Iraq: Bloodiest day this year deepens political crisis

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12 May 2010

A series of violent attacks from one end of Iraq to the other turned May 10 into the country's bloodiest day thus far this year. The attacks, claiming approximately 120 dead and some 300 wounded, have deepened the political crisis that has gripped the country since national elections more than two months ago, which have yet to produce a new government.

Along with a string of horrific suicide bombings—the kind of attack that has kept the monthly death toll in Iraq at between 300 and 400 throughout the year—Monday's violence also saw a series of coordinated and sophisticated attacks on Iraqi security forces, in which at least 12 soldiers and cops were killed and another two dozen wounded.

Guerrillas dressed in street cleaners' uniforms attacked at least 14 military-police checkpoints in Baghdad, firing on security forces with silencer-equipped weapons. Similar attacks were launched on checkpoints in the north, where US, Iraqi and Kurdish troops man tense borders between Kurdish and Arab districts. At least two members of the Peshmerga Kurdish militia were killed at a checkpoint struck by a suicide car bomber.

Attacks also took place in the southern oil-producing center of Basra, an overwhelmingly Shia area, where such operations, by what are presumed to be Sunni armed organizations, had been considered extremely difficult.

In Fallujah, the predominantly Sunni city west of Baghdad that was subjected to repeated US sieges, bombs exploded at dawn outside the homes of leading officials in the local security forces, killing at least four.

The greatest number of lives was lost in a few massive car bombings. One took place outside a state-owned textile plant in the predominantly Shia city of Hilla, about 60 miles north of Baghdad. The first bomb was set off as workers were leaving their shift, while a second was detonated after co-workers, family members and emergency crews had rushed in to aid the wounded. At least 43 people were reported killed, and 150 or more wounded.

Renovation of the factory had been completed only last year as part of a US-funded project. Given the bitter sectarian divide generated by the seven-year-old US war and occupation, such projects are seen by some as part of the transfer of wealth and jobs from the Sunni minority—which has suffered a massive loss of employment—to the Shia majority.

A Shia religious center in Suwayra, west of Baghdad, was also bombed, with 11 people killed.

The level of killing was comparable to the bloodiest days of 2006-2007, before the US military "surge" that had supposedly pacified Iraq and paved the way toward the handing off of security operations from American troops to the Iraqi security forces.

The new wave of violence has underscored, however, that nothing has been resolved, and the real legacy of the US military offensive, as well as the country's continued foreign occupation, is a shattered society in which rival bourgeois factions are prepared to unleash sectarian carnage upon the Iraqi population in pursuit of their own narrow interests.

It has also made clear that the US strategy of targeted assassinations against leaders of the Sunni resistance groups has failed to curtail their ability to carry out devastating attacks.

The reaction to the wave of violence from rival Iraqi bourgeois factions was one of bitter recriminations, with each attempting to blame the other, while simultaneously attempting to exploit them to vie for Washington's support.

In interviews with various media outlets, Iyad Allawi, the former CIA asset whose political grouping won an unexpected plurality in Iraq's March 7 election, warned that Monday's violence was a warning that the country was sliding into a new civil war that was being fueled by

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the attempt of incumbent Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to hold onto power based upon a sectarian Shia alliance.

Allawi and his supporters blamed the violence on the attempt by Maliki's faction to steal the election by purging and jailing Sunni members of Allawi's electoral formation and turning toward the Iraqi National Alliance, led by the dissident cleric Moqtada al-Sadr.

Allawi, who began his service to Washington as a participant in various CIA-backed attempts at overthrowing Saddam Hussein in Baghdad and then became a conduit for Washington's lies about "weapons of mass destruction," was installed by the US occupation force as an unelected "interim prime minister" for nine months in 2004.

He is now warning his American patrons that unless Maliki is reined in, the resulting violence can spread well past Iraq.

"This conflict will not remain within the borders of Iraq," he told the British *Guardian*. "It will spill over and it has the potential to reach the world at large, not just neighboring countries. Now Iraq is at centre stage in the region. But it is boiling with problems, it is stagnant and it can go either way."

Allawi has complained that elected members of his coalition—which owed its plurality largely to Sunni voters—had been arrested and subjected to persecution by the "Justice and Accountability Committee". This government body was initiated under the US Coalition Provisional Authority, the colonial setup created in Iraq in the wake of the US invasion, to ferret out and bar from the government and security forces former members of Saddam Hussein's ruling Ba'ath Party.

At least six members of Allawi's slate have been singled out by the committee. The exclusion of only two of them would deprive the electoral grouping of its 91-seat plurality. Maliki's State of Law Coalition won 89 seats, while the Shiite fundamentalist Iraqi National Alliance won 70. The remaining 57 seats went to Kurdish parties from Iraq's north.

Allawi has also sought to enlist Washington's support by charging that Maliki's machinations are being carried out at the behest of Iran, which he accused of "meddling" in Iraqi affairs and inspiring the use of the de-Ba'athification panel against his supporters.

A spokesman for Allawi's Iraqiya coalition, meanwhile, charged that the attacks had been facilitated by the politicization of the security forces and the prolonged stalemate in efforts to form a new government.

"This is the result of the political vacuum," said Maysoon al-Damluji, a Sunni politician who serves as the Iraqiya spokeswoman. "There is no government. No parliament. Insurgents are able to sneak through these gaps—the inefficiencies of the security apparatus."

Maliki managed to force a recount of ballots in Baghdad, a process that could drag on for weeks. Political wheeling and dealing in pursuit of a majority coalition could continue for even months more.

Maliki, the leader of the Shiite fundamentalist Da'wa Party, who returned to Iraq from exile in 2003, has, like Allawi, served as a servile puppet of the US occupation. He took office as prime minister in 2006, before US forces were unleashed against anti-occupation Shiite militias.

He and his supporters have denounced Al Qaeda as the author of Monday's nationwide attack, though the organization itself has not claimed responsibility. The clear aim is to curry favor with Washington, which has justified its "global war on terror" as well as its continuing war in Afghanistan-Pakistan in the name of a crusade against the Islamist organization.

While Allawi and Maliki have feigned support for the withdrawal of US military forces from Iraq, both of them are seeking to curry Washington's favor and are seeking continued US military backing to solidify a new government capable of dispensing wealth and privileges—all control of oil production—to the bourgeois factions that they represent.

For Washington, which has stated its intention to reduce the number of American occupation troops to 50,000 in order to free up forces for deployment to Afghanistan, the new wave of violence poses serious problems.

In what must qualify as one of the major understatements by US officials, Major-General Stephen Lanza, the US military's spokesman in Iraq, said that the attacks exposed "a threat out there that we have to be concerned about."

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