

La Gazzetta Del Mezzogiorno (Bari)

8/27/03 English translation

"Implications from the bombing in Baghdad"

By Kenneth W. Stein

On August 19, a suicide bomber drove a new cement mixer full of explosives into the side of a three story converted hotel in Baghdad, which served as the UN headquarters in Iraq. International organizations were housed there, including UNICEF, the World Bank, and other UN agencies. The attack killed at least 18, including Sergio Vieira de Mello, 55, the United Nations secretary general's special representative in Iraq.

Among the 100 or more killed or wounded, there were nationals from all over the world, not dissimilar from the wide array of nationalities who suffered in the September 2001 terrorist attacks against America. Several days after the blast, it is still too early to know for sure the short or long term effects of the bomb blast. However in the context of Iraq's reconstruction effort led by the United States, it is evident that a shift may have taken place to attack not only Americans (61 have been killed since the end of the fighting in April) but to attack additionally those countries, individuals, and organizations engaged in pacification and stabilization of Iraq, or who contributed to Saddam Hussein's demise. On August 7, the embassy of Jordan in Baghdad was attacked with more than 50 people killed or wounded; Jordan of course allowed its territory to be used in the Anglo-American attack on Iraq.

On August 17, a water pipeline serving four million Iraqis in north Baghdad was blown up; and since June there have been regular attacks Iraqi oil pipelines, especially the 965-kilometer pipeline that runs from the Iraqi oil center Kirkuk to Turkey's Ceyhan port, and normally earns Iraq \$7 million per day. All these targets point to a willingness to attack civilians, high profile infrastructure installations, not just American or British soldiers.

In the context of the previous fortnight, terrorist groups want to derail or drastically slow down Iraq's revitalization in hopes that the Iraqi people already doubtful of Anglo-American intentions and frustrated with the pace of reconstruction, will clamor for Anglo-American withdrawal before a workable government or economic structure is set in place. There is also a contingent motivation to dissuade other countries or groups from sending personnel to Iraq. Any deep engagement from Germany, France, India, Turkey, or Arab states would have the effect of

supporting Anglo-American reconstruction of Iraq.

Wider geographic participation in Iraq's reconstruction inevitably narrows the gap between the Bush administration on the one hand and the EU, Arab and Moslem states on the other who quickly passing over the issue of where are the weapons of mass destruction?' The outrage expressed by the international community, as exemplified by Romano Prodi, the President of the European Commission, that the work of the UN is essential,' could instigate a greater European willingness to do exactly opposite what the terrorists wanted, namely, joining in a deeper fashion Iraq's reconstruction. In other words, will this attack pull disparate groups and countries together in a fashion similar to the September 2001 attacks? Will this attack see the reconstruction of Iraq as a motivational force to resist terrorism, the adopted mantra of the Bush administration?

With the arrest of Taha Yassin Ramadan, the Vice-President of Iraq in Saddam's regime, the same day as the bomb blast, one can not discount that motivation for this attack was undertaken by his or Saddam Hussein loyalists. From numerous Palestinian case examples, there is clear evidence that when Israelis have arrested or killed a leading Hamas or Islamic Jihad official, these organizations have used suicide bombings as a reply to the loss or incarceration of an important leader.

A continuation or increase in either the number or degree of terrorist attacks Iraq's reconstruction may be interpreted as a coordinated effort by a variety of groups, who are variously motivated by hate of the Bush administration, distaste for US led redesign of the Middle East in general, who remain Saddam Hussein loyalists, or who are disgruntled that Iraq is being shaped in a way that does not meet local political leader patronage desires or interests of surrounding states. It seems that undoing Iraq is their object; it is the magnet for sentiments as expressed by any number of dissident groups that may or may not be connected to al-Qaeda, or other independent, radical, or extremist Islamic groups.

So far, the Bush administration and the British government are resolved to stay the course in Iraq. The success and duration of Baghdad's stabilization and nation building requirements will come from UN, the EU, Moslem and Arab world country responses. As the Israelis have learned only too well, when indigenous patriotism combined with deep seated hatred for the ruling power is added to porous borders in a semi-lawless state, acts of sabotage and terrorism are difficult to prevent.

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