

Green Zone Defeat? 'Handed Over' to a Government Called Sadr

Occupation forces no longer control the Green Zone

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BAGHDAD, Apr 2 (IPS) – Despite the huge media campaign led by U.S. officials and a complicit corporate-controlled media to convince the world of U.S. success in Iraq, emerging facts on the ground show massive failure.

The date March 25 of this year will be remembered as the day of truth through five years of occupation.

“Mehdi army militias controlled all Shia and mixed parts of Baghdad in no time,” a Baghdad police colonel, speaking on condition of anonymity, told IPS. “Iraqi army and police forces as well as Badr and Dawa militias suddenly disappeared from the streets, leaving their armoured vehicles for Mehdi militiamen to drive around in joyful convoys that toured many parts of Baghdad before taking them to their stronghold of Sadr City in the east of Baghdad.”

The police colonel was speaking of the recent clashes between members of the Shia Muqtada al-Sadr’s Mehdi Army, the largest militia in the country, and members of the Iraqi government forces, that are widely known to comprise members of a rival Shia militia, the Badr Organisation.

Dozens of militiamen from both sides were killed in clashes that broke out in Baghdad, Basra, Kut, Samawa, Hilla and most of the Iraqi Shia southern provinces between the Mehdi Army and other militias supported by the U.S., Iran and the Iraqi government.

The Badr Organisation militia is headed by Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, who is also head of the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council (SIIC) that dominates the government. The Dawa Party is headed by Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

The number of civilians killed and injured in the clashes is still unknown. Iraqi government offices continue to keep largely silent about the events.

“Every resident of Basra knew the situation would explode any minute between these oil thieves, and that Basra would suffer another wave of militia war,” Salman Kathum, a doctor and former resident of Basra who fled for Baghdad last month told IPS.

For months now there has been a struggle between the Sadr Movement, the SIIC, and the al-Fadhila Party for control of the south, and particularly Basra.

Falah Shenshal, an MP allied to al-Sadr, told al-Jazeera Mar. 26 that al-Maliki was targeting

political opponents. "They say they target outlaw gangs, but why do they start with the areas where the sons of the Sadr movement are located? This is a political battle...for the political interests of one party (al-Maliki's Dawa party) because the local elections are coming soon (due later this year)."

The fighting came just as the U.S. military announced the death of their 4,000th soldier in Iraq, and on the heels of a carefully crafted PR campaign designed to show that the "surge" of U.S. troops in Iraq has successfully improved the situation on the ground.

"I wonder what lies General David Petraeus (the U.S. forces commander in Iraq) will fabricate this time," Malek Shakir, a journalist in Baghdad told IPS. "The 25th March events revealed the true failure of the U.S. occupation project in Iraq. More complications are expected in the coming days."

Maliki has himself been in Basra to lead a surge against Mehdi Army militias while the U.S. sent forces to surround Sadr City in an attempt to support their Badr and Dawa allies.

News of limited clashes and air strikes have come from Sadr City, with unofficial reports of many casualties amongst civilians. Curfew in many parts of Baghdad and in four southern provinces had made life difficult already.

"This failure takes Iraq to point zero and even worse," Brigadier-General Kathum Alwan of the Iraqi army told IPS in Baghdad. "We must admit that the formation of our forces was wrong, as we saw how our officers deserted their posts, leaving their vehicles for militias."

Alwan added, "Not a single unit of our army and police stood for their duty in Baghdad, leaving us wondering what to do. Most of the officers who left their posts were members of Badr brigades and the Dawa Party, who should have been most faithful to Maliki's government."

The Green Zone of Baghdad where the U.S. embassy and the Iraqi government and parliament buildings are located, was hit by missiles. General Petraeus appeared at a press conference to accuse Iran of being behind the shelling of the zone that is supposed to be the safest area in Iraq. At least one U.S. citizen was killed in the attacks, and two others were injured.

"The Green Zone looked deserted as most U.S. and Iraqi personnel were ordered to take shelter deep underground," an engineer who works for a foreign company in the zone told IPS. "It seemed that this area too was under curfew. No place in Iraq is safe any more."

Further complicating matters for the occupiers of Iraq, the U.S.-backed Awakening groups, largely comprised of former resistance fighters, are now going on strike to demand overdue payment from the U.S. military.

Ali, IPS correspondent in Baghdad, works in close collaboration with Dahr Jamail, our U.S.-based specialist writer on Iraq who has reported extensively from Iraq and the Middle East

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