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Iraq

What the Western media doesn't tell you

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Description:

Gilbert Achcar presents articles from the Arab press which give a startlingly different account of what is happening in Iraq to that of the mainstream Western media.

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The Western media, which are very prompt to report any atrocities committed by "insurgents" against civilians, hardly tell the public about the important political resistance to the occupation going on in Iraq, both in the streets and in the Parliament.

Thus, the huge demonstration called for on April 9 by Muqtada al-Sadr - whose Current plays a prominent role in the organization of the political resistance - was very much and very blatantly underrated in most Western media. What is even less known to the Western public opinion is the political fight waged by Iraqi MPs against the occupation.

The following facts, reported in articles on the front pages of the most prestigious Arab daily, are almost unknown in the West. They are all the more important that the shift in US public opinion against the occupation of Iraq has begun to find an echo in the US Congress itself.

For this reason, I felt that it was necessary to translate the following two articles from Al-Hayat. They deserve to be widely read in the West.

June 22, 2005

83 MPs Ask al-Jaafari to Put a Timetable for the Withdrawal of Foreign Troops

Baghdad - Abdel-Wahed Tohmeh - Al-Hayat, June 20, 2005

One-third of the members of the National Assembly (83 MPs) [out of 275] have asked for a timetable for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Iraq, accusing the Assembly itself of not caring "about the demands of millions of Iraqis."

During a press conference that they organized, Falah Hassan Shneishel MP, a member of the "Independent National Bloc," said that "the presence of the occupation forces gives a pretext for the continuation of violence and terrorism that have taken the lives of thousands of Iraqis."



Supporters of Muqtada al-Sadr

In reply to a question from Al-Hayat about the attitude that he would take with his colleagues if the Assembly did not comply with their requests, he said that "they would take a stand" without giving further details.

Jawad Bulani MP told Al-Hayat that the demand for the withdrawal of occupation forces "have begun as soon as the National Assembly was formed, and it is a legitimate right of the Iraqis to get their sovereignty in conformity with UN Security Council resolutions, which gave the National Assembly and the Iraqi Government the right to impose an agreement on foreign troops if they were to remain on Iraqi territory."

He asked Ibrahim al-Jaafari's Government to act in order to negotiate such an agreement "in compliance with our request and with the administrative law, when extending the presence of these troops on our territory." Bulani accused the National Assembly and the Government of "being careless and of compromising the cause," affirming that the people "demands sovereignty and we are conveying the demands of the masses that the Assembly ought to adopt."

Karim Najati MP, a member of the [majority] Shia "United Iraqi Alliance," described the government's request of the extension of the presence of multinational forces in Iraq as "shameful and disgraceful." He pointed to the fact that "there are members in the US Congress opposed to the occupation of Iraq whereas we ask for the troops to stay," adding that "no Arab or Muslim can accept" what al-Jaafari's Government did.

Another member of the UIA, Abdul-Rahman al-Neeimi (Sunni), said that the presence of these troops "confused the security issues." He accused the multinational forces of standing behind attempts at igniting a civil strife, asserting that "they have used all possible means in order to provoke a sectarian strife in Iraq, but have failed thanks to God." He concluded saying "We tell the occupation forces: Hands off the Iraqi people and let us heal our wounds by our own means."

Baha' al-Aaraji MP, of the "Independent National Bloc," said that "the presence of these forces creates a lot of problems and hinders the political process."

He maintained that "Iraqi security and military apparatuses are able to take care of the security issue whereas the continuing deployment of foreign troops in Iraq, in a situation where there is a honourable national resistance ("honourable" is the label designating in Iraq resistance forces that attack only foreign troops), is a threat to stability." Muhammad Saadun Hatem MP considered the decision by al-Jaafari's Government to extend the presence of multinational forces without referring to the national Assembly a "dangerous precedent."

Saad Jawad Qandil MP said: "the occupation should not be legalized." Ferial Ammar MP asked the Government "to include a timetable for the withdrawal of foreign troops in its decision to extend their presence," while Sheima' Zein al-Abdeen [a woman] MP asked the Government to "give a timetable for the withdrawal of foreign troops."

The 83 MPs signed a petition, of which Al-Hayat obtained a copy, accusing the National Assembly of "blatantly ignoring the demands of the MPs." "The most serious fact," the petition maintained, "is that the Government asked UN Security Council to extend the duration of the presence of occupation forces without consulting the people's representatives in the National Assembly, who have the right to vote on such decisive issues."

The petition also stated: "From the standpoint of our historical responsibility, we refuse that the occupation be legalized and repeat our demand that its forces get out." It added: "Our national forces were able to break the back of terrorism, extend their influence markedly in Iraqi streets and give authority back to the State and confidence in their security forces back to the citizens."

The "Commission for Detainees" Accuses the

Multinational Force of Stalling the Release of Prisoners of Opinion

Baghdad - Su'dad al-Salehi - Al-Hayat, May 29, 2005

The four-member commission formed by the [majority] "United Iraqi Alliance" for the release of Iraqi detainees said that the multinational forces "stall their release and refuse to refer their cases to [Iraqi] justice, under the pretext that it is 'not competent.' They refuse to charge the majority of the detainees who are prisoners of opinion, arrested for their patriotic stance, which means that their practice does not differ from that of the previous [Baathist] regime."

Falah Hassan Shneishel MP, a member of the commission, said that "the political representative of the US embassy in Baghdad promised repeatedly to contact his superiors in order to settle the issue of the detainees, without any result." He explained that the commission demanded that the cases of the detainees be referred to Iraqi justice and that they be charged so that they could be tried, but "the multinational forces rejected the demand."

He added that "the commission has also demanded the release of women and children detained in the occupation's prisons, but its demand was also rejected." He made it clear that the demands concern the release of prisoners of opinion and patriotic stances, and do not include those who are involved in violent actions against civilians.

The MP maintained that "the stalling and temporizing that US forces have practiced went as far as refusing to allow the prisoners' relatives, or the judicial committee formed to follow the matter, to visit the detainees to check their situation and their cases." He added: "The way US forces behave has become the continuation of the way the [Baathist] previous regime used to deal with political prisoners, a fact that increases the hatred toward these forces."

The MP said that the number of detainees belonging to [Muqtada] al-Sadr's Current reached 350 and that their names were given to the Iraqi Government, affirming that the majority of them were arrested "preventively and they have not been charged with any accusation until now."

He added that the four-member commission have asked the Government, in a memorandum given to the National Assembly, to apply article 15 of the Transitional Administrative Law which stipulates that "nobody can be arrested for more than 24 hours without being charged" and that "no one can be arrested for their religious or political opinions."

He asserted that the detainees belonging to [al-Sadr's] Current are "prisoners of opinion and patriotic stances" and fall therefore under the article referred to, adding that they are presently detained in the prisons of "Buka" in Basra, "Badush" in Mosul and "Abu-Ghraib" in Baghdad, and that the conditions of their detention are "very bad and harsh," and that the Government should order their release.

Sheikh Muhammad Taqi al-Mawla, a member of the commission and a leader of the "Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq," told Al-Hayat that the multinational forces detain in their prisons thousands of Iraqis, including many women and children, without charging them, and that the Government and the National Assembly are acting for their release.