

Iraq War Crimes: Kidnap and Murder of Ministry of Education Officials

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Global Research, November 07, 2012

BRussells Tribunal

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#)

In-depth Report: [IRAQ REPORT](#)

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BRussells Tribunal, 31 October 2012.

We hear a lot about “militias” and their crimes everywhere in Iraq, but many Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish personalities still refuse to tell the media details about these militias, which persons are connected with them, and who represents them in the Parliament, in the government or even in the streets.

A couple of days ago, the Baghdad Operations Headquarter stated that they found the remains of tens of Iraqi academics that were kidnapped from the Ministry of Higher Education – Department of Missions – in 14 November 2006. They were buried in the Al-Sada Area in Sadr City. The bodies were found after one of the militia members (who is arrested by the Iraqi authorities) confessed and told about the place where the victims were buried, their number, the details of how the militias carried out the kidnapping, why they did it and who is behind all this. (2)

The Iraqi people always ask themselves when such “incidents” occur, like a kidnapping or a blast or a car bomb: “who is behind this?”

Everyone in Iraq knows that the Ministry of Higher Education kidnapping was the work of sectarian militias, more specifically the ones that are politically linked to the government.

When the Iraqi people ask about the names of these militias, and the reasons behind the secrecy of the Iraqi government, they are surprised that no one wants to talk and no one dares to name names. The Iraqi government, the Army, the Ministry of Interior, the Parliament members, the human rights organizations, even the TV channels and media, all of them avoid to mention the names of those militias as if it was a sacred talisman or a taboo!

Do these militias consider the blood of their victims as the cheapest thing in the world, and are their crimes all sacred?

Everyone knows that the Al-Mahdi Militia, led by Muqtada Al-Sadr, is among those who committed such disgusting crimes. Some of the media dared to mention the details of this crime saying that Hakim Al-Zamili, one of the leaders of the Al-Mahdi Militia, was responsible for this crime that took the lives of more than 150 Iraqis, some of them Iraq's best academics. Al-Zamili is a prominent member of the Iraqi Parliament, representative of the

Al-Sadr Party. Many Iraqis know it, but the government and parliament representatives keep silent and never mention the name of the murderers of the academics in November 2006. (Read more about Hakim Al Zamili underneath: "A case study. The Ministry of Health, a very unhealthy Institution")

When will the government, the parliament, and the judiciary authorities dare to name and accuse this criminal who killed numerous Iraqi citizens? When will the Iraqi government stop its courtship with the murderers, ignoring the bloodshed of innocent Iraqi people, and ignoring the judiciary authorities? A punishment is not only meant to punish the criminal, not only an attempt to do justice to the victim, it is also a way to show criminals that there's a price to pay if they commit a crime, to set an example. But it is well known that the US occupation authorities created lawlessness themselves.

They have shown no inclination to investigate the crimes and bring the perpetrators to justice. This calculated disinterest is itself revealing. And even worse, official spokespersons gave overt expression to the pervasive inclination of the occupiers to view chaos and lawlessness as "creative" in the sense of providing opportunities to wipe the state clean, to create new beginnings, or start over from scratch. In the context of engineered chaos, the wanton degradation of Iraq's once vaunted educational and health systems represented for them an "opportunity to begin again".

Criminal gangs could rob and kidnap and murder with impunity. They played a marginal, but instrumental role in the instability in Iraq. Because none of the committed crimes were investigated, the victims had the impression that law and order were non-existent in the "new Iraq". So in 2005-2008 many Iraqis fled the country with their families. These bandits could do their crimes under the eyes of 750.000 security forces, without fear of being caught or prosecuted. This feeds the suspicion among the Iraqis that the occupier at least tolerated these crimes in order to create as much chaos as possible, in order to encourage the process of ethnic cleansing and erasing collective memory.

We demand that the Iraqi judiciary, especially the High Judiciary Council spokesman stop being cowards and mention the name of those bloody sectarian militia's to the public. We also demand of Baghdad Operations, the Ministries of Defense and Interior, the Parliament (especially Al-Nujaifi), and the Ministerial Council headed by Al Maliki, that they should take their responsibilities, respect the rule of law and arrest the culprits of this horrendous crime, to show the public that the blood of the victims is not cheap. If they don't take the necessary measures, the reputation of the country and its government will sink even deeper in the quagmire of lawlessness and overall corruption.

It's worth to mention that a few months ago Al-Maliki declared that he knows who is responsible for the kidnapping in the Ministry of Higher Education, at the time when Muqtada Al-Sadir made a deal with the Kurdish government and Iyad Allawi's Al-Iraqiya party, and declared that Al-Maliki is not trustworthy anymore. Maliki's words were meant as a threat. That's why Muqtada changed his mind immediately and withdrew from this cooperation deal. The same thing is happening again now. When Muqtada wanted a vote of no confidence against Al-Maliki, the latter made his move and told the media all about the kidnapping incident. That's how the criminal ruling elite uses the blood of innocent citizens as a winning card: to blackmail each other whenever it suits them. All of these criminals know who is responsible for which bloodbath. And the Americans know, because they helped to put these people in power.

Long before the invasion, the US 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 were:

1. The Iraqi National Congress (INC) led by Ahmed Chalabi.
2. The Iraqi National Accord (INA) led by IyadAllawi, now heading the Al Iraqiya party in Parliament.
Both groups constituted 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 constituted of thousands of Iraqi expatriates and illegal Iranian immigrants expelled from Iraq in the 1980's. The group is trained and heavily armed by Iran and the U.S.
4. Then there was the Sadr movement (known as the Mahdi Army), led by Muqtada al-Sadr. The movement has been accused of many crimes and sectarian killings since the Sadr movement entered the political process. And now they're the ones who stand accused for the kidnapping scandal in the Ministry of Higher Education.

Since the invasion, each militia group had 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 Kadhimiyah, and in 2006 integrated in the Special Police Commandos, created by the US Army. They were armed and financed by the U.S. and its allies, and fully integrated into the Occupation. Each group was carefully used by the occupying forces to terrorize 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 was 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 were deliberately targeted for rejecting the Occupation. (3)

A Women for Women International - Iraq 2008 report gives a pretty accurate picture of how Iraqi politics work and who is responsible for the Iraqi catastrophe:
"Within the central government in Baghdad, Iraqi politics are largely deadlocked. The current government is made up largely of Shiite politicians closely tied to various militia warlords.

The Sunnis are not well represented in the government or the parliament, and tribal sheiks of Anbar, Ninawah, and Salah al-Din provinces tend to view the government as a front for Iran. Even among the Shiites, many believe that the politicians in Baghdad are working for the best interests of the militias, not the best interests of the Shiites as a whole, let alone all Iraq.

The problem derives in large part from the flawed decisions that went into the creation of the IGC in 2003 and the interim government of 2004. Having brought exiles and militia leaders into the government and given them positions of power, it became virtually impossible to get them out, and even more difficult to convince them to make compromises. The militia leaders used their positions to maintain and expand their power at the expense of their rivals outside the government as well as in the central government itself.

As a result, each ministry in Baghdad is wholly captive to the militia that controls it."(4)(5)

Hakim Al Zamili - A case study: the Ministry of Health, a very unhealthy institution(6)

Minister of Health in 2006, Ali Al-Shimari, belonged to Moqtada Al-Sadr's political movement while the latter's military arm, the Mahdi Army, was acting inside hospitals with impunity. Sick and wounded patients were abducted from public hospitals and later killed. As a consequence, more and more Iraqis were avoiding hospitals.

"The hospitals have become killing fields," said Abu Nasr. Ali Al-Shimari fled the country as soon as charges of sectarian acts were brought against officials at the ministry. Al-Shimari was granted political asylum in the USA.(7) After the attack hit Samarra's Askariya shrine, also known as the Golden Mosque, on February 22, 2006,(8) Ali Al Shimari and his deputy Hakim Al Zamili, a commander of the Mahdi army, turned the Ministry of Health into a torture and killing centre.

In September 2006, when the streets of Baghdad were swamped with thousands of brutally assassinated bodies, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki ordered the Ministry of Health not to release further figures about casualties to the United Nations, as it had previously done.(9)

On February 8, 2007, occupation forces raided the ministry and arrested Hakim Al Zamili. He was accused of allegedly funnelling money to the militias. He used private ambulances and hospitals to carry out the killings. He was the key suspect in the kidnapping and (suspected) murder of his colleague, Ammar al-Saffar, who was also a deputy Health Minister.(10)

After a two-day trial, marred by accusations of witness intimidation, the charges were dropped and Mr. Zamili was freed after spending more than a year in American custody.(11) According to accurate Iraqi sources, Hakim Al-Zamili killed 160 persons, among them D.r Raad Al Mahdawy - a Sunni - the general director of the health department in Diyala.

Al-Zamili's 2009 release was, according to some Iraqi witnesses, part of the deal for returning the bodies of 5 Britons, held hostage for 2 years by an obscure militia known as "Islamic Shia Resistance in Iraq." This group of Britons was seized while they were installing anti-corruption software in Baghdad's Ministry of Finance, by about 40 men "disguised" as Iraqi policemen, in May 2007.(12) The Iraqi authorities acted as lead negotiator and broker for the deal.(13) "The first thing Hakim Al-Zamili did after being released was killing Hassan Aziz, a judge who was involved in trying to convict Mr. Zamili. Now this criminal is a member of the Iraqi new parliament!" an anonymous Iraqi source testifies. Hakim Al-Zamili, recently elected Member of Parliament from the Sadrist bloc, is now one of the strongest advocates for carrying out the death sentence on former Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz.(15)

This is today's sad reality in Iraq's "blossoming democracy."

And it's not getting any better.

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