

# Help the Iraqi Resistance

By LAURIE MYLROIE

Every major city in the Shiite south of Iraq has risen in revolt since the end of the Gulf War — Karbala, Najaf, Hillah, Diwaniyah, Nasiriyah on the Euphrates; Kut, Ali al-Gharbi, Ali al-Sharqi, Amara on the Tigris, and Basra. The three-week-old revolt has turned into a see-saw battle, with the same ground frequently changing hands. Government troops are using heavy equipment against the rebel population. "So many had been killed that their bodies were stacked up like firewood," refugees from Basra have testified.

Reports that government troops are using napalm against civilians have been confirmed by the director general of the World Health Organization. The bodies of rebels are hung from the barrels of Republican Guard tanks, while famine and epidemic threaten the country.

## Implicates U.S.

This slaughter is proceeding under the eyes of half a million American troops. The U.S. Air Force commands unchallenged superiority of the skies. Any policy premised on Saddam Hussein's suppressing the rebels implicates the U.S. passively in Saddam's massacres.

Washington long ago limited its ability to deal with any development in Iraq except a coup against Saddam Hussein from within the ruling elite. Administration officials are barred from contact with all elements of the diverse group called the Iraqi opposition, including Kurds, Shiites, liberal democrats—everyone. This ban exists because Washington expected the institutions of the regime to hold and was apprehensive about involving itself in Iraq's internal politics when it believed the Baathists to be the sure winners in any case. So, in the middle of the biggest revolt in Iraq's modern history, American policymakers are not even talking to the Baathist regime's opponents, although all other major members of the coalition speak to them.

The Kurds are the fourth-largest ethnic group in the Middle East and constitute 20% of Iraq's population. They now control most of the north, including the oil fields. That is more territory than they ever held in their long revolt against Baghdad, a revolt that goes back to the 1920s, when the victorious allies in World War I reneged on promises of autonomy for the Kurds.

The Shiites are 55% of Iraq's population. Together with the Kurds, they constitute 75% of the country's population. The Shiite revolt began spontaneously, driven by hatred of Saddam Hussein and the Baathist regime. Emboldened by the proximity of the American army and grateful to the U.S. for having dealt such a blow to the regime, they initially expressed appreciation for their presumed liberators. One man named his newborn son "Mr. Bush." A woman, with very limited English, explained to a Western reporter "Saddam, no. Bush, yes."

But Washington showed little interest in the Iraqi population. As Saddam Hussein's forces began to suppress the revolt, Wash-

ington had relatively little to say. The U.S. was even slow to arrange humanitarian relief to refugees in its zone of control. Two thousand Iraqis live in the territory under American occupation. Article 55 of the Fourth Geneva Convention obliges an occupying power to provide food and medical care to civilians living under its control. The American colonel who said, "We are not in the business of massive humanitarian assistance," was mistaken.

Last week Saddam Hussein's troops seized Shiite Islam's senior religious figure, the 94-year old Ayatollah Abul Qasem Khoi and dragged him off to Baghdad, where he was paraded on Iraqi television. It was a profound insult to religious sensibilities. Although he was returned to Najaf, the man is now hostage to the regime, denied permission to leave the country, his life at risk.

Ten days before his detention, the New York office of Ayatollah Khoi addressed a plea for help to the U.S. "Mr. President, the people of Iraq were urged to rise up against their leader. They have done so.

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.... A tragedy is in the making. Would you as the leader of the allied forces let it happen?"

Ayatollah Khoi is no fundamentalist. He was a foe of Khomeini's and represents the quietest strain in Shiite thought, which considers all politics corrupt, and therefore to be shunned. (That is why Ayatollah Khoi would never appear voluntarily in Saddam's palace.) However, his office did not receive even the courtesy of a reply from the U.S. government.

The U.S. could have won significant good will. It could have, for example, responded to the ayatollah's request by threatening to retaliate against Saddam's forces for any further damage to the Shiite holy shrines, which had already come under government fire. The U.S. would then have been in the position of defending Shiite Islam's holy sites at the request of Shiism's pre-eminent religious authority, not a bad position for a country so often accused of defiling the Islamic holy places. Even now, Washington could demand that Ayatollah Khoi be allowed to travel.

In contrast to American aloofness, Tehran was quick to express sympathy and political support for Iraq's Shiites and to provide humanitarian aid to the refugees that crossed into Iranian territory. Yet Iran's support for Iraq's Shiites was limited at first—Tehran heeded American warnings against involvement and it did not want to jeopardize newly reestablished diplomatic

relations with Riyadh and Cairo.

But as the atrocities mount, it grows difficult for Tehran to stay out. Iranians are in an uproar over the abuse of Ayatollah Khoi. A prominent Iranian cleric normally distant from the Tehran regime, Ayatollah Muhammad Reza Musavi Gulpaykani, has condemned the attacks on the Shiite shrines, and has issued a call to all Muslims to defend them.

The revolt in the south continues. The best Saddam can hope for is to reassert military control over the cities and towns. Even then, a guerrilla war is likely to continue. If Kuwait remains politically unstable, torn between the government and an opposition moved by Iraq's cruel occupation to demand full political rights, the turmoil in southern Iraq may compound civil unrest in Kuwait.

When Saddam takes his troops from the south to fight the rebellion in the north, the southern revolt may flare up with renewed ferocity. As time passes and Tehran remains the only outside power to show sympathy and provide support, the Iraqi Shiites are likely to become fixedly pro-Iranian. The U.S. may find it hard to keep Tehran out of the fray. All Tehran has to do is allow free passage across the border to Iraqi exiles in Iran. If Iraq's Shiites were to succeed under these circumstances, the Shiite entity in southern Iraq would be dominated by Iran.

That is the nightmare scenario for the U.S., Europe, the Gulf Arabs and the Soviet Union. But if the nightmare turns real, it is partly because the outside powers are banking on a dubious policy—that Saddam will repress the rebels and that his army will then turn on him.

It is time to end the slaughter in Iraq. The United Nations Security Council should condemn the massacre. Even more, it should declare explicitly that the removal of Saddam Hussein's regime is a goal of the allied coalition. What right does Saddam have to rule his country? He has committed aggression against five states—Iran, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain (the Scuds missed) and Israel—and he is demonstrably despised by his own people.

## War Crimes

The war crimes resolution Margaret Thatcher sought to bring before the U.N. Security Council last fall could be reintroduced. There was sufficient reason for the resolution then, and there is more now.

Since the U.N. does not aim to replace one Saddam with another, it could enunciate neutral principles for any new authority in Iraq—such as constitutional government and a U.N. role in monitoring human rights violations and elections. If the rebel forces accept those principles, then the allied coalition could provide them air support, and bring the slaughter to a quick end. This would be the principled course, as well as the most practical guarantee against festering instability in Iraq.

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