

WORLD TABLE CONFERENCE
'GOING FOR PEACE & RECONCILIATION IN IRAQ'
RIGA CONGRESS CENTRE, RIGA, LATVIA
'EXTERNAL FACTORS'
Mon 2nd- Tuesday 3rd March 2015

Mr President, Ladies & Gentlemen,

I am very privileged to have been invited here to RIGA today by the Peace Ambassadors for Iraq. I congratulate you on your great initiative in setting up this foundation and in pursuing such a principled objective. Surely peace and reconciliation in Iraq is what the beleaguered citizens of that country deserve after so many years of oppression under the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, followed by two catastrophic invasions by the West and the ensuing insurgency and brutal incursion of ISIS that we see today.

The civilised world has united in its condemnation of the barbaric beheadings of innocent Western aid workers and Egyptian Coptic Christians and the horrifying burning to death of the brave Jordanian pilot by the so-called Islamic State. Their rapid expansion from Syria across vast tracts of Iraq and their subsequent murderous campaign against Christians, Yazidis and anyone who did not fit with their perverted vision of Islam, has shocked the world. Demands for revenge against the perpetrators of such incomprehensible acts of inhumanity have been universal. But we have to pause for a second, before our anger and frustration boils over and ask ourselves how this crisis came about.

It was naive of the West to think that we could simply sweep away dictators and despots like Saddam Hussein and Bashar al-Assad and somehow replace them with functioning Western democracies, without giving due cognizance to the ancient

hatreds and festering tensions – religious, social and tribal – that bedevil the Middle East.

Islamic State came into being only because Saddam was toppled and Assad was effectively crippled in Syria by the Western-backed revolution. ISIS now roams over huge parts of Syria, Iraq and Libya, looking hungrily at neighbouring countries like Jordan, which they regard as ripe for plucking. The repeated atrocities carried out by ISIS are designed to stoke up tribal tensions and undermine the authority of governments and leaders in the zone.

It has been admitted that US and allied airstrikes against ISIS cannot and will not lead to the defeat of the Islamic State. They are designed to bolster the fight on the ground by the Iraqi military, the Peshmerga and more ominously, the Shia militias. The Peshmerga, as a Kurdish military force is contained in Northern Iraq. They are being armed and supplied by the West and are fighting courageously to reclaim territory lost to ISIS. The Iraqi army, on the other hand, is in a state of virtual collapse. Riven with dishonesty and fraud, it mirrors the chaotic and rampant corruption of the Iraqi government in post-Saddam Iraq.

These circumstances have provided the perfect conditions for the Shia militias to thrive. There are dozens, perhaps hundreds of these militias. They are trained, financed and often led by the terrorist Iranian Quds Force. They are Iranian proxies. So the US and allied air strikes are actually aiding and abetting Iran in achieving its ultimate objective, which is total control of Iraq. This situation was unintentionally bolstered by a *fatwa* issued by Iraq's senior Shia Cleric Ayatollah Sistani, who said that Iraqis had a duty to defend their country. He actually intended his *fatwa* to encourage people to join the Iraqi army, but in fact tens of thousands flocked to join the Shia militias, finding themselves quickly under the command of the

IRGC – Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps – the praetorians of fundamentalist Islam.

Iran is now well on the way to extending its hegemony across the entire region and it is worth remembering that ISIS is not the only organisation intent on using violence and bloodshed to create a worldwide Islamic caliphate; it is a core principle of the Iranian Constitution, drawn up by Ayatollah Khomeini, that they will export the Islamic revolution with the clear intention of creating an Islamic caliphate. Indeed, Tehran regards ISIS as direct Sunni competitors in this struggle to enslave the world in a medieval corruption of the Muslim faith.

The current war raging across Iraq was as avoidable as it was predictable. When I was elected President of the European Parliament's Delegation for Relations with Iraq in 2009, I warned that Nouri al-Maliki's second term as Prime Minister, insisted upon by Iran and supported by the US, was a tragedy for the Iraqi people, for the region and for the world. As a puppet of the Iranian mullahs, he encouraged the Iranian-led Shia militias and used them to enforce his merciless "iron fist" sectarian policy of indiscriminate bombing, shelling, arbitrary arrests, torture and mass execution of innocent Sunni civilians.

The number of executions in Iraq rose to record heights and an increasing number of political opponents found themselves faced with trumped-up charges of terrorism. These issues, along with the already devastated state of Iraq, added greatly to the staggering casualties and destruction following the illegal invasion and occupation in 2003. But we in the West stood aside and allowed Maliki, as a puppet of Tehran, to remain in office and now we are witnessing the results of this catastrophic policy.

I warned again and again that Maliki's reign would lead to

civil war. But mine was almost a lone voice. Maliki even called a press conference in Baghdad to denounce me as a liar and an enemy of Iraq.

He sent an envoy to Brussels to ask me what it would take to get me to shut up. I told him that the only thing that would make me shut up would be his resignation and indictment for crimes against humanity. As I highlighted repeatedly, Maliki utilised the claim of fighting a war against terror to secure his grip on power and the West fell for it, even although his war on terror was, in fact, a war against his predominantly Sunni political opponents.

The sudden emergence of ISIS became a convenient focal point enabling Maliki to accelerate his sectarian campaign against his political foes. Indeed the reason ISIS made such rapid and spectacular gains across large tranches of Iraq was because they faced little or no resistance from the Sunni tribes, who often preferred the Islamic State to the brutal Iranian-led militias that had been terrorizing them for years.

When Maliki came to power, step by step his government distanced itself from Washington and got closer to Tehran. A clear indication of this was Maliki's approach towards the main Iranian Opposition, members of the People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran. 3500 PMOI members had lived in Iraq for almost 25 years. They had built a small, modern city called 'Ashraf' out of the desert in Diyala Province. But from the first day after the fall of Saddam, Tehran had conspired to massacre their arch foe and to annihilate Ashraf and in Nouri al-Maliki they found a willing tool.

As the U.S. withdrew from Iraq, it handed over the protection of Ashraf to Maliki's government, having first signed an agreement with each and every individual resident of Ashraf, guaranteeing their safety and security in return for the

surrender of their weapons. This amounted to signing the death warrant for these defenceless residents. The predictable outcome materialised in the form of six brutal massacres during the years 2009 to 2013.

We warned the US, UN and EU again and again that these massacres would take place. But our cries fell on deaf ears. We were told not to rock the boat and not to do anything that might upset the delicate nuclear talks in Tehran. What an utter joke. It was the PMOI who first revealed the fact that the mullahs were enriching uranium and building a nuclear weapon and 12 years later we are still talking, extending deadline after deadline so that the mullahs can buy time and achieve their final goal of domination of the Middle East.

Indeed the National Council for Resistance in Iran (NCRI) held a press conference in Washington last Tuesday at which they revealed yet another top-secret nuclear facility, buried deep underground at a military base in the suburbs of Tehran. This facility, known as Lavizan-3, is using advanced centrifuge machines to enrich weapons-grade uranium. It has been entirely hidden from international inspectors up until now.

The West must wake up to the fact that any cooperation and alliance with Iran to fight ISIS is extremely dangerous and will turn this war into a sectarian war between the Shiites and Sunnis, and even if it is temporarily suppressed, it will again surge and will encase the region for decades. To overcome the Islamic state, it needs a cultural and religious alternative that can defy the violent, fanatic and extremist view of Islam, be it of the Sunni type like ISIS or the of the Shiite type like the Iranian regime and its affiliated groups. The PMOI and Maryam Rajavi's democratic and tolerant version of Islam can play a vital role in isolating the Iranian regime and its twisted Islamic Ideology inside Iran.

Lawlessness, terrorism, corruption and the systematic abuse of human rights are each a daily feature of life in Iraq. The World Bank lists Iraq as having one of the worst qualities of governance in the world.

'Transparency International' lists Iraq as one of the world's most corrupt countries. It has a dreadful human rights record and now is in third place after only China and neighbouring Iran in the number of people it executes. In spite of vast oil revenues, per capita income is only \$1,000 per year, making it one of the world's poorest countries. The situation for women in Iraq is dire. Women are subject to rape, attack and violence. Iraq has 5 million widows and 5 million orphans, but only 120,000 receive state aid. A widow's average benefit is in any case only \$85 per month and average rent is \$200 per month.

The world now looks to Haider al-Abadi to take control and restore order inside Iraq. He must begin by rounding up the savage militias associated with the Iranian regime such as the Badr, Asaib and Kataib terrorists, as well as other criminal gangs that have played a significant role in Maliki's rule and instigated the sectarian war in Iraq. He must purge the army of Iranian mercenaries and all those that Maliki recruited under his sectarian policy, restoring patriotic officers and turning it into a professional and national army. Only such an army, supported by the tribes and the people will be able to confront extremist and terrorist groups like the Islamic State (IS).

The new Prime Minister should also disclose to the Iraqi people the names of those who carried out the executions, massacres, bombardment and rocket attacks against innocent people and those responsible for poverty and state corruption; all should be held accountable in the courts. He must re-establish the independence of the Judiciary, dismissing those who have turned Iraq's justice system into a political tool wielded by Maliki.

He must also arrest and hold to account the perpetrators of the six massacres at Camps Ashraf and Liberty that led to the violent death of 116 people and the wounding and maiming of hundreds more.

He must order the lifting of the inhuman siege, especially the medical siege, against Iranian refugees in Camp Liberty and guarantee their rights and security and their right to ownership of their property at Liberty and Ashraf.

I have to say that so far, we have seen little to encourage us that Dr al-Abadi will take the rapid steps necessary towards implementing these measures. He's been in office for 6 months, but still the Sunnis are not really sharing power in any meaningful way. Sure there are Sunni politicians in his cabinet, but they are largely the same ones who served under Maliki and they are still in the same, powerless positions. He must re-integrate those prominent Sunnis who fought against Maliki, like the former Vice President Dr Tariq al-Hashemi. He must release the thousands of Sunni political prisoners. He must openly condemn the excesses of the Shiite militias and evict them from Iraq. He now has in his hands the historic role of saving Iraq or presiding over its total disintegration.

It is also imperative for Obama to change his policy in Iraq. As tens of thousands of Shiia militia fighters under the command of the Iranian terrorist Quds Force General Qassem Suleimani, prepare to recapture the city of Tikrit from ISIS, the Americans are set to launch airstrikes against key ISIS command centres. They have effectively become Iran's allies in the war against the Islamic State. This is a very dangerous and misguided strategy, which even if successful, will simply enable the Iranian regime and its brutal militias to replace ISIS, effectively taking over Iraq in the process.

I have published a comprehensive report on Iraq in the past

few days. Copes should be available at this conference, or you can find it on the EIFA website. It encompasses all of the issues I have highlighted today and charts the predictable rise of ISIS and the strategies required to defeat them and restore peace and stability in Iraq.

I have also written a book entitled '*SELF-SACRIFICE – Life with the Iranian Mojahedin*', which will be published in June, to tell the story of the abject failure of the West's policy of appeasement to the Iranian mullahs and their marionettes in Iraq. I gave my wholehearted support to the Iranian Mojahedin at a time when they were still unjustly listed as an international terrorist organisation. I suffered smears and attacks from all sides when I campaigned successfully to have them removed from the US, UK and EU terrorist blacklists.

My book provides a disturbing account of the mistakes, duplicities and blunders that have led directly to the rise of ISIS and the catastrophic events that now engulf the Middle East. Iran has seized this opportunity to extend its malign influence. The West has sown the wind and now it will reap the whirlwind. That's why this conference in Riga is so timely and that's why the quest for peace and reconciliation in Iraq is so vital. ISIS will not be defeated unless the Iraqi people rise up in unison to confront them and the Iraqi people will never unite unless the Iranian militias are first driven from their territory.

STRUAN STEVENSON

Struan Stevenson was a Conservative Euro MP representing Scotland from 1999 to 2014. He was President of the European Parliament's Delegation for Relations with Iraq from 2009 to 2014 and is currently President of the European Iraqi Freedom Association (EIFA).

(2,438 words)