Further into the Iraqi quagmire: US intensifies repression

James Cogan
20 August 2005

To use the term "democracy" in relation to the situation in Iraq makes a mockery of the word. The reality of life for the Iraqi masses is a social and economic catastrophe, alongside ever-more brutal colonial rule at the hands of the American military and its local Iraqi security forces. As tensions increase, the Bush administration and the Iraqi government are presiding over a stepped-up campaign of repression against the population.

On Thursday, hundreds of people demonstrated against the US occupation through the streets of the Baghdad suburb of Amiriya, carrying the coffins of three more men gunned down in their house during an American raid and search.

Khalil Hussein, a middle-aged man whose wounds in the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s had left him crippled and confined to a wheelchair, was shot dead in his bathroom and left lying on the floor. His two brothers, Khalid and Jamal, were also killed. His sister-in-law was wounded in the arm and foot.

A US military statement labelled them a "kidnapping cell" and "terrorists". Their family and friends have accused American troops of indiscriminate killings. Khalil Hussein's "crime" may well have been being unable to stand up when ordered to by American troops. A friend of the brothers told Reuters: "They call everybody 'terrorists' but they just commit terrorist acts whenever they want."

Every week in Iraq, hundreds of people are killed, wounded, detained or intimidated during searches or at roadblocks. The US military is enforcing a reign of terror, particularly in Baghdad and the predominantly Sunni Arab regions where support is greatest for the anti-occupation resistance organisations.

The suspicion and hostility toward the occupation forces has reached such levels that a common belief on Iraqi streets is that the indiscriminate bombings of civilians—including suicide bombings—are being orchestrated by the police and the US military to foster sectarian divisions among the Iraqi people and create a climate of fear. Stories have circulated of people discovering explosives in their cars after they were detained by police for several hours and then ordered to drive through particular suburbs.

Another wave of bombings that deliberately targeted Shiite Muslim civilians was unleashed in the capital on Wednesday, killing over 43 people and wounding at least 88. The Iraqi government immediately blamed Sunni Islamic extremist insurgent groups.

The daily death toll in Iraq is escalating. The central Baghdad morgue alone received 1,100 corpses in July—676 of whom had been shot. The morgue director, Faed Bakr, told the *Los Angeles Times*: "In the days of Saddam we had maybe 16 shootings a month. Now we have more than that every day."

The fatalities include people killed by US troops, private contractors or Iraqi security forces; Iraqi police and government officials killed by insurgents; and numerous casualties of the country's unchecked criminal violence. They also include the victims of extra-judicial killings by police commando units of the Iraqi interior ministry. The horrifically tortured bodies of dozens of people who were detained by the police have been found in rubbish dumps, rivers and abandoned buildings.

The first judicial murders since the US invasion are likely to take place over the next week. The Iraqi government has authorised the hanging of three men convicted of a number of rapes and killings. The men's nationally-televised trial was a total travesty. According to the *New York Times*, at least three witnesses identified the men as murderers because they saw some of them confess to the crime before the trial on a widely condemned television program operated by the police commandos. Terrified men who have clearly been beaten and tortured have appeared on the show admitting to

© World Socialist Web Site

horrific crimes.

State executions are part of preparations to escalate the level of violence against the Iraqi people. Far from there being a reduction in the number of US troops in Iraq, as many as 20,000 extra troops are likely to be deployed by the end of the year. The boost will facilitate a series of counter-insurgency operations and provide additional security during the referendum on a constitution, planned for October 15, and elections scheduled for December 15.

In a telling indication that the Pentagon is planning a major crackdown over the coming months, the US military announced on Wednesday that it is sending 700 extra troops to garrison its fourth prison in Iraq, which is expected to be functioning by October. American forces are detaining at least 10,800 Iraqis, many of whom have never been charged. The new facility is intended to allow prisoner numbers to increase to around 16,000.

Underlying the preparations are the growing signs of a social and political upheaval against the occupation and the US-backed government. US atrocities since the invasion have produced deep-seated opposition while the conditions of life for millions of people are unbearable.

Households are getting just four to six hours of electricity per day. Almost half of Baghdad's population has lost access to running water. There are chronic shortages of fuel. Unemployment is between 50 and 60 percent. One quarter of all children are suffering malnutrition.

The August 9 editorial in *Azzaman*, an Iraqi journal, articulated popular anger. The piece declared: "It seems it is not in the interest of our rulers to have things under control. Prosperity, stability and security, once achieved, will be a blow to their ends. Because if the bombs stop, food is made available, electricity returns, crime is checked and the country is back on its feet, all the Iraqi people will then turn their attention to the most pressing issue—how to drive the occupation troops out of the country. It does not take a genius to understand that both the government and the occupation need each other and both thrive on our miseries."

The anger erupted on August 7 in the southern city of Samawa, where Japanese and Australian troops represent the occupation. Over 1,000 people marched on the governor's office, demanding his resignation, jobs, electricity and water. The demonstration was led by supporters of Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, whose movement, which is based among the urban poor of the major cities, took up arms last year against US forces. The governor and most of the local police are members of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI)—one of the main factions in the Iraqi government.

After police fired on the crowd, killing two people, Sadrist militiamen fought a running battle with the SCIRI police. The area is reportedly still extremely volatile.

The Bush administration and its puppet regime in Baghdad have only one answer to the growing demands of the Iraqi people for their social and democratic rights—more repression. A factor in the urgency with which Washington is demanding that the parliament in Baghdad agree on a new constitution and hold fresh elections is to provide a façade of legitimacy. Mass killings will be justified as defending a "democratic" government against "terrorists" and "extremists," just as they were last year in Fallujah.

Barry Rubin, the director of an Israeli-based strategic thinktank, spelt out the implications of the deteriorating situation in Iraq in the Spring edition of the *Washington Quarterly*. In blunt terms, he argued for the consolidation of an Iraqi regime based on Shia factions such as SCIRI and, with US backing, the use of their militias to carry out a bloodbath against both the Sunni and Shiite opposition to the occupation.

Rubin wrote: "Defeating insurgent forces consisting of Saddam loyalists, Al Qaeda terrorists and Shia extremists with mild methods is impossible... It is impossible, however, for any US or US-led force effectively to employ the methods necessary to defeat the Iraq insurgency. Every time a US marine kills an Iraqi civilian or fires on a mosque, tens of millions of Arabs and many Iraqis will take it as proof that the United States has an evil anti-Arab and anti-Muslim agenda... Nothing other than an Iraqi force willing to use the necessary methods and have them accepted as 'pro-Muslim' and patriotic will successfully crush the insurgency."

What George Bush and Dick Cheney have taken to calling the "noble cause" in Iraq consists of unspeakable crimes against the Iraqi people, and preparations for even greater ones.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site