

2003-2013: Iraqi Resistance, American Dirty War, And The Remaking Of The Middle East – PART 4

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Arab spring in Iraq – Continuing resistance against the ongoing occupation.

Despite the immense high levels of trauma that the Iraqi people have endured during the violent occupation of their country, despite all the killings, ethnic cleansing and enforced displacement, their will to resist has not been broken. Nicolas Davies: “The people of Iraq did not seek violence. They had violence thrust upon them by a brutal, brainwashed American occupation force allied with unscrupulous Iraqi exiles. American officials were fully prepared to reduce the fate of the Iraqi people to a bloody struggle in which they believed that their own far greater capacity for violence would ultimately prove decisive. As in Vietnam, they discovered that their weapons could destroy Iraq but could not conquer it.”¹

The armed resistance has never stopped since 2003 and currently still carries out some 200 operations against the US and Iraqi armies and National Police every week, despite the merciless repression of the occupation forces and their local stooges. But also non-violent protests have been taken place frequently since the invasion and subsequent occupation of the country. In addition to protests against corruption, nepotism and women’s rights, Iraq has also seen a powerful workers movement emerge in recent years. Across Iraq doctors, nurses, taxi drivers, university staff, police, customs officers and emergency service personnel have repeatedly used non-violent protests, strikes, sit-ins and walk-outs. They have done so in order to draw attention to important issues such as their poor working conditions, the interference they are subjected to from various forces, the pressures under which they work, unfair dismissals, ineffectual government regulation and the dangerous nature of their jobs². But the peaceful protests gain momentum.

As mentioned above, basic necessities such as potable water, reliable electricity,

garbage pickup, a functioning sewage system, employment, health care, etc. are beyond the reach of the vast majority of Iraqis. Complaints have been growing about public power lasting just a few hours each day. Iraqi police used water cannon and batons to disperse protesters in the southern city of Nassiriya after protests flared on 22 August 2010 over crippling electricity shortages and inadequate services. Similar demonstrations occurred in Nassiriya in June 2010 when 1,000 protesters tried to storm the provincial council building, scuffling with police, and also in Basra, where two people died in clashes with police.³

Violent protests in several cities over power shortages in Basra and several other cities in June 2010 forced Iraq's electricity minister Kareem Waheed to resign.⁴

The December 2010 to January 2011 uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt inspired Iraqis to take to the streets. The first occurred on January 30 with two marches in Baghdad. 100 showed up in Firdos Square, where the statue of Saddam Hussein was famously pulled down during the 2003 invasion. While Iraqis wanted to show solidarity with the people of Egypt, they had their own demands as well. They called for better governance, services, and security. Another protest happened in Tahrir Square by the Green Zone, which also mentioned better services, but also demanded that the authorities not evict squatters from public buildings. The next day there was yet another turnout in the capital⁵.

Every day since February 2011 demonstrations and protests in many Iraqi towns have been organized, not covered by the mainstream press. Police shot randomly at hundreds of protesters in al-Hamza district in Iraq's southern province of al-Diwaniya on the 4th of February, killing one person and injuring four. The incident came after a statement released on 3 February by the Iraqi parliament condemning the use of violence against demonstrators in Egypt and urged for the respect of human rights. The protesters carried lamps and small sacks of sugar to symbolize their demands for food and electricity

A lawyers' union protest in Basra on Feb. 10 included demands for women's rights and transparency in government finances. In Baghdad, demonstrators decried reports of state-sponsored torture and other abuse in secret prisons. In Kirkuk in late January, the complaint was too many blackouts. On Sunday night 13 February near

an entrance to Baghdad's famed "Green Zone," residents of a nearby housing project gathered to accuse the prime minister of forcing them out, only to move in his allies in the security apparatus.⁶ On the same day in Mosul a man had died after setting himself ablaze to protest against unemployment.⁷

On Monday 14/02/2011, a long-term sit-in was organized in different parts of the country, including in Firdos Square in downtown Baghdad, and in front of the governate's buildings in Diwaniyah, Basra, Fallujah and Kirkuk. This demonstration was organized by the Popular Movement for the Salvation of Iraq, the Front for the Salvation of Kirkuk, the Free Iraqi Student and Youth Organization, and the Movement for Liberating the South. The call said: *"This peaceful demonstration demands the unconditional and immediate withdrawal of the Occupation as well as improvement of basic public services. It will be held in different provinces and is an expression of the unity of all the Iraqi People. It also demands from the government in the Green Zone, job creation for Iraqi youth and the accountability of those criminals responsible for the murder of the Iraqi people and the accountability of those accused of corruption and of plundering public money as well as for bringing them to immediate trial. It demands the immediate release of all detainees and warns that unless these demands are met, this peaceful demonstration will turn into an uprising in all Iraqi cities from Zakho to the Fao, and in God we seek help."*

Our demands at the present time:

- 1. Obliterating corruption and bringing to justice those who have embezzled or misused public funds.*
- 2. Provide the full entitlements under the ration system and ensure complete coverage for all. Initiate immediate plans of action in order to improve of basic public services.*
- 3. The release of detainees who are held without trial or charge and immediate disclosure of all secret prisons.*
- 4. Providing job opportunities for all young people.*
- 5. The enactment of the immediate care and financial support for millions of orphans and widows and to increase the salaries of retirees.*

These are our primary demands. They are the demands of the majority of the Iraqi people.

We appeal to our youths to join the march for these national demands based on the sincere desire for national independence, for rebuilding Iraq and to preserve the unity and dignity of its people. We deplore any attempt of a partisan monopoly or political manipulation of this popular movement.

the US and Iraqi forces attacked the peaceful protesters in Firdos Square with batons and water canon, tearing their banners and dismantling their camp. One of the organisers: Uday Al Zaidy (Muntadher Al Zaidi's brother) was taken to an unknown destination, beaten and tortured and ten other protesters were also arrested by interior ministry special forces.

The crowd also blamed the provincial council for abusing its power by shutting down bars and closing liquor stores.

In an attempt to stop the protests, Prime Minister Maliki ordered the prime minister's salary to be decreased by 50% and the difference returned to the Iraqi state budget starting February 2011. A day later, he announced that he would not run for a third term even though he is not barred from doing so by law.

Three people were killed and dozens wounded on 16 February in clashes between security forces and protesters in Kut in the southern Iraqi province Wasit, after around 2,000 people attacked government offices in protest over poor services. Three government buildings were set on fire, including the governor's official residence.

On 17 February new protests broke out in several cities and private security guards in the city of Sulaimaniya in Kurdistan fired on a group of protesters who tried to storm the political offices of the region's leader⁸, with one person killed and 57 injured⁹.

On 19 February a few thousand demonstrators took the streets in downtown Sulaimaniyah, demanding that those responsible for a shooting two days earlier that killed two people and injured nearly 50 be held responsible. Earlier at the city's university, about a 1,000 students also rallied to demand Barzani to apologize. About 1,500 people rallied in Baghdad in a demonstration organized by non-governmental organizations looking to highlight the plight of some of Iraq's most vulnerable citizens:

widows and orphans¹⁰. Three people had died so far and more than 100 have been wounded in clashes between protesters and heavily armed militia forces linked to the two ruling parties of Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdish region¹¹. What united the demonstrators, too is their determination to keep the demonstrations peaceful, despite the savage reaction by the security men and police, as in the shooting and the arrest of demonstrators and wounding and killing several of them in Kut, Sulaimaniya and Baghdad.

Journalist Riad al-Rubaie was killed in the middle of a peaceful demonstration of youth on 20 February, at Tahrir Square after being severely beaten by the police under the eyes of the protesters.

Security forces in civilian clothes raided the sit-in in Tahrir Square at dawn on February 21 and attacked the protesters with sharp implements and blades, killing one person and seriously injuring nine others. The wounded protesters said the security forces asked them to leave the arena. After midnight, the security forces withdrew from the arena to make way for about sixty men armed with spears, sticks and electric batons to attack the camp. They raided the camp and burned down the sit-in tent.

On 24 February 2011, soldiers stormed the office of the Journalistic Freedoms Observatory, the country's sole media-advocacy group. "They wanted to shut us up to clear the way for what they planned to do," says Ziad al-Ajili, the group's director. The troops confiscated hard drives, cameras, and other files. When popular protests started to emerge in February 2011, government agents began arresting Iraqi reporters in attendance, confiscating their cameras and notebooks. Having silenced the native chroniclers, security teams swept in, beating scores of demonstrators and using tear gas, water cannons, and bullets to disperse crowds. Nineteen people were killed and several thousand arrested in February. Ajili estimates that 160 journalists were arrested within five days of the protest¹². Hundreds of other reporters have been detained or beaten in the months since, he said¹³. Journalist Hadi Al-Mahdi's was murdered in Baghdad on 8 September 2011, on the eve of nationwide protests that he supported. He had been shot twice in the head. There can be no doubt that his murder was politically motivated.¹⁴ Hadi al-Mahdi, who was arrested on 25 February,

told Amnesty International he received electric shocks to his feet and was threatened with rape during his interrogation by police. He had been repeatedly threatened since.

Then Iraqi youth declared the 25th February 2011 a “Day of Rage” and they called for demonstrations in Baghdad and the rest of the country. Through Twitter, Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/Iraqe.Revolution>) and specially created websites (like <http://www.iraqi-revolution.com/home.html> and <http://www.wammdh.com/user>) Iraqi youth organized and discussed proceedings and actions and exchanged information and ideas. It is quite normal that the youth is in the forefront of the protest movements, given the fact that the median age in Iraq is 20,9 years (male: 20.8 years, female: 21 years¹⁵) and that hope for a better future and unwillingness to accept injustice is usually enshrined into young heart and minds.

The demonstration was totally independent of any political current and expressing popular demands and sentiments. The National Day of Rage was the result of the slow rumblings of the Iraqi People's anger about the past 8 years of destruction, pillage and plunder, rape, and total catastrophe. It's interesting to read their slogans and demands:

- * Enough with our silence, our patience has ran out.
- * We are like camels, we eat weeds and transport gold.
- * Our annual income from oil is \$100 billion, yet we cannot find bread to eat.
- * Death to democracy that takes us from bad to worse.
- * Death to democracy that does not recognise impeccable qualifications.
- * Death to democracy that has made people strangers in their own homeland.
- * Death to democracy that looks the other way while the ministers steal and embezzle billions and facilitate their escaping justice (reference to the minister for electricity, commerce etc.)
- * Death to democracy that robs the bank in daylight (reference to the robbing of the bank of Rafidain in Zuwiya)
- * Death to democracy that has promised transparency but created foggy atmosphere.
- * Death to democracy that has turned into a religion of worshiping positions of power.
- * Death to the democracy of assassinations with silencer guns.

- * Death to the democracy that assassinated our best academics and scientists and is replacing them with ignorant people who can hardly read and write.
- * Death to the democracy of death and beheading.
- * Death to the democracy of poverty, backwardness and murder.
- * Death to the democracy that arrests the murderers, then set them free and claims they escaped!
- * Death to the democracy that assassinated the opposition writers and those who stand by the truth.
- * Death to the democracy of the ethnic and sectarian quotas.
- * Death to the democracy that brought us a cancer of separation walls in our beloved Baghdad..

Some of these slogans relate to the dreadful state of Iraq's Higher Education and the killings of academics. Others are directed against the poor quality of public services, against corruption, against death squad policies and against the lack of freedom.

These protest are nationwide, not sectarian. The Iraqi youth, main instigators of this movement, are challenging the sectarian Iraqi Quisling government and counter American and Iranian plans for the country: no partitioning of Iraq, but electricity, jobs, clean water, free healthcare and education. No to corruption, no to summary executions and death squads. No to state-sponsored terror. These Iraqi demonstrators want a unified Iraq and want the money of their oil being used for public services. These protest movements are a sign of hope, hope for change, hope that the Iraqi people can reverse - as one nation - the deadly spiral of ethnic cleansing, sectarianism, despair and the culture of death, imported by the US horsemen of the apocalypse and their Iraqi stooges.

The fact that protests broke out simultaneously in many Iraqi towns proves that there is some sort of nationwide organisation and that the protests didn't happen spontaneously. The different fractions of the armed resistance supported the protests. And that's another conclusion: The Iraqi resistance and civil society organisations manifested side by side during the protests. There is still a major debate about the use of violent or non-violent methods to end the occupation and to challenge the Quisling government. Some civil society organisations oppose fiercely the Iraqi armed resistance and some even call them "terrorists". Confronted with the

state violence of the Maliki government against peaceful protesters, these discussions halted temporarily and many anti-opposition groups worked together to denounce the dreadful economic state and corruption of the country.

The protests in Iraq have been not so much around regime change as in other countries of the region, but peaceful actions around the pace of reforms under the current elected government, the scale of unemployment in the country and charges of corruption at many levels of public life.¹⁶ The situation in Iraq is totally different from other uprisings in the Arab World. Contrary to other Countries, Iraq is under foreign occupation since 2003. The anti-occupation movement has tried “regime change” for the past 8 years. Fighting simultaneously against the US occupation and its installed dictatorial puppet government, has resulted in ten thousands of victims. The Iraqi people have suffered tremendously. Due to the harsh repression and the indiscriminate policy of collective punishment and death squad policies, many people are temporarily tired of fighting and they try now desperately to improve their living conditions and exert their democratic rights through peaceful means, for minimum requirements, although they're as fed-up with this dreadful occupation as they were 8 years ago.

All layers of the civil society joined the protest movements across the country. They came on foot, Shiites and Sunnis, Christians, senior citizens, women, teenagers and children, most of them there to support the freedoms that Iraqis have fought so hard to grasp over the past eight years. Even political parties who are involved in the political process, like the Iraqi National Party and the Iraqi Communist Party and their affiliated mass organisations took part in the protests. Another observation is that the protest movement is a mosaic of different organisations, with various demands and slogans, sometimes demonstrating simultaneously in the same city in different locations. But the fact that they chose to demonstrate on the same day and continue to do so proves that they realize the strength of solidarity and speaking with a united voice to decry the dreadful situation of the country and the disastrous policies of their corrupt government. Some may argue that during the protests in Iraq they did not see a ‘nation’ protesting like in Egypt, but rather different sectarian groups with diverging interests. An answer to that could be that the ruling parties of Al Maliki and Moqtada Al Sadr urged their followers not to take part in the protests. Despite this ban many

Shia took part in the protest movement and the slogan “we are one nation, we are one people” was often heard.

The security agencies and intelligence services had on 23 February given warning to the owners of the buildings surrounding Tahrir Square of the consequences of allowing photographers and journalists from getting to the rooftops and took their written pledges, in an attempt to prevent a wide media coverage of the event, on Friday, 25 February. Colonel Hameed Kadhim, Director of Training of Police in the Ministry of Interior, has resigned because he has refused to obey orders to attack the demonstrators.

The protests began peacefully but grew more aggressive. A group of protesters gathered at the nearby Jumhuriya Bridge, which runs over the Tigris to the Green Zone, and began trying to tear down concrete blast walls that had been set up shortly before the protest¹⁷. Angry crowds seized a local police station in Kirkuk, set fire to a provincial office in Mosul and rattled fences around the local Governate offices in Tikrit, prompting security forces to open fire with live bullets. At least three people were reported killed in the Tikrit area and three others in Kirkuk. Two people were also reported killed in Kurdistan, in the north and one in Basra¹⁸.

By sundown in Baghdad, security forces were spraying water cannons and exploding sound bombs to disperse protesters, chasing several through streets and alleyways and killing at least three, according to a witness.

A day after the “National Day of Rage” that brought tens of thousands of Iraqis into the streets in nationwide demonstrations and ended with soldiers shooting into crowds, Iraqi security forces detained hundreds of people, including prominent journalists, artists and intellectuals.

Four journalists who had been released described being rounded up well after they had left a protest at Baghdad's Tahrir Square. They said they were handcuffed, blindfolded, beaten and threatened with execution by soldiers from an army intelligence unit.

During the demonstrations across the country at least 29 people were killed, as crowds stormed provincial buildings, forced local officials to resign and freed

prisoners¹⁹. Six people were killed in Fallujah and six others in Mosul, with the other deaths reported in five separate incidents around the country²⁰.

Not to anyone's surprise, the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad played down Friday's violence, as well as the draconian measures Maliki took to stifle turnout. Iraq's security forces "generally have not used force against peaceful protesters," said Aaron Snipe, an embassy spokesman. "We support the Iraqi people's right to freely express their political views, to peacefully protest and seek redress from their government. This has been our consistent message in Iraq and throughout the region."

The turnout of the "Day of Rage" was huge, coming as it did after a curfew on cars and even bicycles forced people to walk, often miles, to participate. There were also pleas from Maliki and Shiite clerics, including from Moqtada al-Sadr, to stay home. Maliki described the demonstrators as "the enemies of freedom" and his officials issued statements insinuating that political opposing the political process in the country were behind the protests. Some went as far as accusing al-Qaeda and the Baathists of participating.

As the uprisings from Tunisia to Bahrain show, trade unions are playing a key part in the mass movements calling for dignity, justice and democracy. In Iraq, they are an urgently needed antidote to rising authoritarianism and sectarianism. Unions also have a critical role in speaking up for the rights of women²¹. Before major clashes erupted in several Iraqi cities on 25 February's protests, trade unions in Iraq had conducted strikes and protests in demand of a new labour law that gives public-sector trade unions full and universal rights.

On 14 February thousands of working people rallied in central Baghdad. The protesters massed in the capital's al-Tahrir Square and chanted slogans demanding that the Iranian-backed government take action to get people into work, raise wages and rein in soaring food prices. Many raised banners bearing the image of a broken heart, a reference to Valentine's Day, while others held up placards demanding that corrupt officials be held to account²².

The most recent strikes started on 13 February when an oil and gas workers' branch of the General Federation of Iraqi Workers (GFIW) staged protests at facilities of the North Oil Co. in Kirkuk. The protest actions in northern Iraq were repeated on 24 February. The next day, as part of the "Day of Rage," GFIW and its affiliates in Basra held protests demanding a labour law that would finally give Iraqi workers and trade unions rights. The demonstration in Basra by the GFIW also called for public policies to reduce unemployment especially among the young, basic services for all citizens, and improvements to ration cards.²³ The Sadrists (followers of Moqtada Al-Sadr) have staged something of a civil society coup by taking over the country's independent labour movement. They are a small, but important, minority in the Iraqi coalition government, and won control of the labour ministry in the government after the last elections. In preparation for union elections, these Sadrist officials have been issuing their own union membership cards, effectively giving them the right to decide who can vote. In a similar incident in 2010 - and a worrying sign of things to come - the polling booth for a union election was inside the Sadrist party offices. In April 2011, the Labour Minister issued a decree, immediately derecognising the General Federation of Iraqi Workers (GFIW), and instead appointing a committee of officials, largely drawn from the ranks of the Sadrists, to take control of unions' funds, offices, and the running of upcoming union elections.²⁴ And it is painfully sectarian. In Basra the seven officials that demanded the keys to the local union office were all from the Sadrist party. The 2011 Annual Survey of violations of trade union rights – Iraq, mentioned that "In January, staff from Baghdad's most famous hotel went on strike demanding a safety bonus after numerous mortar attacks and the death of two staff. Also in January the President of Basra's Iraqi Teachers Union was imprisoned, and the government sought to interfere with its elections. Iraqi police raided and shut down the offices of the electricity unions. In March after oil workers protested over low pay and their union's illegal status, union leaders were transferred, while in June dockworkers protesting the prohibition of unions in ports south of Basra were surrounded by troops, and their leaders transferred. Trade union rights in law are very restricted".²⁵

The following Friday, 4 March 2011, was the scene of more Iraqi protests, called "Day of the Martyr".

Iraqi Human Rights Activist, based in Amman, Jordan, gives a first-hand account of the event:

My dear Dirk:

You have been receiving bulletins from me throughout the day which I know full well, you find quite dry and without any feeling or sentiment – well now I am writing to you to let you know what it was really like watching and listening – watching all these thousands of young men and women as well as the old demonstrating peacefully and knowing full well they are going to be attacked, arrested and probably in some cases killed for no reason other than wanting freedom and dignity.

I was also listening to their fervour and anguish which literally brought me to tears and broke my heart probably for the umpteenth millionth time since the invasion and occupation of Iraq asking myself all the time how can the world be so blind and deaf – and for the past two weeks I have felt that the world is not only deaf and blind but dumb also, with a very few exceptions, of course!

We started the Martyr's Day, for that is what the young people have called it, with the execution of a young married man being taken away in full sight of his young wife and children by a force called Battalion 24, formerly known as the infamous, Muthanna Battalion commanded by the very infamous Raheem Risen Al Baythani who has commanded this battalion in Abu Ghraib and has terrorized its citizens since he took over which is around 3 years ago – before that he was in command of Hay Al Jamia'a which he also terrorized – infact, he is famous for terrorizing the areas he has taken command of – I've heard that he tells the people that they are all his slaves!

The young man, Ahmed Inizie Al Hamdani was found executed a short while later just 50 meters from his home....., in the village of Al Hamdaniya in Abu Ghraib.

Of course, last night it was announced that the so called government had imposed a curfew from 12 o'clock midnight, last night, to 6.00 a.m. Saturday morning throughout

Iraq. They had also imposed a curfew on all vehicles in Baghdad and in all Iraq's cities.

The Tahrir Square demonstrators were beaten with electric truncheons and clubs and a chase took place in all the neighbouring side streets, hotels and buildings! A number of journalists and hoteliers were arrested. Chased by water cannon and looked on from above by helicopters! Watched also from the Turkish Restaurant building by this weeks new Death Squad - they were the people who gave commands and orders to the security troops to shoot and beat-up!

In all the Iraqi cities people were threatened under pain of death and shoot to kill orders were given by police officers to their men in order to stop the demonstrations and yet people still came out and demonstrated in most of the cities – the most important of which were Baghdad, Mosul, Samarra, Basra, Najef, Diwaniya, Thiqar. They all sang about Maliki being a liar – it is amazing how this man is so much without dignity – hundreds and thousands of Iraqis have been singing a special song for him about his being a thief and a liar for the past 2 weeks – anyone else would have resigned and got out but not he.

There are a whole spate of songs about him and his regime of crooks and plunderers now – I will be sending you some very soon.

Sulaimaniya – yes, I must never forget Sulaimaniya – brave Sulaimaniya who has paid so expensively for its revolt against corruption and oppression and who started all of this 3 days ago it gave its youngest – a 12 year old boy.

We, too, paid – we too paid – today a young girl was shot by a sniper in Samarra – and the snipers are all members of the Iranian Quds Army who were positioned on the top of buildings.

Today, the brave men of Mosul have decided to stage a sit in which they will not give up until their demands are met – they are holding it in the Sports Stadium. The neighbouring families have started keeping them supplied with food and water.

Already Mosul has paid up so many young lives – I will soon be sending you a list of the young people killed by security forces.

The press, as usual suffered today – three members of the press were attacked so badly by the security forces in Basra that they ended in hospital and a fourth was also attacked – we saw blood streaming from their heads and faces. One of them said that he was told that he was an enemy of society!

The press also suffered in Tahrir Square. One journalist told that they were in touch with the UN representative in Baghdad and had given him a detailed report – I find the whole idea of the UN very amusing – there is an old proverb in Arabic, Dirk – which more or less says that you may go on calling but there is no life in the person you are calling and a stone would answer you had you called it!

The press were barred from cities like Tikrit and Hawija was totally surrounded by the army and the police.

I listened to an old Imam from Kirkuk calling everyone to fight oppression of the Ashawiss in Kirkuk and the oppression of the huge army that has occupied Iraq – he made the tears come to my eyes and broke my heart – I listened to an old resistance fighter reminding the new Pontius pilates and Judas Escariots of the 21st century – Dr. Salman Al Jumaili and Dr.Rafi'i Al Essawi who sold their country, their people and their religion for a handful of silver and for a chair; he also encouraged the people to continue their fight and told us that we will soon liberate ourselves. He was marvellous – both these men were marvellous - their voices and words still ring in my ears. I also heard a young man addressing Maliki and telling him that he really is the most dismal of cowards – he was so frightened of people demonstrating peacefully and felt that it was essential to take such draconian measures and he wondered what he would do had these people been carrying arms; he paused for a minute and then told him we soon will!

Women – oh so many women demonstrated and so many women spoke and encouraged the young people of Iraq to go on with their brave fight – one of these women said that she had lost 3 sons – ,that no one should be frightened of Maliki

and that his days are numbered – yes, it was quite an emotional day – something I don't like expressing except to the people closest to my heart, as you well know- the people who stood by and suffered with us for our suffering for the slow murder of Iraq.

Again I ask, are the American Administration and the European Community blind???

Is the world blind – is it deaf????

Well, just to update you, the Unions in Iraq are demonstrating in Tahrir Square tomorrow and Monday we'll see demonstrations of Regret. (Regret for having participated in the general election and they've asked people to come with a finger painted in red!).

Sallams and Peace.

Witnesses in Baghdad and as far north as Kirkuk, where seven protesters were killed, described watching as security forces in black uniforms, tracksuits and T-shirts roared up in trucks and Humvees, attacked protesters, rounded up others from cafes and homes and hauled them off, blindfolded, to army detention centers²⁶.

Security forces under the control of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) stood by and watched as dozens of masked men attacked protesters in Sulaimaniya on March 6, 2011, Human Rights Watch said. Assailants were allowed to beat and take away demonstrators and set their tents alight, while another group ransacked the office of an independent Kurdish radio station. Security forces have an obligation to protect the right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, Human Rights Watch said.

Two political parties that led demonstrations in Baghdad over the past two weeks said that security forces controlled by Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki had ordered them to close their offices. Officials for the Iraqi Nation Party and the Iraqi Communist Party said in interviews that dozens of armed security forces had come to their offices here Sunday, two days after a few hundred protesters in Baghdad observed the first anniversary of Iraq's national elections with a "day of regret" on 07

March, when In Tahrir Square some demonstrators dyed their index fingers red and thrust them into the air, a bitter echo of the purple-stained fingers that smiling Iraqi voters, emerging from the polling stations, had waved on Election Day.²⁷ Among the demonstrators were an array of civil society organizations who, on the anniversary of the 2010 elections wanted to join with others in expressing regret. The Teachers Association, Iraqi Women's Association and the Organization of Women for Peace were among the other groups participating. Meanwhile the US Embassy in Baghdad finally released a statement on the targeting of journalists.

Later in the week, at least two Humvees delivered a similarly clad force to the office of the Journalistic Freedoms Observatory in Baghdad, which advocates for press freedoms. The men ransacked the office, carting off computers and files. In another incident, nearly a dozen gunmen stormed an independent radio station in Sulaimaniya's Kalar district, vandalizing the office, breaking most of the equipment, and confiscating the rest. And there were more such incidents against the press in different Iraqi cities.

In recent weeks, assailants had ransacked or torched offices of the opposition Goran party in the KRG-administered cities of Erbil, Dohuk, and Soran, according to journalists and news reports.

Friday 11 March saw again huge demonstrations again in many Iraqi cities, from North to South.

It is being said that nearly half a million in Tahrir. People were being beaten up with truncheons, including the Press, as well as being kidnapped and disappearing. Ahmed Al Rikabi a member of the press came out and said that people were being kidnapped by Maliki's thugs dressed in plain clothes - that they beat them up and took them to unknown places and at the time he was speaking he said he was being followed. Ms. Sahar Al Moussawi - Media Spokeswoman for the demonstrators was also beaten up! A day earlier there was a large demonstration in Baghdad University as well as in Tahrir - Baghdad university was surrounded by the army and its doors were closed. No press was allowed.

More than 45 deaths were counted since the start of the protests in Kut and Sulaymaniya until 11 March.

And protests continued.

Throngs of demonstrators protested in the rain on Friday 25 March, rallying in central Baghdad's Tahrir Square. Several women also turned out at the square to call on the Iraqi government to release sons and husbands who are in the prison awaiting trial or investigation. Some were carrying photos of their loved ones²⁸.

On April 13, security forces entered the adjoining offices of the Federation of Workers Councils and Unions in Iraq (FWCUI) and the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI), where the February 25 Group has held meetings in Baghdad. The security forces arrested one of the group's members, Firas Ali, who has peacefully participated in several of the Tahrir Square demonstrations.

A protester detained in early April for taking part in demonstrations at Tahrir Square told Human Rights Watch upon his release that he saw Ali inside a prison in Baghdad's Old Muthanna Airport. The witness said Ali was being held with more than two dozen protesters, 20 of whom were detained on the day of the April 15 demonstration. HaydarShihab Ahmad, also from the February 25Group, has been missing since April 1, just after taking part in that day's demonstration in Baghdad's Tahrir Square²⁹.

15 April was named the "Friday of the Free" and again mass demonstrations were organized. Here's a report written by Asma Al Haidari:

What am I to write to you about today The Friday of the Free??? For this is what our young revolutionaries have called it.

What am I to start with Mosul or Tahrir Square I will start with the courageous and long suffering men, women, children and youth of Iraq in Tahrir – my tears are streaming down uncontrollably – a man of 50 who cries and says Death to Iran – Death to America – Death to Maliki – 80% of Parliament and the people who rule are Iranians – no loyalty to Iraq – Long Live Iraq – all our sons are in detention centers –

my 16 year old son is in prison – Iraq is the crown on our heads – we will all die for Iraq – Iraq will live forever – then a young man who says Down with Sectarianism- Down with the Quota System – Death to Iran – let all Iraqi Young Men rebel and fight for Iraq – If Mohammed is a Sunni then I am a Shi'i – we are all one – we are all brothers – we all have the same blood - women – women cry and men – grown up men cry tears of agony and anguish for Iraq and for our sons and daughters – for our country that has been raped and pillaged – Dirk, where are the free western pens???? Ah, the scenes in Tahrir were phenomenal because Maliki and his henchmen yesterday ordered people to demonstrate in two football grounds – again on a sectarian basis, can you imagine???? But he is a stupid man – so are his advisors – the Iraqis are much too intelligent and clever for all of this and demonstrated that they are now at the point of no return in their rebellion and revolt – they assembled in Tahrir and told Maliki and his parliamentarians to go and play football in the stadiums he has assigned!

The young man who said let's all unite and fight – yes, armed resistance is what he is speaking about- continued to say that Maliki and his parliamentarians seem to be equating their demonstrations with a game – well, we will show you that we are not playing. He says that if we do not demonstrate in Tahrir then we will return to Armed Resistance and get martyred for Iraq – he also said that he was sure a massacre was going to be committed by the security forces of the demonstrators, today.

These same security forces that could not stop them from coming to Tahrir.

Men, women, and children, and Christians who are speaking out about the “government's” criminality against them – it was amazing and enthralling! The crushed Iraqi middle class in all its colours and hues is out and will remain out - this is the beginning of civil disobedience - all very peaceful but full of force and commands respect and a bowing of our heads to them.

The women who are in Tahrir are in the hundreds – all women whose sons or husbands have disappeared in Maliki's and the Occupation's secret prisons – Iraqis have broken the chains – the world should watch out – But the world is so silent and apparently deaf and blind as well.

Can't the world see that this revolution is totally different – that we are a people and a country under occupation – and that we have slowly started to take our rights back and to free ourselves.

You can feel the atmosphere of Tahrir – you can see and feel the life that is Tahrir – Tahrir belongs to the People – Of course all the bridges and streets leading to Tahrir were cut off but people came all the same and are still there – They are chanting that Maliki is a liar and a thief – they are chanting that whoever does not say Tahrir – “Liberation” then his life is a loss – They are daring the security forces who are there in great numbers to detain them – I have always known and told you what we are made of – Dirk, how can people not love the Iraqi People – how could the Americans have ever thought that they can colonize us?????

I am amazed at the fact that the United States believed the lies that it was told about us – I am amazed – then you come to Mosul – ah brave and courageous Mosul where for the past 6 days a huge demonstration and gathering has been gathering in force and today there are 12,000 people in The Square of the Free – the old prison square – all the tribal shaikhs who had not sold themselves to the occupation came from the very south of Iraq, Nassiriya and Basra being led by Shaikh Salim Al Thabbab – The Prince of Rabee'a and Sheyban , tribal shaikhs and leaders from Kut, Diyala, a contingent of Kurdish demonstrators from Azadi Square in Sulaymaniya whose leader put on the “Iqal” – the traditional headgear of Arab men and said that we are all Iraqis – and stood under the old Iraqi flag – they came from Haweeja and Tikreet – a tribal chief from Tilkaif – the Christians in the north as well as tribal leaders from Anbar, Kubaissa and Fallujah – we have come together again, this time publicly – for all the world to see but what is most amusing is that today the American Occupation's helicopters made a great entrance on the stage demonstrating that the American Administration really does believe the democracy it alleges it brought to Iraq is in fact equal to garbage No really, Dirk, I really mean it literally!

It was funny and it is all on film – daily, since the vigil and demonstration started in Mosul, American helicopters buzzed the demonstrators and the demonstrators answered back by throwing their shoes and slippers at them in disdain! Today, the

helicopters performed what they considered their coup de grace! By flying very low over their heads and throwing down bags of garbage! This is the American sham called “democracy” and this is their attempt to colonize Iraq – they should read history and anthropology a bit more carefully from now on!

When the people in the Square of the Free were asked for comments their answers were that the Americans throw garbage at us every day since the occupation – all the enriched uranium; all the white phosphorous; all the drugs and aids; all the disease, tyranny, oppression, plunder, theft lies and illiteracy they brought with them amongst much more – so we, Iraqis, know everything and we will have justice at the end of the day when a new dawn comes – the feeling is that it is going to be quite soon.

In the Square of the Free, united Friday Prayers were held for the 12,000 - women, poets, lawyers and the important Muslawi Business Merchant community joined - they all signed their names in blood in the Register of the Honoured. A young couple insisted that their wedding should take place in the square today!

Again, I ask, where is the world – where are the free men and women who opposed this war – is there no man no woman, who feels that justice is on his side and that he should speak freely and forcefully about us?????

Reading the NY Times one would believe that their correspondents must be living on another planet – amazing they are so silent – all the mainstream press, in fact.

Today, there were large demonstrations in Basra, all over Anbar province and Babil as well – in Diwaniya they were threatened by the security forces that they would all be detained. Of course, Sulaimaniya in the tens of thousands in Azadi Square. I also heard a tribal chief from Tel Afar say that 10 large vehicles were on their way to Mosul when they were stopped by the notorious general Ghannam and told why do you want to go to Mosul – they are all Sunnis and terrorists and you are Shi’is! and were turned back – the scene is developing and is building up -

On 19 April, following 62 days of continuous protest in Sulaimaniya, against corruption and tribal rule within the Kurdistan Regional Government, legal permission

for the protest has been revoked. A source within the armed Peshmerga Forces said that they have been given orders to shoot to kill any demonstrators. There have also been assassination attempts against religious leaders advocating for this non-violent revolution.

On April 21, hundreds of Falluja Lawyers organized a sit-in demonstration at the headquarters of the Lawyers Syndicate, demanding the departure of the U.S. forces from Iraq and the release of innocent detainees from prisons, where they spent several years of their lives without trial.

On May 10 hundreds of workers from Iraq's southern oil hub of Basra protested outside numerous facilities Monday, claiming Oil Ministry officials have ignored repeated concerns about the use of funds, equal pay, and the allocation of housing.

On May 27 four young activists were arrested today in Tahrir Square, when they were demonstrating with other 250 protesters, in a new demonstration called "Friday of Decision", as reported by an activist group.

On Friday, June 10, members of the Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI) were attacked and sexually molested as they gathered there. Since February of this year, OWFI members had been among demonstrators assembling in Tahrir Square every Friday—to demand that Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki fulfil promises for democratic change and the delivery of fundamental services³⁰. Government-sponsored demonstrators, some armed with clubs, attacked pro-democracy protesters in Tahrir Square and paraded pictures of Prime Minister Nouri Maliki's chief rival, Iyad Allawi, with a red X slashed across his face. Groups of rowdy young men, some said by Western sources to have been bused in by Maliki's Islamic Dawa Party, roamed the streets armed with sticks and other weapons³¹.

Unlike others, this uprising and the merciless repression against protesters have been virtually ignored by the mainstream media. It took place in Iraq, a country which is still occupied by tens of thousands of U.S. troops, and whose puppet government is completely under the thumb of the United States. A survey of media coverage of the protests in Iraq found that since February most of the world's media "forgot about

the country. Today, there is hardly anything in the media about the demonstrations that continue in Iraq.³²¹

In late 2011, the long awaited withdrawal of US troops was announced. The media – sticking to the script it has followed for most of the past decade – was quick to announce the end of the war in Iraq. But in a war fought not only by enlisted foot soldiers, but also by corporations, mercenaries, and drones, what constitutes “the end?”

The withdrawal of US forces represents a victory for the resistance of the Iraqi people, and for the efforts of peace-loving people worldwide. It is a significant milestone. However, the withdrawal of troops from Iraq does not signify an end to occupation. The US footprint is still heavy, not least in the form of corporate contractors who employ indentured servants (under the euphemism “third country nationals”) and mercenaries without oversight, accountability, or transparency. Accordingly, the Iraqi anti-occupation movement is preparing for what it calls, “the second face of the occupation.” This implies continued resistance against all structures imposed by the US, including not only the infrastructure and ideologies of corporate intervention, but also the sectarian government and its divisive constitution.

Conclusion: The Iraqi resistance will continue until the country has regained its full sovereignty. The current protest movement, that brings millions together in the Iraqi streets since 26 December 2012, is a clear proof of the will, tenacity and courage of the Iraqi people.

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devastating effects of UN imposed sanctions. He was a member of the International Organizing Committee of the World Tribunal on Iraq (2003-2005). He is also co-coordinator of the Global Campaign Against the Assassination of Iraqi Academics. He is co-author of Rendez-Vous in Baghdad, EPO (1994), Cultural Cleansing in Iraq, Pluto Press, London (2010), Beyond Educide, Academia Press, Ghent (2012), and is a frequent contributor to Global Research, Truthout, The International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies and other media.

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