

Iraq: Provoking the Inevitable

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On Monday, Iraqi government security forces [arrested](#) two prominent Sunni leaders in Iraq's volatile Diyala Province. One of them, Sheikh Riyadh al-Mujami, not coincidentally, is a prominent leader in the local Sahwa (Sons of Iraq), the 100,000-strong Sunni militia that was set up by the US military to quell attacks against occupation forces and launch an effort to battle al-Qaeda in Iraq. Both of those objectives were accomplished, but these efforts are being erased by ongoing missions by Iraqi government security forces, sometimes backed by the US military, to kill or capture both Sahwa leadership and fighters. The results of these attacks against the Sahwa are already evident in an escalation in violence that has taken two forms – a dramatic increase in spectacular attacks against Iraqi civilians and increasing attacks against occupation forces.

The Sahwa played a critical role in the reduction of overall violence in Iraq. When the US decided to pay off the resistance (to the tune of \$300 per month per fighter) that was effectively shredding occupation forces from late 2003 until mid-2006, the number of US military personnel being killed began to decline, and has, until recently, continued to decline. The Sahwa were also effective in finding and eliminating al-Qaeda in Iraq, so the fact that we are now seeing a renewing of horrific attacks against the Shia should not come as a surprise as the Sahwa continue to leave their security posts around the country.

The Maliki government in Baghdad, which has perceived the Sahwa as a threat from the beginning of the group's formation, is systematically eliminating the perceived threat. Maliki has broken his promise to integrate the Sahwa into the government security apparatus, while continuing to forgo payment to Sahwa forces working in security positions around much of Baghdad.

Recent weeks have found a major Iraqi military campaign in Diyala province, including more than 30,000 Iraqi soldiers and police. Over 1,000 Sunni tribal figures and Sahwa have arrest warrants issued against them, and dozens of detentions have already been made. On May 17 alone, 14 Sahwa fighters were detained as "suspects."

The Maliki government has attempted to legitimize the ongoing attacks against the Sahwa by claiming, as did a local security official in Diyala concerning the recent arrests, that the men being detained are charged with "committing crimes against civilians."

The day after the aforementioned arrests, the Maliki government attempted to "reassure" the Sahwa, by having one of Maliki's advisers, Mohammed Salman al-Saadi, [tell the media](#), "The government does appreciate the role of Awakening Councils in imposing security and stability, but the integration and paying of 100,000 members is a big process."

This rhetoric comes in the wake of an ongoing series of attacks against the Sahwa. On May

8, Al-Hayat, a Saudi-owned newspaper wrote, "Iraq: Dozens of Awakening fighters abandon their posts," and "The fate of the awakening councils [Sahwa] in Iraq depends on calculations ruled by the logic of sectarian quotas and these calculations are putting the whole experience of Sunni fighters at risk of political suppression. While withdrawals continue from the ranks of the councils in protest against the delay in receiving their salaries, Iraqi Vice President Tarek Al-Hashemi confirmed that the "experience of the awakening councils is being targeted 100 percent." Leaders of some councils confirmed that dozens of their members left their posts in protest against the delays in paying their salaries. Politicians and observers fear that the dissatisfaction might push thousands of fighters back into the lap of the armed groups."

On May 6, Reuters [reported](#) that while there isn't yet a mass of Sahwa rejoining the armed resistance, many Sahwa leaders fear that many of their fighters are heading in that direction due to the ongoing attacks from the government, as well as the lack of pay. Shuja al-Adhami, who heads a Sahwa unit in western Baghdad's Ghazaliya district, [said](#) "I have 170 Sahwa fighters and 40 have already left their posts to drive taxis, sell groceries or do construction, and why? Because they have children to feed and can't bear the government's delay." Hassan al-Jubouri, a Sahwa leader in northern Kirkuk, [said](#) a quarter of his 500 fighters had already quit. In Baghdad's Adhamiya district, Sahwa guard leader Abu Omar, who is also an ex-military intelligence officer, [said](#) "Without us, things would return to what they were in 2005. What Awakening guards can do in two hours, US and Iraqi troops weren't able to do in four years."

On May 10, a roadside bomb attack in Taji, north of Baghdad, killed Abed al-Khairiya, a senior Sahwa member. On May 14, gunmen stormed a home in Baquba, killing two Sahwa fighters and their mother. May 15 found two policemen and a Sahwa member wounded when gunmen attacked their Samarra area checkpoint, and on the same day, during a raid in Suwayra, police arrested 12 "al-Qaeda suspects" and two members of the Sahwa. On May 19, a Sahwa leader was wounded in Jurf al-Sakhar during a roadside bomb attack. While all of this is happening, scores of Sahwa fighters are walking away from their security posts each week, in protest of having not been paid by the government.

Meanwhile, violence, much of which is largely a result of the ongoing efforts of the Iraqi government targetings of the Sahwa, continues to burn across Iraq on a daily basis.

On May 20, a car bomb exploded near several restaurants in a Shiite neighborhood of northwest Baghdad, killing 41 people and injuring more than 70, [according to](#) local police and hospital officials. May 19 found five Iraqis killed in violence, another 12 wounded, and the Green Zone rocketed, and on May 18 five Iraqis died, with another 14 wounded. May 17, Sunday, at least 20 Iraqis had been slaughtered and 21 wounded. Violence included a bomb at a coffee shop in the Dora district of Baghdad, 55 detentions in and around Fallujah, and a professor being wounded by US troops near Hilla, while he was driving in his car. Twenty-two Iraqis were killed and 28 wounded on May 16, along with a US soldier killed down in Basra, and hundreds of bodies being unearthed in a mass graves in Najaf province. That same day, mortars killed a toddler in Sadr City, in addition to wounding the mother and two other siblings. The previous day, May 15, saw six Iraqis dead, another nine wounded, and a British mercenary killed in Hilla, while on May 14 eight Iraqis and a US soldier were killed, with 14 Iraqis wounded.

Two US soldiers were killed on May 9, along with three Iraqis, with another 11 Iraqis wounded. At the time of this writing, 14 US soldiers have been killed this month, bringing

the overall total to just four shy of 4,300.

As several of my previous articles for this web site have been outlining, the ongoing attacks by the Maliki government against the Sahwa continue to destabilize the situation in Iraq and allow overall violence to increase with each passing week. We are seeing Sahwa fighters leave their posts in ever-increasing numbers; the US military is literally [redrawing the boundaries of cities](#) in order not to move their bases outside of them to respect the Status of Forces Agreement, and there is no sign from the Obama administration that there will ever be a full withdrawal from Iraq, nor reparations made to the people of Iraq.

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