

Wikileaks exposures deepen political crisis in Iraq

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The publication of thousands of US military reports by Wikileaks on October 22 has added to the tensions that underlie the ongoing failure of the main Iraqi political factions to form a new government nearly eight months since the March 7 election.

The largely Sunni-based Iraqiya coalition, which holds 91 of the 325 seats in the new parliament, has called for an investigation of acting Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. The Wikileaks documents confirm what millions of Iraqis already knew: that Maliki's Shiite fundamentalist and Kurdish nationalist-dominated government collaborated in a campaign of mass killing to suppress opposition to the US occupation.

Iraqiya legislators issued a written demand on October 28 for the convening of an emergency session of parliament to remove Maliki as acting prime minister and form a commission of inquiry in conjunction with the judiciary and the UN to bring charges against him. Just three days earlier, the Iraqi Supreme Court had ruled that it was unconstitutional that the parliament had met only once, for 20 minutes, since the election.

Maliki has denounced the publication of the Wikileaks documents as a conspiracy to prevent him retaining his post of prime minister. In reality, the reports are powerful evidence of war crimes by the US-led occupation and the puppet regime in Baghdad.

Maliki was installed as prime minister in April 2006, two months after the destruction of the Shiite Al Askiriya mosque by alleged Sunni extremists. The Al Askiriya attack was seized upon by the US occupation forces and the governing Shiite parties to whip up a sectarian frenzy. US forces stood by while Shiite militias, including the Mahdi Army of cleric Moqtada al-Sadr and the Iranian-linked Badr Brigade, rampaged through the suburbs of Baghdad and other cities, looting and burning Sunni mosques, businesses

and homes.

Over the following months, thousands of men were dragged from their homes or seized on the streets by the predominantly Shiite Iraqi army and police, taken to secret locations and brutalised or murdered. Hundreds of others who had been detained by American troops were handed over to the Iraqi forces with the full knowledge of what would happen to them. The Wikileaks documents contain numerous references to the activities of Shiite death squads and over 1,000 reports by American soldiers of allegations of torture and abuse.

Sunni extremist groups responded by escalating their own indiscriminate killings and bombings against Shiite civilians. In the final months of 2006, as many as 100 bodies were being dumped in the streets of Iraq's cities every night, murdered by one or other rival faction. In many cases, the victims had been decapitated or mutilated with electric drills and other devices.

It is estimated that 600,000 people fled their homes during 2006 to escape the carnage. Many have never returned. Overall, it is estimated that up to two million people were displaced by the sectarian violence.

The reign of terror presided over by Maliki achieved its intended purpose. It broke the back of the Sunni-based insurgency by mid-2007—just as the thousands of additional US troops sent as part of the Bush administration's "surge" were deploying into the country. By the end of 2007, the majority of Sunni guerrilla fighters had accepted US offers of amnesty on the condition that they ceased insurgent activity and joined the "Sons of Iraq". While the formation of these US-backed Sunni militias was portrayed as an uprising against "Al Qaeda" and extremism, the Sons of Iraq primarily saw their role as protecting Sunni communities from the Iraqi security forces.

The response to the Wikileaks documents underscores how politically fragile Iraq actually is. The legacy of the horrors under US occupation has bred intense sectarian hatred and divisions, which are exploited by rival elites in their struggle for power and privilege. The March election resulted in a starkly divided 325-seat parliament, with no grouping close to holding a 163-seat majority. While Iraqiya won 91 seats, Maliki's Shiite coalition, State of Law, won 89.

Washington, which continues to occupy Iraq with 50,000 troops, has pushed for State of Law and Iraqiya to combine and form a type of "national unity" government with the Kurdish parties. But the bitter sectarian divisions have continued. The Shiite establishment accuses the Sunni-based parties of being fronts for Saddam Hussein's old Baath Party. The Sunni elites, in turn, regularly accuse the Shiite parties of being killers and pawns for the Iranian regime.

Iraqiya is led by longstanding US collaborator Iyad Allawi and supported by most of the Sunni Arab establishment that dominated the country under Saddam Hussein. The bloc has insisted that as it won the most seats it must be part of any government, with Allawi as prime minister.

Maliki has desperately tried to cling onto power without making major concessions to the Sunni elites. He has instead sought a coalition with the rival Shiite United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) that won 70 seats. The UIA is made up of Moqtada al-Sadr loyalists, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) and several smaller Shiite parties.

Washington is concerned that such an arrangement would see the Iranian government, which has close relations with the Sadrists and ISCI, exert significant influence over Iraqi policy. Iran, facing its own threats from the US, could seek to derail US plans to maintain permanent military bases in Iraq and to open up the country's vast energy reserves to foreign domination.

Even if the entire UIA supported Maliki, however, he would still need the support of the Kurdish nationalist parties, which hold 57 seats, to form a government.

The 19 demands issued by the Kurdish alliance on October 22 make it virtually impossible for an agreement to be struck. Included is the longstanding Kurdish demand for a referendum in the oil-rich province of Kirkuk [Tamim] and other areas of northern Iraq on whether to join the autonomous Kurdish Regional Government (KRG).

The KRG exercises considerable powers in the northern

areas of the country under its control. It has independently entered into contracts for the exploration of oil and gas deposits, and maintains its own substantial armed forces, the Kurdish *peshmerga*.

Among the other terms demanded by the Kurdish parties is an agreement that the Iraqi central government accepts legislation giving the KRG control over natural resources and provides funds for more advanced equipment for the *peshmerga*. The Kurdish leaders are also demanding the post of Iraqi president and a guaranteed number of federal ministries.

All the Arab-based parties—whether Shiite or Sunni—oppose the push by the Kurdish nationalists to expand their territory and increase their independence from the Iraqi government. If Maliki accepted the Kurdish terms, he would lose support elsewhere.

Amid the seemingly intractable stand-off, there is growing anger among broad sections of the population, who face atrocious living standards and have no confidence in the various factions of the political establishment. There have been reports also that some members of the Sons of Iraq militia are deserting to re-join insurgent organisations, including the Sunni extremist organisation Al Qaeda in Iraq. There has been no major spike in violence, but bombings, attacks on Iraqi police and assassinations are a daily occurrence, particularly in Baghdad.

The political impasse and early signs of a descent back to sectarian civil war have been accompanied by rumours last month that the Obama administration might ultimately encourage the US-created Iraqi security forces—a bloated apparatus of over 660,000 personnel—to step in and carry out a coup.

As the WSWS noted last month, there would be an objective logic to such a step. The Iraqi parliament has never been anything more than a façade behind which every decision of importance was made by Washington and the US military. If the parliament is so discredited and dysfunctional that it becomes an obstacle to US imperialist interests, it will be swept aside.



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