

Hawija: War Crimes, Iraqi Resistance and America's Weapons of Mass Destruction

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The parliamentary investigative committee in the Hawija massacre, that left more than 50 peaceful protesters dead, revealed on Tuesday 30 April that 90% of the victims of the Iraqi SWAT team raid were shot in the head, abdomen and chest. Some protesters were shot [while their hands were tied](#) behind their backs. [The report](#) affirms that the protest area was free of weapons. This confirms the claim made by the demonstration organizers, who assured the peaceful nature of the protest and vehemently [denied possessing weapons or inciting violence](#).

Chairman of the Iraqi Parliamentary Human Rights Commission, MP Salim Al-Jabouri, [revealed that](#) "senior Iraqi military officers" were involved in the Hawija army raid. He claimed that these officers had "issued kill orders" to soldiers. "The issue does not stop at an army raid, but it goes beyond this to include executions and murder; while some of the wounded were specifically targeted. This represents a crime against humanity," he added.

Minister of Industry & Minerals Ahmad Nasir Dilli al-Karbuli, Education Minister Muhammad Tamim, and Minister of Science & Technology Abd al-Karim al-Samarrai [resigned](#) as a reaction to the incidents.

"We are staying restrained so far, but if government forces keep targeting us, no one can know what will happen in the future, and things could spin out of control," said Abdul Aziz al-Faris, a tribal leader in Hawija.

A Western diplomat, who was not authorized to speak publicly and agreed to talk only on condition of anonymity, [said](#): "Bottom line, it looks like excessive force was used and a lot of unarmed people were killed. There were more people killed than there were arms".

The Global Forum for Islamic Parliamentarians (GFIP) expressed deep regret for the shocking massacre of Hawija town in Iraq. In a press statement on 24 April, the GFIP said: "The violent raid is a flagrant violation of the United Nations Charter and all international norms and conventions on human rights.

On 25 April, [ICRC staff](#) managed to reach the town of Hawija to assess the situation and deliver medical assistance to the local health-care facility. "In many villages along the road we saw funerals taking place and at the hospital, some of the wounded were still receiving treatment," said Anis Gandeel, the ICRC delegate who led the mission.

Officials have tried the usual downplaying of the violence, coupled with [blaming](#) the media. Iraqi authorities [suspended the operating licenses](#) of pan-Arab broadcaster Al Jazeera and nine Iraqi TV channels on Sunday after accusing them of escalating sectarian tension. While it is Maliki's virulent sectarian policies that have alienated the Iraqi people and made them revolt. Since 25 December peaceful protestors have been demanding that their basic rights be respected. [Hundreds of thousands](#) have been locked up for years, many without charges, in prisons run by sectarian militias. More than 1,400 people face execution. The authorities led by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki [have responded](#) to these peaceful demonstrations with the use of threats and violence on many occasions, in Ramadi, Baquba and other places.

[The Guardian](#) reported on 18 April that

“Troops backed by helicopters are searching for Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri, head of Saddam's now outlawed Ba'ath party, in villages around the former ruler's home town of Tikrit. (...) Security officers involved in the Douri operation said they believed he moved between Tikrit and the towns of Dour and Hawija.”

Could that have been the reason why this particular protest site came under attack? Maybe, but there are more important reasons for the deadly raid in Hawija.

Hawija is not just another Iraqi town. It has been one of the most rebellious towns in Iraq. It has paid a heavy price for fiercely resisting the occupation since 2003. And now its children are slowly dying.

US forces used WMD that kill children in Hawija

In late August 2011, The [Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq \(OWFI\)](#) released a [damning exposé about major environmental and human harm being caused by a US military base in the Iraqi town of Hawija](#)

Their report, entitled U.S. Army Base Transforms the Town of Hawija into a Crisis Zone: Hundreds of Paralyzed Children and Teenagers with Cancer, describes how

“in a town of 109,000 people there is a generation of children who are suffering from Poliomyelitis paralysis and cases of brain damage or atrophy. 412 of these children and teenagers are registered patients in the health clinic, whereas the actual numbers exceed 600 cases of child disability. Cancer is also spreading like an epidemic among all age groups but especially among teenagers, who await their death as the Iraqi and U.S. governments make no efforts to provide treatment or medication. The U.S. government is responsible for the radiation and the unleashing of their arsenal to practice with live ammunition and explosives in a field that was merely one and a half km away from a residential neighbourhood and with no wall or a fence to prevent civilians, children, and shepherds from entering.”

The report, that went unnoticed by the mainstream media, found that Hawija and the surrounding villages in this district have become a backyard dump polluted with radiation and leftover munitions from a U.S. Army base, a fact that has caused a human tragedy denied to this day by the Iraqi and American governments. Moreover, the two governments work hard to ensure that the issue remains top secret, despite the daily tragedies borne by the residents of the area.

Evan Al-Darraji wrote in her article: “Multiple Methods, One Murder”

“The strange thing is that the U.S. continues to claim that its war on Iraq was ‘clean’!! Can you call a brutal war that has caused murder, destruction, and displacement ‘clean’? They deny it, despite all the evidence against them, a fact that only reveals their lies and violations of international treaties and protocols such as the Geneva Protocol of 1925 that prohibits the use of bacteriological methods of warfare, in addition to asphyxiating and poisonous gases, among other weapons. It was signed by twenty-nine countries, yet the United States was conspicuously opposed to it. Moreover, in December 1966, the United Nations General Assembly issued a resolution that dictated the need to adhere strictly to the aforementioned protocol. During the 1960s, Britain made the effort to disarm its biological weapons and received broad support for these efforts, especially from the Soviet Union. Likewise, in 1969 former President of the United States Richard Nixon announced the country’s disapproval of the use of biological weapons, and ordered the destruction of the country’s reserves.

The UN General Assembly also referred to its resolution number 2662 (25th session) that was made on December 7th, 1970, to take the necessary steps to remove the weapons of mass destruction such as those that use chemical and bacteriological (biological) factors from the military munitions of all countries.

What is the meaning of these treaties and resolutions? Are they mere clichés and embellishments to be added to their ‘human rights’ counterparts that are being violated in Iraq in every way? Who is responsible for demanding our most basic rights and for holding accountable those who violate it? Where is the government, and what position does it assume in defending the lives, health, and future of the citizens of Iraq in the face of multiple levels of humanitarian crises?

Whom do we hold accountable? To whom do we raise our grievances?”

Falah Alwan of the [Federation of Workers Councils and Unions in Iraq](#) wrote a piece for GlobalResearch about the report. Alwan writes: “There are hundreds of people with illnesses, including cancer. People cannot afford proper medical treatment; FWCUI and OWFI are demanding that the weapons testing stops, that the site is cleaned up and that people are given access to the medical treatment they need.”

Hawija, a story of resistance

Hawija is a town near Kirkuk north of Baghdad. Hawija is in the Kerkuk province of Iraq and approximately 30 miles south of Kirkuk. There are approximately 450,000 people in and around Hawija. The city itself has about 150,000 inhabitants.

During the occupation U.S. and Iraqi forces have experienced numerous lethal attacks in the area from the resistance. As of March 2006, the area of Hawija was considered one of the most dangerous in all of Iraq with US soldiers and the foreign press corps in Baghdad dubbing Hawija “Anbar of the North”.

US Army under constant attack

The closest US Forward Operation Base (FOB) to Hawija is FOB McHenry. FOB McHenry was established in 2003 by Alpha Company 1-12 infantry who had been operating out of an abandoned school in the town of Hawija. As of May 2005 FOB McHenry was home to around

500 US soldiers. In March 2006, Soldiers in 1st Battalion 327th infantry regiment at FOB McHenry were finding 3 to 5 roadside bombs a day. From November 1, 2005 through March 2006 medics treated 120 trauma cases. Nine members of the brigade as of March 2006 have died in combat in Hawijah proper, most from a single company, C Co. 1-327th Inf, call sign 'Cold Steel.'

The battalion that replaced 1st Battalion 327th infantry regiment in August 2006 was the 2-27 wolfhounds from the 3rd BDE, 25th ID. During their 15 months at FOB McHenry, they experienced one of the deadliest periods of the war. Over 15 months, of the estimated 250 to 300 soldiers that were regularly going outside the wire on missions, 18 were killed in action. The deadliest day was on 6 December 2006. Five soldiers were killed when a surface to air missile was modified into an IED, destroying the Humvee and killing everyone inside.

A lot of US military operations have targeted the city of Hawija. The first was Operation Bayonet Lightning, a military operation during the early stages of the Iraq War, that was held to capture weapons, materials, and people that "posed a threat" against coalition forces. The joint operation between Iraq and the United States, lasted approximately 16 hours, and was conducted on 2 December 2003. 1,200 soldiers from the 173rd Airborne Brigade, the 4th Infantry Division, and Iraqi military participated. Operation Bayonet Lightning was concentrated on Hawija.

Several other military campaigns against Hawija followed, but that didn't discourage the resistance.

It is impossible to find out how many Iraqis have been killed in Hawija between 2003 and 2013. No journalist, no soldier has mentioned civilian casualties in this city, but we can assume that many Hawijans have lost their lives during this period.

Embedded journalists report

In an article from 8 July 2006, titled: [How Do You Solve a Problem Like Hawija?](#), embedded reporter Shelby Monroe writes:

"Not far from Kirkuk is the town of Hawija. Hawija gives the appearance of a more peaceful existence. It is an area of farmland, full of greenery in spite of months without rain. Rows of sunflowers border plots of land. The sheep have fields to graze in, unlike the sheep in Kirkuk that have to settle for whatever food can be found in the garbage that litters the streets. It is possible to imagine a life of tranquil simplicity among the irrigated fields and flowers, but nothing is simple in Iraq. Though more soldiers serve in Kirkuk, more soldiers have died in Hawija.

Major Victor Vasquez describes Kirkuk as similar to the Chicago of the 1920s, and Hawija is the Wild West. According to Major Kelly Kendrick, the majority of attacks against our soldiers in Hawija are perpetrated by people who are resistant to our presence, but who are not part of an organized terrorist network. "We are trying to take away power from those who abuse it, and they do not want to go down without a fight.

To the soldier on patrol, an IED is an IED, and whether or not the people who target us consider themselves members of an organized effort or not, they are all capable of brutal acts. When a convoy drives through downtown Hawija, thoughts turn to grenades. The slow pace of the traffic through the narrow streets becomes nerve-wracking. Although the local population conducts

business as usual, it would be unwise for the soldiers to stop and talk, making it difficult to change perceptions, let alone build relationships.”

On October 19, 2006, in his article [Hawija: A small city with big problems](#) , Ben Murray writes:

“This city isn’t on a lot maps of Iraq. Small and somewhat isolated in the farmlands between Kirkuk and Beiji about 175 miles north of Baghdad, Hawija is a destitute sprawl of buildings ridden with the long litany of problems suffered by many towns in Iraq.

Home to about 40,000 people, it has no major industry to speak of or political significance, and its streets are laden with garbage and the evidence of repeated insurgent attacks.

As a small city near the Kurdish northern region of Iraq, it has the potential to be an unremarkable town. But whenever U.S. forces leave Forward Operating Base McHenry near the city, they drive directly into the teeth of an angry insurgency so violent that it killed five men in the first six weeks the Hawaii-based 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment has spent here.

Unemployment is phenomenally high in the city, perhaps 80 percent, due in part to the disbanding of the old Iraqi army, said Col. Fatah Mahmoud Yaseen, Hawija’s police chief. Many in the city are former military members who lost their jobs when U.S. forces rolled north in 2003 and scattered the force.”

These two examples give an idea of the strong resistance the coalition forces and the Iraqi armed forces have encountered in Hawija since 2003.

So it doesn’t come as a surprise that Hawija was the first protest area that had to be “cleaned up” and destroyed by Maliki’s forces. Hawija was meant to set an example for the rest of the protest movements in other areas.

But the massive and peaceful demonstrations against the government continue across Iraq’s provinces without diminishing...they have been going on for over four months now, and the numbers reach the millions.

In a desperate attempt to stop the demonstrations Nouri al-Maliki has ordered military reinforcements and anti-riot forces to the province of Anbar. As a reaction, tribes in Al Anbar decided to set up armed units to protect the protestors.

It’s time to stop this bloodshed. Time for Maliki and the remnants of the American occupation to go.

Hold the warmongers accountable !

Meanwhile, American leaders still don’t accept responsibility for their destruction of Iraq.

“I am comfortable in the decision-making process. I think the removal of Saddam Hussein was the right decision for not only our own security but for giving people a chance to live in a free society,” former US president [George W. Bush said.](#)”As far as I’m concerned, the debate is over. I mean, I did what I did. And historians will ultimately judge those decisions.”

No Mr. Bush, the debate is far from over. The world community holds you accountable and will finally judge you for the crimes you have committed against the Iraqi people. Without accepting accountability there can be no justice.

Dirk Adriaensens is coordinator of SOS Iraq and member of the executive committee of the BRussells Tribunal. Between 1992 and 2003 he led several delegations to Iraq to observe the devastating effects of UN imposed sanctions. He was a member of the International Organizing Committee of the World Tribunal on Iraq (2003-2005). He is also co-coordinator of the Global Campaign Against the Assassination of Iraqi Academics. He is co-author of *Rendez-Vous in Baghdad, EPO* (1994), *Cultural Cleansing in Iraq*, Pluto Press, London (2010), *Beyond Educide*, Academia Press, Ghent (2012), and is a frequent contributor to *Global Research*, *Truthout*, *The International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies* and other media.

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