

The Dirty War

By [Dahr Jamail](#)

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Iraq's Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki looks at the coffins of Harith al-Ubaidi and his brother-in-law. Harith al-Obaidi, leader of the Iraqi Accordance Front, the largest Sunni bloc in the Iraqi Parliament, was shot dead. (Photo: Reuters Pictures)

On Friday, June 12, Harith al-Obaidi, leader of the Iraqi Accordance Front, the largest Sunni bloc in the Iraqi Parliament, was [shot dead](#) outside a mosque just minutes after giving a sermon condemning the Maliki government for human rights abuses. Obaidi, who was a leader in the opposition movement against the government and had strong support among both Sunnis and the Shi'ite bloc loyal to the cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, was a long-time advocate for human rights and a staunch critic of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

Only the day before, Obaidi had given a speech in parliament calling for the resignation of top government officials for their ties to human rights abuses in Iraq. In addition, the neighborhood where the mosque he had given the sermon was located had several checkpoints, thus begging the question of how a gunman could have made his way, undetected, to the mosque.

In the wake of this assassination, Maliki has ordered the creation of a committee to investigate the death of this influential human rights advocate. The day after Obaidi was killed, Maliki went so far as to [attend his funeral](#).

Many would consider both these acts to be smokescreens for Maliki's – and possibly even US – complicity. US action in Iraq since the invasion was launched appears to favor the creation of a client state in Iraq along lines similar to those in Egypt, Jordan and Colombia. In any case, one essential element of that equation seems to be military and/or paramilitary forces answerable to, and supporting, the US-backed head of state.

Let's be clear – Maliki has been supported by the US as the leader of Iraq since his installation. In January 2005, I was in Baghdad for the elections that formed an Iraqi Parliament, which then elected Iraq's first prime minister under US occupation – that man was Ibrahim al-Jaafari. Jaafari wasn't exactly toeing the US/UK line in Iraq, so it wasn't long until then-US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and her UK counterpart Jack Straw rushed to Baghdad to [set things straight](#). Just after their visit, Jaafari was out and Maliki was in. No democracy was involved in this process.

In a recent article titled "[Iraq's New Death Squad](#)" for The Nation by independent journalist Shane Bauer, we are provided with an inside view of Maliki's iron fist, which has come in the

form of the Iraq Special Operations Forces.

Bauer writes:

"The Iraq Special Operations Forces (ISOF) is probably the largest special forces outfit ever built by the United States, and it is free of many of the controls that most governments employ to rein in such lethal forces. The project started in the deserts of Jordan just after the Americans took Baghdad in April 2003. There, the US Army's Special Forces, or Green Berets, trained mostly 18-year-old Iraqis with no prior military experience. The resulting brigade was a Green Beret's dream come true: a deadly, elite, covert unit, fully fitted with American equipment, that would operate for years under US command and be unaccountable to Iraqi ministries and the normal political process. The ISOF is at least 4,564 operatives strong, making it approximately the size of the US Army's own Special Forces in Iraq. Congressional records indicate that there are plans to double the ISOF over the next "several years."

According to Bauer, control of the ISOF was slowly transferred by US Special Forces to the Iraqis in 2007, but it wasn't put under the command of the Defense or Interior Ministry. Rather, "the Americans pressured the Iraqi government to create a new minister-level office called the Counter-Terrorism Bureau," Bauer writes, "Established by a directive from Iraq's prime minister, Nuri al-Maliki, the CTB answers directly to him and commands the ISOF independently of the police and army. According to Maliki's directive, the Iraqi Parliament has no influence over the ISOF and knows little about its mission."

Untold numbers of politically motivated murders have followed as a result. Regular assassinations and detentions of al-Sahwa (US-created Sunni militia that Maliki had opposed from the beginning) members have been ongoing for years. Last August, the ISOF raided the provincial government compound in Diyala, while backed by US Apache helicopters, and arrested a member of Iraq's main Sunni Arab political party. In December, the ISOF arrested more than 30 Interior Ministry officials who were believed to be opponents of Maliki's Dawa Party. In March, the ISOF arrested a leader of the Sahwa.

Michael Knights, a Lafer Fellow at the Washington Institute and head of its Iraq program, told Bauer that he believes the Maliki government had developed a "culture of direct control" and the people running the ISOF at regional levels are "personally chosen loyalists or relatives of Maliki. It reminds me of Saddam.... The prime minister is looking for re-election, and there are not that many restraints on his ability to target political opponents, as [his government] has been doing with the Sadrists for years now."

Thus, the stage is set for an indefinite amount of bloodletting across Iraq. A cursory glance at the week from June 6 through June 13 provides several examples of this dirty war. For a dirty war it is, as the opponents of Maliki, and the occupation, and the Sahwa, are sure to respond in kind to any violence visiting them.

On June 8, a gunman was killed while attacking a checkpoint in Fallujah, and [on the same day](#), five "suspects" were captured. The next day, two policemen were wounded during a bombing in Fallujah, a bicycle bomb wounded another seven, and six more "suspects" were detained from [around the city](#). June 10 found police forces in Diyala province, during three different operations, arresting five people "affiliated with armed groups" [around Baquba](#). It is worth remembering that long-time reasons given by the Maliki government for arresting Sahwa members have been that they are "affiliated with armed groups" or for having had

taken part in resistance operations against occupation forces. On June 12, two policemen were arrested in Mosul in connection with an attack on Americans in February, while gunmen [raided the home of an Iraqi army officer](#) in Balad Ruz, killing his 17-year-old daughter and wounding his wife.

In total, it was another typical week in occupied Iraq, one that found 95 Iraqis killed and another 176 wounded. At least two US soldiers died in Iraq, and another died by [hanging himself in the backyard of his childhood home](#) due to not having recovered from having seen "his sergeant blown to pieces. He saw the bodies of half of the men in his platoon torn apart. Heads were cut off and limbs severed."

The US occupation of Iraq has killed as many as [1,320,110 Iraqis](#) and at least [4,312 US soldiers](#), and as usual, there appears to be no end in sight.

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