

Terror Tornado: Shi'as under attack in Iraq

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“Iraq is an emerging regional power that will play a significant role in Iran's political evolution, particularly as Iraq's parliamentary democracy and quietist Shia tradition are a standing challenge to the legitimacy of the Iranian theocracy.” – Douglas A. Ollivant, Senior National Security Fellow, New America Foundation.¹

A new wave of deadly terrorist bombings in Iraq, mainly targeting Shi'as, has resulted in a civilian death toll of over 700 with over 1600 injured in the month of April, 2013.² This follows 229 deaths in March, 418 in February and 319 in January of 2013³ for a total of over 1600 killed in armed violence in Iraq up to May. So far in May, the death toll exceeds 250.⁴

On Monday, May 20, deadly bomb attacks in Iraq took the lives of more than 70 Shi'a Muslims. Serial terrorist acts were executed from Basra in the south, where 2 car bombs and a blast inside a bus terminal took the lives of 14, to Balad, some 80 km north of Baghdad, where a parked car detonated next to a bus carrying Shi'a pilgrims from Iran, killing 12. Other car bombings took the lives of at least 30 Iraqis in predominantly Shi'a districts of Baghdad.⁵

On the same day, a monster tornado struck outside Oklahoma City in the south central U.S. state of Oklahoma killing over 20.⁶ The event received round-the-clock television coverage on all U.S. networks, but there was no similar coverage for the victims of the U.S.-induced terror tornado that struck in Iraq. Some Iraqis have even suspected that the U.S. was behind the recent surge of bomb attacks;⁷ others accuse the U.S. of deliberately inciting the violence as part of a plan to divide the country into three regions.⁸

In response to the wave of lethal assaults, primarily targeting Shi'a Iraqis, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq called “for Iraqis to embrace diversity.”⁹ Before the illegal U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq in March of 2003, Iraq society had embraced diversity. There was relative harmony between Iraqi Shi'as and Sunnis, and the kind of atrocities witnessed today simply did not occur. Shireen Hunter, a visiting professor and lecturer in political science at Georgetown University from Tabriz, Iran writes:

“Clearly, differences between the Sunnis and Shias, which began immediately following the Prophet Muhammad's death, concerning his legitimate successor, are real and cannot be denied. However, historically, ordinary Sunnis and Shias have lived peacefully, even if not closely, together.”¹⁰

Driving home the point, Professor Hunter adds, “In South Asia, where there are also substantial Shia minorities, until the last decade or so there was no history of any large-scale Sunni-Shia conflict.”¹¹ So what transformed Shi'a-Sunni peaceful coexistence into a tornado of terrorism? Having primarily lived as minorities in majority Sunni Muslim countries and hence, not having an equal political voice in governments, Shi'as began their quest for equality in Lebanon in the 1960s under the leadership of Ayatollah Musa Sadr. This movement became radicalized as a

result of the Zionist invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and the subsequent years of civil war,¹² analogous to what has happened to Shi'a movements in Iraq following the U.S. invasion in 2003.

In conflict with Mr. Ollivant's above claims of a "quietist" Shi'a tradition in Iraq, Ayatollah Mohammed Sadiq Al-Sadr, cousin and student of Ayatollah Mohammed Baqir Al-Sadr, himself a resolute opponent of the Ba'ath party who was martyred by Saddam's henchmen in 1980, strongly advocated for Shi'a leaders to openly oppose the dictator's oppressive regime.¹³ Anything but a "quietist," he denounced the U.S. because of the devastation caused by its economic sanctions, and confronted Saddam's regime with increasing intensity from about 1997.¹⁴ A primary force behind the development of the powerful Sadr movement, now under the leadership of sole remaining son Muqtada Al-Sadr, Ayatollah Mohammed Sadiq was martyred by Saddam in 1999 in Najaf along with his other two sons, Mustafa and Muammal.¹⁵

The Sadrs, with their zealotry for Shi'a Islam and open opposition to the Ba'athist regime, were the direct opposites of the more "quietist" approaches of Ayatollah Sistani and Ayatollah Al-Khoei.¹⁶ However, U.S. authorities appear to have been taken by surprise that even these latter "quietist" clerics would not stand for a secular "democracy" imposed by the architects of the Iraq occupation; rather, they wanted to see free elections for all Iraqis.¹⁷ In fact, the party that won the largest number of seats in the 2005 Iraqi national assembly elections was the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) formed under the tutelage of "quietist" Ayatollah Sistani.¹⁸

In another short-sighted move after the U.S. invasion in 2003, Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) head Paul Bremer instituted a "de-Ba'athification" plan which, because top posts in Saddam's regime had been held mostly by Sunnis, was viewed as "de-Sunnification."¹⁹ Perhaps intentionally creating an insurgency, Bremer dissolved the Ba'ath Party and the Iraqi Army, which immediately caused hostility by placing 300,000 armed young men out of work, cut pensions of tens of thousands of ex-army officers, and furloughed over 30,000 experienced government administrators.²⁰ Then, by applying a carefully-crafted formula based on religion and ethnicity for the selection of new appointees to replace the Ba'athists, Bremer, instead of achieving the desired "secular" mix, institutionalized the sectarian strife that eventually spiraled into a full-fledged civil war.²¹ Further fragmenting the fabric of Iraqi society, U.S. authorities constructed concrete walls between predominantly Sunni and Shi'a neighborhoods under the guise of preventing sectarian violence.²²

The U.S. has been instrumental in fostering the internecine violence in Iraq and elsewhere since this fits into the West's overall regional strategy of attempting to isolate Iran, as Professor Hunter explains, "On a broader scale, the latest intensification of sectarian tension throughout the Muslim world reflects the Western strategy of instrumentalizing sectarian differences to forge a regional alliance against Iran."²³ ExxonMobil also managed to capitalize on the U.S. ethno-sectarian division in Iraq when it signed an oil deal with the regional Kurdish government in Kirkuk without the approval of the central government in Baghdad.²⁴ This, too, should come as no surprise, as Tariq Ali writes:

"Did anybody apart from outright apologists seriously believe that the aim of the occupation was democracy? Surely it's well known that oil and democracy don't mix. The record of the west on this is perfectly clear. Where there is oil it's better to deal with a compliant autocracy and if

democracy threatens Western control of the oil then it is the elected leader who must go. It happened in Iran in 1953 and failed in Venezuela in April 2002.”²⁵

However, Nuri Al-Maliki has remained steadfast in keeping Iraq out of the U.S.-backed Saudi/Qatari/Turkish/Zionist attempt to overthrow the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad. Washington even sent Secretary of State John Kerry to convince the Prime Minister to change his ways back in March but without success.²⁶ With terrorist attacks in Iraq on the upswing, no doubt at least in part due to U.S.-backed Salafi insurgents crossing over from Syria and precipitating a renewal of Al-Qaida of Iraq (AQI), it is understandable that Al-Maliki would not want to side with the U.S. against Syria, and hence would feel Iraq’s interests are more closely aligned with those of Iran.²⁷ Unfortunately, this disagreement over policy towards Syria brings the U.S.-installed Iraqi government into direct conflict with its Washington benefactor and former master.

Despite the horrific toll of human lives lost in Iraq and Syria, the U.S. and their Wahhabi- Zionist allies continue relentlessly their ruthless campaign to inflame ethno-sectarian differences in Syria, Iraq and throughout the Middle East with the ultimate goal of targeting Iran. Condemning those who perpetrate bloodshed in the name of Islam, Dr. John Andrew Morrow writes, “Islam, it must always be remembered, categorically condemns the killing of non-combatants. Militants who murder civilians act in opposition of the ideology they claim to defend.”²⁸

Endnotes

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⁹ “United Nations calls for Iraqis to embrace diversity,” United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, 21 May 2013, accessed 22 May 2013, <http://unami.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=2790&ctl=Details&mid=5079&ItemID=1473725&language=en-US>.

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¹¹ Shireen Hunter, “Sunni – Shia Tensions Are More About Politics, Power and Privilege than Theology,” *ibid.*

¹² Shireen Hunter, “Sunni – Shia Tensions Are More About Politics, Power and Privilege than Theology,” *ibid.*

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- ¹⁴ Patrick Cogburn, *ibid.*, 88.
- ¹⁵ Patrick Cogburn, *ibid.*, 96.
- ¹⁶ Patrick Cogburn, *ibid.*, 92.
- ¹⁷ Patrick Cogburn, *ibid.*, 140.
- ¹⁸ Adeed Dawisha, *Iraq: A Political History from Independence to Occupation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 284.
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