

## Iraq - 'Things Are Getting Worse By The Day'

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The mayhem continues in Iraq, with today at least 40 people dead, including five US soldiers in Diyala province as the meltdown of the failed US-led occupation continues.

Two suicide bombers detonated themselves after walking into a crowd of police officers in Hilla, south of Baghdad. The policemen were demonstrating outside the mayor's office to protest a government decision to disband their Special Forces unit.

In yet another horrible PR move (or attempt to raise sectarian tensions?) by the US military the head of Iraq's largest Sunni political party, Mohsen Abdul Hamid was detained from his home early this morning in western Baghdad. Of course his head was promptly bagged and his hands tied before he was taken away to be interrogated. His three sons were also detained with him. Stun bombs and bullets were said to be used during the raid, according to his wife.

It just so happens that his party, the Islamic Party, opposes the new US-backed security operation now engulfing Baghdad because they believe the security forces will disregard the rights of innocent Iraqis.

Later today he was released and the military admitted it made a mistake.

The military statement concerning the matter said, "Coalition forces regret any inconvenience and acknowledge (Abdul-Hamid's) cooperation in resolving this matter."

Abdul Hamid refused their apology in the Arab media, and stated that he was humiliated when US soldiers held their boots on his head for 20 minutes. It was also stated that he accused American soldiers of removing items from his home, including a computer. This is standard operating procedure with home raids-I can,t tell you how many Iraqis I've interviewed after their homes were raided who complained of money, jewelry and other belongings being looted by American soldiers.

The Islamic Party released a statement after the release of Abdul Hamid which said, "The U.S. administration claims it is interested in drawing Sunnis into the political process but it seems that their way of doing so is by raids, arrests and violating human rights."

At least 740 Iraqis have been killed since the new "government" took power in late April, and with the ongoing operations sparking more attacks each day, it doesn,t look like there is an end in sight. Keep in mind, the vast majority of the Iraqi security forces are either Shia or Kurdish battling against a primarily Sunni resistance (for now). It can easily be argued that we are witnessing a US-backed Iraqi government who is deliberating using its power to wage a civil war.

On that note, today Major General Ahmed al-Barazanchi, a Kurdish man who was the director of internal affairs of Kirkuk province died this morning after being shot yesterday.

My sources in Baghdad also said there have been fierce clashes today in the al-Amiriya district of Baghdad between resistance fighters and Iraqi and US soldiers. "Open gun battles in the streets," as one friend told me, "And as soon as the Iraqi and US soldiers leave the area, the resistance takes it back over."

Keep in mind that all of this is against the backdrop of well over 50% unemployment, horrendous traffic jams, and an infrastructure in shambles that continues to degrade with next to no reconstruction occurring in Baghdad.

"Electricity shut offs drive us crazy in this hot summer," one of my friends wrote me recently, "Even we can,t read at night because of long hours of electricity cuts and because the outside generators can,t withstand running these long hours and we have to turn these generators off for some time to cool them!"

He continues, "Two years of occupation for God sake where is the rebuilding, where the hell are these billions donated to Iraq? Even not 1% improvement in services and electricity! They say again and again the terrorists are to blame and I would accept this, but why they do not protect these facilities? Do the American camps have cuts of electricity? No, no, and nobody will allow this to happen...but poor Iraqis, nobody would be sorry for them if they burn with the hell of summer, small kids and old men they get dehydrated because no electricity, no cold water, etc. Have you heard about the tea that is mixed with iron particles? It is real in our life. People have to make sure their tea is not mixed with iron by use of magnets."

He concluded his email with, "Things are getting worse day by day. Iraq has become a country not for its people, every day thoughts jump into the mind that sooner or later we have to leave this country, searching for another. And there is a saying, "your home is where you sleep safe," but this is not true in Iraq anymore."

He sent me that email three days ago.

Yesterday the Iraqi government announced that it may decrease subsidies for fuel and electricity, despite a severe shortage of both in the country, according to the electricity minister who warned Iraqis to prepare for more blackouts this summer.

Ongoing fuel, electricity and drinking water shortages persist, and only 37% of Iraqis have a working sewage system.

As so many of my Iraqi friends continue to say, "This is the freedom and democracy that America has brought us."

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