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Voici une analyse détaillée de l'évolution des tendances de la résistance irakienne depuis l'occupation étasunienne et la réaction de l'occupant. La tendance qui veut la guerre civile est très minoritaire même si elle est très meurtrière... et la pire de ces tendances se construit à l'intérieur des organes de sécurité du gouvernement irakien avec la bénédiction de l'occupant même s'il risque de perdre le contrôle de la situation. La résistance nationale, largement majoritaire, rejette cette tendance, qui ne bénéficie qu'au duo des frères ennemis Al-Quaïda/impérialisme, dont la dynamique infernale pourrait cependant la déborder. La clef de la solution, encore une fois, est le départ immédiat de l'occupant même si les lendemains de son départ seraient incertains.

Marc Bonhomme

Michael Schwartz on conditions in Iraq today:

“There will be more violence the longer that the U.S. stays”

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IN THE U.S. media, the Iraqi resistance is generally described as a hodgepodge of Saddam loyalists, al-Qaeda supporters, Zarqawi Islamist zealots and various kinds of bitter enders. Is this accurate?

AS FAR as the Zarqawi elements, which I call the jihadists, even American intelligence is willing to say that they constitute no more than 5 percent of the resistance in the Sunni areas, and I think that we should take that figure seriously. They do tend to be involved in some of the larger and more spectacular attacks, especially the ones that attack Shia civilians, and so maybe they account for more of the deaths of civilians than the other attacks.

But we're talking about a war that currently has about 700 military engagements a week, and the jihadists may account for 20 or 25 of them, so we're not really talking about very much of the war.

The Baathists are a more complicated issue, because there are in fact so many Baathists in Iraq, since the way that Saddam ran the country was to recruit many people into the Baath Party.

But to talk about them as Saddamists is another one of these great mistakes. Most of the Baath Party was disillusioned with Saddam. Even though many of them are fighting the occupation, they're not fighting it under his name, but under some other ideological framework they've adopted--mostly a more religious one.

What we really need to understand is that the resistance in Iraq is overwhelmingly--well over 80 percent--constituted of people whose main goal is to expel the Americans and their foreign allies. And the resistance arose not at the moment of the attack or the moment that Saddam fell, but rather

over a period of several months as the nature of the U.S. occupation became clear to people and as the brutality of the American army reached into the corners of the various parts of the country.

So the resistance is a very large, now quite well organized, very extensive effort to expel the American army from Iraq. All tendencies within it agree around that central point, and while there may be Zarqawites, and there may be a handful of Saddamists who actually would like to restore the Saddamist regime, they constitute such a small proportion that we can't characterize the resistance that way.

This is one of the ways in which the American media has really distorted the situation. Not so much by embracing the idea that the Saddamists or Zarqawites are dominant, because if you read the press carefully, it says that there's been a new report from the CIA that 3 percent of the resistance are foreigners, that Zarqawi doesn't have much of a base, that a large proportion of the movement has denounced Zarqawi or is disillusioned with him.

They report this with some regularity, but they never characterize the rest of the movement properly so that people get a sense of what it's about. So people see the rest of the movement as vaguely similar to Zarqawites or Saddamists, and the characterization of them as the expression of the Sunni desire to expel the Americans never makes it as part of the story that the American press tells.

TO WHAT extent is the resistance isolated to the Sunni areas? To what extent is the resistance also made up of Shia forces?

THE RESISTANCE and the big battles as they're described in the media are largely confined to the Sunni areas of Iraq and the Sunni communities in Baghdad, and some Sunni communities in other cities that are not fully Sunni. But that is probably more an expression of American military strategy than it is an expression of the fact that they are the only ones fighting the American occupation.

If we go back to the middle of 2004, I think we get a better sense of where the resistance is located. At that point, there had been the major battle in Falluja. All of Anbar province was pretty much in revolt. Cities that had been very quiet up until then, such as Ramadi and Samarra, which are Sunni cities, were starting to revolt.

But also, Sadr City, the main Shia area of Baghdad, had been fully organized by the followers of Moktada al Sadr. They had organized the Mahdi Army as a local militia to bring law and order when the U.S. didn't bother to create law and order.

As the U.S. became more and more concerned about the Sadrists as an independent force that they wanted to suppress, the Mahdi Army became the instrument of a fairly extensive and very powerful Shia rebellion. Sadr City, like several Sunni cities, is now a no-go area for U.S. troops, ruled effectively by the Sadrists, as some of these Sunni cities are effectively ruled the resistance there.

But the Sadrists also spread to Basra and Najaf and a number of other cities. They basically control Maysan province and several other provinces, and as they spread in these areas and brought with them the demand for the U.S. to leave the country and their willingness to fight the U.S., there were major battles, two of them in Najaf. The second one resulted in a virtual defeat for the Mahdi Army, but they didn't emerge less powerful but more powerful.

Basra, which is the second- or third-largest city in Iraq and the largest Shia city, is supposed to be controlled by the British. The way things were managed in the South, however, is that after the second battle of Najaf in the fall of 2004, the U.S. decided to leave these cities to the rule of the local Shia militia and not attempt to recapture them--and, of course, the British had the same hands-off attitude.

We see the denouement of that in Basra now, where the local Basra government several months ago simply announced that it wasn't going to cooperate with the British at all. The British stationed outside the city have made no effort to conquer it, except for one very ferocious battle that ended in

a standoff, and now, the British are talking about leaving.

So the difference between the Shia areas and the Sunni areas is that in the Sunni areas, the U.S. is mounting huge campaigns to go into these cities and “pacify” them, root out the leadership of the insurgency, or arrest or kill them. In the Shia areas, they decided to back off and allow these local forces to rule--perhaps hoping for an alliance with them that will get them on board with the U.S.-installed central government in Baghdad against the Sunni areas in a “civil war” format, which so far has been unsuccessful.

The real difference, therefore, is not so much in the anti-American stance, but the strategy of the occupation--very violent suppression in the Sunni areas and tolerance of local autonomy in the Shia areas.

DO YOU think this will change with the revamping of U.S. policy to tilt against the Shia out of fear of links with Iran’s Shia ruling establishment?

I’M NOT sure that piece of it will change.

Clearly, American policy is changing quite dramatically as we speak because they now feel that their attempt to make an alliance with the Shia and install a friendly government dominated by Shia politicians has gone afoul. These politicians appear to be uniformly more sympathetic to Iran than the U.S., and willing to take some very independent stances with respect to the U.S.

I’m convinced, for example, that Ibrahim al-Jaafari, the former prime minister, was unsatisfactory to the U.S. and ultimately removed from office because he had made an agreement with the Sadrists as a way of getting the votes he needed to become premier.

The agreement involved two things--one, he would call for the staged withdrawal of U.S. troops, something that the U.S. cannot tolerate. Two, he agreed to resist and reverse the effort to privatize the major enterprises that are currently state-owned, which is a plank of the Sadrist platform.

He agreed to take a position against the U.S. on the two most crucial issues for the U.S. So at that point, the U.S. was looking at a battery of Shia politicians, all of whom were resistant to the fundamental goals of the U.S. in Iraq. So U.S. officials said, “I guess we have to look for some kind of alliance with Sunnis to try to resist this.”

However, there is no sign that the U.S. is going to make an effort to militarily overwhelm the Shia. If they tried, it would probably result in the expulsion of the U.S. U.S. forces are simply not strong enough to take down or defeat the Sunnis, and the Shia are far more powerful than they are.

So militarily, I don’t think they are contemplating that, because at least as far as Iraq policy goes, the Bush administration has been listening to the generals, and the generals are generally protective of their own army and don’t want to see it destroyed. They know they’re overextended, and they have said we can’t manage this.

SECTARIAN VIOLENCE has been on the rise, especially since the bombing of a Shia shrine in Samarra in February. Is the resistance weaker as a consequence of this?

I DON’T think there’s any question that the bombing of the Golden Dome and the subsequent violence that took place is a setback for the resistance from the point of view of successfully attempting to expel the U.S.

However, the crisis caused by the Golden Dome bombing made visible what was probably a somewhat deeper crisis a few months before--which, I think, might be less severe now.

This problem really started in 2004 and became larger and larger all through the first half of 2005, as the Zarqawi forces gathered a lot of strength, especially right after the Falluja battle of late 2004, which convinced an awful lot of Iraqis that the only way they were going to solve anything was to

be terrorists.

By “a lot,” I mean still a tiny minority of the people doing the fighting--but large enough to create an incredible wave of suicide attacks. And a substantial proportion of them were directed at police in highly populated civilian areas--so the “collateral damage,” to borrow a term from the U.S. military, was tremendous.

There was clearly an indiscriminate sense that if a lot of Shia are killed, that’s okay. That’s the Zarqawi line--that the Shia are hopeless allies of the Americans who have to be attacked and intimidated into not supporting them.

The crescendo of those car bombs, which really peaked in mid-2005 and have subsided very dramatically since then, created a definitive split inside the resistance between the national or Iraqi resistance and the foreign or jihadist resistance.

The national resistance declared that we don’t want Zarqawi, and these attacks are not part of the legitimate resistance, which is designed to expel the Americans. Jihadists were expelled from various communities, in many cases, through the use of force, and therefore, the nationalist resistance became a dominant force in these places.

As a consequence, there has been a decline in the number and severity of these attacks as compared to a year ago.

The Golden Dome attack was responded to in a new way--by the terrorist counter-attacks of assassination squads. We can’t avoid understanding the origins of these death squads. They were organized by the U.S. inside the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior, starting in early 2005.

Newsweek magazine had an excellent article right at the beginning about how the U.S. was employing the “Salvador option”--which is the organization of death squads designed to assassinate guerrilla leaders and political leaders that support communities that are guerrilla organized. The idea was to go after particularly the Association of Muslim Scholars (AMS), which is the political resistance wing of the Sunni community. These death squads have been assassinating people ever since.

The U.S. claims that this is something it doesn’t know anything about--which is clearly false. There have been many articles written that document quite carefully this connection.

But what you can’t document is whether the assassination squads have now gone beyond their American mandate and operate quasi-autonomously inside or outside the Ministry of the Interior, organized systematically to wreak revenge on Sunnis for the attacks by jihadists.

That’s the new element in this, and that has made the violence more spectacular-looking, because we now see hundreds of these bodies executed by these death squads, which are effectively the Shia terrorist response to the Sunnis.

So the idea that there’s a civil war in progress already is still a little bit off the mark. What you really have is jihadists attacking Shia, to be sure, and then there are government instruments and quasi-government instruments committing terrorist acts against the Sunni community--basically as an expression of the government and the U.S. occupation.

The fallout from this, of course, is more and more antagonism between the two communities, because it’s not really possible for ordinary citizens from these communities to sit by and look at what’s happening and not hate the ostensible author of the attacks.

In the Shia community, the ostensible author is the Sunni community, and in the Sunni community, the ostensible author is the Shia government that has portrayed itself as an expression of the whole Shia community. So each act creates more and more antagonism.

There have been efforts by the Sadrists and the AMS to forge unity across the religious divide, which they have done several times. For example, when the Golden Dome was attacked, the Sadrists announced that the U.S. was ultimately responsible, and that the only way to stop these things was to organize for the expulsion of the U.S.

But even within their own organization, the Mahdi Army, there were terrorist counter-attacks in retaliation, which the Sadrists responded to by saying that we can't control our own people, because that's the nature of the movement--the top leadership can never completely control the bottom.

The situation is quite complicated and made more complicated by the fact that even by U.S. statistics, of the approximately 700 attacks in the month of March, which is the last month I saw numbers for, about 650 attacks were directed at the U.S. military and 30 or so were directed either at the Iraqi police or military, and only 20 were directed at civilians. So you're talking about less than 10 percent of all the attacks are directed at anyone except the U.S.

THERE ARE now some reports that Sunni death squads are being organized within the Ministry of the Interior to terrorize Shia areas. Have you heard about this?

I DON'T find it at all surprising because we already know that the U.S. strategy is not so much to foment civil war, but to use Sunnis against Shia and Shia against Sunnis. They say that they're organizing integrated units of the military, but we also know that they're also organizing Sunni units of the military if they can find the people to join.

And so the idea that they would be organizing Sunni units in the Ministry of the Interior to do special forces and death squad operations isn't surprising, but I don't know how much has been documented about that. This is a shadowy area that the U.S. tries to keep from view.

WHAT ARE the prospects for a truly national resistance that bridges the religious divide and heals the sectarian wounds that have opened up?

I'M HONESTLY uncertain what the trajectory is. We see that there are forces on both sides of this.

The most powerful force on the side of creating sectarian division and violence between Shia and Sunni--and perhaps bringing the Kurds in as a third coordinate in that violence--is the U.S., and the second most powerful force is the jihadists, who have been systematically trying to foment civil war.

On the other side, we see that the unified hatred, even extending into the Kurdish areas, of the American project is the key force for preventing that from occurring.

A logical response for a great many people--I'm sure the majority--to all of the sectarian violence is to think that if we get rid of the U.S., this would all go away. That's a very logical position that people come to, and it has a lot of resiliency even in this terrible situation.

But I don't know how successful or how far down the road of being unable to cooperate that we've gone.

I think we can see from the formation of the government that it's not going to be much of a factor one way or the other, and the answers will take place on the ground.

I anxiously watch the press--everything I can get in English--to look for signs of Sunni-Shia unity, and there really are efforts going on all the time.

There is another recent joint statement by the Sadrists and the AMS around the formation of the government, saying that it shouldn't allow for the country to be divided into three units, that Kirkuk should not be allowed to become part of an independent Kurdistan, and that the U.S. should leave.

And there was that really notable meeting in Cairo followed by a joint statement of all political parties saying that the U.S. should be told to set a timeline and leave on the timeline without conditions. Of course, this has not been enacted by the government, but the people who are now supposedly running the government were all signatories to this.

We know the Sadrists will push for this, and we expect the Sunnis to support them, so that may be another arena where this unity could be expressed and further realized. But I really don't know whether the trajectory is towards bridging this gap, and with all the resources the U.S. can bring to bear on creating the gap, that's a very powerful force.

THE U.S. case to its own population is that “we can't leave Iraq now” because the job would be left undone, and the country would collapse into civil war--therefore, we aim to leave as quickly as Iraqi forces take our place. What do you say to that argument?

THERE ARE two answers to that question. The first part is that all the things that people say are bad about Iraq--like there might be a civil war, which is the most prominent idea right now--are being caused, not prevented, by the U.S. And the longer the U.S. stays, the more likely there will be a civil war.

So without ignoring the fact that there is a lot of friction and that therefore there might be a lot of violence if the U.S. were to leave immediately, I think it's easy to know that there will be far more violence if the U.S. stays--and not only violence created by the U.S.

Keep in mind that we have all this inter-ethnic violence going on, and it still represents a small proportion--perhaps 20 or 25 percent--of all the deaths in Iraq. The rest is caused by the U.S.--75 percent of the death is caused by the U.S. even in this period of high sectarian violence. So there's no way that the U.S. departure would create more violence--there would be less violence.

Now, whether Iraq would then explode into civil war is not altogether clear, but one thing we can be certain of is that if the U.S. stays, the country *will* explode into civil war. The U.S. is creating civil war, not suppressing it.

The other part of the answer has to do with the idea of “finishing the job.” You have to ask what job the U.S. is trying to finish.

When you look at the beginning of the war, after the Saddam regime collapsed when there was relatively little violence, the U.S. effort was to completely dismantle the Iraqi economy, “liberalize” it and administer economic shock treatment from which the Iraqis have not yet recovered. We're talking about somewhere between 30 and 70 percent unemployment right now.

Thirty percent was the level of unemployment during the U.S. Great Depression, and 70 percent is just unheard of--total paralysis of the kind suffered by the countries that have suffered the worst neoliberal reform. And this is getting worse, not getting better.

So if we're trying to finish that job, that's a horrible job to finish.

What we need to do is withdraw the military and economic pressure that the U.S. is applying and allow Iraqis to repair their own economy and their own infrastructure, which they did fairly successfully after the first U.S. war in 1991.

So the idea that the U.S. is somehow preventing something is wrong, and the idea that the U.S. ought to be finishing this terrible job is also wrong. There's no way that the U.S. staying is somehow a benefit.

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Notes from the Editors

Today there are constant reports in the U.S. media on the growth of “sectarian violence” in Iraq, which has now come to dominate the military as well as political context of the occupation. Carefully sidestepped in most such reports, however, is the fact that these horrific developments are to a large extent the result of the active U.S. promotion of death squads in that country. In danger of losing the war for control of Iraq, Washington turned, as it had in Central America in the 1980s (and as it is in Colombia today), to developing terrorist armies that would do the job for it. On January 8, 2005, *Newsweek* cracked the story that the U.S. military was considering initiating the “Salvadoran Option” whereby the United States would train, arm, and finance Iraqi death squads, drawn principally from the Shiite and Kurdish militias: irregular military forces whose job would be to terrorize the Sunni population as a means of undermining the support for the insurgency. Soon after, the *Wall Street Journal* in its February 23, 2005, issue reported that the United States was already working at forming government-based paramilitary units or militias in Iraq that would carry out these objectives.

The single most important of these paramilitary units, consisting of thousands of troops, the *Wall Street Journal* declared, was the Special Police Commandos formed in September 2004 by General Adnan Thavit, uncle to Iraq’s interim interior minister and a former Baathist military intelligence officer. “This was a horse to back,” in the words of U.S. General David Petraeus, in charge of training Iraqi forces. In hearings before the U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee on February 16, 2005, U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said that the Special Police Commandos were among the “forces that are going to have the greatest leverage on suppressing and eliminating the insurgency” (quoted in A. K. Gupta, “Unraveling Iraq’s Secret Militias,” *Z Magazine Online*, May 2005).

Fast forward to the present a year or so later. Two-thirds of the thousands of corpses stacked up in the morgue in Baghdad are said to have been tortured and killed execution style. Their deaths are attributed by human rights activists to paramilitaries under the control of Interior Minister Bayan Jabr, a member of the main Shiite ruling party, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), and a former leader of SCIRI’s Badr Brigade militia (Andrew Buncombe and Patrick Cockburn, “Iraq’s Death Squads,” *The Independent*, February 26, 2006). The Iraqi Interior Ministry exercises direct authority over the Police Commandos (formerly the Special Police Commandos—now operating as an irregular force within the National Police) and other paramilitary units. In its March 20, 2006, issue, *Time* magazine quoted U.S. authorities as declaring that the Police Commandos and other government-linked, Shiite-dominated, U.S.-trained militias are now “out of control,” kidnapping, torturing, executing, and committing mass atrocities in ways that give pause even to the U.S. occupying authorities. Former national security advisor for the Coalition Provisional Authority in occupied Iraq, David Gompert, recalls: “I remember saying, ‘If there is going to be a civil war, it’s going to be fought between Sunni insurgents and Shi’ite militias.’” *Time* cynically concludes: “And as long as Jabr is running the Interior Ministry and its police forces, there is little doubt which of the two [the insurgency or the Interior Ministry with its brutal militias] in such a conflict will have the law—and American training—on its side.” Meanwhile Defense Secretary Rumsfeld has pronounced that “the United States does not have responsibility” other than “to report it” for any atrocity committed by the Police Commandos and other U.S.-trained militias (*Washington Post*, December 4, 2005).

Under these circumstances, for the U.S. government and media to speak of mere “sectarian violence” in Iraq is to downplay the criminal role of the United States in creating and supporting the very death squads that are its main instigators. The U.S. empire has truly become, as we once called it here, an “Empire of Barbarism” (*MR*, December 2004)—one that must be opposed by all of those committed to humanity and justice.