

Iraqis demand end to American occupation

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19 April 2003

Friday's prayer sessions in Baghdad were followed by a mass demonstration of the Iraqi people's hostility toward the US invasion. As many as 20,000 worshippers left the city's Abu Haneefa al-Nu'man mosque and marched through the streets waving Korans and carrying banners in Arabic and English reading "Leave our country, we want peace."

Prior to the protest, Ahmed Al-Kubaisi, a leading Sunni Muslim cleric, accused the US of crushing Iraq on Israel's behalf and denounced the American military occupation as illegal. Calling for the unity of the country's Sunni and Shi'ite populations in a common struggle to expel the American troops, he told worshippers that Saddam Hussein had "betrayed the Iraqi people" by failing to defend the country.

Al-Kubaisi advocates the establishment of an Islamic state, and among the banners carried by demonstrators was one declaring, "No to America! No to secular state! Yes to Islamic state!"

American troops in the path of the demonstration were withdrawn as the angry crowd advanced toward them. On both Tuesday and Wednesday, US marines gunned down Iraqi civilians in the northern city of Mosul, fueling the nationwide anger against the US forces.

The unrest in Mosul was sparked by the display of the American flag on US military vehicles and over the city's municipal offices, and an attempt by Mishaan Al-Jubari, a pro-US former Republican Guard general who fled Iraq after he was accused of corruption, to declare himself the city governor.

According to the US Central Command spokesman General Vince Brooks, a large crowd outside the municipal offices on Tuesday "was violent, throwing rocks at the marines, hitting them with their fists and spitting on them." Whether responding to direct orders or due to panic, marines opened fire, killing ten demonstrators and wounding at least another 16. A US

soldier complained to the *New York Times* that the people in Mosul were "not grateful."

On Wednesday, according to Iraqi witnesses, US marines killed civilians a second time, opening fire on a crowd beginning to gather for another protest. Mosul's emergency hospital reported that three fatalities and 12 wounded were brought in, including two children. The US military claims its troops in the municipal offices only fired on snipers shooting at them from neighboring buildings.

Other leading Muslim clerics used Friday prayers to preach opposition to the US. In Karbala, southwest of Baghdad, a leading Shi'ite cleric denounced the US invasion before thousands of worshippers at one of the holiest sites of Shi'ite Muslims, the shrine to the prophet Mohammed's grandson, Hussein. Sheikh Kaazem al-Abahadi al-Nasari told worshippers: "We reject this foreign occupation, which is a new imperialism. We don't want it anymore. We don't need the Americans. They're here to control our oil. They're unbelievers, but as for us, we have the power of faith."

In the predominantly Shi'ite Muslim northern suburbs of Baghdad—previously called "Saddam City" but now renamed "Sadr City"—some 50,000 worshippers filled the streets surrounding the Al-Hikma mosque to hear leading Shi'ite cleric, Sheikh Mohammed Fartusi, implicitly attack the US moves to install a puppet regime. A government "that allows Iraqis to say what they want but gives them no say in their destiny," he said, "would be worse than that of Saddam Hussein."

Demonstrations against the US have also been reported this week in the cities of Kut, Nassiriya and Basra. In Kut, demonstrators spat on American troops and chanted "no Chalabi." Ahmad Chalabi is the leader of the US-sponsored and financed Iraqi National Congress and may be installed by the Bush

administration as a leading figure in an American puppet government.

The outpouring of sentiment in Iraq denouncing the US troops as invaders and occupiers has reached such dimensions that it cannot be ignored even by the media outlets that have claimed American forces are being welcomed as liberators.

The most shameless advocate and apologist of US militarism, Fox News, has elected to report Friday's demonstration in Baghdad as the positive expression of the "democracy" the US has brought to the country. Perhaps more concerned about its credibility than Fox, CNN introduced its news bulletins throughout Friday with the statement that "US forces have gone from heroes to aggressors in the eyes of some Iraqis." Wire reports by Associated Press, AFP and Reuters have analyzed the demonstration as being primarily a reflection of discontent over the failure of the American forces to prevent looting and restore essential services.

There is little doubt that much of the Iraqi population blames the US for the looting and anarchy since the Iraqi government collapsed and Baghdad fell on April 9. The talk on Iraq's streets—with good reason—is that the US military directly facilitated and encouraged the chaos in order to further weaken the country and justify a permanent military occupation with the claim the Iraqi people cannot govern themselves.

At the more fundamental level, the gatherings and demonstrations are an expression of the bitterness, humiliation and anger of a people who have seen their country reduced to rubble and helplessness by the world's greatest power. Iraq has been brought to its knees, at the cost of hundreds of thousands of lives, by 12 years of US aggression. The looting and destruction of museums, libraries, schools, hospitals and government buildings over the last nine days can only take place in a society that has been shattered.

As the shock and trauma of war begins to dissipate, however, it is inevitable that Iraq's different ethnic and religious groups will begin demanding solutions to their complex array of national, democratic and social aspirations left unanswered when Britain and France created the nation by drawing lines in the sand. Uniting large sections of the Iraqi population will be demands for the full withdrawal of foreign troops and their right to decide their own fate—not to be governed by a regime headed by people like Chalabi and Al-Jubari, corrupt

figures with no political legitimacy or following.

The US massacres in Mosul are an anticipation of what can be expected across the country over the coming weeks and months. The Bush administration will be driven by the predatory aims of the US ruling elite to brutally repress the Iraqi people.



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