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## Iraq's Death Squads: A Tool of the Occupation

By Ghali Hassan\*

On November 14, 2006 militias and death squads dressed as police commandos kidnapped up to 150 staff and visitors in broad daylight raid – one of daily raids throughout Iraq – on the Higher Education Ministry annexe in central Baghdad. Although some hostages have been released, the fate of others is unknown. It is alleged that large number of the hostages have been tortured and others were murdered. The totality of the raids, kidnapping, torture, ongoing civilian massacres and murder were part of the illegal and racist war of aggression perpetrated by the U.S. and Britain against a defenceless nation in disregard of International Law and contempt for International institutions.

Let me stating the obvious. The U.S. did not invaded Iraq to establish "democracy" and "free Iraqis". The U.S. invaded and destroyed Iraq in order to humiliate and divide Muslims – Arabs in particular –, protect Israel's Zionist expansion and control Iraq's natural wealth. So, the U.S.-imposed democracy by force is fraud. 'Democracy is like a plant; it grows from bottom up, not from top down'. The U.S. sabotage of democracy in Palestine and U.S. support for Israel's criminal destruction of Lebanon are just two current examples of U.S. love for democracy. Also the idea that the U.S. and its allies are in Iraq to stabilise the situation is a falsehood. Destabilisation was one of the aims of U.S. foreign policy. The unprovoked war of aggression and the continuing U.S. presence in Iraq, including the illegal building of U.S. military bases and the largest C.I.A. station in the world on Iraqi soil, are major destabilising factors. The U.S. objectives have always been to weaken Iraq, divide the people and control Iraq behind a façade of corrupt stooges, with poorly trained and poorly armed army and police.

Long before the invasion, the U.S. and its allies were involved in the training and arming of tens of thousands of militias and anti-Iraq collaborators. The most conspicuous of these militia groups are: 1. The Iraqi National Congress (INC) led by the indicted conman Ahmed Chalabi. 2. The Iraqi National Accord (INA) led by Iyad Allawi, the U.S./Britain most preferred 'strongman' because of his criminal past. Both groups constitute of Iraqi expatriates (including ex-Ba'athists), trained and armed by the U.S. and Britain. 3. The Badr Brigade, the armed wing of the Da'awa/SCIRI religious 'parties' led by Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, Ibrahim al-Jaafari and Nuri al-Maliki. This group constitutes of thousands of Iraqi expatriates and illegal Iranian immigrants expelled from Iraq in 1980s. The group trained and heavily armed by Iran and the U.S. 4. The Kurdish militia (the Peshmerga) led by opportunist warlords were trained and armed by the U.S. and Israel. All four groups were involved in acts of terrorism and took arms against the Iraqi State. With U.S. blessing and guns, they have replaced the disbanded Iraqi military and police force.

There is also the Sadr movement (known as the Mehdi Army), the anti-Occupation movement led by Muqtada al-Sadr. The movement bears the brunt of Western media attacks, including demonisation and accusations of crimes. U.S. forces and U.S. collaborators in different parts of Iraq have targeted the movement with deadly attacks. The recent car and mortar attacks on Sadr City, which took the lives of more than 200 civilians and injured many more were coordinated – as always – with U.S. forces. The movement's involvement in crimes against Iraqi civilians remains unproven. It is also unknown how much influence does al-Sadr exerts on the many units of the Mehdi Army. However, al-Sadr has yet to publicly denounce those who work

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against the interests of all Iraqis, including the puppet government.

During the invasion of Iraq, the four groups of trained militia were piggybacked into Iraq by the invading forces to provide support and to terrorise the civilian population. The Badr Brigade armed with tanks and personal carriers, invaded Iraq from Iran to assist the invading U.S./British forces in the invasion. The Kurdish militia attacked Iraqi forces stationed in the Northern provinces. Without exception, the four groups participated in the pillaging and looting of the Iraqi State and Iraq's wealth, including Iraqi cultural heritage under the radar screen of the invading forces. Today, the leaders of the militias form about two-thirds of the U.S.-imposed Iraqi puppet government, and exert significant influence on the newly U.S.-created Iraqi army and security force, including the Ministry of Interior.

Since the invasion, each militia group has mutated into several groups of death squads and criminal gangs such as; the Wolf Brigade, the Karar Brigade, the Falcon Brigade, the Amarah Brigade, the Muthana Brigade, the Defenders of Kadhimiya, and the special police commandos. They are armed and financed by the U.S. and its allies, and fully integrated into the Occupation. Each group is carefully used by the occupying forces for terrorising the Iraqi civilian population in a campaign designed to erode the civilian population's support for the Iraqi Resistance against the Occupation. U.S. military sources have openly admitted that the population, where support for the Resistance is high, "is paying no price for the support it is giving to the [Resistance] ... We have to change that equation", (Newsweek, 14 January 2004). In other words, Iraqis civilians are deliberately targeted for rejecting the Occupation.

In his *Let a Thousand Militias Bloom*, Arun Gupta writes that 'the U.S. government is not only aware of these illegal militias but is arming, training and funding them for use in their counter-insurgency operations'. According to Greg Jaffe of the Wall Street Journal, the "special police commandos" – is being used throughout Iraq and has been conducting criminal assassinations known as the "Salvador option" with the full knowledge of U.S. forces. "Pound for pound, though, they are the toughest force we've got", Col. Dean Franklin, a senior officer in Gen. David Petraeus's command told Greg Jaffe (WSJ, February 16, 2005). The occupying forces have also succeeded in turning one militia group against the other using the civilian population as a fodder. "And it's all happening under the eyes of US commanders, who seem unwilling or unable to intervene", revealed Deborah Davies in a special Channel 4 investigation, 'Iraq's Death Squads'.

To destroy Iraq as an independent nation, the U.S. initiated the criminal campaign of "De-Ba'athification", which implied the liquidation of anyone associated with the Ba'ath Party as well as anyone with anti-Occupation nationalist views. "De-Ba'athification" is simply a murderous campaign for inciting violence and destroying the Iraqi society. Together with the Israeli Mossad, U.S. Special Forces, the pro-Occupation militias and death squads have embarked on deliberate campaign of assassinations and ethnic cleansing. Thousands of scientists, including more than 350 scientists specialized in nuclear science have been assassinated. Thousands of professors, prominent politicians, and medical doctors have been murdered in cold blood. The Ministry of Higher Education reported that at least 210 teachers have been murdered and some 3,700 have fled Iraq to neighbouring countries. According to the UN more than 3,000 Iraqis flee to Syria and Jordan every day to avoid being killed. More than 1.7 million Iraqis have fled the country.

The aim is to create a climate of terror and incite civil war among Iraqis in order to justify the ongoing Occupation of Iraq and the fraudulent "war on terror". The growing number of daily civilian massacres, rapes and torture of Iraqis by U.S. forces and their collaborators are deliberately ignored by the media, making Iraq the biggest hidden U.S. atrocity in the U.S. history of violence against defenceless people. It is also possible that the violence is created to provide a "safety net" for foreign troops' withdrawal and discredit the heroic struggle and Resistance against the Occupation

and deny Iraqis victory against the most violent and powerful war machine in history.

For example, in his lengthy article (Boston Review, 27 November 2006) Nir Rosen dwells on the significance of al-Sadr and rarely holds the U.S. accountable for the illegal and criminal destruction of Iraq and the murderous crimes against the Iraqi people. He writes: "The civil war was spreading. Violence between Sunnis and Shias [sic] took on a life of its own, operating outside the reaches of the occupation and its forces. Sectarian violence even extended to the American prisons in Iraq, and prisoners segregated themselves". How the violence operates "outside the reach of the occupation and its forces", and inside the U.S.-run prisons in Iraq"? Rosen provides no explanation. Similarly, Peter Beaumont of the London Observer (08 October 2006), called the Occupation "a brutal conflict" and replaced the illegal invasion with the phrase "American arrival" in Iraq, deliberately shielding the U.S. from any responsibility for the horrific crimes committed against the Iraqi people. According to Rosen, and Beaumont, the 'New Iraq' is occupied by "Iraqis fighting Iraqis", and that the more than 200,000 U.S. troops and foreign mercenaries are nowhere to be seen.

From the outset of the Occupation, the media continue to obfuscate reality on the ground in Iraq, misinform (see Max Fuller Crying Wolf) the public and divert public attention from the Occupation as the generator of the violence, and blame Iraqis themselves. Hence, Iraq is reconstructed according to Western media and pundits. The use of the phrase "sectarian violence" and the labels of "Sunnis" versus "Shi'ites" are invented to cover-up deliberate crimes against civilians, shield the occupying forces from any responsibility and portray the Occupation-generated violence as Iraqis killing Iraqis.

The U.S. policy of "let them kill each other" is an integral part of U.S. foreign policy carefully executed to serve U.S. imperialist interests. Hence, the comment of Senator Carl Levin, "We cannot save the Iraqis from themselves", designed to deflect any U.S. responsibility away from war crimes and misleadingly presenting the Occupation as the saviour of Iraqis. We know that the vast majority of Iraqis disagree and want the immediate end of the Occupation. More than 61 per cent of Iraqis approve of the Resistance attacks against the occupying forces. The U.S. and its allies bear full responsibility for the destruction of Iraq and for the death of more than 700,000 innocent Iraqi civilians.

Iraqis have gone many generations without fighting each other. Iraqi (males and females) worked studies and conducted their business in a safe environment. Regardless of their religious affiliations and ethnic backgrounds, the Iraqi people were living in peaceful environment despite the horror of the West-imposed genocidal sanctions. Why have they suddenly started fighting? Why all these crimes and bloodshed did not take place under the government of Saddam Hussein, even when his government was scrutinised by Western NGOs and human rights organisations? Today, these NGOs and human rights organisations have remained silent, preferring to use the fraudulent and farcical trial of Saddam to claim credibility of "defending" human rights. In less than four years, the U.S. and U.S.-trained and armed death squads and militias have destroyed Iraq beyond comprehension.

The immediate arrest of senior police commandos after the raid on the Higher Education Ministry annexes and the immediate release of some hostages shed light on the extent of U.S. complicity in the ongoing crimes against the Iraqi people. Therefore, the longer the U.S. forces stayed in Iraq, the more violence they generate. Only full and immediate withdrawal of U.S. forces and mercenaries will contribute to the end of violence and ongoing suffering of the Iraqi people.

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