery hospital offered by the Italian cooperation performing eye surgeries. This was our only chance to get in touch with common Iraqi citizens and with something that was really working for the benefit of Iraqis (although not financed by our European budget).

For the rest, we had the opportunity to hear the political speech of the local Governor as well as the speech of the Iraqi general in command plus theatrical performances, music and the rest of entertaining activities, the whole of it amounting to a typical tourist political act with the main difference that all of it was performed in a heavily guarded security perimeter.

So, although the visit was of little use to learn about the real Iraq, it was very useful to understand the logic of the main actors in the financial cooperation effort. With the exception of the World Bank and some embassies, all the main financial actors in this reconstruction effort were over there, namely representatives of several UN agencies.

The UN people included two Iraqi refugees who were hired in Amman to help the reconstruction effort. One of them was an Armenian doctor from Basra and the other a Baghdad Kurdish engineer. I found the UN agencies' idea brilliant, although very telling on the political solution to the problem: to allow refugees, for the most part professionals, to come back and help their country out of the problems of "capacity building" (using the Euro-jargon in the meantime fully absorbed by the local Iraqi Governor).

Otherwise the UN teams were made of people—interesting, kind and humble for the most part—who really reflected an idea of transnational commitment for human values that you normally associate with the UN. One of the staffers was an absolutely charming Pakistani lady, from the South of Waziristan, whose style contrasted with the image one has of this nest of Islamic fanaticism.

The presentation of the work of the several UN agencies was not outstanding, and one got the idea that the several agencies were basically doing the same sort of things using the same sort of opaque wording to describe what they were doing. The Iraqi people, however, conveyed the image of being actively engaged in real productive work on behalf of Iraq.

The diplomatic community present, including a Japanese representative, was not happy with the performance, and would have apparently appreciated more the kind of approach of the World Bank that handed the money directly to the Iraqi Government.

Although the stories about the corruption of the Iraqi authorities filled the prime time and first pages of the media, (I really do not know about Japan, but I doubt it was any different) the diplomatic community was just eager to grant the money to the Government and showed little if any interest in the sound financial management of these funds.

I then understood that my criticism of the UN agencies' work had little to do with the one made by the Western diplomatic community. I did realise the UN agencies were performing poorly in terms of coordination between themselves, not to mention with the outside World, they tended to be plagued to a larger extent by the same negative phenomena I knew from the European administration, and had a poor record on efficient reporting, but in the end they had in their ranks people who were there to try to help Iraqis out of their dramas, and they were trustworthy people.

The logic of the foreign affairs community seemed to be quite different. Cooperation money is perceived as a diplomatic tool to be used in the relation with the native authorities. In this regard, it is quite secondary to know if these authorities are a competent set of people, able to contribute to solve the real problems of their citizens, or if they are mostly a kleptocratic clique supplying themselves with money; what is important is that they get the money so to be able to return whatever gestures diplomats are expecting from them.

With this reasoning, the UN became a nuisance, not because it was inefficient in handling the funds but because it prevented it to be perceived as a gift by the Iraqi authorities, whereas the World

Bank was great: the Iraqi Government received the checks directly. If it had not been for the disastrous remarks of the most senior official of the UN present, I would even say that they had passed the exam, although with low marks. However, the senior UNAMI (United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq) official decided to explain to me why I should be happy seeing films and photographs of what has been done instead of the real projects that I came to see.

As he justified, he was once in charge of overseeing a project in Mecca and, not being a Muslim himself, he was not authorised to see what was going on. “Never mind” he said. He controlled the project through pictures!

I was astonished, and so were several other diplomats and UN officials, who had travelled thousands of kilometres to listen to this kind of nonsense.

Just by coincidence, I was then carrying with me and I was finalising the reading of “Bankrolling Basra” which at its end fully explained the logic of budget controlling by photograph:

“During ‘our watch’ in the south we kept a tight control over funds and saw relatively little corruption. But a friend who worked in Basra some time later found that fraud was rife. The westerners who controlled the cash were unable to get out of the bases because of the worsening security problem. This meant that they had to rely on photographs and documents to ‘prove’ that the buildings, bridges, and roads were being built as promised. ‘A whole new industry in forged documents, receipts and photographs had grown up’, said my friend. ‘They were ingenious, though not always very thorough in the fraud. I said to one of the Iraqi officials one day “if you are going to show me fabricated photographs of the project at least show me photos of the same place!” The pictures he was showing

me the project being completed came from at least two separate locations’.”⁷

What was more amazing was the ability of the most important Western actors in the Iraqi scene to ignore what could easily be found in the press, on specialised literature or, for that matter, just getting into the Red Zone and speaking with people and yet taking decisions that were crucial to all of us.

The Nasyriah mission coincided with a lot of attention given to the accusations of Judge Radhi, in all the Western media (front page in *Le Monde*, for instance⁸). The former head of the anticorruption forces in Baghdad till he had to ask for asylum on the US, accused the Iraqi authorities of systematic embezzlement and, furthermore, denounced the existence of regular diversion of funds to terrorist groups and militia.

Having lost 31 members of his staff and escaping several times from attempted murder, Judge Radhi only gave up in face of the frontal refusal of the Government to allow him to do his job.

As usual, Maliki never cared to give explanations on any of the accusations on his Government, but decided to accuse Judge Radhi of being corrupt himself, which is the typical way of the Iranian theocracy and their disciples to get rid of their opponents: to accuse their victims of the crimes they committed themselves.

One of my first questions to the countless Iraqi sheiks, religious and political leaders I met in June 2008 in Ashraf was about what they thought should be done to support Iraq financially.

⁷ Alderson, Andrew, *Bankrolling Basra*, Robinson, 2007, ISBN 978-1-84529-510-3, page 258

⁸ Le Monde, 17/06/2008, http://www.lemonde.fr/proche-orient/article/2008/06/17/fraudes-en-irak-23-milliards-de-dollars-ont-disparu_1059185_3218.html

All of them, without any exception, answered that no money should be handled to the Iraqi Government unless a strict control was to be made, as they all thought Judge Radhi's position to be common sense: otherwise money would be stolen and a large part of it would find its way into supporting terror.

The photo opportunity was just the most delirious way out of reality chosen by the West, the most pathetic symptom of the "Green Zone syndrome".

As I came to understand by this Iraqi episode, we have to change dramatically the way that we manage our cooperation effort with third countries. If we allow this to be held solely as a business between governments through diplomacies we will risk seeing scenarios like the Iraqi one repeating endlessly.

The only way out is to cooperate much more openly with scrutiny from Parliaments as well as from the press and the public in general. I think a truthful cooperation effort has to be a second pillar in the relation we might establish with the Greater Middle East.

c) Building bridges

No bridges were actually left standing to the South of Kirkuk on the road to Ashraf city when we came down on 13 June 2008. The large number of carcasses of bombed cars and trucks, together with the ever prevailing signs of former roadside bombs were a testimony to the kind of violence that had devastated the area since the last time I had used that road in January 2007.

Otherwise the situation was much calmer. The check points were relaxed and in every village we could see people carrying their normal lives under the protection of lightly armed Awakening Council members.

In Ashraf city, we were received in a more discreet way than the year before, and I hardly had time to get to the place before the meeting



Bridge on the road from Kirkuk to Baghdad Photo Ana Isabel Alves (June 13, 2008)

started. I had left Brussels early in the morning of the very same day when I was introduced to my first brainstorming meeting with Iraqi sheiks.

My Iranian PMOI hosts explained that the next morning I could participate in the ceremony of the handling of three million signatures on a petition of Iraqi Shiia asking for the expulsion of the Iranian Ambassador and the closure of all the Iranian diplomatic facilities and, conversely, allowing a free hand to the PMOI.

Indeed this was quite a development. The vast majority of Shiia were no longer supporting the Iranian led parties and, quite on the contrary, they had become the core of the resistance to the undeclared occupation of the country by Iran and its agents.

Enthusiasm for provincial elections was rife, and difficult negotiations were being developed aiming at the formation of a non-sectarian alternative to the Iranian block of Al-Hakim (SIIC) and Maliki's Al-Dawa faction.

The Kurdish block seemed quite stable and impossible to move, whereas the secular Arab tendencies seemed to have difficulties to come to terms with the Islamic Party, the main confessional Sunni party. The Kurdish block saw the distinct possibility of a federal Iraq as a way to reinforce its autonomy in a large part of the country.

The Kurdish perspective did not appear realistic to me, as Iran, or even Turkey, would not accept a nearly independent Iraqi Kurdistan.

Apparently, it was now the Arab Shiia community that better understood the dangers posed by this partition, as it would place them under the thumb of the Iranian dictatorship with a status close to those of the Ahwazi (Arabs of Iran), one of the most discriminated and persecuted minorities in the region.

To my amazement I met in Ashraf not only the traditional disfranchised Shiias in Ashraf but important personalities of both

the Dawa Party and the Sadr movement who were ready to come to terms with a secular coalition where you could find nearly every ethnic group and religious affiliation.

During my stay in Ashraf, Saleh Al-Mutlaq became the attending leading figure of a promising coalition, as Ayad Allawi was represented but not there in person.

The Iranian-Iraqi conference held in Ashraf city was therefore a major success. It turned around the handling of the files with three million signatures of support from Iraqi Shia to the PMOI, broadcasted alive by the main Arab TV channels.

The Iraqi Government's spokesman, Ali Al-Dabbagh, one of the most important Iranian agents controlling the Iraqi government, responded the next day with a renewed enraged attack where he threatened the PMOI and all of those who had been in Ashraf (this time I was also included) and demanded the handling of Ashraf from the US to the Iraqi forces.

Again the main problem seemed to be the US position, embroiled now in a negotiation with the Maliki government on the future statute of US forces.

The US rightly understood that Iraq would become a full puppet of Iran if they just left. The US continues to oversee the action of the Iraqi Armed Forces and therefore, it did not allow its transformation into a sectarian force as the pro-Iranian government tried to.

However, as they had given the Iraqi government all the pretence of an independent and legitimate government, they were now dependent on their authorisation for continuing in the country.

So, the US basically had to obtain permission of their enemies to be able to control them, using as only favourable argument their still existing leverage made of their military force on the ground.



*Addressing the Fourth annual session of the Solidarity Congress of the Iraqi People
Photo Henrique Burnay (June 14, 2008)*

Once again, the US decision-makers were caught in the same sort of “catch 22 situation” they had always been in since the 2003 intervention.

This is the ideal battle ground for the excellent Iranian chess players and Levantine negotiators and one where the US rigid structures of command and square-minded approach is least prepared for.

So, the Maliki government made it quite clear: if the US wanted to have authorisation to stay, it had to give green light for Maliki to get rid of the opposition to an Iranian ruled Iraq.

The question, of course, is that without the civil society opposition to the Iranian rule the US military force in Iraq would be useless, but this is what remains to be understood by the West.

The Iranian authorities made it known that they did not want the US forces to remain, therefore allowing Maliki to act as if he was not only following Iranian orders but was a truly independent player.

In 2007 the US Ambassador to NATO, Victoria Nuland, came to the European Parliament’s delegation for relations with NATO Parliamentary Assembly to explain the European defence shield against Iranian missiles. On the occasion, I challenged her with the US policy blatant contradiction: how could the US confront Iranian nuclear threats on the one hand and on the other hand propel its expansion into neighbouring Iraq?

She was positively enraged when she answered me, guaranteeing it was obvious that the Iraqi government had nothing to do with Teheran. The very same “State of Denial” that Bob Woodward brilliantly described in the US Administration⁹ regarding the situation in Iraq continued unabatedly.

⁹ Woodward, Bob, *State of Denial: Bush at War, Part III*, Simon & Schuster, 2006, ISBN 978-0-7432-7223-0

The US decision makers, and most in particular, the neo-conservative ideologists who had been heavily infiltrated by the most sophisticated fundamentalist ideology, did not want to come to terms with the reality that their major military operation since Vietnam had propelled their enemies (Iranian religious fascism) into control of the main strategic area in dispute (Iraq) and they would use any argument and any opportunity to try to hide this reality.

The problem is that without understanding this reality they will never be able to succeed, regardless of their military power and political will.

Europe plays a negative role here. Its leaders are divided into one group that fully aligned with the US and is as keen as the US to hide the reality and not to confront its colossal errors and the other that did not align only on procedural points but otherwise never understood that the way the entire Iraqi operation was conceived would only fuel the Iranian religious fascism threat.

And yet the best teachers on these issues are the peoples of the Greater Middle East, especially the ones who learned the hard way, experiencing a fully fledged “Islamic Revolution”. Contrary to what the politically correct ideologues of the West think, people in the Middle East are not essentially different from any one of us; they want development, freedom, the Rule of Law in a democratic society.

The bridge that we have to rebuild across the Atlantic will have to use glue from the Greater Middle East. This glue will not be made of oil, not even of the one-sided fear of the Islamic fascism nuclear bomb, even less of the “politically correct” tolerance towards the local totalitarian ideologies; it has to be made of the will of the people of the region to become an integral part of the free and developed World.

Epilogue

Epilogue

The claim was unanimous and expressed in so many different ways that I could understand how genuine it was: “we want free, fair and fast elections.”

I was particularly impressed because these people, survivors from a tremendous nightmare that was to a large extent made in the name of “democracy”, insisted on elections.

Political, religious and tribal leaders they all assured me in our last gathering in Ashraf city in June 2008: give us the opportunity, and we will have non-sectarians in Provincial Governments of Iraq. For the first time I saw mainly Shiia but also Iraqis of other convictions united in a common objective.

They were conscious that there would be no conditions for elections if there was not a strong monitoring presence from all sorts of international organisations; they were conscious that the five-million plus refugees and displaced people who would be prevented from voting would be the most likely to vote for an Iraqi anti-sectarian platform; they were conscious that those who would dare to defy the rulers would risk their lives, as so many lost their lives for their political convictions, but they still saw elections as the only way out.

I could hardly understand how these people still kept their energy, or at least, so many of the Iraqi people still did, since clearly you had so many others whose post-traumatic syndrome was so intense that their interest in life was gone.

So why do the Western leaders, five years after the initial Iraqi operation, seem unable to hear the message and do what they miserably failed to do previously: ensure a proper monitoring of the coming provincial elections so that results can be trustworthy?



Fourth annual session of the Solidarity Congress of the Iraqi People (June 14, 2008)

Regarding now Iran, why do they not understand that the only way to avoid the building of the nuclear bomb by the founders of modern mass, suicidal, religious terrorism and an armed conflict of unpredictable consequences is to empower the Iranian people in their fight for democracy?

Why don't they understand that the short-sighted oil obsession commanding their political options will backfire, as oil and gas will definitely slip into the influence of their main foe if they allow the whole of the Gulf to be dominated by the same totalitarian forces?

The Western leaders who decided to go forward with the invasion of Iraq as well as those who seem comfortable with its results have to get out of their "state of denial" and ask themselves how it was possible that an operation which was supposed to start a democratic revolution did in fact start an Islamic revolution that mimicked the Iranian one.

There is yet no consensual estimation of the number of victims of all sorts of violence that ravaged Iraq since 2003, but the most likely estimates point to hundreds of thousands of casualties.

Last year the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, Leandro Despouy, appealed to the Iraqi Government not to carry out the death sentence against Mahmoud Sa'eed, who confessed to have participated in the deadly August 2003 attack at the UN headquarters in Baghdad, which killed Sérgio Vieira de Mello and 21 others.

As Leandro Despouy pointed out, this execution would hinder the right to know the truth about this terrorist act. Needless to say, the UN appeal was ignored and the presumed implicated on the murder

was rapidly and swiftly executed¹.

As yet, there is not a single major crime committed in Iraq that can be said to have been investigated and tried without procedurally flawed legal processes. It is not only Mr. Sérgio Vieira de Mello relatives and friends who have been deprived of the right to the truth, but the whole world.

The history of Iraq has proved that the absence of proper investigation and trial of crimes of a genocidal dimension leads to its repetition with ever bigger targets.

This is why I think the international community owes to the victims of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq a specialised international Court for Iraq that will investigate, put on trial and punish those guilty of crimes against humanity.

Furthermore, the international community must make an effort to take the necessary lessons of what went wrong in Iraq. Clearly, parliaments should promote thorough inquiries into the matter, as I did propose in the European Parliament, but unfortunately was disapproved by the majority.

Unless we fully understand what went wrong in Iraq, we will not understand what we have to do right. To blame George Bush, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Bremer, or the neo-conservative ideology for all the problems means to miss the complexity, the dimension and the reasons of the disaster.

¹ United Nations General Assembly, 06/08/2007, A/62/2007, page 18, Death penalty and the right to the truth, <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N07/451/70/PDF/N0745170.pdf?OpenElement> and United Nations General Assembly, 25/10/2007, GA/SHC/3894, page 11, Independence of Judges and Lawyers, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2007/gashc3894.doc.htm>

Kenneth Pollack, a former US civil servant with main responsibilities over the region, wrote three well-documented and professionally researched books which are fundamental to understand the reasoning of those who led the US into the Iraqi disaster.

On Iran² he authored the “Persian Puzzle” that mainly reflects how puzzled he feels, or he wants his readers to feel, with the policy to be followed by the US with the country, rather than how puzzling the country is. This is a compilation of doubts, contradictions and uneven appraisals that show his inability to draw conclusions and invites to a no-policy, that is, freedom for the Iranian theocratic expansionism.

On Iraq³ he authored “The Case for Invading Iraq” that is almost the reverse of the latter book. No doubts or contradictions exist there: Saddam Hussein is the single devil, there is only one possible path: the invasion. Most shocking is the description of the Iraqi section of the IRGC as an opposition group that balances between Iran and the US who, unfortunately, was not strong enough to make the “regime change” without outside help. To engage in the biggest military involvement since Vietnam to replace Saddam Hussein by the puppets of the Iranian theocracy is such an act of “suicidal policy” that one cannot overlook it.

His last book⁴ advises the US to take a step further in the suicidal policy resulting from the two previous he advised: to allow Iran to direct a “security organisation” of the Gulf where the US would

² Pollack, Kenneth M., *The Persian Puzzle - The Conflict between Iran and America*, Random House, 2004, ISBN 1-4000-6315-9

³ Pollack, Kenneth M., *The Threatening Storm - The case for Invading Iraq*, Random House, 2002, ISBN 0-375-50928-3

⁴ Pollack, Kenneth M. *A path out of the desert*, Random House, 2008, ISBN 978-1-4000-6548-6

not be present. This is indeed the most important next objective of the Iranian Theocracy.

In the modern World, there is a growing perception that power lies more in the media, the so-called fourth power, than in the formal political structures, and that the political structures have better and more active mechanisms of control than the media.

The Iraqi crisis proved that there is yet a fifth power subject to even less scrutiny than the fourth and this is made of NGOs and think tanks. The most outlandish inventions regarding WMD and the overall sectarian and less objective reports regarding Iraq were produced by “Human Rights Watch”.

However, HRW was able to do it with no scrutiny whatsoever. There is no public scrutiny on the financial sources of this organisation, on the political career of its research staff, on the conflict of interests of its board members, indeed on their political responsibility for the tragic consequences for million of Iraqis of the lies it produced without any sort of apology.

A large part of the problem though lies in the region itself, and in particular in the Arab World. The Arab mainstream public opinion has to come to terms with its own reality and stop blaming the US or Israel in particular, and the West in general for what is a direct consequence of its autocratic structures.

There is no doubt that errors and even crimes have been committed by the Western forces in Iraq, but it is only fair to take in consideration that the West was the only to have punished some of its own abuses, and it is simply not true that the Allied forces are directly responsible for most of the terror, death and destruction. For the most part, these were crimes committed in the name of a fanatic reading of Islam.

The leaders of the region should therefore stop hiding the main

problems they face behind others but consider the fight against fanaticism as their main task and the full democratisation of their societies as the only long-term solution to their problems.

To know Iraqi people in the Red Zone is to understand how the “war of civilizations” has no grounds. Iraqis are the ones who are the staunch opponents to terrorism since they have suffered extensively from it; they are the ones who understand better than any others the importance of having proper democratic rulers instead of dictators who misuse nationalism or religion; they are the ones who understood in real life how fanaticism jeopardises the future of their children, their opportunities for economic improvement and their dreams.

The theocratic dictatorship of Iran is trying to dominate the whole of the Greater Middle East starting by waging war in Iraq, Lebanon, Israel and Palestine and this is where we shall confront it if we want to avoid confrontations in much more difficult scenarios.

The present year will be crucial in defining where we are aiming at, either at a global confrontation or to the beginning of an era of tolerance, respect and understanding in the region.

The aggression mode of Teheran is a direct consequence of the Western disastrous policies in the region. If the West does not understand this it will not be able to succeed.

I hope the lessons from the dramatic events that resulted in an Islamic Revolution in Iraq can be learnt to change our course of action in the Greater Middle East, and that we might confront the totalitarian regimes with what they fear most: the will of their own citizens.



*With (from left to right) Gunnar Hökmark, Chairman of EFI
European Parliament Steering Committee; Hans-Gert Pöttering,
President of the European Parliament; Meital Goor, EFI Israeli
Affairs Officer and Dimitri Dombret, EFI Director
Photo European Parliament (September 11, 2007)*

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With (from left to right) Congresswoman Sheila Jackson-Lee, member of Foreign Affairs Committee, Homeland Security Committee, and Judiciary Committee, US House of Representatives; Bruce McColm, former Executive Director, Freedom House and Congressman Tom Tancredo, member of Foreign Affairs Committee, US House of Representatives, former presidential candidate from the Republican Party (2008 elections) (June 20, 2006)

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