

Death Squads in Iraq: Fanatic Militias Used in a Dirty war

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Okhwan Sinna wa Shi'a, hatha alwatan ma nbi'a (We are brothers, Sunnis and Shiites; we are not selling this homeland) This slogan was chanted by the Iraqis in Baghdad and other provinces days after the occupation in April 2003, denouncing any sectarian division in the Iraqi society, on every occasion. There was hope. Until very recently, in spite of all the killings, Iraqis were million per cent confident that there is NO sectarian sensitivity between the Shiite and the Sunnis.

Now, death on seemingly sectarian bases is the strongest reality in Iraq. Families are afraid to show up at the morgue or the hospitals to collect a killed son's body because of the armed militias who might be hiding in disguise around the corner. Heads of young men are rolling in the streets like watermelon, they were kidnapped near the morgue. In the first five months of 2006, directly after the elections which was supposed to stop the killing and establish (democracy) in Iraq once and for the coming four years, and the Samara Shrine explosions, the Baghdad morgue was receiving 35-50 daily, according to Dr. Qais Hassan, a director in the morgue (1).

Six thousands Baghdadis' bodies were brought to the central morgue in the last 5 months (for the first time in its history). In May alone the bodies were 1,398. according to the Ministry of Health, not including victims of explosions. It was the bloodiest month since the occupation.

In Basra, which was relatively calm until the last elections, more than one thousand were killed in the same period (not including May). In May the number exceeded the last few months together that prime minister Maliki had to impose martial laws on the city, it is said that a man is killed every hour in Basra, and in Anbar the assassination were so many, especially of prominent Sunni scholars, consolations were rejected, while the city was under siege for months, and Maliki announced on TV late May, that a big (security operation) is going to take place soon.

In Diyala (east of Baghdad), tens of mutilated bodies found in isolated areas are not news any more.

This week, a passenger bus was stopped by armed men; all the 25 children, old people and students on it were ordered out and were shot one by one. At the passport office in Baghdad, which usually begins receiving people at 9:00 am, long queues gather at 5:00 for three months now, those who arrive at 6:00 are sent back. Huge family exodus is expected

by July, when the summer holiday begins. Families are running away from the killings and threats letters, telling them to leave, or face death, and also from the unbearably bad conditions of daily life(2). It has become a very profitable trade for the passport office employees. They claim that they can not receive more than 30 files a day, making people pay \$500 to get a passport. Those who can not afford it, or do not have any where to go decide to stay and face their destiny. Some simply refuse to go "We can not just leave Iraq to the criminals, we have to resist. The only problem is our families", a man who already received two threats said.

So what happened? Is this the beginning of the civil war? If yes, why the so called sectarian killings, which actually began 3 years ago did not succeed in creating civil war then? Why now? Who is behind them? Who are the death squads after all? To begin with, it has become common knowledge, beyond any argument that the Interior Ministry and the Iraqi Army are involved in the death squad, whether the Iraqi ministers or the American authorities, admit it or not (3). There are tons of eye witnesses' testimonies, documents, evidences, films...

The type of killing now connected to the death squads began around early 2005, on the hands of the Iraqi police commandos. But some important points worth mentioning here: that the first Iraqi interim government was (elected) in January 2005 and was heavily Shiite (Jafari government), that around that time the talk of the Salvador option in Iraq was being heard (4), and that the police commandos were formed, mainly of Shiite militias, especially Badr (the armed branch of the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq) and the Mahdi Army (the Sadr Movement militia).

But does all this mean that the death squads are Shiite militias within the interior ministry forces? The answer is: NO, not exactly. I know that any Iraqi who has seen a death squads' operation (which is becoming a familiar day light phenomenon) would want to shoot me in the head for this answer; because a convoy of heavily armed men, masked, black-suited, in expensive modern cars and pick ups, calling Sunnis the worst of names, shooting in the air, calling for revenge, attacking individuals, shops, kidnapping people, beating them to death or shoving them in cars trunks, would not look like anything other than a sectarian militia. But this is only part of the story.

Throughout 2005, thousands of young Sunni men were arrested (officially) by the Iraqi police commandos (a major arrests operation in Baghdad was in May 2005, given the name of "Lightning", when hundreds were arrested). Weeks later, some of their bodies were found in different places of Baghdad, or Iraq, mainly to the east. The names of the Wolf Brigades, the Ra'ad (thunder), the Nimr (Tiger), the Karrar (Imam Ali), the Imam Hussien, the Scorpion; Al-Borkan (volcano)...became familiar names of police commandos brigades (Maghaweer). They are supposed to be counterinsurgency, intelligence based troops. They were created, trained, armed, and directed by the American intelligence officers who are well known for serving in central and South America where death squads were a major part of the political scene (5). The Maghaweer were so brutal, that one of the prominent Iraqi personalities, who publicly denounce the occupation, told us that the American prisons are more merciful than the Iraqi. Those detainees told stories of the kinds of torture they were exposed to in the Iraqi Interior Ministry prisons. In many ways, they were similar to the traces seen on the bodies found in the garbage or the sewage daily in Baghdad nowadays, connected to the death squads. Holes drilled in the head, feet, lungs... etc are trade marks (they were well-known in the Iranian prisons). Broken bones, smashed skulls, burnt or peeled skin, savage beatings, electric shocks, pulled out right eye, are familiar in both cases.

Abu Omar, an Iraqi engineer who spent 4 months of 2005 in Al-Nisoor and Al-Kadimiya notorious prisons, talked about pick ups leaving after midnight and coming back after few hours with tens of men, handcuffed and blindfolded. Abu Omar was one of tens of prisoners who appeared on a famous TV program, produced by the Interior Ministry. Badly tortured, those prisoners admit committing several acts of terrorism, but more important, publicly accusing well known Sunni scholars of immoral acts or of terrorism. Interestingly enough, Abu Omar was released immediately after accusing on TV one of those scholar Sheikhs of using the mosque to hide weapons; although Abu Omar's file was filled with all kinds of fabricated crimes that would execute him a hundred times, according to his judge, who released him. Later, especially after the Shiite coalition won the December 2005 elections, and after the Samarra Shrine explosion, the killings changed dramatically in number and in technique.

The worst were in the last week of February and in March. Thousands of Sunnis were slaughtered by black-suited militias using the police cars and weapons, hundreds of mosques were burnt, thousands men, women and children were kidnapped, mainly in Baghdad suburbs and areas of mixed sectarian communities. Crime gangs, some of them are again connected to the militias, were a big part of the whole chaos. Ali, a young Sunni from Doura was kidnapped in May, the gang asked for \$50.000 ransom. Ali was one of the luckiest. He was released after his family managed to collect and pay \$30.000. Ali told us how he was kidnapped, taken in a car trunk, driven for 1.30 hours in rural areas, and beaten. He heard the gang calling some body telling him "we got a Sunni dog", they were talking in a southern slang. It is well known that the Rashid ex-military barracks, the biggest in Iraq before the occupation, are now a shelter for criminal gangs. Mohammad, another young man from al-Madain (south east of Baghdad) was kidnapped and hidden there, he told us stories of kidnapped children and women kept by gangs there. A university student girl was brought one morning, he said. They called her the bitch, because she was not wearing the hijab. She kept on screaming until late in the afternoon that day, when she was finally "silenced".

Other crimes were also connected to these groups, white and children slavery, drugs trade and smuggling, according to Iraqi Human Rights organizations. While some kidnappings and killings are political, criminal or for sectarian revenge, many others were for obscure reasons. Medical doctors, university professors, businessmen, merchants, school teachers were also targeted. Hundreds of them are being assassinated. Some of them were Baathists, but many others were not.

The big question remains why the government is not doing anything about it. Actually, in Amara (south east of Iraq) and in Kut (east of Iraq) some armed men who were caught killing civilians and burning mosques were arrested by some police stations, but the American troops and some political parties intervened and released them. In Basra there was a big problem between the governor and the Shiite reference in Najaf because he accused the Shiite political parties in the Maliki government of sponsoring the assassinations and corruption (namely oil smuggling). Actually, Al-Fadhila party spokesman (Shiite) accused the prime minister, Maliki, of imposing martial law for political, not security, reasons e.g. to marginalize and control the political forces who oppose the Shiite Coalition government policies and parties. But the important fact here is: that the police commandos were mainly Shiite militias does not imply that they were always committing their brutal crimes for sectarian reasons. Actually, that was why they were used to commit those crimes, simply to instigate sectarian civil war.

It was the American Governor of Iraq, Bremer, who engineered the Shiite militias join the Iraqi security forces, according to article 91 of the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL) put by Bremer himself, to fight the (Sunni insurgency) by Iraqi hands. Death Squads in Iraq are units inside the security forces, whose members are not just religiously fanatic sectarian militias, by foreign intelligence: American, Israeli, Iranian or any other country. They are also Iraqis “educated” and trained outside Iraq, brought into Iraq before the occupation, and shortly after it. Their job is to instigate sectarian conflict leading to create a (federal) Iraq, e.g. a divided Iraq.

It is true that the hands are Iraqis, but the minds and the money are not. It is also true that some political sectarian militias are involved in the death squads, especially those who are connected to the Iranian project in Iraq. But it is interesting to notice how the mainstream media, and the Iraqi government keep on nurturing the idea that the sectarian killings are done by the Sunni insurgency, what they call the rogue units in the police, and the Mahdi Army.

The other militias who are involved in the sectarian killings and violence are set aside. But who are those Iraqis whose job is to instigate a civil war? Why? Many of us remember very well the few hundreds of military men who accompanied Chalabi (head of the National Congress party, well known for being the Pentagon man) into Iraq directly after the occupation. They were highly trained outside Iraq, many say in an isolated island in the Pacific, by American, Israeli, and south African officers. There are reports that some were trained in the Israel, Hungary and Poland.

Early after the occupation, there were few individual assassinations, mainly of Baathists, especially in Adhamiya, where the community still remembers a man called Mohammad Saddam. He was responsible for the arrest and killing of many Iraqi resistance members and advocates. There were some assassinations of Baathists and security individuals in Nassiriya too, where these troops were moved. There was strong reaction against their activities. The press talked then about the American authorities disarming the Chalabi militias.(6) They disappeared for a while.

But all the Iraqi families, whose houses were raided by the American troops, especially in 2003, remember masked men who speak Iraqi, accompanying the American troops in these raids. They were called informers. Maybe some were, but the way they quickly joined the occupation troops was curious. A member of these forces (they were called the Forces of Iraq Freedom) recently sent out a sheet of facts exposing the rule they were playing in assassinating Shiites and Sunnis to create sectarian problems. After explaining how they were brain washed and recruited, and trained before (and some after) the occupation, he said that these forces were infiltrated in the New Iraqi Army, the National Guards, the Iraqi police, the Maghaweer (police commandos), the Interior Intelligence and the Iraqi Special Forces. They are actually called the Iraqi Special Forces and their headquarters are in the Baghdadairport. They are not connected to any Iraqi security body, and are supervised by American and Israeli officers.

This man, who promised to expose his identity once the death squad’s leadership is arrested, said that they were attacking Sunnis “in uniforms, IDs, and police cars”, and they were attacking Shiites “in cars normally used by the Mujahideen”. He gave an example of the biggest operation they did which was the Kadhimiya bridge stampede last summer, in which more one thousand were killed. He gave a list of some members of these forces. Among the 67 names he gave, only 14 were Arabs, the rest were Kurds, mainly from Barzani

(president of Kurdistan's party). Two were Jews, and one Iranian.

Nothing in this paper was news to us, may be some of the details, but to come from a member of the death squads talking about the dirty war they are waging in Iraq is very important at this point, when many Iraqis begin to believe that this is a sectarian war. In some ways it is, and increasingly tribal too, especially after the Samara Shrine explosion, although in fact, there is a wide understanding that it was not the Salafists who did it, simply because Samara was under their control for months until last December, and they did not do it. In fact, the Iranian intelligence, or their Iraqi allies are accused of bombing the Shrine, just to unleash the sectarian violence through retaliatory attacks, which is what is happening the last 4 months.

When will the mainstream media give us this side of the story?

Notes

(1) -Dr. Qais said that the Baghdad morgue received 1068 bodies in January 2006, February, March, April (around four months). He said that more 90% of them were gun shot

(2) -Extremists distribute leaflets in Baghdad streets listing prohibited things: T shirts, shorts (for boys), female drivers, not covering the hair, make up, and jewelry... Girls are being pulled out of the school buses and beaten if they do not put the scarf. A student of chemistry in the Technological University was shaved bald. School buses drivers are being beaten or threatened if they allow (such) girls in the bus.

(3)-the Prime Minister, the Minister of Interior and the Vice president admitted publicly that some police troops were involved in the death squads.

(4)- Shortly before that, there are at least 2 cases (that we personally know about) of American soldiers in uniform killing Iraqis in an unfamiliar way, not shooting or bombing ...etc. They were slaughtering the victims by bayonets, or shooting them in the mouth.

(5)- It is also important to mention that some of the Maghaweer brigades were actually formed late in 2004. For detailed information on this point see: Max Fuller, For Iraq, the Salvador Option Become Reality, Center for Research on Globalization. See: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=viewArticle&code=FUL20051110&articleId=1230>

(6) It would be interesting to notice that Chalabi - and Allawi too- were curiously very quiet lately, almost silent, in the last 5 months when the big problem of the Interior and defense ministries was negotiated among the new Iraqi political players.

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