

Iraq suicide bombing campaign: a reactionary diversion from the political struggle against imperialism

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The suicide car bomb attack in the Iraqi town of Hilla on Monday has produced the greatest death toll from a single such incident since the US invasion toppled the regime of Saddam Hussein nearly two years ago. Those targeted in the blast were young men seeking medical tests needed to join the US-organized Iraqi police and military. The victims, who numbered as many as 125 dead and at least 130 more wounded, included passers-by and people shopping in a nearby market.

The attack in Hilla—a predominantly Shiite city—is only the latest and bloodiest in a string of terrorist attacks that have continued to escalate over the past two months. According to a count provided by the Associated Press, 234 people were killed and 429 wounded in some 55 separate attacks in January. The death toll rose to 311 while the number of injured increased to 433 as a result of 38 such attacks in February.

This slaughter of Iraqi non-combatants—including working class youth lured into joining the police and army by the prospect of a job and salary in a country where the majority is jobless and destitute—is a political atrocity and deserves to be condemned.

This is not a question of mere moral outrage. These are political crimes. Far from undermining the illegal American occupation of Iraq, the principal outcome of such attacks is deeper political confusion among the masses, which can lead to debilitating sectarian conflicts.

The opposition of the *World Socialist Web Site* to terrorist bombings has nothing in common with the hypocritical denunciations of the Hilla bombing and similar attacks by the Bush administration and the big business media, whose sole aim is to justify US imperialism's crimes in Iraq.

Few bother recalling that Hilla is no stranger to mass carnage, having suffered one of the bloodiest attacks at the beginning of the US war on Iraq. On April 1, 2003, the US military targeted the town with cluster bombs, killing at least 60 people, many of them children, and leaving hundreds more wounded. The use of this weapon constituted another war crime in a continuing criminal war.

Washington is ultimately responsible not just for the killing conducted by its own military forces—which accounts for the bulk of the tens of thousands who have died since the US invasion—but for all of the bloodshed in Iraq. This is indisputably true from the standpoint of international law, as the US is an occupying power.

But more fundamentally, the American war and occupation, coming on top of a decade of devastating economic sanctions, have decimated Iraqi society, provoking resistance while reducing Iraq to a state of social and economic disintegration.

The crimes of US imperialism, however, in no way justify tactics that result in the pointless slaughter of Iraqis—including many who undoubtedly are opponents of the American occupation.

While armed struggle is a legitimate and inevitable tactic in the struggle against foreign military occupation, it is not an end in itself and cannot take the place of a political program that educates, guides and inspires masses of people. There is, moreover, a profound link between ends and means. Just as the utterly predatory objectives of the Iraqi occupation find expression in the sadistic practices carried out by the United States at Abu Ghraib, the mass killings of Iraqis expose the essentially reactionary perspective of the political forces responsible for the suicide bombings. It is noteworthy that these attacks are conducted without even a suggestion that they are aimed at winning the population to a particular political platform or galvanizing popular opposition to the US colonialist presence in Iraq.

The struggles of the anti-colonial movements in an earlier epoch were unquestionably accompanied by violence, including, as in the case of Algeria, the utilization of terrorist bombings. But these actions were carried out by movements that advanced political programs or demands that—with all the limitations and illusions of bourgeois nationalism—were presented to the masses to win their support.

The organizers of these atrocities make no pretense of appealing to widespread discontent and political unrest, or attempting to tap into the broad opposition to US imperialism that predominates throughout the region as a whole. Rather, they cynically exploit the anger, spirit of self-sacrifice, and genuine hatred of oppression of young men and women by using them as cannon fodder in an ignoble venture.

These tactics are not based on a struggle to defeat imperialism. They are conducted in contempt of the Iraqi masses and the deep historical traditions of working class struggle in Iraq. They serve to undermine social consciousness and sow political confusion.

An Islamist web site reported that a group calling itself the Al Qaeda Organization for Holy War in Iraq had claimed responsibility for the Hilla bombing. Whether the group even

exists as more than a name is far from clear.

It cannot be excluded that forces loyal to pro-American stooges like Ahmed Chalabi and Iyad Allawi would carry out such provocations in order to foment internecine violence, with the aim of preventing the ascension of a government from which they are excluded, as well as to provide a continued justification for the US military occupation upon which they depend.

It is in the nature of such terrorist bombings that the precise identity of their organizers and the character of their political aims are not entirely discernible. Bombings can be carried out in the name of a non-existent organization to further hidden agendas, including those of the CIA itself.

But these tactics are by no means foreign to either the Islamist forces or the remnants of the Iraqi Baathist regime. Both have played a significant role in misdirecting a broad resistance to US occupation that has won the support of not only many Iraqis, but peoples throughout the Middle East.

Neither Baathists nor Islamists represent the interests of the working class and oppressed. The Baathist regime, like secular bourgeois nationalism throughout the Arab world, sacrificed the social needs and basic democratic rights of the Iraqi people to further the interests of a ruling elite. It fell victim to the imperialist power that it previously looked to for support.

The Islamists owe their rise primarily to this historic failure of bourgeois nationalism. They were supported by Washington in attacking the Soviet-backed regime in Afghanistan in the 1980s, and they continue to enjoy at least tacit support from elements within the Saudi elite and other regimes in the region, which are loath to see the emergence of a Shiite-dominated state in Iraq. Both the Baathists and Islamists would be prepared to do a deal with imperialism if it furthered their own narrow interests.

These are the retrograde social ends that are pursued through the criminal means of suicide bombings against Iraqi civilians. Neither of these forces is capable of winning mass support—either for the restoration of the Baathist regime or the imposition of a reactionary Islamic utopia like that of the Taliban in Afghanistan or the Mullahs in Iran.

Underlying these methods—to the extent that they are not the result of an imperialist provocation or a deliberate attempt to provoke an ethnic civil war—is a profound pessimism that pervades both these forces and their political apologists. They categorically reject the possibility of a unified struggle against imperialism based on the conscious political mobilization of the Iraqi masses.

The socialist movement's opposition to terrorism has a long history and powerful political foundations. Lenin, Trotsky and the other leaders of the October 1917 Revolution forged their political program and perspective precisely in struggle against the politics of terrorism. They opposed such methods not from the standpoint of abstract morality, but because they served only to obstruct the development of political consciousness and independent political struggle on the part of the working class.

“In our eyes, individual terror is inadmissible precisely because it belittles the role of the masses in their own consciousness, reconciles them to their powerlessness, and turns their eyes and hopes towards a great avenger and liberator who some day will come and accomplish his mission,” Trotsky wrote in his 1909

article “Why Marxists Oppose Individual Terrorism”.

Trotsky and his comrades, of course, were battling against the terrorism practiced by a layer of the Russian petty-bourgeois intelligentsia, in the form of assassination attempts against tsarist ministers, not the wholesale slaughter of unarmed and impoverished people.

While the struggle against imperialism in an occupied country must inevitably assume violent forms, to believe that such actions as the Hilla bombing will further this struggle is both delusional and reactionary.

The critical question in the struggle against the US occupation and attempt to recolonize Iraq is the emergence of an independent movement of the Iraqi working class, fighting to unite with working people throughout the region and internationally on the basis of a common socialist and internationalist program.

In the face of a powerful mass movement of workers, the US would be unable to maintain political control. The reaction of the American occupation authorities when tens of thousands of Shiites took to the streets in early 2004 demanding direct elections was instructive. Confronting the masses, US imperialism was forced to retreat and rework its plans.

The perverse effect of the bombing campaign is that even the possibility of mass mobilizations is undermined by the ever-present threat that they will be met with anonymous violence.

The emergence of a genuinely independent movement of Iraqi working people can take place only through an irreconcilable struggle against the forces that have historically held the Iraqi working class back. These include the gangsters of the Baathist regime, the religious-based movements that foster extreme political backwardness, and the Iraqi Communist Party, which bears a particular responsibility for the present dilemma confronting the workers of Iraq.

The Stalinists of the Iraqi CP have remained consistent only in their steadfast determination to oppose the political independence of the working class. They integrated themselves into the Baathist regime, despite the Baathists' massacre of thousands of the party's members following the CIA-backed coup of 1963. The Iraqi CP clung to Saddam Hussein until he launched another bloody purge of the Stalinists in 1978-1979. Now the ICP is the de facto supporter of the US occupation, joining the puppet regime and operating a US-sanctioned trade union federation that opposes neither occupation nor the wholesale privatization of the Iraqi economy.

A new political party of the Iraqi working class must be built based upon the historic and often tragic experiences of the international socialist and anti-imperialist struggles of the twentieth century. There is no alternative to the construction of a revolutionary political party of the working class, based on an internationalist perspective.



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