

Iraqi soldier kills two US troops

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On Tuesday afternoon, 26-year-old Soran Rahman Taleh Wali, a Kurdish Iraqi soldier, opened fire on US troops at an Iraqi commando base near the city of Tuz Khurmatu in Salahaddin province, 210 kilometres north of Baghdad. Two American soldiers were killed, 26-year-old Sergeant Philip Jenkins and 22-year-old Private James McClamrock, and nine others wounded before Wali was shot dead.

The American troops were escorting a US commander who was visiting the base. Iraqi Staff Colonel Ghaleb al-Bayati told the *Washington Post* that Wali had been playing volleyball with the US soldiers. An argument allegedly broke out and Wali opened fire, resulting in the first American deaths since US President Barack Obama declared the “end of the war” in Iraq just one week earlier.

The American military claimed the incident did not point to any deeper hostility toward the US occupation among Iraqi troops. The commander of American forces in northern Iraq, Major General Tony Cuculo, told the *Washington Post*: “This is a tragic and cowardly act, which I firmly believe was an isolated incident and is certainly not reflective of the Iraqi security forces in Salahaddin.”

Contradicting such claims, however, *Stars and Stripes* reported on September 8 that all American troops operating at Iraqi military bases have since been ordered to keep a loaded magazine on their rifles at all times, and to be “alert” for any behaviour by Iraqi troops that “does not make sense”. The article cited Iraqis carrying weapons on their base as an example.

The few details that have emerged surrounding the incident point to other motives for Wali’s actions than a dispute over a volleyball game.

Zargan Kfoor, a relative of Wali’s, told the *New York Times* that the young soldier had recently been teased by American troops he had been assigned to work with over his strict adherence to his Sunni Islam faith.

According to *Post* the neighbourhood where Wali and his family lives, Jumhuriyah, was recently raided by joint US-Iraqi forces, targeting followers of the Sunni Islamist insurgent group, Ansar al-Sunna. The *New York Times* reported that just hours before he opened fire on the American troops, Wali had taken part in escorting eight detainees to a police station.

Whatever the exact reasons, Wali’s actions cannot be separated from the deep-seated opposition among the Iraqi population to the ongoing occupation of the country by US forces. There are still 50,000 American troops in Iraq who are on call to assist a puppet government in Baghdad suppress all those who oppose the continuing US occupation of the country.

The fact that Wali was an ethnic Kurd—the only section of Iraqi society from whom the occupation did not face mass resistance—has also provoked concerns. An anonymous Kurdish security official told the *Washington Post*: “This is the first incident in which a Kurd killed Americans. We are worried that this might end the honeymoon between the Kurds and the Americans.”

The so-called honeymoon is a reference to the widespread hopes that existed among the long-oppressed Kurdish population that a US invasion would bring democracy and prosperity. Such illusions have been dashed. The occupation has instead installed a corrupt and dictatorial layer of the Kurdish elite in power over the Kurdish-populated northern provinces. While a minority has enriched itself, the bulk of Kurdish Iraqis remain mired in poverty.

Tens of thousands of young Kurds were encouraged to join the new US-created Iraqi army after 2003. Poorly equipped Kurdish troops were then used by the American military as little more than cannon-fodder in the brutal operations that were waged to crush resistance in Sunni and Shiite Arab areas of the

country. Thousands of Kurdish soldiers were killed, wounded or psychologically scarred by being involved in the repression of civilians.

The Iraqi population—whether Kurd, Arab or Turkomen, Sunni or Shiite—has been left to deal with the consequences of the virtual destruction of the country. Over one million people have been killed, four million turned into refugees and entire cities devastated. While millions of people struggle without stable electricity supplies, clean water or adequate housing, Iraq’s vast oil reserves are in the process of being turned over to giant transnational corporations for exploitation.

The claim that the US occupation has brought “democracy” to Iraq is a fraud. The Iraqi state is dominated by ethno-sectarian-based ruling class cliques that were placed in power by the US-led occupation. The country has been left bitterly divided. Six months after the March 7 election, there is still no new government because rival Shiite, Sunni and Kurdish factions cannot agree on its make-up. Prime Nouri al-Maliki continues to rule as a “caretaker” government amid the constant threat that conflicts over the division of power and wealth could plunge the country into civil war.

Under such conditions, expressions of hostility like that of Soran Rahman Taleh Wali are inevitable.

This week’s incident was not the first since Obama declared an “end of the war” on August 31. On Sunday, six insurgents launched a suicidal assault on the headquarters of the Iraqi Army’s 11th Division in central Baghdad, which also has American personnel on its staff. Far from their combat role ending, US troops and helicopter gunships played the major role in repelling the attack. Twelve people, including the six insurgents, were killed and 29 wounded.

While US imperialism maintains its occupation, the war will continue and American troops will continue to kill and be killed.



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