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The Return of the Resistance

By: Dahr Jamial

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At least 20 US soldiers have been killed in Iraq in May, the most since last September, along with more than 50 wounded. Iraqi casualties are, as usual - and in both categories - at least ten times that number.

Attacks against US forces are once again on the rise in places like Baghdad and Fallujah, where the Iraqi resistance was fiercest before so many of them joined the Sahwa (Sons of Iraq, also referred to as Awakening Councils), and began taking payments from the US military in exchange for halting attacks against the occupiers and agreeing to join the fight against al-Qaeda in Iraq. In early April I wrote a column for this website that illustrated how ongoing Iraqi government and US military attacks against the Sahwa, coupled with broken promises of the Sahwa being incorporated into the government security apparatus or given civilian jobs, would likely lead to an exodus from the Sahwa and a return to the resistance.

Slowly, but surely, we are seeing that occur. While US liaison Col. Jeffrey Kulmayer has called this idea, along with the ongoing controversy from the Iraqi government - led by US-pawn Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki - not paying most of the Sahwa members, while continuing government arrests of and attacks on Sahwa members "overblown," this does not change reality. Let us recall the telling words of the reporter Caud Cockburn, father of journalist Patrick Cockburn, "Never believe anything until it's officially denied."

Not surprisingly, in direct contradiction to Kulmayer's comment, the Sahwa have warned the Iraqi government not to disregard its commitments to the fighters as far as providing them jobs and payment. On May 28, the independent Saudi-owned United Kingdom-based newspaper, al-Hayat, reported:

"A number of the leaders of the awakening councils called on the Iraqi government to honor its commitments towards the members of the awakening councils by paying their salaries which are three months late. They warned that their fighters might rebel against the government if their demands for their financial rights continue to be disregarded which might have an adverse effect on the security situation. Sheikh Masari al-Dulaymi, one of the leaders of the council in Falahat al-Taji to the north of Baghdad, announced that the committee supervising the national reconciliation process warned the leaders of the councils in and around Baghdad that their salaries would be paid and that a form of cooperation will be agreed upon with the tribes to preserve the security in Baghdad."

The paper added that al-Dulaymi also pointed out that many council fighters abandoned their duties in protecting their areas because of the delays in receiving their salaries, and "we don't want the crisis to grow any worse because the council members already distrust government promises." Al-Hayat also reported that Sheikh Khaled Yassine al-Janabi, a leader of the council in al-Latifayah in southern Baghdad, warned that the "government's disregard for the issue of the councils and their demands will have an adverse effect on the security situation."

Simultaneously, the Iraqi Resistance, whose ranks are growing with disenfranchised Sahwa along with other Iraqis joining for the usual reasons: their countrymen and women being detained, tortured, and raped by occupation forces and their Iraqi collaborators, the destroyed infrastructure and the suffering that accompanies this, among a myriad of other reasons (like the fact that one in four Iraqis lives in poverty), are, at least verbally, preparing to resume full operations.

The Los Angeles Times recently reported that a commander in the Iraqi Resistance, who is also a member of the currently besieged Sahwa, said, "If we hear from the Americans they are not capable of supporting us ... within six hours we are going to establish our groups to fight against the corrupt government. There will be a war in Baghdad."

Having relied on the US military to fulfill their promises of assisting the Sahwa into the Iraqi political system, as well as for protection from ongoing attacks from the Maliki government security apparatus, their patience has just about run out.

A former military intelligence general, a resistance commander who heads a group called the Iraqi Liberation Army, and who is also a member of the Sahwa, told The Los Angeles Times in the same article, "If the Americans leave Baghdad in 24 hours, the street belongs to the resistance and the people. The people are boiling."

Violence has been escalating since January. April was the deadliest month for Iraqis in over a year. Daily we are watching Sahwa members leave their security posts. Rather than safeguarding the areas where they worked as security, many of them, in protest of government attacks and lack of payment, are rejoining the resistance. Simultaneously, they have effectively ceased targeting al-Qaeda operations in Iraq, which was also what the US had created the Sahwa for in the first place. Thus, when al-Janabi warns that the "government's disregard for the issue of the councils and their demands will have an adverse effect on the security situation," the "adverse effect" is two-fold. And this does not account for the future ramifications of having 100,000 fighters, who were allied with the occupation forces, turn completely against them again. Today, as aforementioned, we are getting a small, very small, taste of what that might look like.

Rivers of blood continue to flow in occupied Iraq. On May 25 a suicide bomber drove a car packed with explosives into a US patrol in Mosul, killing eight people and wounding another 26. The same day, in Hilla, 60 miles south of Baghdad, a gunman killed a Sahwa fighter who was manning a checkpoint.

On May 21, suicide bombers struck in two cities, killing three American soldiers and nearly two dozen Iraqis in a spasm of violence that took at least 66 lives in two days. That same day saw more attacks against the Sahwa, who in addition to being attacked by Iraqi government forces, are being attacked by al-Qaeda. Seven Sahwa members were killed in Kirkuk on May 21 as they waited in line at a military base to receive their salaries.

Meanwhile, the Pentagon is prepared to leave fighting forces in Iraq for as long as a decade, despite an "agreement" between the US and Iraq that would bring all US troops home by 2012. General George Casey, the Army chief of staff, recently stated that the Pentagon must plan for extended US combat and stability operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan, saying, "Global trends are pushing in the wrong direction," he said, "They fundamentally will change how the Army works." It is important to note that at the moment, the US maintains 139,000 troops in Iraq, which is still a greater number than that which existed prior to the so-called "troop surge" of George W. Bush.

Many of these troops, along with nationalistic US citizens who blindly supported, and/or continue to support the criminal occupation of Iraq, believe it is a mandate from God that justifies the "might makes right" strategy of US Empire. Let us recall one of the better-known authors from the United States, Mark Twain. Better known for Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn, Twain was quite anti-war. I certainly was never instructed to read Twain's "The War Prayer," part of which sardonically reads:

"O Lord our Father, our young patriots, idols of our hearts, go forth to battle - be Thou near them! With them - in spirit - we also go forth from the sweet peace of our beloved firesides to smite the foe. O Lord our God, help us to tear their soldiers to bloody shreds with our shells; help us to cover their smiling fields with the pale forms of their patriot dead; help us to drown the thunder of the guns with the shrieks of their wounded, writhing in pain; help us to lay waste their humble homes with a hurricane of fire; help us to wring the hearts of their unoffending widows with unavailing grief; help us to turn them out roofless with little children to wander unfriended the wastes of their desolated land in rags and hunger and thirst, sports of the sun flames of summer and the icy winds of winter, broken in spirit, worn with travail, imploring Thee for the refuge of the grave and denied it - for our sakes who adore Thee, Lord, blast their hopes, blight their lives, protract their bitter pilgrimage, make heavy their steps, water their way with their tears, stain the white snow with the blood of their wounded feet! We ask it, in the spirit of love, of Him Who is the Source of Love, and Who is the ever-faithful refuge and friend of all that are sore beset and seek His aid with humble and contrite hearts. Amen."

This is the slaughter and suffering that is being caused by the US occupation of Iraq. This is the death and suffering that is causing the Iraqi Resistance to once again form, gain strength, and prepare to resume full operations.