

# Two opponents of the US occupation assassinated in Iraq

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Two leading members of the Association of Muslim Scholars (AMS)—an organisation of 3,000 Sunni Muslim clerics calling for a boycott of the January 30 Iraqi elections—were assassinated this week.

Sheik Faidh Mohammed Amin al-Faidi, one of the most prominent Sunni clerics in the city of Mosul, was gunned down in a drive-by shooting as he left his house on November 22. Faidi was the brother of the main AMS spokesman in Baghdad, Mohammed Bashar al-Faidi, who has made passionate speeches at the Umm al-Qura mosque in recent weeks, denouncing US war crimes in Fallujah and the anti-democratic character of the planned election.

The next day, a group of masked gunmen shot and killed a second cleric, Sheik Ghalib Ali Latif al-Zuheiri as he left his mosque following dawn prayers in the town of Muqadiyah, north of Baghdad.

It is not known who carried out the killings. Suspicion, however, must fall upon the US-led occupation forces. They have the necessary personnel and the motive—silencing opposition to the rigged elections.

The individual installed by the US to head the Iraqi interim government, Iyad Allawi, has been described as a thug even by American officials. Nothing about his history gives any reason to doubt that he is capable of ordering the murder of political opponents.

Allawi began as an agent for Saddam Hussein's Baathist dictatorship, allegedly spying on and intimidating Iraqis living in Britain and Europe. In 1975 he fell out with the regime and transferred his loyalties to the British intelligence agency, MI6. During the 1980s, he developed an association with the CIA and in December 1990, in the lead up to the first war on Iraq, became the leader of the US-financed Iraqi National Accord (INA).

The *New York Times* has published accusations by former CIA agents that Allawi and the INA carried out terrorist bombings in Iraq between 1992 and 1995. In the

late 1990s, his organisation sought to develop as many ties as possible with dissident Iraqi generals and Baathist leaders, with the aim of using them as the basis for a pro-US police state following Hussein's overthrow. Along with Ahmed Chalabi, the other CIA frontman among the Iraqi exiles, Allawi played a major role in collecting and doctoring the false claims that Iraq possessed "weapons of mass destruction".

Following the US invasion last year, Allawi, with US sponsorship, took control of reforging an Iraqi intelligence agency. A significant number of the hated Iraqi secret police were recruited to work for the new US-controlled regime.

In July this year, just weeks before he was named as interim prime minister, a leading Australian journalist, Paul McGeough, published eyewitness allegations that Allawi personally executed six prisoners in a Baghdad police station. No investigation has been carried out into the charges. In August, US National Guardsmen discovered and sought to stop the torture of detainees in a Baghdad prison by Allawi's new interior ministry police, but were ordered by US commanders to leave the victims in the hands of their tormentors.

Training, financing and advising Allawi's regime are 3,000 staff at the US embassy in Iraq—the largest embassy in the world. Among them will be, without question, a large contingent of CIA and special forces operatives whose specialty is counter-insurgency.

The American ambassador in Iraq, John Negroponte, has a long familiarity with death squads and covert activities. The WSWWS warned at the time of Negroponte's installation as Iraq ambassador that it was a signal the Bush administration would carry out a "protracted and dirty war of repression against the Iraqi people" (See: "The Negroponte nomination: a warning to the people of Iraq").

From 1964 to 1973, Negroponte worked as a senior US

operative for the US embassy and the National Security Council in Vietnam, a period that coincided with “Operation Phoenix”—the use of US special forces to murder as many as 20,000 Vietnamese suspected of supporting the national liberation struggle. From 1981 to 1985 he was the ambassador in Honduras, during which time hundreds of opponents of the US-backed military dictatorship were assassinated, “disappeared” or subjected to horrific torture by CIA-trained and funded right-wing death squads.

In 2001, Negroponte publicly justified the atrocities in countries like Vietnam and Honduras, following his appointment as ambassador to the United Nations. He declared that the US-backed regimes may have been “dictators” and “not as savory as Americans would have liked”, but democracy had not been possible due to “turmoil”.

The repressive methods that were tested in Vietnam and Central America are in use in Iraq. At the beginning of November, Allawi imposed 60 days of martial law on 15 of Iraq’s 18 provinces. This has provided the US military with a veneer of legitimacy for enforcing media censorship and curfews, carrying out the arbitrary detention of opponents and, above all, unleashing the bloody assault on the city of Fallujah—one of the centres of popular Iraqi resistance.

The US military claims to have killed more than 2,000 Iraqi fighters in Fallujah and detained over 1,600 people. The city has been laid waste and its population of 250,000 turned into refugees in their own country. The massacre has been accompanied by mass arrests of alleged insurgents around Iraq. The offensive underway in towns south of Baghdad has resulted in over 200 arrests, on top of more than 600 taken in house raids and roadblocks over the past three months. House-to-house raids in Kirkuk this week led to 38 detentions. Dozens more have been seized in Mosul and Baghdad.

No recent figures exist on how many Iraqis are currently being held in US-controlled or interim government-run prisons. It is believed, however, that tens of thousands have been detained at one point or another since the US-led invasion in March 2003.

Allawi implicitly threatened the AMS last weekend—immediately before the two assassinations. “Those who call for violence will be dealt with by force. The judicial system also will deal with those who allow themselves to stoke hatreds. I hope that those who call themselves the Association of Muslim Scholars rise to the standards set by Islam as a religion of love and tolerance,”

he declared.

Prior to the two killings, at least seven AMS leaders and dozens of their supporters were arrested during raids on Sunni mosques. Three people were gunned down and more than 40 arrested on November 19 during a raid on the Abu Hanifa mosque, the most important Sunni shrine in Baghdad. On November 16, US troops also arrested Naseer Ayaef, a leader of the Sunni-based Iraqi Islamic Party, which left the interim government in protest over the attack on Fallujah.

Leading members of the Shiite movement led by Moqtada al-Sadr were seized in Najaf and Karbala last week. Sadr’s main spokesman, Ali Smeisim, this week denounced the arrests, and the continued detention of another 160 Sadr supporters, as a demonstration that the Shiite parties supporting the US occupation—the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and Dawa—were “using their position in the government to persecute” the organisation.

In April, and again in August, thousands of Sadr’s followers took up arms against American troops across the south of the country. An uneasy truce has been in place for the past three months, but arrest warrants are still out on Sadr; who continues to oppose the occupation and is, at present, calling for a boycott of the elections. Calling for Sadr’s supporters to restrain their anger over the recent arrests, Smeisim warned that the interim government was trying to force the movement into “a third battle” so it could be crushed.

The aim of the repression is to ensure that the elections in January result in a pro-US regime that will allow American corporate interests to plunder the country’s economy, in particular its vast oil reserves, and sanction the indefinite presence of the US military.

The actions of the US military and the Allawi regime leading up to the Iraq ballot make a mockery of the Bush administration’s denunciations of the elections in the Ukraine and elsewhere. Most Iraqi people are deeply hostile to the US occupation and want its immediate end. Yet anyone who articulates these sentiments risks imprisonment or death at the hands of the American military and their local collaborators.



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