

Albright Group Backs Iraqi Reds

By J. MICHAEL WALLER

With a newly adopted democratic platform and some alleged credibility from opposing Saddam, Reds in Iraq are getting more than a nod from foolish U.S. groups.

With the Soviet Union gone, who is to take up the communist cause in Iraq? If some in the U.S. relief effort have their way, it will be the American taxpayer. As U.S. officials continue to map out a strategy to help Iraqis build a democratic system, some are urging that the Iraqi Communist Party be made a beneficiary of U.S. aid and assistance programs. Some American operatives in the political reconstruction process even claim to see the communists as the anchor of Iraq's fractious secular political parties and a bulwark against Islamist fundamentalism.

Leading the charge, sources at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) tell *INSIGHT*, is the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), a private, taxpayer-funded group chaired by former secretary of state Madeleine Albright that is chartered to promote democracy abroad. The NDI has won bipartisan praise for its work in the former Soviet bloc and the developing world, but by supporting the Iraqi Communist Party, friends say, the NDI is embarrassing itself and the United States.

The initiative likely will raise the ire of USAID administrator Andrew Natsios, an Army veteran of the Persian Gulf War. Natsios is trying to revamp USAID in an effort to return it to its original purpose as an instrument of national-security policy.

As senior Iraqi communists publicly hinted to their loyalists that they were prepared to use violence against American and Coalition forces and that they were organizing front groups and infiltrating civil organizations across Iraq to

gain political power, some American aid workers nonetheless were convinced that the communists are committed to European-style social democracy. "At present, the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) boasts the most significant organizational structure of the secular parties," NDI Middle East director Leslie Campbell wrote in a January bulletin by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "With dues-paying members and small offices nationwide, the credibility of long opposition to Saddam, and a newly adopted European-style social democratic platform, the ICP could anchor a secular democratic coalition that could rally some former Iraqi National Congress parties and the newly formed or reinvigorated parties of moderate, secular Governing Council members."

The Governing Council, the standing group of leaders of tribal, religious, regional and political groups, is designed to become a transitional government under the Coalition Provisional Authority led by U.S. Ambassador L. Paul Bre-



Natsios: The USAID administrator would focus national-security policy.

mer. At first the ICP refused to collaborate, but then Communist Party Secretary General Hamid Majid Mousa was given a seat on the council.

While appearing to cooperate publicly, the ICP Central Committee wrote a letter to its faithful in October 2003 explaining that it would use its position on the Governing Council to wage political warfare from within, to complement its fight from the outside. "Our Party," the letter said, "has regarded the Council as an arena of struggle rather than being a final, fixed and definitive authority... Our Party can play a more influential role from within this process, to push in the required direction, while struggling, from without, to mobilize the people to effectively ensure that the process develops in the right direction. It is, in this sense, an arena of struggle because diverse forces and sides are influencing the political process both inside and outside the Council."

But NDI seems to treat the Communists as a representative voice of secular Iraqis. The group issued an on-site assessment report in July 2003 that stated, "When asked if the military or the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) should withdraw from Iraq, most people expressed a sentiment similar to the one we heard from a former secretary general of the Iraqi Communist Party, 'If the CPA were to withdraw from Iraq, there would be a civil war and democrats would have no chance.'"

That isn't what the party has been telling its cadres at home and its comrades abroad. On April 10, 2003, the day after U.S. and Coalition forces toppled Saddam Hussein, the ICP issued a statement denouncing the Americans, demanding "an immediate halt to the war" and "ending U.S. unilateralism." Mousa told the radical Italian paper *Il Manifesto* in June, "If the U.S. wants stability for the country, then it should accept our solution."

"And if they don't agree," asked the *Il Manifesto* questioner, "would you then be ready to fight?" Mousa avoided the question, replying, "We are now acting in a legitimate and peaceful way."

For now. But the party reserved the right to fight the Americans. On July 9, Iran's Communist Tudeh Party journal *Tareeq Al-Shaab* ran an interview with "Comrade Salam Ali," a member of the ICP Central Committee, who assailed the Americans as "occupiers" who were denying the Iraqi people their sovereignty. Ali appeared to threaten the liberators: "Failing to respond to the just demands of the people can only intensify sentiments of anger and resistance against U.S.-British occupation." Another senior ICP official, Raid Fahmi, made a



Comrades rejoice: Iraqi Communists take to the streets of Baghdad to celebrate the capture of Saddam Hussein. Effort is afoot to finance them with U.S. tax dollars.

HENGSHAMEH FAHMI/AFP

similar veiled threat in an interview with the *Communist Party USA* weekly paper: "We are for a speedy end to the occupation and the creation of an Iraqi provisional government. It should arrange for the transfer of power from the occupying power and prepare the withdrawal of troops. Of course if the Americans don't respond, each party could resort to other forms of struggle."

Although U.S. officials say the ICP has been behaving responsibly, they add that the Communists would be foolish to do otherwise. For the first time in its 70-year history, the ICP is able to operate freely throughout Iraq without fear of persecution. Well-organized, well-trained, and supported from abroad, the party maintained networks of clandestine front organizations inside Saddam Hussein's Iraq and abroad. It was the first to publish a regular newspaper after the U.S. liberation, even as the Coalition was struggling to establish a credible daily of its own. For now, the ICP is content to pursue the nonviolent road. In its October letter to members and followers, the ICP Central Committee explained, "Resisting occupation is not limited to employing violent means in struggle, but rather includes various forms of peaceful political struggle."

Ironically, the ICP owes its survival to American and British forces. "In the '90s the party reconstituted itself in Iraqi Kurdistan and after the Gulf War in 1991 the Party worked publicly there" under the protection of the U.S./U.K.-enforced northern no-fly zone, Raid Fahmi told the *People's Daily World*. "We had our own headquarters, publications, several radio stations and a television station," and an Arabic-language newspaper as well. The overthrow of the Hussein regime brought new opportunities too. Since April, Fahmi said, "The Party

has reorganized. We had a large number of comrades abroad. We were present in practically every European country and everyone was doing an enormous job. We had an underground structure that was working in Baghdad and southern Iraq. So when the regime collapsed, the Party was able to be on the ground very rapidly. Because we [were] already publishing our paper in Kurdistan, we could rapidly get it to Baghdad. We are now starting radio broadcasts from Baghdad."

That organization has allowed the ICP to infiltrate new political and social institutions, including human-rights groups, and provoke them to take and maintain an anti-U.S. position while benefiting from U.S. protections. "A lot of effort has been put into rebuilding the democratic and trade-union movement," the ICP's "Comrade Ali" told the Iranian Communist Tudeh Party. "Women, youth and student organizations have emerged in the open, after long decades of clandestine work."

A senior Pentagon official says the Coalition Provisional Authority and USAID lack the means to screen the ICP, Islamist agents and other troublemakers from receiving taxpayer funds. "It's pretty hard to screen them out when people in the middle USAID machinery want to bring them in," he said.

The ICP and its front groups set about undermining U.S. and British leadership. According to Comrade Ali, "Workers are flexing their muscles, setting up their national trade unions and protesting the rampant unemployment. The first demonstration against violations of workers' rights by a U.S. multinational company took place last month in Basra and was organized by the Workers Democratic Trade Union Movement." That movement is a front of the ICP,

according to the *People's Daily World*.

Reaching out beyond its own membership, the ICP has set up "local Political Coordinating Committees which encompass various political organizations, to help with mobilizing the people, representing their interests and articulating their demands," says Comrade Ali. The coordinating committees are working against — not with — the Coalition, he told his Iranian counterparts: "There is an ongoing political battle on the ground, in all major cities, with the occupation authorities that are trying to usurp the people's legitimate right to elect their own representatives to bodies of local government." That said, skeptics within USAID are wondering how their colleagues can justify financing the ICP.

Shaping Iraq's secular culture also is high on the ICP agenda. "The party is also helping with efforts to revive and support various cultural activities, sponsoring theatre, art and folk groups, especially young talents," according to Comrade Ali. "In the current circumstances, under the existing climate of freedom, the Iraqi political forces, including our Party, are in almost unanimous agreement that violent means are not the most appropriate and effective," the party Central Committee said in its October letter, "as long as peaceful means have not been exhausted."

The Iraqi Communist Party says it is depending on the international antiwar movement — the same movement that tried to save Saddam Hussein — to protest for the U.S. and the Coalition to get out of Iraq. Says Comrade Ali, "Active solidarity by peace movements all over the world is therefore of great importance."

J. MICHAEL WALLER IS A SENIOR WRITER FOR *Insight* MAGAZINE.