

Violence escalates against students and teachers in Iraq

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The kidnapping of three law professors and a student on Monday and the deaths on Sunday of five students at a girls' secondary school underscores the collapse of the Iraqi educational system brought on by the American invasion.

Both incidents occurred in the Baghdad area. The law professors, teachers at Nahrain Law School, were Adnan al-Abid, Amar al-Qaisi, and Abdul-Mutaleb al-Hashimi. Dr. al-Hashimi's son, a student at the school, was also kidnapped. The four were seized as they were leaving the premises of the university.

The five girls, ranging in age from 12 to 16, were killed when the Kholoud Secondary School came under mortar fire at about 11:00 a.m. More than 20 other students were wounded in the attack.

According to the *New York Times*, primary and secondary schools have been targeted in the past month. Ten students were killed at the Gharbiya Secondary School in Baghdad. In early December, a girls' high school in a Christian neighborhood of Baghdad was closed down after posters appeared that threatened to kill the students.

The worst atrocity occurred on January 17, when bombs exploded at the prestigious Mustansiriya University in Baghdad, killing more than 70 students, most of them female, and wounding scores more. The blasts occurred when students were lining up in front of minivans to take them home.

The attacks were anticipated. According to journalist Nir Rosen writing on IraqSlogger in December, the Sunni fundamentalist group Ansar Al Sunna had put up posters and banners in Sunni neighborhoods calling for a boycott of universities by Sunni students. Mustansiriya University, in particular, had been targeted.

In response, a banner had been hung up at

Mustansiriya University saying, "We will not surrender to terrorism, and that is our response."

Students from the Iraqi College of Dentistry had earlier written an appeal to the Iraqi government protesting the relocation of their institution to Mustansiriya University, calling it "the campus of horror and dread."

The massacre at Mustansiriya University prompted student protests. Approximately 60 students from the University of Technology in Baghdad staged a sit-in, demanding protection for faculty and students.

One of the students, Yasmin Mohammad, told Aljazeera about the January 17 bombing: "This attack is not targeting a specific sect. The university has students who are Shiites, Sunnis, Kurds and Christians. It is a war on everything associated with Iraq."

On January 23, a Professor of Economics at Mustansiriya University, Diya al-Meqoter, was shot in the head and chest. Meqoter had hosted a popular television show that granted poor people funds to start small businesses. Meqoter was also the head of the Consumers' Association, a group that combated price gouging by businesses.

More than 300 University professors have been assassinated since the US invasion of 2003. Nearly 40 percent of Iraq's professionals have left the country, including more than 3,000 professors. Hundreds more have flowed into the relatively safe haven of Iraqi Kurdistan.

A report issued by the United Nations in 2005 found that fully 84 percent of Iraq's higher education facilities had been "destroyed, damaged and robbed" since the US invasion two years earlier.

In 1982, UNESCO awarded Iraq a prize for eradicating illiteracy. At the time, Iraq had one of the highest rates of literacy for women. In 2004, UNESCO

estimated that the literacy rates for adults—after a year of American occupation and 12 years of UN-sponsored sanctions—stood at 74 percent. A UNESCO survey conducted in January 2007 estimated that only 37 percent of women in the countryside are now literate.

According to the same survey, only 42 percent of boys and 30 percent of girls of school age attend classes.

Universities in other parts of the country are open, but have become deserted. Many schools in Basra, Mosul, and Diyala are empty. Parents are keeping their children home from primary and secondary school.

The destruction of Iraq's cultural infrastructure began with the looting of the National Museum in April 2003. The American occupation forces allowed this disaster to happen. Since then, the destruction and occupation of schools (30 percent of schools are occupied by American forces in Ramadi) and the nurturing of sectarian hatreds by the Bush Administration have caused a nearly total collapse of the Iraqi educational system.

This can only be by design. To the extent that a population is deprived of education and knowledge, it is easier to subject it to semi-colonial domination. Thus, school has become impossible for millions of youth. Teachers and professors are shot. Libraries are shut, and newspapers are bombed.



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