

US occupation regime staggered by bomb blasts, uprisings

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19 May 2004

The suicide car bombing that killed the head of the US-appointed Iraq Governing Council Monday is the latest in a series of blows to the occupation regime, which is widely hated by the Iraqi people and seen as increasingly weak and beleaguered.

Izzedin Salim, a veteran Shiite politician who held the rotating presidency of the IGC during the month of May, was killed just before 10 a.m. local time as he was waiting at a US checkpoint to enter the heavily fortified Green Zone, the portion of downtown Baghdad set aside for the occupation authority.

While Salim's five-car convoy waited to be inspected by US soldiers, a car behind his in the line shot forward in the passing lane until it was abreast of Salim's own vehicle, then detonated in a huge explosion. The suicide bomber clearly had inside information, knowing not only the route Salim was to travel, but which of the five Nissan Patrols he was riding in.

While appointed by US administrator Paul Bremer, Salim had recently come into conflict with the US plan, devised in consultation with UN envoy Lakhdar Brahimi, to abolish the IGC on June 30 and replace it with a caretaker government of "technocrats," administrators who would not be affiliated with any of the parties now occupying places on the council. Salim rejected the exclusion of his Dawa Party, a conservative Shiite group, declaring, "We shall listen to the ideas of Mr. Brahimi, but his ideas are not compulsory for us. The Governing Council is the one responsible for forming the government."

The bombing was the most spectacular attack on an occupation regime target in central Baghdad since the truck-bomb explosion which destroyed the United Nations compound and killed UN envoy Sergio de Mello last August. Salim was the highest-ranking Iraqi collaborator with the US occupation to be killed.

Another member of the IGC, Akila Hashimi, was assassinated by unidentified gunmen last September.

Even reports in the pro-war American media confirm that the killing of Salim was a staggering blow to the morale of US officials in Baghdad, six weeks before the scheduled dissolution of the Coalition Provisional Authority and transfer of formal authority to a handpicked US-backed Iraqi regime. Salim was on his way to a meeting with Bremer to discuss the transfer.

A front-page analysis in the *Washington Post* Tuesday began: "With stunning brazenness, pinpoint timing and devastating force, the suicide car bomber who killed the head of Iraq's Governing Council on Monday gave shape to a feeling among Iraqi and U.S. officials and common citizens that the country is almost unmanageable."

An unidentified "senior occupation official" told the *Post*, "It will take a lot of doing for this not to end in a debacle. There is no confidence in the coalition. Why should there be?"

The analysis in the *Post*—whose editorial line is one of unrelenting support for the US invasion and conquest of Iraq—painted a grim picture of conditions throughout the occupied country:

"Central Iraq, home to a long-running revolt by Sunni Muslims, is plagued by daily roadside bombings, occasional car bombings and frequent assassinations of Iraqis working with the U.S.-led administration. To the south, frequent clashes over the past six weeks have pitted U.S. and allied forces against a persistent insurgency led by Shiite Muslim cleric Moqtada Sadr. Fighting has all but paralyzed several southern cities.

"Hostile bands operate freely in cities that straddle the main routes in and out of Baghdad. Foreigners who travel Iraqi roads run the risk of being kidnapped, and reconstruction projects in many parts of the country

have come to a standstill.”

Added to this is the impact of repeated car-bombings in Baghdad and elsewhere, assassinations of Iraqis employed by or politically supporting the Coalition Provisional Authority, and armed attacks on police stations and other government buildings, both in the Sunni Triangle and the Shiite region in the South.

The insurrection led by Shiite cleric Moqtada Sadr spread to Nasiriyah over the weekend, as fighters of Sadr’s Mahdi Army launched an offensive which forced Italian paramilitary police to withdraw from the center of the city and take refuge in a military base on its outskirts. In the course of the fighting, a convoy carrying the chief Italian administrator in southern Iraq, Barbara Contini, came under fire, and two of her police escort were wounded. As in the case of the Marine withdrawal from Fallujah, US military spokesmen were at pains to deny that any “retreat” was involved, saying the Italians “just moved to a more secure camp.”

As for Fallujah itself, an extraordinary article in the *Los Angeles Times* Monday described the city as “for all intents and purposes a rebel town, complete with banners proclaiming a great victory and insurgents integrated into the new Fallujah Brigade—the protective force set up with U.S. assistance to keep the peace.”

The successful defiance of the occupation forces has given an enormous boost to the Iraqi resistance, the newspaper admitted: “This once-obscure city to the west of the capital is now an inspirational ground zero for anti-Western militants in the Middle East, the place that beat back the Marines. Fresh graffiti in Arabic tell the story: ‘Long Live the Heroic Mujahedin of Fallouja.’ ‘Long Live the Resistance.’”

“At the entrance to Jolan, one of the two neighborhoods where the most violent fighting raged, a sign reads: ‘This Is the Neighborhood of Heroes, Congratulations.’”

The *Times* report gave a picture of the conditions in Fallujah in late April that confirms that top Marine commanders decided to reverse course and abandon plans to storm the city because they anticipated fierce resistance and heavy casualties. “The insurgents came at the Marines in relentless, almost suicidal waves,” the newspaper reported, describing a firefight April 26. Citing the views of Lt. Gen. James Conway, commander of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force, the newspaper continued: “It was, in a microcosm, what

house-to-house fighting might look like if the Marines were forced to storm Fallujah and, possibly, level a city of 300,000 people. He didn’t like the look of the future battlefield.”

Even before the twin uprisings in Fallujah and the Shiite heartland in the South, there was overwhelming opposition to the US occupation among the Iraqi people, according to a poll conducted by the occupation authority itself. Four out of five Iraqis surveyed in five major cities had a negative view of the occupation regime and the US military, with 82 percent saying they disapprove of the US and coalition forces. Donald Hamilton, a senior counselor to Bremer, said that “generally speaking, the trend is downward.”

In the face of this growing popular opposition, the Bush administration has only one answer: more military violence. The Pentagon announced Monday that it would shift another 3,600 troops from South Korea to Iraq this summer, moving the 2nd Brigade of the Army’s 2nd Infantry Division, together with its tanks and Bradley armored vehicles. The transfer comes after repeated delays by the South Korean government in its promised dispatch of 3,000 South Korean troops to Iraq.

Meanwhile the death toll among US military personnel in Iraq has mounted to 775, including 565 killed in combat and 210 dead from suicide, homicide and accidental causes. More US soldiers were killed in April than in any previous month of the war, including the invasion. At the current rate, over 1,000 US soldiers will have been killed by the time of the June 30 deadline for the transfer to a US-selected “sovereign” regime in Baghdad, with as many as 10,000 wounded.

The Iraqi death toll is far higher, but neither the Pentagon nor the Coalition Provisional Authority will make any estimate of how many Iraqi men, women and children have been killed by the forces supposedly sent to “liberate” them.



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