

Iraq “day of rage” protests shake US occupation regime

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Tens of thousands protested in cities throughout Iraq yesterday against the economic oppression and corrupt officials imposed by the US occupation regime, as well as the US occupation itself.

Complaining of joblessness, worsening electricity outages, food shortages, and rising food prices, they denounced or demanded the resignation of several national and local officials. Even though Iraq has the world’s second-largest oil reserves, social conditions are atrocious. The official unemployment rate is over 15 percent (in reality much higher), large parts of Iraq have only a few hours of electricity a day, and the country is still occupied by 47,000 US troops—with Iraq’s oil fields now largely in the hands of Western energy firms.

Iraqi security forces fired on protestors in several of the at least 17 cities where protests took place. Fifteen demonstrators were confirmed killed and at least 130 were wounded. Despite warnings from Iraqi officials, there were no suicide bombings or attacks by anti-US forces on the demonstrators.

Protestors defied curfews and an explicit warning from Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki the day before, who had told Iraqis not to attend the protests. They also defied opposition from Shiite clergy, including Moktada al-Sadr and Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, whose spokesmen told Al Sumaria Television that they feared that “infiltrators” would profit from the protests.

Al-Sadr issued a cowardly statement, alleging that participating in the protest would make it easier for state forces to justify a crackdown: “They are attempting to crack down on everything you have achieved, all the democratic gains, the free elections, the peaceful exchanges of power and freedom. So I call on you, from a place of compassion, to thwart the enemy plans by not participating in the demonstrations

tomorrow, because it’s suspicious, and it will give rise to the voice of those who destroyed Iraq.”

Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki ordered the resignations of provincial governors in Baghdad, Basra, and Nasiriya at the end of the day.

In the capital, Baghdad, the authorities deployed masses of soldiers to enforce a lock-down and banned all vehicle traffic in an attempt to prevent people from reaching the protests. Al-Maliki imposed similar vehicle bans in Mosul and Samarra. Baghdad’s international airport was also shut down.

An estimated 5,000 protestors nonetheless massed on Baghdad’s Tahrir Square, which was heavily guarded by pro-regime security forces. Protestors marched on the Green Zone, the heavily-guarded district that houses the US occupation authorities, the US embassy, and Iraq’s parliament.

Protestors denounced al-Maliki as a liar, with one man telling the *Christian Science Monitor*: “I’m a laborer. I work one day and stay at home for a month. [Maliki] says people will do better than they did under Saddam Hussein—where is it?”

The protestors breached two concrete blast walls on Jumhuriya Bridge, the main access point to the Green Zone. Police charged the protestors, while Iraqi Army helicopters buzzed the crowd, stirring up large clouds of dust to disorient them.

At the protests in Baghdad, Sadrist spokesman and Member of Parliament Sabah al-Saadi faced shouts and jeers. One said, “You have to cut your salary—we have nothing! Why are you taking so much money when we have no money?”

In the southern port and oil hub of Basra, protestors reported as numbering between 4,000 and 10,000 knocked over a concrete blast barrier and demonstrated in front of the offices of Governor Sheltagh Aboud al-

Mayahi. They demanded that he resign and that Basra officials face trial for corruption.

Basra protestors also demanded food ration cards and jobs. One protestor was reported killed in Basra.

Several cities in the center of the country faced large-scale protests. In Fallujah, a city repeatedly devastated by US military assaults, 1,000 protestors demonstrated and clashed with police outside municipal buildings. Nine protestors were injured.

In Tikrit police fired on protestors trying to take over a government building, killing two and injuring nine.

In Mosul, the capital of Iraq's northern Nineveh province, hundreds of protestors demanded jobs, better public services, an end to corruption, and the resignation of provincial governor Athel al-Nujafi and the provincial council. After an unidentified person threw a grenade near the government building, the guards opened fire on the protestors. Five were killed and 15 others wounded.

Earlier in the day, protestors stoned the convoy of al-Nujafi and his brother, Osama, the provincial parliamentary speaker.

Demonstrators in Hawija, a city near Kirkuk in northern Iraq, reportedly tried to occupy the city's municipal building. Security forces fired into the crowd, killing three protestors and wounding 15 according to Fattah Yaseen, the Hawija police chief.



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