

## **VISIT OF STRUAN STEVENSON, MEP TO JORDAN**

### **Accompanied By Dan Dalton – Adviser, ECR Group**

#### **Purpose of the visit**

The purpose of the visit was to meet with various political personalities involved in the political process in Iraq in order to gain a greater understanding of the current situation. In addition, we also planned to meet with key political personalities within the Jordanian government. The main focus was on the upcoming elections and the security situation in Iraq however as there was political unrest in the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem on the day of our arrival, the current situation in the Palestinian territories was also of key importance in all our meetings with representatives of the Jordanian government.

#### **Monday 26<sup>th</sup> October 2009, Amman, Jordan**

##### **09.00 hrs Meeting with a group of Iraqis affiliated with National Dialogue front (a secular parliamentary group),**

Iraqis whom I met believed that the bomb outrage on Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> October, which had killed 150 people and wounded 500 outside the Ministry of Justice, near the Green Zone, was certainly politically motivated and a reaction to the formation of these coalitions. Although quickly blamed on the Sunni insurgents, such a sophisticated device could only have been smuggled into this high security zone with the knowledge and connivance of the Qods force (Iranian) who roam throughout Baghdad with impunity. The massacre was almost certainly motivated by Iran and aimed at sending a warning to Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki that he should rejoin the Hakim, 9 Badr, Sadr – pro-Iranian Shiite coalition in order to secure power again following the election, with the Vice President of Hakem FACTION – Abdel Mehdi – candidate for Prime Minister.

Following the bombing, the date for registering coalitions had been extended for another 3 days and the election law had not yet been promulgated.

The group thought a closed list system was likely for the elections despite Ayatollah Sistani calling for an open list. They said the EU should push strongly for an open list system and send monitoring teams to cover the elections. They also noted that the Sunnis and the Kurds together provide an electoral balance with the Shiites and also predicted an escalation of problems when the US military leaves Iraq, possibly leading to another military dictatorship.

They added that current tactics by the pro-Iranian factions was to threaten people not to vote in the elections and through fear and intimidation, dramatically reduce the number who participate. This then leaves hundreds of thousands of blank ballot papers that can be falsified. Apparently all civil servants are being ordered to vote for the governing Shiite parties.

On the question of Iranian meddling in Iraq, they were adamant that Iranian infiltration to the very top of government has taken place to an unprecedented extent. Two of PM Al-Maliki's senior staff are Iranian. His private jet and the entire crew are supplied by Iran. They suggested that the border with Iran should be closed for one year while security services in Iraq root out the militants. This border and the border with Kurdistan should be guarded by a UN peace-keeping force. With no logistical support, he said, the pro-Iranian political factions would quickly dissolve.

They also pointed out that many current government ministers in Iraq have dual nationality with other countries, in order that if any are accused of corruption they can quickly escape arrest and flee from Iraq.

I mentioned a possible invitation to the leaders of all the main political factions to come to Brussels and wondered if the pro-Iranian parties would accept the invitation. Both thought it was highly likely that the Hakem faction would attend, partly because they are not all radical Islamists. Some are independently-minded. They also pointed out that the Henry Jackson Society is holding a key conference on 'New Iraq' in London on 27 and 28 November, at which many of these faction leaders will be present. They thought someone from the EU should also attend.

**11.00 hrs. Meeting with the Acting Foreign Minister Dr Nabil El-Sharif – Minister of State for Media Affairs and Communications and Ahmad S. Al-Hassan, Director of European Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.**

Dr Sharif explained that the Foreign Affairs Minister – Nasser Judah – had been called to an urgent meeting with the UK Foreign Minister David Milliband in London and sent his apologies. He started by saying that the Jordanian Ambassador to the EU – Ahmad Masa'deh, was a fine candidate for Secretary General of the new Mediterranean Union. He also said that Jordan was looking for advanced status in its relationship with the EU.

On regional issues, the Acting Foreign Minister said that the provocative actions of the Israelis at the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem gave Jordan great cause for concern. Jordan, by Treaty, is the guardian of the Al Aqsa Mosque on the dome of the rock in Jerusalem. Indeed the father of King Abdullah – King Hussein – had spent \$8 million of his personal funds restoring the golden dome. For Jewish extremists now to threaten to close the mosque to Muslim worshippers was highly provocative and could cause widespread unrest. Taken together with the Israel policy of preventing the expansion of Arab homes and uprooting the Arab population of East Jerusalem, this was totally unacceptable. Jerusalem is an occupied land and is subject to binding resolutions.

We need to press for the implementation of the 2002 Beirut initiative, backed by 57 Muslim States and the 2-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian question. It was astonishing that the Arab nations had agreed to the Beirut plan but now it had lain on the table for 8 years with no movement from Israel and no pressure on them from the US. We need to re-launch negotiations and get results. There is no time to be wasted on any further 'processes'. The new approach by Obama is encouraging but the US administration needs to be more engaged. Peace is in everyone's interest. Extremism will continue to flourish until the Palestinian question resolved.

Jerusalem is a "red line." All occupied land must be returned. King Abdullah said that in the beginning the negotiations were marked by "hopes and dreams" but now it is a "cold peace" which has taken its place.

Dr Sharif said that Jordan has gone out of its way to support Iraq. King Abdullah is the only Arab leader so far to have visited Iraq since the war. He felt the overall Arab commitment to support Iraq was maybe not strong enough. Jordan is the gateway to Iraq and is gradually rebuilding trade so that Iraq will soon become the main economic trading partner once more.

As far as the forthcoming Iraqi elections are concerned Dr Sharif said that it was essential that all of the political factions were included in the political process. No-one must feel left out. The elections could be a crucial turning point. In answer to my question about Iranian meddling, he said that Jordan stood firmly against any interference in the internal affairs of Iraq by any outside source or nation. He was appalled at the bomb outrage yesterday and confirmed that King Abdullah had phoned President Talabani to offer his condolences.

On the nuclear enrichment issue in Iran, he hoped that dialogue between the US and Iran would succeed as "dialogue is the only

way to resolve this issue.” But he emphasised that all the parties must be transparent. Tougher sanctions need to be carefully assessed if we reach that point.

On the situation following US-withdrawal from Iraq, he was confident that the country will stabilise if the political process is successful. No occupation can last forever, he said. The question of any UN presence in Iraq following the US military withdrawal must be a question for the Iraqi government.

On Ashraf, I outlined the attack in July, the deaths and injuries and the 36 hostages who were freed after almost succumbing to a dry-hunger strike. I said there is a new threat now to displace the 3400 refugees to the desert in southern Iraq and that this will create the conditions for another massacre. I outlined the EU’s concerns and the April resolution I Strasbourg. Dr Sharif said that his staff were taking careful note of these points and he would look into the matter before outlining the Jordanian position. Mr Hassan suggested that perhaps I could resolve the situation by offering all 3400 PMOI refugees visas to come to live in Scotland!

On the general refugee situation in Jordan, Dr Sharif said that the half million Iraqi refugees were regarded as Jordan’s guests. They are our brothers in distress, he said. We educate and give them health care to the best of our ability. They are a considerable strain on our budget, but help has come from the international community. It is a humanitarian situation. These are people in need but Jordan needs more help from the international community. Once things settle down, we hope that many of these Iraqi ‘guests’ will return to their own country.

**12.30 hrs Meeting with the Speaker of the House of Representatives Abdel Hadi Al-Majali, together with the Chairman of the Jordanian Parliamentary Association of Friendship with the European Parliament – Dr Mohamed Al Badri. Also present Dr Mohammad Al-Haj, MP.**

The Speaker was convinced that everyone was now focusing on Iran as a means of deflecting attention from the worsening situation in Israel. The new Israeli government under Netanyahu is violating our rights, he said. Jordan is trying to advocate peace and yet Israel continues to violate our attempts to secure peace.

We offered Israel all of the rights it requires under the Beirut initiative but this has been rejected, or at least negotiations have gone nowhere. The west punished Iraq for perceived violations. You are calling for Iran to be similarly punished. Why not punish Israel? There is no level playing field and this leads to a general view in the Arab world that the West favours Israel and only picks on the Arab countries. There is no justice. Israel should not be allowed to demand more land from the Arabs.

The Speaker was of the opinion that Iran is not interested in Israel. Their interest is in Persian domination of the Middle East. He felt that there was "a secret relationship between Iran and the US." Iran has been protecting the US in Afghanistan, he said.

The key to peace in the Middle East is the resolution of the Palestinian question. The Arab nations in Beirut offered the solution. Accepting Israel as a state was an astonishing breakthrough. Why has this solution been ignored?

On Iraq, the Speaker said a new, moderate, nationalist coalition could outvote and isolate the extremist parties. But he said it was the US who is supporting the pro-Iranian parties in Iraq. He said that if the "militia" win the forthcoming elections, it will point to a dangerous future. He felt that a Sunni could conceivably become the next Prime Minister of Iraq and that this would help to bring peace. He said we need to bring back the Baathist army officers and disarm the civilian population. He felt that there was some pressure from Iran on Iraq not to trade with Jordan. He also was adamant that an independent Kurdish state would never be

accepted. A federal solution might be accepted, but never independence.

**15.00 hrs. Meeting with Patrick B. Renauld, EU Ambassador and Head of Delegation in Jordan, together with Sarah Barnat, Operational Section Attaché with responsibility for Iraq.** Mr Renauld said that the EU had invested Euro 1 billion in Iraq since 2003, but now a bi-lateral approach has replaced the former multi-lateral approach. The EU is moving away from big cash contributions to smaller Euro 25 million per annum, contributions. This is mostly for capacity building, multi-annual planning and is based on good governance criteria

He also said that the EU had contributed Euro 84 million to the election process in Iraq since 2004, mostly through IHEC, the Iraqi High Election Commission. Sarah Barnat said that it was almost certain that there would be an election observation team from the EU that she was working on. However, she said security was now much worse following yesterday's bomb outrage and that the EC office in Jordan always relied on the UK Ambassador in Iraq to provide security for visiting Europeans. She felt that it was not a good idea for the bureau of the EP Iraqi Delegation to go to Baghdad in January as a quasi election observation team. Either we should wait until the dust settles and visit Iraq after the election, or we should join up with the proper election observation team that she was putting together.

Patrick Renauld said that there are two separate populations in Jordan – East Bankers and Palestinians. Currently 65% of the population of Jordan are Palestinian. If the West Bank comes back to Jordan, that figure will rise to 90%. This is worrying for some and potentially de-stabilising for the monarchy. This why the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the other Jordanian political leaders want to be seen to be strong, pro-Palestinian and pro-Arab. The Al-Aqsa mosque is a necessary distraction...a handy vehicle for them to display their anti-Israel and pro-

Palestinian fervour. King Abdullah and his father before him built their credibility on two key elements: the protection of the tribes and Jerusalem. The current situation in Jordan is highly unstable. While the country benefited at first from the influx of wealthy Iraqis, it cannot stand any further economic shocks. Jordan needs a new era of regional economic co-operation involving three key sectors: energy, transport and water/environment.

Jordan needs the EU and the EU needs Jordan. We need a common sectoral policy. The European Parliament needs to support the EC initiative on Jordan.

**16.30 hrs. Meeting with Mr Sattar Albayber, member of the political bureau of the Iraqi National Accord movement, Iraqi National List Candidate in election of Council of Representatives, Deputy Minister of Civil Society during government of Prime Minister Ayad Alawi and currently CEO of Iraqi Development and Human Rights Commission. Also present Mr Zayad Alnaqeeb.**

Mr Albayber said the bomb outrage yesterday may delay the Iraqi election, but for no more than 2 weeks, but only parliament can decide on the promulgation of the election law, not the IHEC.

He explained that the coalition talks were indicating the appearance of three distinct factions: (1) Pro Iran, (2) Kurds and (3) Nationalist. He emphasised that Iraq needs a real liberal, secular government if there is to be an end to the insurgency and eventual peace and economic growth and stability. He said that the Iraqi military are not capable of taking over security when the US departs.

Mr Albayber made the following recommendations:

1/ The EU must encourage an open list of candidates for each party in each region.



2/ The EU should support the opening of voting centres in countries like the United Arab Emirates, Libya, Yemen and Egypt, where millions of Iraqis reside as refugees from the conflict in their own homeland. At the last elections there were 14 voting centres opened worldwide, but in the Middle East these were only in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. There are 600,000 Iraqis in Syria alone and these are poor people who will certainly return to Iraq when it is safe to do so, so they have a right to determine the political future of their country.

3/ The Iraq Delegation should certainly meet political leaders from all the factions in Brussels before the elections in January

4/ An election observer team is essential to prevent widespread cheating. At the last election, six trucks filled with forged ballot papers were seized on the border, crossing from Iran into Iraq! In addition, 13 anti-Iran politicians were assassinated during the last election campaign.

5/ The Iraqi military must remain independent and stop pressurising citizens and political parties.

**18.00 hrs Meeting with James Watt, British Ambassador to Jordan.** Mr Watt was highly critical of US foreign policy under President Obama, stating that the Americans were doing nothing in the Middle East. They have it within their power to bring great pressure to bear on Israel, but Obama seems content to do nothing. Mr Watt was careful, however, to praise UK foreign policy, stating that Gordon Brown and David Milliband had given a clear lead on the Middle East and the Iranian nuclear enrichment issue

Mr Watt was aghast at the idea of anyone from the European Parliament visiting Baghdad in January. He said that after yesterday's bombing the security situation was ten times worse. He said British military personnel could provide some security for

EU visitors, but only from the airport to the Green Zone and this was by no means a guarantee of safety. However, there was absolutely no way any MEPs could go outside the Green Zone, where they would become instant targets. He said that in addition to British military protection, the British Embassy always uses private security companies for additional protection, but that these are extremely expensive. He said that any visit even to the Green Zone, which he strongly advised against, must be seen as purely symbolic, with no attempt to go outside that zone.

**Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> October, 2009, Aqaba, Jordan.**

**11.00hrs. I attended a series of meetings organised by Dr Mohamed Al Badri, (Chairman of the Jordanian Parliamentary Association of Friendship with the European Parliament) and MP for Aqaba.**

**1/ Mr Arch. Husni Abu Gheida, Chief Commissioner for the Special Economic Zone Authority of Aqaba.** The Chief Commissioner said that although they had planned an initial investment package totalling \$6 bb in Aqaba, there had now been investment of over \$18 bn. It was a runaway success. Jordan only has 27 km of coastline, so this development is of crucial importance.

There are several key elements involved in the development of Aqaba. Firstly the international airport which is only 15 minutes from the city centre and is open 24/7 with an open sky policy.

Secondly the tax free zone, which means factories can manufacture goods and sell them in to Jordan or ship them worldwide through the port or airport, with only 5% tax levied on all income generated from activities inside the economic zone. Duty free import of commercial quantities of goods is also enabled.

Thirdly, the development of tourism. Over 500,000 tourists visited Aqaba last year with charter flights from 12 EU countries alone. Also many cruise ships dock in Aqaba for one or two days to bus visitors to Petra and Wadi Rum. They are planning to build an additional 3000 hotel rooms and with artificial lagoons and artificial beaches, extend the coastline for tourist purposes.

### **Dr Zaid Zregat – Governor of Aqaba**

The Governor said that the current population of Aqaba of 110,000 would rise to 250,000 in the next 10 years. However, he said that Aqaba is in a difficult geographical position and any further instability in the region could hinder development. He said that the port was key to the reconstruction of Iraq, with much of the building material and required goods coming through Aqaba or Kuwait. He urged the Obama administration to do more to put pressure on Israel to agree to the two state solution to the Palestinian question.

### **Dr Mozfi Amyan, Dean of Aqaba University College**

Dr Amyan explained that a new university was in the process of being built which will triple the number of students he can cater for. The college offers 4 year courses in hotel management, nursing, catering etc.

### **Eng. Imad N. Fakhoury, CEO, Ms Oula F. Ayyoub, Executive Investor Relations & Marketing and Neil Carruthers, Project Director – Aqaba Development Corporation.**

The slogan of ADC is to “Turn Sand into Gold” and this certainly seems likely with the massive inward investment and development that they now control. They are wholly owned by the Jordanian Government who are the owners of all the development land, including the existing airport and port. They plan to move the port some distance outside the city so that its present location can

be developed for tourism. They have a huge container facility under construction and said that most of the world food programme aid for Iraq comes through the port, which acts as a bridge from North Africa to West Asia.

### **Conclusions and Set of recommendations**

The set of meetings provided a very useful introduction to the very complex set of issues that currently affect both Iraq and Jordan. Although overshadowed by both the troubles around the Al-Aqsa mosque and the bomb outrage in Baghdad, the meetings did enable us to gain an initial understanding of how the EU can take measures which can make the election process in Iraq more open, more transparent and fairer.

Many recommendations we were given in some meetings were contradicted in subsequent meetings however following these meetings we would propose the following proposals for future EU action in Iraq.

1) We welcome the adoption of open party lists for the Iraqi elections next year. This was an issue raised repeatedly in our discussions. Closed lists in the Iraq context provide no opportunity for people to vote out politicians perceived as corrupt and lack transparency. However, the newly passed Election Law only foresees 5 parliamentary seats for the millions of expatriate and refugee Iraqis who live outside the country. It only requires 50,000 Iraqis to elect a member of parliament inside Iraq. The EU should ask for a review of this article to enable the expatriate Iraqi community to have fair and equal representation.

2) The Iraq Delegation of the European parliament should invite the leaders of the political parties in Iraq, or at least their representatives, to Brussels to address the Delegation.

3) The Iraq Delegation of the European Parliament should invite the Head of the EC office in Baghdad to brief the delegation at any time he is in Brussels.

4) We welcome the possibility of providing election centres in Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria and the United Arab Emirates. Many Iraqis have fled the violence in their country and are living in other countries in the Arab world. The opening of election centres would allow these Iraqi citizens to vote without having to return to Iraq. The newly approved Election Law foresees the opening of voting centres in any countries with more than 20,000 Iraqis in the community.

However, there are significant questions with regards to the cost of operating such centres and to the security of ballots cast in these countries. It would provide an extra opportunity for vote rigging. The EU should examine the possibility of helping to run and monitor these election during the election.

5) The EU should send a representative from the Iraq Delegation in the European parliament to the conference on 'New Iraq' being hosted by the Henry Jackson Society in London on the 27th and 28th November.

6) The EU should encourage an election observation team to go to Iraq during the elections themselves. There our significant security concerns to be overcome with regards to organising such a team however if it is remotely possible within the existing security environment, the European Union should engage in such a mission, even if the team is small and its scope severely limited.

7) Further research should be done into the possibility of the Iraq delegation from the European Parliament visiting Iraq during 2010. The general consensus appeared to suggest that a visit of the Bureau of the Delegation during or before the elections would not

be viable given the fact that security could not be guaranteed and that MEPs would be a target.

It was also made very clear that any visit around election time could only be made to the Green Zone in Baghdad and would be purely symbolic in nature.

However there are possibilities for a visit towards the end of next year depending on the security situation following the elections. In addition the North of Iraq remains relatively calm and stable with regular flights from the EU into the northern city of Erbil and indeed President Brani of Kurdistan, on his recent visit to Brussels, extended a warm welcome to members of the Iraq Delegation to visit Kurdistan.

There is therefore the possibility of a delegation visit to the Kurdish areas of Iraq if the security situation there remains good and if there is support from the local political leaders. This possibility can be investigated although there would be political repercussions if the delegation only visited the Kurdish areas of Iraq.

Alternatively, there is the continued possibility of the delegation meeting with senior Iraqi figures in neighbouring countries outside of Iraq. Amman in Jordan is the 'gateway to Iraq' and is therefore one possibility along with the United Arab Emirates.

8) With regards to Jordan, it is important that the Jordanian regime is able to withstand the significant pressures that it is under, emanating from its difficult geographical position between Israel and Iraq. It has taken in many Iraqi refugees and still is an oasis of relative calm in the Middle East. Therefore the candidature of Ahmad Masa'deh, as the Secretary General of the new Mediterranean Union should be supported.

9) In addition, the EU should look at the possibility of enhancing its status with Jordan. A stable Jordan with Iraq as its biggest trading partner will have a significant impact on the stable development of Iraq.

10) The EU should press for a resumption of negotiations on the 2002 Beirut Initiative. The offer from 57 Muslim states to recognise Israel and a 2-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian question is significant. The stability of Jordan can be better guaranteed with a return to the negotiating table. It is the one issue which fundamentally undermines the legitimacy of the Jordanian government.