

Hundreds killed in upsurge of terror bombings, sectarian attacks in Iraq

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A wave of violence is shaking the neo-colonial Iraqi regime that emerged from the US war and occupation of Iraq, as sectarian tensions between Iraq's bourgeois factions are inflamed by the savage US-led proxy war in neighbouring Syria.

In this past week, more than 200 people have been killed in car bomb attacks in a number of Iraqi cities. The worst violence was in Baghdad, where car bombs hit markets and bus stops in Shia neighbourhoods during the Monday morning rush hour.

Attacks also hit the Shia-majority city of Basra in southern Iraq, where two car bombs killed at least 13 and wounded 40. A car bomb in Balad, 80 km north of Baghdad, exploded near a bus carrying Iranian pilgrims, killing six Iranians and one Iraqi, and wounding nine.

Numerous Shia mosques have also been targeted. While no one claimed responsibility for the attacks, they were assumed to be the work of Sunni terrorist organizations, such as Al Qaeda in Iraq.

Sunni areas were also hit, including Samarra north of Baghdad, where a car bomb went off near a gathering of Sunni armed security men working for the government, killing three and wounding 13. In the western province of Anbar, armed men killed eight police officers in Haditha. A further 13 dead bodies were found, including eight police officers kidnapped at gunpoint last Friday.

Violence has risen following the attack by Iraq's security forces on a protest in the northern town of Hawija last month, following a raid on an army position, killing about 53 people and injuring 150 more.

According to the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, April was the bloodiest month in Iraq since June 2008. 712 people were killed and another 1,633

wounded in "acts of terrorism and violence."

Most of those killed were civilians and non-military personnel, including 161 police officers, making a total of 595. Similarly, most of those wounded were civilians and non-military personnel, including 290 police officers. In addition, 290 members of the Iraqi security services were killed, and another 195 were wounded.

Baghdad, the capital bore the brunt of the violence: 211 were killed and another 486 wounded. Sunni-majority provinces of Diyala, Saladin, Kirkuk, Nineveh and Anbar also saw numerous attacks.

It is prompting people to flee their homes. Jordan has closed its border with Iraq, however, as it is struggling to cope with more than 550,000 Syrian refugees, so Iraqi refugees are becoming internally displaced inside their own country.

Some violence in Sunni areas is being carried out by Sunnis against Sunnis working with the Maliki government—24 policemen have been killed in Anbar alone—but some of it has also been carried out by Shia gangs in retaliation.

The US-led war in Syria and the related preparation by Washington and its European allies for war with Iran are tearing apart the various factions underlying the regime of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

Washington and its allies are arming ultra-right Islamist fighters tied to Al Qaeda in Iraq, such as the Al Nusra Front, in a war broadly aimed at isolating the Shia regime in Iran and the Shia-led Syrian regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. This policy of confrontation with Iran brings Washington into conflict, however, with the Shia-majority Maliki government that it helped to set up in Iraq.

The Maliki government has refused to back demands for Assad's ouster and has forged close ties with Iran.

Washington has accused Iraq of tolerating Iranian shipments of weapons to Syria through Iraqi airspace; some Iraqi Shia militias are reportedly fighting on the side of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime.

The escalating tensions reflect the reactionary character of the regime US imperialism set up in Iraq, in a war that cost over a million lives and was fought based on US plans for a sectarian-based "partition" of Iraq. This allowed Washington and its allies to pursue a strategy of divide and rule inside Iraq, and oversee the looting of its oil.

The working masses, however, face rising unemployment, the lack of electricity, water and sanitation, and the failure to rebuild infrastructure destroyed by US war and sanctions. The deep tensions and social anger created by the legacy of US occupation are now being inflamed by reactionary sectarian conflicts that imperialism is again mobilizing to pursue its interests in the region.

Anbar and other mainly Sunni provinces of Diyala, Saladin, Kirkuk and Nineveh have seen weekly rallies against Maliki. Since last December, they have been protesting official discrimination, arbitrary arrests, detention, torture, and executions of Sunni oppositionists by Maliki's Shia-led coalition. Hundreds of thousands have been locked up for years, many without charges.

Sunni forces are also denouncing a sweeping anti-terrorism law that targets members of Al Qaeda or the Ba'ath Party of former President Saddam Hussein. They have called for Maliki's resignation.

Anbar leader Muhammed Khamis Abu Risha, a fugitive former member of the Sunni Awakening—fighters who were paid to switch sides and fight alongside the US during the US occupation of Iraq—have pledged further attacks on security forces.

He said that the government had not responded to their demands. He said, "We will not accept the army in Anbar. This is out of the question." He added, "The protest is not peaceful anymore, and we are ready for them. The coming days will not pass peacefully. We don't want democracy anymore."

According to *Al-Hayat*, Sunni protest leaders have called for "armed confrontation or the declaration of an [autonomous] region."

Prime Minister Maliki has responded by saying that while he would contemplate the establishment of an

autonomous region in the Sunni-dominated western provinces, this had to come about "through the correct legal procedures." He also said he would overhaul Iraq's security strategy, without providing further details. He added, "I assure the Iraqi people that they [attackers] will not be able to return us to sectarian conflict" that killed tens of thousands in Iraq in past years.

Iraq's Sunni parliamentary speaker Osama al-Nujaifi called for an emergency session to discuss the worsening security situation. He provocatively called for "a clear position from the international community on what is taking place in Iraq."

Maliki, who urged politicians to stay away from the parliamentary session, hit back at al-Nujaifi, alleging that legislators were exploiting sectarian passions for their own political gain. He said, "The politicians bear the responsibility for the sectarian escalation because of their statements, calls for violence and sectarian positions. Ignorant people pick up on that and go out bearing weapons and calling for fighting."

He accused some Sunni leaders of stoking unrest, saying: "The sectarian speeches at the demonstration sites are giving the insurgents a reason to kill."

Maliki is also in dispute with the oil-rich autonomous Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). It has awarded oil contracts to international corporations, sold oil on the international markets, and shipped oil to Turkey via its pipeline, bypassing Baghdad. Kurdish ministers and legislators have refused to attend the central cabinet meetings and parliament in Baghdad over the state budget allocations.



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