DOSSIER PART 3:

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A campaign of The BRussells Tribunal and
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A US campaign to eliminate Baath Party influence in Iraq is being criticized for inflexibility.

By Scott Peterson | Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

BAGHDAD - When it comes to assessing the US campaign to cleanse Iraq of Saddam Hussein loyalists, one need look no further than an assistant's desk at Baghdad University.

Piled two feet high are petitions from students and faculty alike, appealing to US officials for favorite professors to be exempt from a decree that fires all ranking Baath Party members.

This heavy pile is bursting the sides of a thick plastic shopping bag; the handles have ripped under the weight. And these are just a few of the hundreds of petitions that have been submitted - from universities only - that illustrate the difficulties of scrubbing Iraq clean of the old regime.

While the surge of guerrilla attacks against coalition forces grab headlines - including the death of six British military policemen in southern Iraq on Tuesday - real change in Iraq is being engineered here, at government institutions.

The result so far is a tension among Iraqis about a Draconian decree, that paints the problem of de-Baathification in black and white - while in fact, many Iraqis say, it should be shades of gray.

"It's not a witch hunt. It's a very careful process - as careful as we can make it in this demanding situation," says Andrew Erdmann, a US State Department policymaker who is the top American appointed to the higher education ministry of the US-led Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA).

He is swamped with issues emerging at university campuses across Iraq, and trying to focus on meeting emergency needs to complete an extended school year by the end of July. That means fans, air conditioners - US troops delivered a consignment to the Technical College Wednesday - and even printing examination booklets.

Jubilant scenes as students sit for class portraits, Mr. Erdmann says, are "tangible symbols that students feel that their life is progressing, that there is something beyond."

But de-Baathification is complicating the picture. According to his own proclamation on May 16, only the American chief of the occupation authority in Iraq, L. Paul Bremer, can approve individual exemptions. The decree purges the top four ranks of the Baath Party. Party apparatchiks with critical skills, who "demonstrated" that they were not committed to the Baath Party under Mr. Hussein would be most likely candidates.

"Some people stepped forward to protect people. Some did not. Those things matter," says Erdmann. There are exceptions, though "the idea that you became a senior party member by accident - it usually doesn't happen."
But some say it did happen to Hussam al-Rawi, a former ranking Baath Party member and British-educated former head of the architecture department, who now must "volunteer" to finish the year, until his status is resolved. At least one fellow professor says Mr. Rawi came to her aid in the past, against an unscrupulous Baathist who deliberately misinterpreted her work, to get her into trouble.

"They did this [de-Baathification] without considering who were good people, and who were bad people," says Janon Kadhim, an architecture professor who says that Rawi "protected" her reputation.

"This is not an American way of working," says Rawi, who lived in Britian for 16 years and was elected as a member of the Royal Institute of British Architects. "A lot of skilled workers are out of jobs now," Rawi says. Mr. Bremer has "made enemies of millions of people."

During a brief interview on campus, two separate groups of concerned students, with folders and books tucked under their arms, came to Rawi to inquire, "Are you back with us?" and to wish him luck. Students and other faculty have signed a petition for an exemption for Rawi - adding to the pile of thousands awaiting Bremer's review.

Upon noticing the presence of a Western reporter, one student, unbidden and within minutes, collected five others, to vouch for their professor.

"Of course we don't accept what [the CPA] decides," says student Mohamed Jassim. "He studied abroad and we will lose him. Whoever comes after can't be as good."

"Dr. Hussam is a good professor and teacher, who helped us a lot," says another student, Haidar Faleh. "We want him to stay."

"In my case, if I were to leave the party, I would have had to flee the country, or would have been questioned," says Rawi, whose portrait hangs with those of a string of other past department heads, in the faculty room.

"They shouldn't draw a parallel between the Baath and Nazism, but between Saddam and Stalin. Look at [Russian President] Vladimir Putin. He was a former KGB agent."

That doesn’t mean that all Iraqi professors share Rawi’s apparent popularity. Before the de-Baathification decree, students protested against the university president, who was known to be the personal physician of the Iraqi dictator.

Erdmann says that several university presidents came to him privately, begging him not to reinstate them, because they "recognized that they did not have the legitimacy to continue, with students or with faculty."

Likewise, students and faculty have made their wishes clear of who should be forced to leave, as well as - demonstrating almost daily for certain professors that have lost their jobs - those they want back in the classroom.

Despite the upheavals, Erdmann notes that his meetings with university chiefs from around the country show that the lowest postwar attendance rates are 75 percent, with most campuses showing 80 and 90 percent or higher. Such figures in the aftermath of war, he says, are "incredibly encouraging."
And few Iraqis question the need to weed out Baath figures who helped make their lives miserable for a generation. But few, also, think a blanket decree was the best way to do it.

"The truth is that 80 percent of the party were members for fear or their interests, and have no belief whatsoever in Baath ideology," says Saad Jawad, a political scientist at Baghdad University.

And the fruits of membership were palpable. Students whose parents were Baathists automatically received extra points on exam scores. Admission forms had a spot marked "Friends of Saddam," a bonus based on the family's position in the party hierarchy. It could determine entry into a good school.

"When they consider every Baath member an enemy, the Americans are putting all of them on the other side of the fence," Mr. Jawad says. "These people are ready to cooperate with the Americans, to work with them. But when you shut them out, they will meet and make an armed cell to fight back."

-Turi Munthe Diary - 10 July 2003
Subject: Entry 1
Posted Monday, July 7, 2003, at 2:08 PM ET

In Baghdad, if you put your head out of a speeding taxi, it's like pointing a hair dryer at your face. The city is yellow with heat and dust. Shattered buildings, like skeletons, totter in the streets. There is neither electricity nor order. Baghdadis sleep on their roofs, with guns under their pillows.

I've been here three weeks, trying to pick up the word on the streets, trying to find out where Iraqis think they're headed. Iraqi society no longer exists. The thriving middle class of the '70s and '80s no longer exists. Professionals earn a fraction of a taxi driver's wage. The most secular country in the region is taking a sharp turn toward God. I have two advantages: I speak Arabic, and if I'm a bad journalist, I'm a good listener.

I spent this morning at the political science facility of Baghdad University, a part of the campus that was spared the worst of the fires and looting. Students have returned for classes three days a week, their exams either looming or already underway. Pictures of Mohammed Baqer al-Hakim, leader of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, the most powerful Shiite party in the country, clutter the walls of the cafeteria. Beside them, the Union of Free Students has posted calls for more demonstrations against the U.S. military presence on campus.

I sat next to two girls: Nadya and 'Alia, who wears a headscarf. Others swarmed us immediately. Being a journalist here is like being a Baathist under Saddam—you're royalty, and everyone wants to know you. It's the novelty of talk. And the students talked for hours. Amongst the seven or so who sat with me around a table and shared Pepsis, there was not a single shared opinion. Some wanted monarchy, others swore on the republic. They disdain the current various political pretenders, but they have no sense of an alternative. There was relish—savage and vengeful—at the Baath Party's demise, and calls for clemency, and despair. The students agreed about nothing except their terror of anarchy. Then they asked me if I wanted to talk to a Baathist. To my immense surprise, a young man sitting behind me volunteered.

Qusay Abd al-Aziz Mohsen al-Salem is 27 years old and was named after Saddam's youngest son. He also happens to be from Tikrit, the town where Saddam was raised. In contrast to the others, he has convictions. He spoke in rapid-fire sound bites. "Of course life was better under Saddam. He was a nationalist, a patriot, and he was Iraqi. He fought for the interests of our country. We do not accept occupation. AlMa'rakat Al-Hawasim is not over." (AlMa'rakat Al-Hawasim means "The Defining Battle," Saddam's term for "Operation Iraqi Freedom.") "We will continue to fight. As for mass graves,
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they are like WMD—an American lie." Hala, another Baath student, had joined us: "The Halabja incident [when Ali Hassan al-Majid, Saddam’s cousin, used chemical weapons to annihilate the village of Halabja and its 5,000 Kurdish inhabitants in 1988] was just Kurdish in-fighting." Qusay finished: "There are three kinds of Iraqis. The Looters, who should’ve have wept over the occupation and instead used it. The Dancers, all those opposition parties who are paid for by the U.S. And the Iraqis, who wait and watch as the chaos escalates, and who will eventually throw the U.S. out of the country." As I left, a student named Amina approached me with the address of the hide-out of a top-ranking Baathist. She’s selling him out. "I want to avenge my father," she tells me. "He spent four years in jail. He was tortured."

Later this afternoon, at the (pro-coalition) Iraqi National Accord Party conference, I sat in a velvet-padded room with no air conditioning and listened as high-ranking civilians cast their grievances: no constitution, no acknowledgment of the professional associations, no security, no police, no salaries, no electricity. These doctors and lawyers and community leaders don’t know whom to turn to. They say the coalition doesn’t listen to them and that they don’t know what rights they have under occupied law. They say no one in Baghdad knows what Security Council Resolution 1441 actually says. An old sheik, dressed in the traditional white Jallabiya robes, stood and in slow, patriarchal Arabic declared: "Let the [opposition] parties stop their politicking, lest the Iraqi people leave them behind."

I’m typing from the Sheraton Hotel in Baghdad, home to many foreign journalists. The hotel faces the Palestine Hotel Meridien, where an Al Jazeera correspondent was killed by coalition fire during the war. Roadblocks and a barricade separate us from the outside world.

At the hotel’s entrance, a 30-year-old man is begging, the stub of a leg propped against his crutch. He lost it in Basra, in 1991. Late this evening, I heard that the British free-lance journalist killed last week in front of the Baghdad Museum was Richard Wild. I was supposed to meet him tomorrow. We were going to travel south together.

Subject: Entry 2

Posted Tuesday, July 8, 2003, at 1:54 PM ET

There are more political parties in Baghdad than there are supermarkets. In every quarter, on every main street, they compete with each other for space, and the less powerful they are, the bigger their signs. Over 70 new political parties have registered themselves since the war. Their names are all a variation on the same buzzwords: the Iraqi/Kurdish/Assyrian/Turkoman Patriotic/Islamic/Democratic/National Party/Union/Accord/Congress. These are the busiest men and women in Baghdad—chasing Ambassador Bremer, who holds the keys to any future power, and chasing each other away from him. Iraqis see them as hyenas, circling the biggest carcass in the region. I spent the morning with ‘Ali ‘Abd al-Amir, spokesperson for the Iraqi National Accord, led by Ayad ‘Allawi. I didn’t have lunch—it’s too hot to eat—but I drank liters of tea with Nuri as-Safi, a top-level member of the Majlis al-’Alaa (Muhammad Baqer al-Hakim’s Shiite party, called SCIRI) in one of their Baghdad party headquarters. I passed the afternoon at the Iraqi National Congress weekly press conference. Each of these parties has a member in the current seven-man political council appointed by Bremer to oversee the creation of the new Iraqi interim government.

‘Allawi, an exiled Iraqi closely allied with the U.S. State Department, was a Baathist student leader in the late 1960s, but fled to Beirut in 1971, when he saw Iraqi Baathism turn tyrannical. Ali, his representative, tells me that Baathist ideas—socialist and (especially) pan-Arab—no longer play any part in INA thinking. Ali is particularly concerned to highlight the dangers of religion. He tells me that the "Golden Triangle" between the towns of Yusufiyya, Mosul, and Tarbiyya is awash with extremist Wahhabis (members of the conservative Sunni Islamic sect), that the Muslim Brotherhood has cells all over the country, and that the as-yet-unfinished Jamia al-Umma—Saddam’s enormous 18-halled mosque complex in the Mansur district of Baghdad—was under al Qaida control. Ali tells me Iranian
and Saudi agents are trying to undermine Iraqi society. His ideas play straight to a coalition audience, as frightened of Iraq's fragmentation and regional unrest as it is of the growth of extremism. It's a canny way of shifting the focus away from Baathist troublemakers with whom, indirectly, his boss is associated.

Nuri as-Safi, on the other hand, explains why he is having so much trouble with the coalition forces, who keep on raiding SCIRI offices. As we talk, shaven-headed, bearded men in white robes waft through the room, silently exchanging kisses. Nuri blames his opposition comrades: "The advisers to the U.S. don't want peace—some are Baathist, some are Jewish," he tells me, but he swears that top-level relations with the coalition are good. Nuri, unsurprisingly, tells me that all the sabotage in and around Baghdad is Baath-inspired. He tells me extremism doesn't exist among Iraqi Shiites. All seven supreme Shiite leaders have issued fatwas declaring sabotage haram, which means forbidden by Islam. Shiites, who suffered the most under Sadaam, welcome the coalition. Unprompted, Nuri repeats that SCIRI wants nothing of the Iranian model in Iraq's future political set-up. "Why," he asks, "when SCIRI welcomed the coalition, when they helped them secure so many towns in the south, are they being treated with so much suspicion?" The answer is simple. SCIRI is by far the most powerful new party in Iraq today. It has its own 10,000-strong militia, the Badr Brigade, and America believes Iran is behind its politics.

The INC press conference is held at the old Baghdad Hunting Club—one of Odai Hussein's many hangouts. The INC is headed by Ahmad Chalabi, known in the press here as Dr. al-Harami (or "The Thief"). Of all the ex-opposition parties, his is the closest to the United States, and the only one sanctioned to fight on its side. Entifadh Qanbar, the INC spokesman, speaks firmly, in full, loud sentences. He wears a dark cotton suit, gold cufflinks, a double-Windsor knot in his tie, and his handkerchief is folded into four flames that lick his breast pocket. Chic is the INC uniform. Nabeel Musawi, another INC chieftain whom I met in London, asked me to join him while he moved his private number-plated Mercedes round the block to avoid traffic wardens. The INC, with no power base anywhere in the country, defines itself primarily as what it is not: Baathist. Qanbar speaks of almost nothing else. "To complete the liberation of Iraq, we must completely uproot Baathism from Iraqi society. ... The Baath was a system, not a political party. ... Cronyism, mass graves, even Saddam himself are all outcomes of the Baath party." Chalabi's party has put itself forward as the dragon-slayer. I asked Qanbar why he would outlaw the party. "The Baath party is 35 years ahead of us all in the political game. It would not be fair to give them equal footing as the other parties." Listen to Qanbar long enough, and you begin to think free elections might actually put the Baath party back in power.

As I left the meeting, I saw a long line of men wearing newspapers folded into sun hats, waiting to change their salaries—issued by the coalition in 10,000 Iraqi dinar notes—into sacks of 250 ID notes. Merchants will not accept the higher denomination. Since the banks (which carried all their currency in 10,000 ID notes) were looted, those notes are now haram, too.

Anti-American graffiti is splashed all over Baghdad's walls. On the base of the statue pulled down in front of millions of viewers worldwide, a scrawl reads "All Downe Go Home." But most of the graffiti is written in Arabic and goes unnoticed. The statue's base is surrounded by dozens of columns; the letters "S" and "H" are carved into each of them. "SH" obviously stands for Saddam Hussein, but it also spells sah, which in Arabic means truth.

It's now evening. I'm staying with an Irish friend who has rented a house here. The electricity, as ever, is down. I'm reading by the light of a gas lamp and facing the beginnings of a garden. For an instant it all feels strangely colonial. Truly colonial—I can hear rifle fire in the street behind me.
The Shu’bat al-Khamsa in Kathimiyya, North Baghdad, was Saddam’s equivalent of Langley, Va. It was the seat of special political intelligence: a colossal, low-lying concrete complex, walled on all sides. For years, across Iraq and beyond, rumors have circulated about a mysterious machine. The few prisoners who ever got out all told the same story—that at the back of the largest compound, intelligence services kept a giant meat grinder. It has not been found, and may never have existed, but it’s a legend that has cloaked Iraq for decades.

When the United States took the area, hundreds of Iraqis came to Kathimiyya, trying to find traces of lost relatives. Overwhelmed, the Army finally capitulated and let them in. This morning, people still lingered. One U.S. soldier told me about a woman who had come every day for two months, clutching a black-and-white photo of her son, pleading for information. She waved it at anyone who passed, too deep in grief to notice that, from so many years of thumbing the picture, his face had completely vanished.

Hundreds of filing cabinets fill the first two rooms of the compound, each one neatly labeled: Communist, Kurd, Independent, Islamic, etc. The file I picked at random was that of Jinan Mohammed al-Khalidi, 1985, who was refused work at the Directorate of Public Security on family grounds: uncle, communist; aunt, communist; uncle (mother’s brother), currently in prison in Karbala for membership of the Islamic Da’wa Party; father, ex-security services, sacked for the same reason. There are piles of paper that reach a meter high. Each file has a fading photo stapled to the top left-hand corner. Thousands upon thousands of faces.

In the temporary police station next door, six prisoners lie in a room. Some get up to talk to me through the hatch. One lies close to the door, his belly wrapped in bandages. He lost a kidney in a knife fight the night before last. He’s here for the murder of the man he lost it to.

Along Palestine Street, a gigantic, empty, dust-covered artery through East Baghdad, field-sized garden nurseries are open for business. Uday Hussein’s shattered Olympic complex faces the Martyrs’ Monument—two blue-tiled teardrops that reach 40 meters high—which commemorates the 400,000 who died in the Iran-Iraq War. Beneath the monument is a camp for some of the officers of the U.S. 1st Armored Division. Down the road, the Iraqi Fashion Centre now houses the Free Iraqi National Movement, a party I’ve never heard of.

I dropped by the heavily barricaded Canal Hotel, where the United Nations is housed. A Japanese girl sat outside smoking. She’s called an "Area Coordinator." In her words: "That’s what I’m called, but there’s not much active coordination. Frankly speaking, the U.N. has absolutely no authority here. At very best, we can act as consultants to the CPA [Coalition Provisional Authority]." The official U.N. people I’ve come to speak to are much less forthcoming.

Late afternoon I spent in Sadr City, named after Mohammed Sadeq al-Sadr, Shiite Maraji’ (or "Supreme Authority") martyred in 1999 by Saddam. The name is only three months old. Until the war it was called Saddam City, and before the 1991 war, it was called al-Thawra (or "the Revolution"). Sadr City is deeply, religiously Shiite and very poor. There are no public services and no active police. U.S. patrols do not dismount here.

The Mohsen Mosque marks one extremity of the area. It has been closed since 1999, when a city-strong demonstration protesting the assassination of Mohammed Sadeq carried an empty coffin here from the Hijma Mosque on the other side of town. Many died in the ensuing battle with Saddam’s Fedayeen, and the outer walls of the mosque are covered with henna handprints for the martyrs who lost their lives there.

At the Hijma Mosque, I met Sheikh Abbas al-Rubai’, the editor of the Da’wa Party’s newspaper, al-Hausa. The Da’wa is one of the biggest Shiite parties in Iraq today, led by the 22-year-old Moqtadr al-Sadr, the martyr’s son. His weekly paper sells 12,000 copies, more than almost every other paper in Baghdad. We sit in the mosque’s antechamber. There’s electricity here so a slow fans whirs. Before he joined the party, Abbas was a painter. He studied at the progressive College of Fine Arts in Baghdad.
He tells me about life under Saddam and the war: "It was worse than you can imagine. Women and children were killed for a word, or even a suspicious look at a picture of Saddam ... and then during this war, the Fedayeen came, and with them Sunni Arab volunteers from Syria and Jordan. From the 14th to the 21st of April, they ransacked the city. They even used rocket-propelled grenades. And for no reason. They had already lost."

The Da’wa Party did everything it could to stave off anarchy. Its student groups took up arms and protected the hospitals, saving the al-Kindi hospital from arson after it was looted and preventing the Qadisiya and Chuwadira hospitals from being looted. Those last two hospitals saved the lives of many of the wounded from all around Baghdad. Now, the party is cleaning up the debris—the dirt and the weapons—of the war. Abbas tells me the Sunnis and Shiites are working together; since the war, their doctors have been sharing medical supplies.

Returning home, I passed the Souq al-Mraidi or Souq al-Haramiya or Souq of Thieves, which, at the end of the war, doubled as Iraq’s biggest illegal arms market. I was frightened. It was near dark, much too late to be out almost anywhere in Baghdad, let alone here. As I stopped to take a photo, a man rushed me. He looked drunk, his eyes dulled by a lard-yellow film. He was screaming, "Kahraba! Kahraba!" He was begging for electricity.

Subject: Entry 4
Posted Thursday, July 10, 2003, at 2:30 PM ET

This morning, I went to the gathering of the tribes. From around the country they converged: 200 heads in black and white headscarves, a sea of checkers in front of the Sheraton elevators. These are the Sheiks, the elders. Some represent tribes of several million people. They are here to show a common front to the coalition, which, so far, has ignored them at official levels. Not a single man present today has been put up for inclusion in the soon-to-be-announced interim government. They are here to pledge unity to each other, almost against nature. Tribal rivalry has been the staple of Arabic literature for 2,000 years.

I spent an hour with a Rikabi sheik who told me nothing, in classical, elliptical Arabic. The only news of any note is that he hadn’t heard of plans to set up a tribal National Guard here, along the lines of the Saudi Arabian guard. I knew that two proponents of the plan had sat in the meeting with him, but they are from Ramadi and Falluja, near Baghdad, with stronger links to the north of the country, while the Rikabis are from the south. Apparently the northern leaders aren’t telling their plans to leaders from the rest of the country. So much for tribal unity.

Later I took a taxi up to the school of architecture to meet Hussam al-Rawi al-Rifa’i, ex-dean of the faculty of engineering. The driver, Raed, was a Palestinian from Gaza. He wants to go home, home to a country he’s never known—he was born in Kuwait, where his father was a migrant worker. In the minds of most Genoa/Seattle activists, the continued failure of the peace process and U.S. policy toward Iraq go hand in hand. Not so here. Saddam Hussein has used the Palestinian cause to garner support among anti-American Arabs across the Middle East: giving Palestinians shelter in Baghdad, free accommodation, and doling out $10,000 sacks to the families of Palestinian martyrs. Iraqis, however, believe Palestine is the cause of all their troubles. Raed, who lives in a Palestinian compound here, tells me there have been death threats and beatings; "They blame us for the war," he says. It’s not just that Palestinians got preferential treatment under Saddam, it’s the belief that the United States only invaded Iraq to settle the Palestinian issue. The argument goes: Control Iraq to control Syria to control Lebanon to control Hezbollah to control Palestine. It’s far-fetched. On the streets of Baghdad, it’s a conspiracy theory; for those circling Paul Wolfowitz in Washington, it’s nearing policy.

Hussam sits beneath his portrait in the architecture school; he is second-to-last in a long line of illustrious names. The school was founded in 1948 by Muhammad Makiya, Iraq’s first great modern
architect. He's the father of the now famous Kanan Makiya, the author ofRepublic of Fear, Cruelty and Silence, andThe Monument (catalogues of Baathist brutality) and the man who did most to justify this last U.S. war on humanitarian grounds. Kanan is the intellectual who hovers above but around INC policy. Kanan and Hussam are therefore linked in another way: The INC is intimately involved with the coalition's de-Baathification campaign, and Hussam is a Baathist, recently sacked from his university post.

Hussam joined the Baath Party when he was 15, just after the 1958 coup that toppled the monarchy. Conservative, from an old Baghdad family, he, like many, felt the Baathists were his only hope against the rising power of the Communist Party. And he believed in them—in the unity of the Arab nation, in freedom, and in socialism. Back in those days, the Baaths were the underdogs; they were lynched all over the capital, and in Ma'mun, were he lived, no one under 18 escaped jail. Hussam believes the current mass de-Baathification stands as "collective punishment," which contravenes the Geneva Conventions.

"We loved Michel Aflak [Baathism's progenitor]—he was romantic, he was a believer, he was almost a Sufi." I asked him why he stayed in the party, when he knew what Baathism was doing to his country. "We kept hoping that something would change. We didn't want to leave because we loved the party, we loved its ideas. I thought we might just be able to fight from within." And Hussam did help, in the most paradoxical way: 90 percent of the staff at the architecture college were not Baathist, because as a high ranking member himself, Hussam was able to stall outside pressure against their joining.

"I believed in an ideology that no longer existed, with a leader that contravened all its principles. I still have a strong ideological commitment to Baathism—in Arab unity, and in a kind of British Labour Party socialism. And I still stand against American globalization. The U.S. has never shown us Arabs any kind of moral justice. But we were torn between anti-imperialism and a bastard. Saddam, the man I hated, stood against America, the power I hated."

That fracture runs through the very core of society. No one here, except the odd fawning ex-opposition party member, speaks of anything but occupation, and yet polls conducted weekly in the Arab Iraqi press show massive support (85 percent to 90 percent) for continued American presence. In Arabic, choosing between the lesser of two evils translates as choosing the madness that suits you best. It’s the choice on which life hinges here, but it’s not a way to live.
the streets anymore. I sit at the back of restaurants and coffee shops. I talk incessantly in Arabic and surround myself with people who are always curious about the blond boy with the Lebanese accent.

Today I took shelter in the Abdel-Qadir al-Gailani mosque, the largest Sunni place of worship in Baghdad. Stick-and-canvas stalls lead up to its entrance; the vendors sell trinkets, worry beads, and photos of the grand Sufi sheikhs of the 1940s. A beautiful 19-year-old Faylee Kurd, his nose broken across his face, sells tapes of Quranic chanting. For the last nine months, he has been living in a shack behind the mosque, with his parents and three brothers. The Faylee Kurds (a specific ethnic group) have been kicked between Iraq, Iran, and the Kurdish north for two decades. I ask this one where he wants to live. He tells me Lebanon.

A deaf and dumb man swinging a Kalashnikov takes me to meet Sheikh Abd al-Jabbar al-Qaissy, the Imam’s No. 2. It’s nearing afternoon prayer time, and he’s waking from his nap. He must be over 70. He is very toothless, very turbaned, and very friendly. And not very clever. Every Islamic party in Iraq has been bending over backward to present themselves as the democratic face of Islam. Abd al-Jabbar knows to be wary of inquiries but doesn’t know how. The biggest religious party in Iraq is Shiite and led by Muhammad Baqer al-Hakim. Would Abd al-Jabbar welcome a Shiite al-Hakim as president? “I’ve never heard of him,” he claims. What does he think of the Iranian governmental model? “I haven’t been there.” And Saudi Arabia? “Saudi Arabia is the land of Islam; I have been on the Hajj to Mecca four times.” But he does tell me that Iraq has never been worse off; that she needs Islam, not politics; that only Islam can govern her; that Iraq will only find peace in God. “We have had 35 years of war here because Iraq abandoned God.” How was life for him under Saddam? “Fine, I stayed away from politics.” Has he heard of mass graves? “Not until the U.S. began talking about them.” Doesn’t he think a man in his position should know about such things? “No, I am a man of God.” He was running to the mosque for prayers. I was furious and desperate now for a translator. Instead of “moral responsibility,” I stammered, “psychological cowardice,” but he was shuffling off and was past hearing or caring.

I had dinner in one of Baghdad’s smartest restaurants with the ”international man” of one of the big tribes here, a man who looks after their financial interests abroad. He spent an hour talking Tuscany and French white burgundy. The only other people there were Bernard Kerik (ex-New York police commissioner, now senior adviser to the ministry of interior) and a young woman. They came in separate cars, escorted. At the door stood four men in matching flak jackets, each with a fold-away automatic weapon, a pistol, and a jungle knife. They’re ex-special forces from Pretoria, South Africa. They call Nelson Mandela, whom they once worked for, a ”sweetie.”

Under the Jadiriyya bridge in south Baghdad, drunkards gather around polystyrene iceboxes, drinking bootleg vodka. At night, it’s the looters’ hangout, where they spend what they stole. The ministry district, badly shelled, looks like a prehistoric graveyard. Men, who look like mice against the charred carcasses of monumental Baathist architecture, scuttle back and forth. By 7 p.m., every night, the crowds flee the city. Three days ago, the 1940s Prime Minister Abdel Mohsen Fahd al-Sadoun’s bronze statue was stolen from its pedestal on the street that bears his name. Even in the late evening, my ears feel the pressure of the heat. Every night, in the 15 minutes it takes me to fall asleep, I hear gunfire. Everywhere I go, people tell me life was better under Saddam.
Between Saddam and the American Occupation: Iraq's Academic Community Struggles for Autonomy

The old regime was no friend to academic values. But Iraqi academics discover that life after liberation and occupation poses new threats to these same values.

By Keith Watenpaugh

On a cheerless Friday afternoon in January 2003, shortly before the American-led invasion of Iraq, I strolled down Baghdad’s al-Mutanabbi Street with the Iraqi architect Hussam al-Rawi al-Sayyad. The street, named for a tenth-century Arab poet, is home to the city’s main used-book market. Al-Rawi took pride in pointing out the many titles published by Baghdad University and the Iraqi Academy of Sciences. Interspersed in and among the scholarly and popular books were state-produced tracts on Baathism, biographies of Saddam Hussein, standard anti-Israel screeds that often cross over into anti-Semitism, and a smattering of self-help books intended to aid one in overcoming wedding-night jitters. Many of the books and journals represented years of careful collecting by Iraqis, who had been forced to sell them for cash. Arranged carefully along the curb, they spoke of a time when Baghdad, flush with oil wealth, competed with Cairo as the intellectual center of the Arab world.

In June 2003, shortly after the fall of the Baathist regime, and after the United States declared an end to major combat, I re-turned to Baghdad and al-Mutanabbi Street as the leader of a group of historians of the contemporary Arab Middle East from Germany, France, Jordan, and the United States. We had come to catalog the extent of the damage inflicted on institutions of higher learning and cultural production by the paroxysm of looting and aggravated mayhem of the previous few months. (We published our findings in a report, Opening the Doors: Intellectual Life and Academic Conditions in Post-War Baghdad, copies of which can be downloaded from H-Net, a Web-based consortium of scholars and teachers in the humanities and social sciences: http://www.hnet.org/about/press/opening_doors/.)

We discovered that the dour mood of the prewar period had been replaced by genuine excitement. The street was filled with Iraqis and others, poring over titles and buying armloads of books. Many, especially those on Shiite Islam, had been written by banned authors. This time, however, the titles also included books looted from Baghdad’s public and university libraries. While some dealers tried to conceal the provenance of the books, others brazenly sold volumes still bearing call numbers on the spines.
The old Baathist tracts were gone, but book dealers had taken to selling artists' renderings of Imams Ali and Hussein, the Prophet Muhammad's son-in-law and grandson, who are the most revered figures in Shiite Islam. Next to them were photographs of bearded Islamic scholars like the Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani and the murdered father of Shia leader Muqtada al-Sadr. Even Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini could be seen.

The differences—and the stark continuities—between my two visits to al-Mutanabbi Street symbolize the larger problems facing Iraq's academic community in the aftermath of the war. Indeed, the troubles of Iraqi higher education in this hottest of all "hot spots" are the problems of Iraq as a whole. For higher education in Iraq, the fundamental challenge is to regain the intellectual integrity and professional autonomy lost during the brutish reign of Saddam Hussein and his Baathist apparatus. But also, and more fundamentally, Iraqi higher education faces unremitting civil strife, the infection of campuses with partisan and religious politics, and a heavy-handed and clumsy quasi-colonial U.S. policy that plans to continue to Americanize and "manage" Iraqi academic and intellectual life for the foreseeable future.

Ultimately, to help create a viable national community and open society, Iraqi higher education will first need to be restored to a firm and independent footing. And the country's vast reservoir of academics must be reintegrated into international networks of professional exchange as colleagues, friends, and equals. How institutions outside of Iraq—colleges, universities, professional societies, and donors—respond to those needs will contribute to the warp and weft of Iraqi society and to its relations with the rest of the world for generations to come.

Before the War
While we were in Baghdad, the co-authors of Opening the Doors conversed with Iraqi academics about life under the Baathist regime. Most notable was our discussion with Alya Sousa, a historian trained at the American University in Beirut, whose father, Ahmad Sousa, was among the leading historians of a previous generation. Alya Sousa, who wrote on the period between the world wars, left the history department at Baghdad University in the early 1990s. A grandmother, she later perished along with twenty-one others, including Sergio Vieira de Mello, the United Nations special envoy to Iraq, in an August 2003 car bombing of UN headquarters.

The architect Hussam al-Rawi contributed to our understanding as well. Trained in England, he is a champion of architectural regionalism and historic preservation, and he served in various administrative positions at Baghdad University. Because of his rank within the Baath Party structure, however, the urbane al-Rawi was expelled from the university in May 2003 by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), the U.S. military entity that governed the country until the handover of power to a transitional Iraqi government this past June. (This article goes to press just after the handover of sovereignty.) He has since left Iraq for exile in the Caribbean. One of al-Rawi's most recent and celebrated commissions is the mosque-tomb complex of Michel Aflaq, one of the three
founders of the Baath Party, who died in Baghdad in 1989. Ironically, that complex served as a storage depot for the largest intact collection of Baath Party documents found to date. It was saved from demolition by the noted Iraqi architect and Brandeis University professor, Kanan Makiya.

Among our other interlocutors were two Iraqis who had returned to the country as advisers to the CPA's Ministry of Higher Education: Issam Khafaji and Farouq Darweesh. Khafaji is a leading Iraqi dissident who has taught in the United States and Europe, most recently at the University of Amsterdam. Darweesh, an engineer, was a former administrator at Baghdad University. Both have since left Iraq again. Khafaji claims that he did so to avoid becoming, in his words, "a collaborator."

All the people we interviewed emphasized a pattern of systematic abuse and corruption of higher education and scholarly re-search by the Baathist state apparatus; they also related anecdotes about acts of individual cronyism and the mental and physical abuse of professors by members of the ruling elite. At the same time, they conveyed the sense that the Iraqi system of higher education and professional development had no inherent flaws. Rather, social forces exterior to the universities had robbed the institutions of their prestige, vitality, rigor, and overall excellence.

Baathist policies toward higher education in Iraq changed dramatically over the thirty-two years preceding the U.S. occupation. Kamal Muzhar, a respected elderly historian, recalled that although the first systematic purges of communist faculty took place in 1968, until 1979 university professors elected their own directors, chairs, and deans. The exiles Khafaji and Darweesh concurred that the situation did not become truly unbearable until 1979.

Others point to the mid-1980s as the period that the system broke down altogether, with the near collapse of scholarly exchange after the state made travel abroad contingent upon ranking membership in the party. Before this time, Iraqi academics enjoyed the right to travel abroad to conferences and meetings; often, the state subsidized their expenses. Still, the security services considered those who spent time abroad suspect, and these academics could face harassment and interrogation on their return. Reduced freedom to travel had its cognate in the abandonment of the tradition of earning at least one higher degree at a school in Europe or North America. An older generation of Iraqi academics remembers a time when they could study freely in other Arab states, the United States, and Europe and when they enjoyed free tuition and liberal stipends from the government.

Although most Iraqis who completed graduate work before 1979 did so abroad, few studied overseas between 1980 and the outbreak of the Gulf War in 1991. After the war, almost no one did. The handful who traveled enjoyed close ties to the ruling elite. For the humanities and social sciences, this lack of mobility has been especially detrimental: foreign language acquisition has been poor and exposure to contemporary research almost nonexistent. An entire generation of junior professors has been unable to spend time abroad, attend international conferences, and build connections with colleagues outside of Iraq.
The state used rewards and punishments in the tenure-and-promotion process to induce and ensure loyalty. Iraqi universities employed, and still use, a tiered system of faculty advancement accompanied by a kind of tenure that guarantees employment but not necessarily rank. Ideally, movement from lecturer to assistant professor to professor is based on successful teaching and a review of research and publications by external evaluators.

But in the late 1980s and 1990s, the regime made it increasingly easy for party members to move through the ranks. Salaries, which were low even by academic standards, were tied to rank. When one became an administrator or a chair, one's salary increased steeply. Membership in institutions such as the Iraqi Academy of Sciences carried with it additional stipends, and opportunities to teach a heavier load for additional pay existed. Nevertheless, access to these upper ranks and perquisites often came at the price of party membership.

Sousa left the university out of frustration in the early 1990s to work with the United Nations. But she looked back fondly on her career in the academy. She said that women professors received support for their research and development until the mid-1980s, when the system became untenable. Her experience highlights the fact that state policy encouraged women’s access to higher education and faculty positions. Not only was this policy in line with Baathist tenets of secular equality, but it was also a pragmatic response to the demographic realities created by the slaughter of many young Iraqi men in the Iran-Iraq war.

Setting issues of academic corruption aside, al-Rawi told me a story after the war that he had neglected to tell me earlier about the potential for arbitrary horror inherent in the old system. Luay Hussein, one of Saddam Hussein’s most favored nephews, failed a required engineering course because of attendance problems. Al-Rawi, as head of the engineering section at the time, had to inform the nephew of this fact. In retribution, young toughs from Luay’s entourage severely beat and maimed the professor who gave Luay the failing grade and later tried to ambush al-Rawi himself on the street. When the president’s office learned of the occurrence, a staged, videotaped beating of Luay’s accomplices was produced and shown to the faculty at Baghdad University as a kind of apology. Nevertheless, al-Rawi was not renewed as head of engineering.

The story underscores the vulnerable position of Iraqi academics in the prewar period. Those in the arts and humanities were especially at risk, because they did not have an obviously pragmatic value to the state, as did their colleagues in the sciences. Historians were in constant danger, as the state placed a premium on the maintenance of an ideologically “correct” portrayal of the past.

Most, if not all, Iraqi historians and other academics with international reputations left the country over the three decades preceding the war to assume better-paying or less-restrictive positions in the Arab Gulf, Jordan, Libya, Yemen, or the West. Prominent examples are the exiles Khafaji and Darweesh and the important historians of the Ottoman period, Sayyar Al-Jamil and Hala Fattah. This
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phenomenon is by no means limited to Iraq. It is an omnipresent fact of intellectual life in the Arab world.

"After" the War
The co-authors of Opening the Doors surveyed conditions at three campuses in the capital: Baghdad University, primarily the urban Bab al-Muazzam campus; al-Mustansiriyya University; and al-Nahrain (Two Rivers) University, formerly Saddam University. All these universities shared problems brought by the war and its aftermath, namely, lack of public safety and unreliable availability of water, electricity, and transportation. Moreover, these institutions are still cut off from all substantive international contact. In real terms, this means a suspension of subscriptions to academic journals, library acquisitions, and travel abroad for faculty members and students.

Postwar looting harmed all state institutions, universities, libraries, and research centers, although some looting and destruction was limited to the theft of computers and other easily replaceable items. Vandals damaged classrooms and research spaces; even in places they did not physically destroy, they stole chairs, tables, blackboards, windows, and doors. Objects of unique value are gone. And missing items extend beyond old Ottoman archives, historic manuscripts, books, and documents. Student records and transcripts—the mundane trappings of everyday life in a modern educational system—also disappeared.

Of more pressing concern is the overt politicization of campuses that threatens to suppress open exchange and freedom of thought. Incidents involving harassment of nonveiled women students and teachers, student-on-student violence, and assassinations of administrators occur often.

Conservative estimates place at thirteen the number of academics murdered in Iraq since the start of the U.S. occupation. The most gruesome killing was the June 2004 beheading of Layla Abdullah Said, dean of the College of Law at Mosul University and one of the few women in positions of academic leadership. Her murder highlights the fact that Iraqi intellectuals who work with the United States or Western nongovernmental organizations have been increasingly targeted for death by the guerilla insurgency.

Women faculty note that their position in higher education has changed for the worse over the past decade, and they worry that it will continue to decline despite the fact that, historically, women have held positions of prominence in Iraqi higher education and female students make up at least 50 percent of the student population.

In spite of the onerous circumstances, including a lack of tables, chairs, examination booklets, and even chalk, by June 2003 the normal rhythm of the academic year had begun to return to the city's campuses. Students, excited and happy to be at school, had set up makeshift cafeterias, where they enjoyed each other's company. They were all well dressed—a major accomplishment given the heat
and lack of running water. Their professors complained about them in ways comparable to what we say about our own undergraduates, suggesting a certain return to normalcy. The resourcefulness and adaptability of Iraqi faculty and students were readily in evidence.

The Occupation
In the middle of the 2002-03 academic year, the occupation authorities had forced sweeping administrative changes at all Iraqi universities: CPA officials dismissed the presidents of universities and deans of faculties as well as most department heads. Where CPA influence was minimal, faculty elections proceeded smoothly on a consensual basis. At that time, the heart of discontent at universities, as in other sectors of society, stemmed from the CPA’s ham-fisted purges of ranking Baathists. Although the CPA subsequently abandoned this policy, it left a bitter residue in the relations between the CPA and the academy.

By the time my colleagues and I arrived, the CPA had lost much of the support and goodwill it enjoyed after the overthrow of the old regime. Its perceived inability to manage the basic needs of everyday life in the capital—for public safety, electricity, water, telephone communication, and gasoline—was the main cause of that loss. Few of our contacts then expressed virulent anti-Americanism, but that has begun to change.

We noticed a mounting frustration, even among members of the large educated Iraqi middle class who had been willing to give the Americans the benefit of the doubt, and who saw the occupation as a tremendous opportunity. For some, this frustration has turned into radical antipathy toward the American presence and assistance efforts. Those who are disaffected in this way make easy recruits for the increasingly organized paramilitary resistance.

Adding to the general sense of disempowerment was the perception that the CPA was institutionally indifferent to the needs of Iraqis. The CPA’s choice of Saddam Hussein’s former palace, for example, as the base of its operations and the future site of the U.S. Embassy, sent confusing and mixed signals to the Iraqi people. CPA officials themselves seemed in a permanent state of lockdown in the so-called Green Zone, the high-security cantonment where U.S. officials and contractors are headquartered. Because the Americans can rarely move about the city without armed guards, Iraqis hoping to meet them must do so in the cavernous Iraqi national conference center after passing through several checkpoints.

Although this article goes to press just after the June 2004 handover of sovereignty to an Iraqi government, it is already clear that the United States plans to maintain a large role in the civil administration of Iraq. Many of the CPA’s functions have simply been incorporated into the massive U.S. diplomatic mission to Iraq, which will involve some nine hundred government employees and contractors. American diplomats will still control the bulk of redevelopment aid allocated to Iraq, as well as the proceeds from the sale of Iraqi oil.
Universities, without independent budgets or endowments and with U.S. military personnel and weapons on their campuses, will continue to be in a subordinate position, underscoring the limits to Iraqi sovereignty. The same holds true for other research and cultural institutions.

The United States plans to continue to deploy U.S. Agency for International Development grants to link the United States and Iraqi institutions. (The first round of agency subcontracts awarded $5.1 million to five American universities and consortia.) Such programs have the potential to help Iraqis rebuild their educational system. But if Iraqis see the programs as part of an American agenda, their role is doubtful in the creation of permanent, collegial, and productive relations between the U.S. and Iraqi academic communities. The ultimate cost of failing to create such relationships may be the dismissal of core academic values—open scholarly exchange, freedom of inquiry, women's participation in higher education, and faculty self-management—as "American" and anti-Muslim.

The appointment by the CPA of John Agresto as senior adviser to the Ministry of Higher Education is one example of how U.S. political interests can taint Iraqi higher education. In the 1980s, Agresto was one of the leading right-wing figures in the "culture wars." Later, he was president of St. John's College in Santa Fe, New Mexico, an institution known for its Eurocentric "great books" curriculum. He now runs his own educational consulting firm, Agresto Consultants. He has no training in Middle Eastern society or culture, and he had no experience in the region before his arrival in Iraq. He was ap-pointed directly by U.S. defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld, whose wife, Joyce, served on St. John’s board of trustees during Agresto’s presidency.

His appointment signaled that the CPA intended to staff its bureaucracy with politically loyal agents, rather than with those most objectively qualified to assist Iraq. The clearly political na-ture of Agresto’s position sent a chilling signal to academic in-stitutions interested in working in Iraq: their efforts would be part and parcel of the administration’s current policy objectives.

Agresto’s last day in Iraq was June 18, 2004. Before leaving, he admitted that Iraq’s universities and colleges had not been rebuilt. He laid the blame primarily on a lack of international aid and support from the U.S. academy. He also faulted the Iraqis themselves. While still in Baghdad, and despite ample evidence to the contrary, he told a reporter for the Washington Post that Iraqis "don't know how to be a community. . . . [T]hey put their individual interests first. They only look out for themselves.”

Beyond an ugly ethnocentrism and an unwillingness to shoulder any responsibility for American failures in Iraq, Agresto’s comments signal a growing belief in Washington policy circles that Iraqis are unable to achieve modernity or democracy and thus are entitled to neither. This attitude can only hurt the chances for higher education to contribute to building a civil society in Iraq.

Despite Agresto’s bleak assessment, the Iraqi interim government took the bold move of appointing a university professional, Tahir al-Bakaa’, as minister of higher education in June 2004. A historian of
the modern Middle East, al-Bakaa’ had been elect-ed president of al-Mustansiriyya University by his peers in the immediate postwar period. A ranking Baathist, he escaped de-Baathification through sheer force of his personality and kept his university open and functioning through much of last year. He recently announced that he would keep the ministry out of local university administration. And, in a decision that may return to haunt him, he rejected a new education law drafted by Agresto’s office at the CPA. It is an open question whether al-Bakaa’ will succeed in navigating between the extremes of a new Iraqi government that hints that it will impose martial law and a U.S. government unwilling to give up real control.

Among the many papers I brought back with me from Iraq is a simple letter in Arabic from the president of the Iraqi Academy of Sciences, Hayawi Hammash. The letter invites members of the Middle East Studies Association to hold a conference in Baghdad at some point in the future. As an attenuated form of Iraqi sovereignty resumes, and as a low-grade but increasingly vicious civil war grips the country, the guarded optimism with which I left Baghdad has all but vanished. But the implicit obligation symbolized by that invitation has not.

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It is a good question. Some 17 months after the fall of Baghdad, Iraqi science is in parlous state. Most of the equipment used by Radhi and his department, much of it British, is 20 or 30 years old. "Look at this," the professor says, as he shows off the university's crumbling electronics lab. "Most of this stuff doesn't work. The few things that do work should be in a museum."

"We might be able to make coffee on this," he adds sarcastically, gesturing at a plate for soldering metal.

It is hardly surprising the professor and other scientists at Iraq's premier academic institution are demoralised. Over the past 20 years the country's scientific community has, as the science dean, Abdul Mehdi Talib, explains, been much reduced. During last year's invasion of Iraq, looters descended on the leafy campus, an enclave of date palms and saysaban trees in central Baghdad. They carried off everything they could - microscopes, oscilloscopes, air-conditioning units - stripping many of the university's five science colleges. "They took the lot. When I came back to my office I found only the walls," Dr Talib recalls. "We managed to buy some of our equipment back from people selling it on the street. But a lot of it was smuggled up to the north and disappeared."

Even before last year's war, Iraq's once vibrant scientific community had fallen on hard times. It had, for more than a decade, been cut off from the rest of the world. After Saddam appointed himself president in 1979, Iraqi scientists - many of whom had studied in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s - found it hard to travel abroad. Then in 1990 Iraq invaded Kuwait.

After the first Gulf war, the UN imposed sanctions, cutting off Iraqi scientists' few remaining contacts with the west. They were no longer able to travel to international conferences or collaborate with colleagues abroad; foreign governments rejected their visa applications. Publication in foreign journals ceased. They were forbidden from buying scientific literature and new equipment.

The priority now, Talib says, is for Iraqi scientists to re-establish a diverse range of contacts with the international scientific community. "We are poor experimentally. Most of our research relies on simulation. And we need a lot of things."

In some respects, Baghdad University is like any other academic community - male and female students sit together in the sunny garden cafe, drinking tea under white umbrellas. In other ways, it is different: guards with Kalashnikovs are posted at all the entrances; every car that enters is searched for bombs. A radical Islamist group recently demanded that men and women in Iraqi higher education should be taught separately. So far, though, the ubiquitous suicide bombers have not tried to blow up the campus.

Since last year's invasion, the university has published several research projects, including studies on the etching of polymer-metal composites by laser ablation; on generation and decay of laser driven
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shock waves; and a spectroscopic study of the dye DCM as an active medium for luminescent solar concentrators, that focus sunlight.

"We hope that we can bring our PhD students to the same standard as the US or Britain," the professor says. "They are the future of this country." What, then, was his message to the wider scientific world? "We are your brothers. We graduated from your universities. Now we need your help."

So far, though, he and his colleagues have been disappointed by the response from the British government; there has scarcely been one. The dean is keen to send his best PhD students and faculty staff abroad; so far, Britain has offered just 50 scholarships for the whole of Iraq.

Hatim Attiya, the university's scientific affairs president, visited Birmingham University earlier this year, but laments that such opportunities for training are few. With Iraq under American and British occupation, the university hoped that its facilities, many of them damaged or destroyed, might be rebuilt. "They promised to rebuild Iraq. But it hasn't happened here," Radhi says, as his colleagues frantically scribble lists of urgently needed equipment and hand them to the Guardian: lasers, wavelength division multiplexes, vacuum ovens. "I can only conclude that they lied," he says. "We are the best university in Iraq. Imagine what the others are like," he adds.

The university is on the brink of signing a memorandum of understanding with Sussex University, which has offered to donate instruments, including a second-hand spectrophotometer, and a stock of chemicals. So far, though, nobody has figured out a way of shipping them to Iraq.

One of the biggest problems that Iraqi scientists face is that they have become famous internationally for the wrong reasons. Talib, who completed his physics PhD at Manchester University in the early 1970s, says it is important to distinguish between scientists who had worked in academic institutions under the old regime and those who worked for Saddam's government. "We want to rejoin the world community," he said. "They shouldn't consider us as devils. We are academics. We don't like politics."

Immediately after the fall of Baghdad, elections were held at the university for a new president, vice-presidents and deans. The old tier of the administration that had been appointed by Saddam was removed; everybody else went back to work.

At the same time, the US military arrested dozens of Iraqi scientists who had been part of Saddam's vast military-industrial complex. The US's aim was to discover Saddam's weapons of mass destruction; some 17 months later it has now become embarrassingly clear, even to Tony Blair, that these weapons don't exist. Despite this, the Bush administration continues to hold a small number of Iraqi scientists - including two women, Rihab Taha, nicknamed Dr Germ, said to have been in charge of Iraq's biological weapons programme in the 1980s, and Huda Amnash, dubbed Mrs Anthrax by US intelligence - at a high-security camp at Baghdad's international airport. None of the scientists has been charged with any crime; the US authorities have refused them legal access.
In January this year, Mohammed Munim Al-Izmerly, a distinguished chemistry professor, mysteriously died while in American custody. An Iraqi autopsy found he had been hit over the head with a blunt instrument.

Eight months on, the White House has still not offered an explanation. Other scientists still being held without charge include Amer Al Saadi, Saddam’s chief scientific adviser who studied at Battersea College of Technology- now part of Surrey University- in the 1960s. In February 2003, Dr Saadi appeared on TV to rubbish the US Secretary of State Colin Powell’s claim that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. In April 2003, three days after Baghdad fell, Saadi gave himself up to the Americans; they have kept him in jail ever since. Saadi’s German wife, Helma, says her husband’s only crime was to have mocked Donald Rumsfeld, the US defence secretary, in a press conference before the invasion.

"Under the Geneva convention, prisoners of war should be either charged or released once a conflict is over,” she says at her home in Baghdad. "My husband is in a black hole of illegality. He was the only one who told the truth. Because of this the Americans have kept him in prison for one and a half years.”

But it would be wrong to suggest that, despite the overwhelming obstacles, Iraqi scientists have given up. Some 71,000 students currently attend Baghdad University - half of them in science departments - together with 6,000 postgraduates; the university’s teaching staff includes 4,000 lecturers and about 1,000 professors. Facilities are sufficient for undergraduate work; the problem, Talib admits, is that at postgraduate level they are woefully inadequate. There are also no jobs for bright PhD students who want to remain in academia. The university doesn’t have any money: 90% of its meagre budget goes on staff salaries, which now average $450 a month.

"Even if we had the cash, we can’t buy anything because Iraq doesn’t have an international banking system," Talib says. "We urgently need a laser lab for our medical students who are investigating cancer problems. But we are not allowed to import lasers.” It would, one would have thought, be a good investment: spend half a million pounds on bringing young Iraqi scientists to Britain for doctoral and postdoctoral courses; and revive Britain’s once-fruitful scientific relationship with Iraq.

Under the old regime, much of Iraq’s intelligentsia fled, to neighbouring countries in the Middle East, and to Europe and America. Unless western governments move swiftly, a new exodus will begin. And Professor Radhi’s conked-out liquid helium machine will never get repaired.

• How can you help? Scientists at Baghdad University have compiled a list of desperately needed laboratory equipment.

• Science and Civilization in Islam by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Islamic Texts Society. ISBN 1903682401

• Science in Ancient Mesopotamia by Carol Moss, 1999, Franklin Watts. ISBN 0531159302
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* www.baghdadmuseum.org/technology

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Israeli secret agents killed 310 Iraqi scientists (30 Oct 2004)

**By Mustafa Amara**

*Azzaman, 2004-10-30* -- More than 310 Iraqi scientists are thought to have perished at the hands of Israeli secret agents in Iraq since fall of Baghdad to US troops in April 2003, a seminar has found.

The seminar, held in Cairo, was attended by politicians, journalists and experts with an interest in current Iraqi affairs.

The experts said they had detected an organized campaign aimed at “liquidating Iraqi scientists” in the past 18 months and most of them pointed the finger at the Israeli secret police service, the Mossad.

The organizers said their aim was to highlight the plight of Iraqi scientists particularly those who were engaged in the weapons programs under the former regime.

“There is a joint American and Israeli plan to kill as many Iraqi scientists as possible,” said Abdel Raoof al-Raidi, an ambassador and assistant foreign minister.

The Iraqi ambassador in Cairo, Ahmad al-Iraqi, accused Israel of sending to Iraq immediately after the US invasion “a commando unit” charged with the killing of Iraqi scientists.

“Israel has played a prominent role in liquidating Iraqi scientists ... The campaign is part of a Zionist plan to kill Arab and Muslim scientists working in applied research which Israel sees as threatening its interests,” al-Iraqi said.

DR. Imad Jad, an Israeli affairs expert at the Al-Ahram Studies Center, said the US had already airlifted 70 Iraqi scientists out of the country and placed them in areas to make it difficult for them to “transfer information to anti-US quarters.”

He said more than 310 Iraqi scientists have been killed so far and most of them at the hands of Mossad agents working in Iraq.
He said the Ahram Center estimated that nearly 17,000 Iraqi scientists working in various fields of knowledge have fled the country since the US-led invasion.

In Baghdad, interim government officials refused to comment on the deliberations that took place in the Cairo conference.

However, the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Science and Technology said their own figures tally with those mentioned at the seminar, particularly regarding the number of Iraqi scientist been killed so far.

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- What is the U.S. role in Iraq’s dirty war? - 16 March 2006.

SPECIAL REPORTS
What is the U.S. role in Iraq’s dirty war?
By Nicolas J S Davies
Online Journal Contributing Writer

Mar 15, 2006, 00:58

The annual U.S. State Department report on human rights for 2005 has acknowledged that the governing institutions created by the United States in Iraq are engaged in an organized campaign of detention and torture.

The State Department report found, “Police abuses included threats, intimidation, beatings, and suspension by the arms or legs, as well as the reported use of electric drills and cords and the application of electric shocks.”

A U.N. human rights report issued last September also found evidence of extrajudicial executions, “Corpses appear regularly in and around Baghdad and other areas. Most bear signs of torture and appear to be victims of extrajudicial executions . . . Serious allegations of extrajudicial executions underline a deterioration in the situation of law and order . . . Accounts consistently point to the systematic use of torture during interrogations at police stations and within other premises belonging to the Ministry of the Interior.”

Dr. John Pace, who wrote the U.N. report, has now left Iraq, and reports that 23,000 people are currently imprisoned in detention centers where torture is rife, and that at least 80 percent of them are innocent of any crime.

These reports acknowledge what a small number of journalists have been reporting for at least two years, that a brutal “dirty war” has grown out of the fertile soil of the U.S. occupation. On March 15, 2004, the New Statesman published an article by Stephen Grey, titled “Rule of the Death Squads,”
about the murder of Professor Abdullatif al-Mayah in Baghdad on January 19, 2004, 12 hours after he had appeared on Al-Jazeera to denounce the corruption of the Iraqi Governing Council.

Grey quoted a senior commander at the headquarters of the U.S.-installed Iraqi police, “Dr. Abdullatif was becoming more and more popular because he spoke for people on the street here. He made some politicians quite jealous . . . You can look no further than the Governing Council. There are political parties in this city who are systematically killing people. They are politicians that are backed by the Americans and who arrived to Iraq from exile with a list of their enemies. They are killing people one by one.”

On January 16, 2005, USA Today reported on the work of Isam al-Rawi, a geology professor who heads the Iraqi Association of University Lecturers. He had been cataloging assassinations of academics in occupied Iraq and had documented 300 of them by the time of the article. He was unable to identify a clear pattern to the killings, except that, like Professor al-Mayah, the victims were usually the most respected and popular members of their universities and their communities.

The killing of academics has continued, and the minister of education stated recently that 296 faculty and staff members at universities in Iraq were killed in 2005. The Brussels Tribunal on Iraq has forwarded a list of murdered academics to the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Summary Executions, noting that the victims were from different ethnic, religious and political backgrounds, but were mostly vocal opponents of the U.S. occupation.

On January 14, 2005, Newsweek reported on “The Salvador Option,” the proposed use of death squads as part of the U.S. strategy to subdue the country. A U.S. military source told Newsweek, “The Sunni population is paying no price for the support it is giving to the terrorists. From their point of view, it is cost-free. We have to change that equation.” This source was expressing quite precisely the rationale that lay behind the dirty wars in Latin America and the worst abuses of the Vietnam War. The purpose of such a strategy is not to identify, detain and kill actual resistance fighters, but rather to terrorize an entire civilian population into submission.

The exile groups who began this dirty war in the early days of the occupation have come to form the core of successive governing institutions established by the United States. Their campaign of killing and torture has evolved and become institutionalized and their victims now number in the thousands. The State Department and U.N. reports do not address the possibility of a direct U.S. role in the campaign, but the Interior Ministry units that are most frequently implicated in these abuses were formed under U.S. supervision and have been trained by American advisors. The identities of their two principal advisors only reinforce these concerns. They are retired Colonel James Steele and former D.E.A. officer Steven Casteel, and they are both veterans of previous dirty wars.
In El Salvador between 1984 and 1986, Colonel Steele commanded the U.S. Military Advisor Group, training Salvadoran forces that conducted a brutal campaign against the civilian population. At other stages in his career, he performed similar duties during U.S. military operations in Cambodia and Panama. After failing a polygraph test, he confessed to Iran-Contra investigators that he had also shipped weapons from El Salvador to Contra terrorists in Nicaragua, leading Senator Tom Harkin to block his promotion to Brigadier General. Until April 2005, Steele was the principal U.S. advisor to the Iraqi Interior Ministry’s “Special Police Commandos,” the group most frequently linked to torture and summary executions in recent reports.

Steven Casteel worked in Colombia with paramilitaries called Los Pepes that later joined forces to form the A.U.C. in 1997, and have been responsible for most of the violence against civilians in Colombia. Casteel is now credited with founding the Special Police Commandos in his capacity as senior advisor to the Iraqi Interior Ministry.

Assigning responsibility for atrocities to particular units or individuals is complicated by the dual nature of the Iraqi security forces, which take orders both from their nominal superiors and from separate chains of command in the factional militias that most of them belong to. Ultimate responsibility for abuses is thus blurred by the fiction of the “government” and the militias as distinct entities, when the same people are really involved in both all the way to the top.

However, reports of torture and extrajudicial killings have followed the Special Police Commandos around the country wherever they have been deployed, from Anbar province and Mosul since October 2004, to Samarra in March 2005, to areas around Baghdad since April 2005. The U.N. report highlighted 36 bodies found near Badhra, close to the Iranian border, on August 25, 2005, who were identified by relatives as men who had been arrested by Interior Ministry forces in Baghdad.

A second group of 22 young men whose bodies were found near Badhra on September 27 had been arrested in Baghdad on August 18. Fifty police vehicles full of Special Police Commandos swept through the Iskan neighborhood early that morning seizing young men from their homes. At their funeral, the cleric declared “They took them from their bedrooms. We blame the government, which came to save us from Saddam’s terrorism but has brought terrorism worse than Saddam.”

After Special Police Commandos were first deployed in Baghdad in April, 14 farmers were found in a shallow grave on May 5, 2005, with their right eyeballs removed and other signs of torture, after they were seen being arrested at a vegetable market. Another incident 10 days later, in which eight bodies were found in a garbage dump, prompted Hareth al-Dhari, the secretary general of the Association of Muslim Scholars, to accuse the Interior Ministry directly. “This is state terrorism by the Ministry of Interior,” he claimed. The defense minister responded by blaming “terrorists wearing military uniforms.”
Then there is the work and tragic death of Yasser Salihee, the Iraqi physician turned journalist, who dared to launch an investigation into abuses by the Special Police Commandos. Knight Ridder posthumously published his work under the title “Sunni men in Baghdad targeted by attackers in police uniforms” on June 27, 2005. The cautious language of the report verged on irony, but it described eyewitness accounts of numerous abductions by “large groups of men driving white Toyota Land Cruisers with police markings. The men were wearing police commando uniforms and bulletproof vests, carrying expensive 9-millimeter Glock pistols and using sophisticated radios.”

Knight Ridder interviewed Steven Casteel for their story. He blamed the killings on “insurgents” impersonating commandos. As the article pointed out, this raised “troubling questions about how insurgents are getting expensive new police equipment. The Toyotas, which cost more than $55,000 apiece, and Glocks, at about $500 each, are hard to come by in Iraq, and they’re rarely used by anyone other than Western contractors and Iraqi security forces.”

Faik Baqr, the director of the central morgue in Baghdad, would only tell Knight Ridder, “It is a very delicate subject for society when you are blaming the police officers . . . It is not an easy issue. We hear that they are captured by the police and then the bodies are found killed . . . it’s obviously increasing.” Mr. Baqr recently fled the country after receiving a succession of death threats. Dr. Pace, the U.N. human rights officer who visited the Baghdad morgue regularly, has said that sometimes as many as 80 percent of the bodies in the morgue showed signs of torture.

Yasser Salihee was shot by a U.S. sniper on his way to get gas to drive his family to a swimming pool on his day off. His editor in Washington, Steve Butler, told me he had no reason to think Yasser’s death was connected to his work, and the U.S. Army’s account of the incident described a “random” shooting based only on rules of engagement that greatly prioritize American over Iraqi lives. However, as Italian investigators found in the case of Nicola Calipari, U.S. accounts of such incidents are not reliable, and U.S. links to the forces Dr. Salihee was investigating cast a dark shadow over his death.

The Iraqi death squads have also killed an American journalist. Steven Vincent was an award-winning art critic from New York who went to Iraq as a freelance writer for National Review, The Wall Street Journal & Harpers, and wrote a book, In the Red Zone, about the experiences of Iraqis living under occupation. On July 29, 2005, he wrote in an op-ed piece in the New York Times that many of the police in Basra were also active in Shiite militias that had killed hundreds of Sunnis in the city. Four days later, he was abducted by a group of men in a brand new white Chevy pick-up with police markings. His body was found by the side of a road outside the city with three gunshot wounds to the chest.

In recent weeks, U.S. forces have freed prisoners from Interior Ministry prisons and rescued a Sunni prisoner en route to his execution. U.S. officials have made strong statements condemning human rights abuses by their Iraqi allies. It appears that the “Salvador Option,” like so many U.S. policies born
of ignorance of local conditions in Iraq, has spun out of control to the point that U.S. officials now feel obliged to restrain it. Or, as so often in the history of U.S. covert action, different factions in the bureaucracy of the occupation may actually be working both with and against the death squads, making an absurdity of any singular explanation of U.S. policy.

Iraqis question whether the chaos unleashed on their country by the United States is the result of incompetence, as most Americans assume, or of a more sinister and deliberate design to destroy their country and society. In fact, setting aside the privatized paradise of Western investment envisioned by a few neconservative dreamers, U.S. goals in Iraq are fairly limited and don’t have much to do with the people of Iraq at all. They can be summarized as “lily pads” (U.S. bases) and oil, and a “government” in the Green Zone to legitimate access to both. The fate of the Iraqi people is only a major concern to U.S. policymakers to the extent that it threatens to impact these primary goals.

Viewed from this perspective, the reactive twists and turns of U.S. policy in Iraq since March 2003 make a lot more sense: abandoning all but the oil ministry to looting; failing to “reconstruct” anything but the Green Zone and U.S. bases; the alternating marginalization and rehabilitation of different political and sectarian figures and groups; the seemingly counter-productive collective punishment and brutalization of the population; and, underlying everything, the political division of the country along sectarian and ethnic lines and the manipulation of these divisions to prevent the formation of a government that rejects U.S. objectives.

In this context, whether U.S. policymakers realized it or not, a smashed Iraq was always going to serve U.S. goals better than a resurgent, independent Iraq under any government. The dirty war advances U.S. policy by terrorizing the population, as explained in the Newsweek article, but also by transforming nationalist resistance into internecine conflict between Iraqis, leaving U.S. forces secure in their bases. Indeed, U.S. casualty figures have fallen as Iraqi casualties have increased since the bombing of the Golden Dome in Samarra three weeks ago.

Assassinations of academics, doctors and local leaders and the resultant exodus of the professional class deprive the country of the intellectual and political resources that might arrest the slide into chaos and impotence. Iraqi novelist Haifa Zangana wrote in an op-ed piece in the Guardian, “For the occupation’s aims to be fulfilled, independent minds have to be eradicated. We feel that we are witnessing a deliberate attempt to destroy intellectual life in Iraq.”

Should the U.S. permit the dirty war to escalate further, whether by miscalculation or simply as the best option in terms of its primary goals, the history of U.S. military and covert operations in other countries suggests that the U.S. will then escalate its own violence beyond all previous restraints. The U.S. Air Force has reported that air strikes intensified in late 2005 from 25 to 145 strikes per month,
and U.S. Special Forces Command is redeploying AC-130 Specter gunships to Iraq, an ominous sign of what is to come. Rumsfeld wants his lily pads and the oil companies want their oil, and what U.S. soldiers see when they look out beyond the walls of their “crusader castles” is of secondary importance to U.S. policy. The tragedy for the people of Iraq is that, whether this policy ultimately achieves any of its goals or not, they will continue to be its victims.


The Iraqi brain drain

As hundreds of Iraqi doctors, professors and teachers are being murdered in what some see as a deliberate campaign, Jonathan Steele meets the ones who managed to escape

Friday March 24, 2006

The Guardian

Still ashen-faced six days after escaping death, Dr Ali Faraj pulls his hair aside to display a scar above his left ear. One of Iraq’s top cardiologists, he was seeing a patient when a group of kidnappers wearing ski-masks stormed into his Baghdad clinic, knocked his receptionist to the floor and when he emerged to investigate the noise, ordered him to come with them. To his surprise, they said they were taking him to the Interior Ministry. “I know the minister so I said I would check if it was really necessary. I put out my hand to pick up the phone, but they knocked my arm aside and struck me on the head with a pistol butt. They dragged me to the front gate where a car was waiting,” he says, safe now in Jordan.

“It was about 7pm, already dark. Suddenly we heard shots. I couldn't tell where they were coming from. One of the kidnappers fell to the ground. He had been hit. Three of them started to lift him up. The fifth man ordered me into the car but I ran back to the clinic in the darkness.”

Faraj was not totally unprepared for what has become a normal risk of Baghdad life. "I had a Kalashnikov in the clinic. My driver took it and started shooting. I also had a pistol in my drawer. The kidnappers drove off.”
Bleeding from his head wound, he was taken home by colleagues. Only the next day did Faraj discover that the firing that saved him came from the garden of a tribal sheikh who lives opposite: "The man's bodyguards saw the gunmen going into my clinic, and were ordered by the sheikh to take cover and shoot if they were obviously abducting somebody when they came out."

Who the kidnappers were remains a mystery. Were they criminals acting for money or, as they claimed to be, people linked to the police? What is certain is that a trickle of kidnappings and murders which began in the first lawless months after US and British forces toppled Saddam Hussein three years ago has now become a flood. At least 1,000 people have died in the sectarian tit-for-tat killings that followed the destruction of one of Iraq's holiest shrines in Samarra last month.

The growing insecurity has set off a massive brain drain, as more and more Iraqis slip away from the country, perhaps never to return. While the fall of Saddam Hussein opened the door for an earlier generation of Iraqi exiles to go home, now the flow is going the other way again. Kidnap survivors are the lucky ones. Hundreds of Iraqi professionals are being murdered in what some Iraqis see as a deliberate campaign to destroy the country's best and brightest. The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research says that 89 university professors and senior lecturers have been killed since 2003, and police investigations have led to nothing.

Iraqi academics have compiled a longer list of up to 105 names of assassinated colleagues. The most recent was Professor Ali Muhawesh, the dean of the engineering college at Mustansiriya University, one of Baghdad's two main campuses. He was shot this week.

The rate of killing is increasing. Some 311 teachers have been murdered in the past four months alone, according to the Ministry of Education. It is not only Baghdad that is suffering. The medical college in Mosul, a city in northern Iraq, has lost nine senior staff.

Even outside Iraq, fear consumes many exiles. In Jordan's capital, Amman, the first port of call for most refugees, requests for interviews produced repeated rejections. Others would only talk if false names were used and no mention made of where they work or live. Faraj is one of the few people who have fled who are willing to speak openly and be photographed. After eluding his would-be kidnappers, he fled to Jordan last week. In the chaos and looting which followed the US entry into Baghdad, he had already taken his wife and children to Amman, aiming to wait until the dust settled. It never did.

His family stayed in Jordan, but he commuted to Baghdad for several weeks at a time. "That's over now," he says with grim determination. "I will never go back to Iraq."

Dr Azzam Kanbar-Agha, a British-educated surgeon, still makes the journey, though he too escaped a kidnapping last September. "My whole life has changed. My family is shattered. I'm a sociable person.
I enjoyed sitting in cafes, meeting friends and talking politics, but that’s all over now. It’s too insecure in Iraq,” he says.

In Jordan he earns a third of what he did in Baghdad. So, despite the growing risk, he still goes back on short visits. His kidnappers did not get as close as the ones who stormed Faraj’s office, but the threat was equally sudden. At his clinic one day last September, Kanbar-Agha took a phone call from someone who announced, "We are the mujahideen" (the resistance fighters). Assuming it was a friend playing the fool, he replied, "Come off it."

"We’re serious," the voice countered. "We’ve been watching your clinic and we want you to make a donation to help our cause. We’re fighting the Americans."

When he asked what figure they had in mind, the voice whispered softly, "We don’t want to force you."

"I told them I wasn’t used to this kind of talk. They suggested $10,000 (£5,750) and promised that no one else would bother me. I would be protected. I asked how I could be sure they were mujahideen. They might be a gang. If we were a gang, the man said, ‘We would just kidnap you without a phone call’,” he recalls.

Kanbar-Agha was given two days to collect the money but a few hours later got a chillingly impatient text message: "You’re not worth negotiating with. We’re going to act." Next day he threw away his mobile phone Sim card and fled to Jordan with his wife and daughter.

Despite the danger, he has been back to Baghdad twice. But now he turns up at his clinic at random times. His receptionist gives patients an appointment but warns them there could be a long wait. In the afternoons he works at a crowded hospital where he feels there is safety in numbers.

One family that has strong evidence that the police are involved in hostage-taking are the Hilmis. The father, mother, and four children in their 20s have had to swap their capacious home in a prosperous Baghdad suburb for a small flat in Amman. Ahmed, 21, who was in his last year at university, was with one of his sisters in their father’s medical supply store last autumn in Karrada, a busy Baghdad shopping area near the river Tigris. His sister had the safe open in the back room when four men arrived. They displayed official IDs from an anti-terrorist squad. They put handcuffs on Ahmed and marched into the back room where they took $40,000 from the safe. Then they blindfolded him and bundled him into a vehicle for a 15-minute drive.

Ahmed could not identify the place where he was held but says it must have been a government building since the electricity was never cut. He suspects it was the notorious Jadriyah detention centre, run by the Interior Ministry, where the Americans discovered close to 200 people in December whose bodies showed multiple signs of torture.
His family was asked to produce 25 daftar, or notebooks, a slang phrase for a bundle of 100 $100 bills - in other words, $250,000. The amount was too much, but they managed to raise $40,000. Ahmed was lucky. He was only held for five days. He was not mishandled in detention, and his kidnappers accepted the "reduced" amount of $40,000. When the family got the money together, he was dumped back on the street.

The next day, the Hilmis fled after quietly moving suitcases to the homes of relatives. They did not dare tell their neighbours they were leaving. Their house is closed up and their new fear, they say, is that if the Americans hear it is empty, they may smash the door and search it, leaving it open to looters once they go.

Similar stories can be heard from families in rented rooms throughout Amman. By some estimates, there are a million Iraqis in Jordan (compared with 300,000 at the time of Saddam’s overthrow). Thousands of others have moved to Syria, Egypt, and the Gulf States.

In one flat I found an elderly gynaecologist and her dentist husband, both with post-graduate qualifications gained in Britain. They left Iraq last year with their four children, all fluent English-speakers with university degrees. Now they are lost to Iraq. "I love my patients. I didn’t want to leave them," says the doctor.

The last straw, says her younger son Ahmed Kamal (not his real name), was when his mother had severe heart pains one evening and they could not get her to hospital because of the daily curfew which starts at 8pm. "There are not enough ambulances. So I tried to drive her myself. We stopped at a police station for an escort because I was afraid we would be shot on the way. The police said they were too busy to help, so we had to go home," he says.

With their various degrees - in electrical engineering, chemistry and agronomy - one might think a family like this could be an asset in Jordan and quickly settle in. But every Iraqi complains of Jordan’s tough immigration rules, under which they only get tourist entry permits for three days or a week. "They hardly ever give residency permits to Iraqis. They’re afraid of competition," says Kamal. "So we have to take work illegally at a quarter of our Iraq salaries. Employers like it that way."

The Jordanian authorities impose a fine of 1.50 dinars (about £1.25) a day for every foreigner who overstays his or her permit. When they leave, the border police count the time since they came in and charge them. As a result, once in Jordan, many Iraqis say they cannot afford to leave. "We’re trapped here. We can’t work and we can’t leave," says a car mechanic from Najaf.

The new sectarian tensions have added to the pressure to escape from Iraq. Like thousands of other families in Baghdad, the Kamals are mixed Sunni and Shia. In the past they had no interest in what sect their friends were but now, against their better instincts, they find themselves beginning to want
to know. Group-think is gaining ground. "Most Sunnis think Shias are all traitors. Most Shias think
Sunnis are all terrorists," says Ahmed.

Slow-motion sectarian "cleansing" is under way as minority groups leave home and move to Baghdad
districts where their sect is in the majority. Kanbar-Agha, who is a Shia but has a Sunni wife, tries to
remain optimistic. He blames politicians for exploiting sectarianism. "It's stronger among politicians
than ordinary people. I see it in their eyes. They no longer talk about the Iraqi people. They only talk
about their own sect or group" , he says.

But sectarianism is also being exploited for financial gain. Kandar-Agha says he has heard that an
estate agent in Adamiyah, a mainly Sunni suburb in north Baghdad, was paying teenagers to deliver
fliers to Shia houses, warning them to leave. He hoped to buy their property cheap or get it to rent out.
Faraj says his Shia aunt who lives in Amariya, another heavily Sunni area of Baghdad, got a letter
saying her 16-year-old son would be kidnapped if the family did not leave. "The boy was immediately
sent away to Turkey to stay with his married sister, but my aunt is refusing to go. 'I'm an old widow.
Let them kill me,' she says."

In another Amman flat, I met Muhammad Taha Yahir, the owner of a mini-market in Mosul, who had
arrived in Jordan the previous day. "I decided to leave Iraq a month ago. I kept hoping things would
improve, but now it's hopeless. Very few people go to the shops. They just come out for an hour or two
in the afternoon," he says. Mosul has few Shia residents and relations between its main communities,
Kurds and Sunni, are not bad, he says. What worries him is the general insecurity, bombs, clashes
between the Americans and insurgents, and trigger-happy American reactions. "I'm worried car bombs
will go off as my kids travel to and from school. Or there could be clashes with the insurgents, and
roadblocks. If an American gets killed, they shoot back in all directions," he says. "If an Iraqi
policeman comes to my shop to buy something, I have to apologise and ask him to leave. I'm afraid
that I'll be thought to be an informer. I'm caught between both sides. We know where the insurgents
live, but we can't say anything."

He has never received any threats, but has two friends who were killed on successive days last week.
They had been kidnapped but their families could not raise the ransom. Both happened to be from
Mosul's Christian community. One ran a hardware store, another a shop selling electrical appliances.
In the last few months before leaving, Taha Yahir rarely visited his own shop for fear of being
abducted. His staff ran everything for him.

His wife and family are still in Mosul, while he organises a place in Amman for them to stay. In a few
days he will rejoin them and try to sell his shop and house. "It will all have to be done with great
discretion and through a bank in Jordan. Otherwise, if people know I am going and think I'm flush
with cash, the risk of kidnapping will be even higher," he explains.
Stop the Assassination of Iraqi Academics!
A campaign of The Brussels Tribunal and

When will it be safe for Iraqi exiles to go back? The guesses range from gloom to the deepest pessimism. “I see no chance of improvement for at least 10 years,” says Taha Yahir. "Maybe we won't live to see it get better," says Kamal. He is not yet 30.

Muhammad Moher el Din sits in the Central Cafe, a favourite haunt for Iraqi men in the crowded streets of Old Amman, where hours are spent playing backgammon or smoking hubbly-bubblies. A leading Iraqi artist, he arrived in Jordan last week. "In Baghdad there is a threat to everything civilised. The attacks are targeting doctors, artists, university people, and everyone who represents civilisation, as well as all of civilisation's symbols, like the shrines in Samarra and Najaf," he says. Suspicion, mistrust, and fear are everywhere. "Even our character is being changed. I feel it in me," he says.

- UNESCO Director-General condemns campaign of violence against Iraqi academics - 05 April 2006.

UNESCO Director-General condemns campaign of violence against Iraqi academics

The Director-General of UNESCO, Koïchiro Matsuura, today condemned the campaign of violence waged against Iraqi academics and intellectuals and called for international solidarity and mobilization in favour of education and educators in the country. “I firmly condemn the campaign of violence waged in Iraq against academics and intellectuals,” the Director-General declared. “The right to education is a basic human right and the persecution of the custodians of knowledge and skills is an unacceptable attack against a whole society. Iraq has a long tradition in learning and academic excellence in the Middle East. By targeting those who hold the keys to Iraq’s reconstruction and development, the perpetrators of this violence are jeopardizing the future of Iraq and of democracy.”

According to the Geneva-based Study and Research Center for the Arab and Mediterranean World, four Iraqi academics, including one physician, were killed last week. The Center says that between 170 and 180 academics have been killed in Iraq since 2003 and that thousands more have been driven into exile.

“UNESCO is currently involved with Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education to help reconstruct the country’s higher education system, which has been severely damaged by decades of oppression and war. We cannot stand by and watch the custodians of Iraq’s culture and learning be threatened, abducted or murdered,” Mr Matsuura said, calling for “international solidarity and mobilization in favour of education and educators in the country”.

The Director-General also announced that he will discuss this issue on 14 April, during a meeting with Muhyi Alkateeb, Iraq’s Ambassador and Permanent Delegate to UNESCO, and members of the International Committee for the Protection of Iraqi Academics. This Committee was created in
- Killings lead to brain drain from Iraq, Telegraph, 17 April 2006.

**Killings lead to brain drain from Iraq**

*By Oliver Poole in Baghdad*

*Last Updated: 12:48am BST 17/04/2006*

The head of Arabic studies at Baghdad University was shot 32 times when his car was ambushed on the way to work.

Abdul Latif al-Mayah was murdered after he had appeared on al-Jazeera television. Police described the killing as "professional".

In Ramadi, the president of the university, Abdul Hadi Rajab al-Hitawi, was dragged from his home and bundled into the boot of a car.

A ransom demand was received a few days later.

Both men are among the growing number of intellectuals to be targeted in Iraq, a phenomenon that is resulting in an unprecedented brain drain as those who can move abroad increasingly do so before they or their families join the list of their colleagues killed or kidnapped.

At least 182 academics have been killed since the invasion in 2003 and there have been many more kidnappings and murder attempts.

And it is not just university professors who are being targeted. In the past four months alone 331 school teachers have been murdered and nine medical workers were killed in a single day in the northern city of Mosul last month.

In response the city's doctors and nurses held a one-day strike in an attempt to force the authorities to provide an adequate number of armed guards at hospitals.

It was thought that the fall of Saddam Hussein would lead to an influx of skilled exiles who would provide the impetus to help rebuild the country.

Instead, the opposite is occurring. By some estimates there are now a million Iraqis in Jordan compared to 300,000 at the time of Saddam's fall.

One prominent new exile is Dr Omar Kubasi, formerly head of Iraq's military medical corps. He left Baghdad last May after he and nine other doctors received letters telling them they would be killed if they continued working.

He and his family now live in Amman, the Jordanian capital, among many former colleagues. Their days are spent drinking coffee near the city's central plaza discussing the disintegration of the medical system they helped establish.

"It is mental death to sit here but even my patients say I should not come back," he told the
"The teaching care was excellent, based on the British system. We were successful enough under Saddam to start our own postgraduate studies, including many medical specialities. Now they are ridding the country of all of this."

Many believe that the targeting of professionals is part of an orchestrated campaign.

Isam Kadhem al-Rawi, the head of the Association of University Lecturers, said political groups inside and outside the country were seeking to rid Iraq of individuals capable of independent thought. By doing so, the men of violence made it easier to push their own agenda, he said.

Those who defy the gunmen worry how the country can be rebuilt effectively or how the professionals of tomorrow will be trained.

"We could be left with a society without knowledge," said Amer Hassan Fayad, assistant dean of political science at Baghdad University.

"How can such a society make progress?"

- Iraq Violence Leading to Academic Brain Drain - Aaron Glantz, 05 Oct 2006.
the person they’re going to get. So they’re not dying in car bombs or sectarian killings where a checkpoint is being set up and everyone is being killed that goes through that checkpoint that’s from the wrong sectarian background. They’re not getting killed in those random ways. There are assassins that go up to them and kill them and only them.”

The killing of so many professors has compelled those still alive to flee the country. The Ministry of Higher Education estimates at least 3,250 have fled since February.

Abdili: "The biggest problem is to avoid a brain drain, and the only way to fight that is to make a safe environment where professors can stay. So we suggested that we should have the professors living on campus, or at least within a block of the campus."

Students, too, need solutions to stay safe. Abdili says Iraq’s universities are now allowing students to transfer colleges on the basis of their ethnic group — so they can attend a university in a neighborhood whose residents have the same ethnic background.

"We have a strategy for the students," he said. "The students that have been accepted in other universities where there is sectarian violence — where the local population is from a different group than their own — we will transfer them to a university which is safer than their own, even to the University of Baghdad, which is the most prestigious in the country. They’ll be in the exchange program, so they won’t be registered as students at that university. They’ll just study there."

Analysts alternately blame militia organizations, Ba'athists, anti-Ba'athists, the Iranian secret service, the Israeli Mossad, and the U.S. military for the violence.

Tikriti says Americans should push their government for an investigation.

"Not a single one of these cases has been solved," he said. "Is there a plot somewhere, and if so why, and if so can anything be done? This kind of dirty war is contributing to a breakdown of Iraqi society, and that in turn is contributing to the disaster that is Iraq that is also a disaster for Americans as well."
Iraq's universities and schools near collapse as teachers and pupils flee - The Guardian, 05 Oct 2006.

Peter Beaumont in Baghdad
Thursday October 5, 2006
The Guardian

Iraq's school and university system is in danger of collapse in large areas of the country as pupils and teachers take flight in the face of threats of violence. Professors and parents have told the Guardian they no longer feel safe to attend their educational institutions. In some schools and colleges, up to half the staff have fled abroad, resigned or applied to go on prolonged vacation, and class sizes have also dropped by up to half in the areas that are the worst affected.

Professionals in higher education, particularly those teaching the sciences and in health, have been targeted for assassination. Universities from Basra in the south to Kirkuk and Mosul in the north have been infiltrated by militia organisations, while the same militias from Islamic organisations regularly intimidate female students at the school and university gates for failing to wear the hijab.

Women teachers have been ordered by their ministry to adopt Islamic codes of clothing and behaviour.

"The militias from all sides are in the universities. Classes are not happening because of the chaos, and colleagues are fleeing if they can," said Professor Saad Jawad, a lecturer in political science at Baghdad University.

"The situation is becoming completely unbearable. I decided to stay where many other professors have left. But I think it will reach the point where I will have to decide.

"A large number have simply left the country, while others have applied to go on prolonged sick leave. We are using MA and PhD students to fill in the gaps."

Wadh Nadhmi, who also teaches politics in Baghdad, said: "What has been happening with the murders of professors involved in the sciences is that a lot of those involved in medicine, biology, maths have fled. The people who have got the money are sending their children abroad to study. A lot - my daughter is one of them - are deciding to finish their higher education in Egypt."

It is not only in Baghdad that the universities are beginning to suffer from the security situation. In Mosul, too, professors complain of a system now approaching utter disarray.

Mohammed U, a 60-year-old science professor who asked for his full name not to be disclosed, spoke to the Guardian after returning from the funeral of a colleague, a law professor and head of the law faculty, who died in an explosion.

"Education here is a complete shambles. Professors are leaving, and the situation - the closed roads and bridges - means that both students and teachers find it difficult to get in for classes. In some departments in my institute attendance is down to a third. In others we have instances of no students turning up at all.

"Students are really struggling. To get them through at all, we have had to lower academic levels. We have to go easy on them. The whole system is becoming rapidly degraded."

Children on the way to school in Sadr City, Baghdad.
Photograph: Karim Kadim/AP
Stop the Assassination of Iraqi Academics!
A campaign of The Russell Tribunal and
Campaña Estatal contra la Ocupación y por la Soberanía de Iraq

The situation is reflected in many of Iraq's schools. "Education in my area is collapsing," said a teacher from a high school in Amariya, who quit four months ago. "Children can't get to school because of roadblocks. The parents of others have simply withdrawn them from the school because of the fear of kidnapping.

"If children have to travel by car, we are much less likely to see them. When I left, we had 50% attendance. We see parents when they come in to ask for the children to have a 'vacation', and they admit they are too scared to let them come.

"Between September 8 and 28 two members of the staff were murdered. The staff was supposed to be 42. Now there are only 20."

It is hardest of all on young Iraqis, most of whom are desperate for an education. Ala Mohammed, a high school student from Zafaraniya, had hoped to go to university this year. But her college is in Adhamiya, a neighbourhood notorious for violence, so she has been forced to ask for a deferral. "The journey is too long and too unsafe. I don't know whether I will be going to college or stay jailed at home."


Oct. 18, 2004, 8:49PM
Iraqi intellectuals seeking exile
Last 18 months have seen 28 administrators and professors killed

By OMAR SINAN
Associated Press

BAGHDAD, IRAQ - The walls of Iraqi universities were once festooned with announcements of coming forums and lectures. Now, many are draped with black mourning banners inscribed with the names of professors who have been slain in the country's spiraling violence.

In the last 18 months, at least 28 university teachers and administrators have been killed, while 13 professors were kidnapped and released on payments of ransom, according to the Association of University Lecturers. Many others have received death threats.

The result: an exodus of academics and other intellectuals, who are urgently needed by a shattered society, from their schools and often the country, joining an earlier generation of exiles who fled the regime of Saddam Hussein.

"The brain drain may cause serious problems in rebuilding a country that has just emerged from wars," said Mohammed Qassim, a lecturer at the Iraqi University of Technology in Baghdad.

Neighboring Syria, for example, is opening a science and technology university this month, with 70 percent of the teaching staff made up of Iraqi exiles.

Questioning motivation

The university's president, Abdul-Majeid Abdul-Hadi al-Saedoun, said recently that these highly qualified academics came mainly because of the "continuing assassinations in Iraq which have targeted Iraqi scientists."
Stop the Assassination of Iraqi Academics!
A campaign of The Russell Tribunal and Campana Estatal contra la Ocupación y por la Soberanía de Iraq

A part of the lawlessness that has infected Iraqi society since the attacks on academe don't appear to be just an effort to eliminate those seen as siding with the interim government. Because the assailants are rarely apprehended, determining motivations is difficult.

But former teachers say some of the violence may be a settling of old scores against academics who wielded power — and misused it — as members of the ruling Baath Party. Death threats, they say, may also come from disgruntled students.

Others say it's an attempt to drive out intellectuals who could help rebuild the country.

"Assassins are targeting Iraqi university professors in a coordinated, liquidation process to force well-known scholars to leave the country and thus hinder the country's reconstruction," said Issam al-Rawi, a geologist at Baghdad University and head of the Association of University Lecturers.

Mohammed Abdullah, Baghdad University's slain dean, was shot in the forehead at his clinic by a person pretending to be ill. The former Baathist had been held in high regard as a doctor.

Who is to blame?
Speculation about who's behind the attacks is wide-ranging, with some even blaming the United States and Israel, while others say neighboring countries like Kuwait and Iran desire a weak Iraq, sapped of its brain power.

Americans are frequently blamed for violence clearly carried out by insurgents and others on the theory that the current lawlessness has resulted only because the U.S. invaded and occupied the country.

Like Iraqis from all walks of life, academics are also taken hostage by ransom-seeking criminal gangs.

"But the main accusation is directed against the Iraqi government for standing still in face of this butchery," said al-Rawi, head of the 1,600-member lecturers association, which "aspires to build a neutral community in a country which is falling apart."

State of fear
Iyad al-Ani, assistant dean of Al-Nahrain University in Baghdad, said: "I received a threatening letter saying, 'Do not nominate yourself to the dean's post, or it will cost you your life.'"

Al-Ani, known as a political independent, decided not to vie for the dean's job, but the university took precautions nonetheless.

"I feel strange going into a lecture hall accompanied by bodyguards. I feel real shame," he said. "If I have the chance I will leave the country for my and my family's sake."

Hundreds, if not more, have already emigrated, because of fear and a chance for a decent income abroad.

Others are remaining in the classrooms and laboratories, at least for now.

"I am not leaving my job," said Abdulhadi Rajab, dean of Anbar University, who was snatched as he lectured in front of hundreds of students and faculty. His kidnappers, described as insurgents, freed him a month later in the rebel-stronghold of Ramadi after he paid an undisclosed ransom.

The parents of Mohammed Abdulazis, a 23-year-old English literature student, had to pay $8,000 for the release of their son from kidnappers his father describes as insurgents linked to criminals.
Stop the Assassination of Iraqi Academics!
A campaign of The Russell Tribunal and Campaña Estatal contra la Ocupación y por la Soberanía de Iraq

The father, Saadoun, an assistant dean of Al-Nahrain’s science faculty, said the insurgents burst into his home last June while he was at a conference in England, looting all the family’s savings and pointing a gun at his son’s head.

Before freeing the son, one of the kidnappers told him to tell his father, "You must leave Iraq. You don't belong here. This country belongs to us."

- Letter Regarding Murder of Two Professors - AAUP, 10 Nov 2006.

Letter Regarding Murder of Two Professors (Nov. 2006)

November 10, 2006

Honorable Nouri Kamal al-Maliki
Prime Minister of the Republic of Iraq
c/o The Embassy of Iraq
1801 P Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036
Fax: (202) 462-5066

Dear Prime Minister al-Maliki:

We write to you on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) and the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) to express our grave concern over the killing of two of Iraq’s most prominent academics: Isam al-Rawi, a professor in the Department of Geology at the University of Baghdad and president of the Union of University Professors, and Jassim al-Asadi, dean of the University of Baghdad’s School of Administration and Economics.

Professor al-Rawi was killed by unknown gunmen on October 30, 2006, on his way to work. Then, on November 2, 2006, in an act which many observers see as revenge for the earlier killing, unknown gunmen murdered Professor al-Asadi, his wife, and son as they passed by car through the neighborhood of al-Adhamiyya.

Their murder highlights the startling fact that over 180 university professionals in Iraq have been killed since the 2003 U.S.-led occupation, and thousands of academics, teachers, clinicians, writers, and artists have fled your country. We note that entire academic departments at Baghdad University and on other campuses have been forced to close down and are no longer able to fulfill their educational and research missions.

As we have previously noted, the present government of Iraq has done little to ensure the safety of academics since it took office. A significant portion of the current violence against academics has been perpetrated by sectarian militias affiliated with the ruling political coalitions. Professors have been threatened, harmed, kidnapped, and assassinated because of their actual or alleged political affiliations, or because they failed to respond resolutely to demands of students for special treatment.
Communities of students are becoming politicized in a way that threatens the institutionalization of tolerance and the protection of intellectual diversity.

We ask your Excellency to recognize that the destruction of Iraq’s intellectual and academic class through murder and mass exodus is a profound challenge to the future of Iraq and that you take immediate action to:

1. Secure the campuses in Baghdad and elsewhere in Iraq;
2. Affirm the independence of Iraq’s system of higher education, immunize it against sectarian politics as far as possible, and provide for it a budget that is institutionally protected from partisan or sectarian pressures; and
3. Identify the murderers of Professors al-Rawi and al-Asadi and bring them to justice.

Please know that we remain ready to take steps, together and with sister organizations, to promote programs and policies in Iraq and on behalf of the international community of scholars and researchers that will resolutely address this disturbing situation.

Sincerely,

Juan R.I. Cole
Middle East Studies Association President

Roger W. Bowen
AAUP General Secretary

(11/13/06)

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**SAR calls for urgent action to protect Iraqi higher education**

**Author**: SAR  
**Publication**: SAR Press Release  
**Country**: Iraq

Scholars at Risk calls for urgent letters, faxes and emails to officials and media outlets at the campus, local, national and international levels demanding an immediate response to the terrible assault on November 14, 2006 on the Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Scholarships and Cultural Relations Directorate, an institute responsible for granting scholarships to Iraqi academics seeking to undertake research abroad.
The most immediate concerns are for the safe return of the dozens of individuals reported abducted in the assault on November 14, 2006 and for significant increases in the levels, training and equipment of security forces dedicated to the protection of higher education facilities and personnel.

Taking immediate action is essential to preserving the physical and intellectual capacity of Iraq’s higher education institutions -- institutions vital to the future of Iraq and the Iraqi people. Particular efforts must be made to protect the higher education’s most valuable and irreplaceable resources -- the trained Iraqi professionals who will help not only in the present rebuilding but must train Iraq’s future leaders and decision-makers for generations to come.

The assault on November 14 -- which we hope is only a kidnapping but fear worse -- is a major escalation of a long-standing campaign of violence undermining Iraq’s higher education sector in which more than 150 Iraqi academics have been killed and many hundreds more forced into hiding and exile because of fears of kidnapping and assassination.

Scholars at Risk (SAR) works to defend threatened scholars and universities, and Iraq has been a major focus: SAR has had nearly 100 requests for help from Iraqi academics including 26 pending cases.

Just last week Scholars at Risk issued an alert calling for more protection for Iraqi higher education institutions. We hope that the terrible assault on the Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education this morning will motivate authorities to take the urgent steps necessary to protect Iraq’s higher education institutions. Scholars at Risk therefore calls for letters, faxes and emails to elected officials and media outlets urging attention to the situation and specifically urging Iraqi, US and international leaders to:

- make a firm commitment to protect Iraq’s higher education institutions, including the physical space of the universities as well as their administrators, faculties, staff and students;

- make every effort to secure the safe release of all persons kidnapped this morning;

- investigate the deaths of higher education personnel, including the two professors assassinated last week, Professor al-Rawi and Professor Jassim al-Asadi, making every effort to identify the individuals responsible and to bring them to justice in accordance with Iraqi law and internationally recognized fair trial principles; and

- provide open, firm and public support for principles of freedom of thought, free exchange of ideas, and academic freedom as central to the mission of higher education and to the role of higher education institutions in society and in a better future for Iraq.

Please send letters, emails and faxes to your representatives, media and other relevant persons or institutions.

[Contact information for US Representatives and Senators is available at http://www.firstgov.gov/Contact/Elected.shtml.]

Please also send letters, emails and faxes to:

Honorable Nuri Kamal al-Maliki
Prime Minister of the Republic of Iraq
c/o The Embassy of Iraq
1801 P Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036 USA
Fax: (202) 462-5066

Ambassador Samir Sumaidaie
The Embassy of Iraq
1801 P Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036 USA
Stop the Assassination of Iraqi Academics!

Fax: (202) 462-5066

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice
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2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520 USA

Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad
US Ambassador to Iraq
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Baghdad, Iraq USA

H.E. Dr. Salah Al-Shaikhly
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9 Holland Villas Road
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The Honorable Dominic Asquith CMG
Her Majesty's Ambassador to the Republic of Iraq
c/o Iraq Policy Unit
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
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Please send copies to:

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c/o New York University
194 Mercer Street, Rm 410
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1-212-995-4402 (fax)
scholarsatrisk@nyu.edu


**Education Ministry kidnappings reflect plight of Iraqi academics**

Matthew B. Stannard, Chronicle Staff Writer

Wednesday, November 15, 2006

The brazen kidnapping Tuesday of dozens of employees at a Higher Education Ministry building in Baghdad, experts and Iraqi officials say, provides evidence of an all-out assault on the Iraqi middle class, a worsening of sectarian violence or a general collapse of the rule of law -- or all three.

"These things don’t take place in a vacuum," said Kamran Bokhari, the senior Middle East analyst at Stratfor, a private security consulting group in Austin, Texas.
By midnight Baghdad time, most or all of the hostages had been freed in police raids across the city, according to reports today by Al-Iraqiya state television and other news services.

The daylight attack reportedly was carried out by attackers wearing the blue camouflage uniforms of police commandos. They stormed the building after clearing the area in the guise of providing security for a visit from the U.S. ambassador, according to news reports from the Iraqi capital.

The incident reportedly began when about 30 official-looking pickups and Land Cruisers with tinted windows surrounded the ministry buildings in Karrada, a middle-class Baghdad neighborhood considered relatively safe.

The suspected Shiite militiamen raced through all four stories of the government office building. They forced dozens of men and women into separate rooms, handcuffed the men and loaded them aboard about 20 pickup trucks. The operation reportedly was over within about 15 minutes.

To assist in their getaway, the abductors cordoned off Nidal Street, only a few blocks away from City Hall, with more than 30 trucks and armored sport utility vehicles. The trucks did not have license plates, witnesses said, but many did have high-caliber machine guns mounted in their beds.

The estimates of those seized varied widely, from 150 or more to about 50. The U.S. military command put the total at 55.

Any number within that range would qualify the attack as one of the largest mass abductions in a country where kidnappings for ransom or murder have become common.

The incident also could spotlight another common crisis in Iraq: an ongoing assault on academics and the professional classes.

More than 100 academics -- more than 180, by some estimates -- have been slain since the U.S.-led invasion in 2003, and 40 percent of Iraq’s professional class has fled the country since that year, according to an estimate by the Brookings Institution.

Abdul Sattar Jawad, former editor of the defunct Baghdad Mirror and onetime dean at two universities in Baghdad, blamed Shiite militiamen for the harassment and threats that drove him from Iraq last year.

"This is the rule of the militias, the mob, the riffraff of people. They don’t like education, they don’t like intellectuals," Jawad, now a fellow at Duke University, said from North Carolina. "And now the campuses are overruled by the firebrand clerics, by the religious militias."
Many past attacks on Iraqi academics have probably been committed by Sunni insurgent groups, said Juan Cole, a Middle East expert at the University of Michigan.

"The Sunni Arab guerrilla movement wants to destabilize Iraq. They want to prevent a new regime from being erected," said Cole. Generally that goal has led guerrillas to target police, Cole said, "but they also do target other kinds of pillars of the establishment. They want to pull down the new Iraq, they want it to collapse."

The initial reaction to the attack -- the closure of Baghdad's universities, an order later reversed -- would have represented a huge victory toward that goal, Cole said. But even if the universities continue to operate, he said, the drain of Iraq's academics could prove devastating if it is unchecked.

"Historically speaking, the loss of the white-collar middle-class ... is absolutely deadly to a country's economic and social well-being. And, indeed, you have seen countries demonstrably suffer setbacks in social development because they have lost that class. I think that happened to Iran after 1979," he said. "Iran really was set back to being basically a Third World country for a while until they could rebuild."

The problem is exacerbated by the overall collapse of security in Iraq, said Cole, noting that in addition to the kidnapping, at least 117 people were killed or found dead in Iraq on Tuesday.

At the higher education building, those kidnapped included employees and visitors, janitors and Ph.D.s, even a deputy general director of the agency. They included Sunni Muslims and Shiite Muslims, Kurds and Christians.

Nour Hussein, a 23-year-old cleaner, said the gunmen were efficient in lining up the detainees.

"Men wearing police commando uniforms entered the building and took our mobile phones," said Hussein. "At the entrance, they were hitting the guards very hard with their hands. They took all of the employees and left some of the women after locking them in a room. They hit employees, visitors and guards."

Five senior police officers were arrested in connection with the abductions -- the police chief and four top subordinates in the Karrada district, the central Baghdad region where the kidnappers struck, according to Maj. Gen. Jalil Khalaf, spokesman for the Interior Ministry, which is widely accused of harboring Shiite militiamen.

Jawad, the former newspaper editor, described himself as a secularist. He said former colleagues he contacted Tuesday blamed the attacks on the Mahdi Army and associated Shiite militias who form an important bloc of political support for the prime minister, leaving him powerless to disarm them.
That alliance, Jawad said, would explain how Tuesday’s attack could have been carried out without interference by the security forces.

"They didn’t steal the uniforms. They have the uniforms already," he said. "It is a political message, and it is also part of the sectarian strife in the country. And the government is unable to do anything."

Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki faces intense pressure from the United States to eliminate the militias and their death squads, which are deeply involved in the country’s sectarian slaughter and are believed to have thoroughly infiltrated the police and security forces.

U.S. Central Command chief Gen. John Abizaid sternly warned al-Maliki face-to-face on Monday that he must disband the militias and give the United States proof that they have been disarmed, according to senior Iraqi government officials with knowledge of what the men discussed.

So far, the prime minister has said the militias should not act illegally but has taken no tough action against them.

Al-Maliki, who leads a Shiite-dominated Iraqi government, appeared to minimize the importance of Tuesday’s kidnappings.

"What is happening is not terrorism, but the result of disagreements and conflict between militias belonging to this side or that," al-Maliki said in televised remarks during a meeting with President Jalal Talabani.

That larger picture may actually include the motivations for Tuesday’s abductions, said Stratfor’s Bokhari.

While the attack’s planners may have used sectarianism and anti-intellectual religious motivation to rally their troops, Bokhari said, Tuesday’s attack fits neatly into the larger political struggles defining Iraq and the region.

In that context, he said, the ministry building may have been selected simply because it presented a target of opportunity -- less defended than the police stations and bases that have been under constant attack.

"To me, it seems like the perpetrators are trying to send a message that we can escalate this," he said. "It is one side telling the other that if we don’t reach a conclusion here, some kind of settlement, nobody is going to be safe -- and here’s a sample of it."
That struggle is happening on several levels, Bokhari said. Within Iraq, he noted, Tuesday's assault is the latest in a string of tit-for-tat violence that most recently has seen several attacks by Sunni guerrillas against Shiite security forces and civilians.

But on another level, Bokhari said, Tuesday's attack can be seen as part of what Stratfor has argued is a kind of proxy battle between the United States and Iran, waged in Iraq, in which Iran uses its influence to increase or decrease violence in an effort to force America to come to terms with Iran.

"The Iranians need to let the United States know ... if you don’t cut a deal with us in Iraq, this place is going down the tubes, and you’re in the middle of it," he said.

Chronicle news services contributed to this report. E-mail Matthew B. Stannard at mstannard@sffchronicle.com.

http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2006/11/15/MNGE7MD5ER1.DTL

This article appeared on page A - 1 of the San Francisco Chronicle


November 16, 2006

Academics in Iraq: a vanishing breed?

The brazen kidnapping of up to 150 employees and visitors of a Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research facility last Tuesday is but the latest example of a long, continuing slide toward a wholesale destruction of the academic enterprise in Iraq. Stannard:

"The daylight attack reportedly was carried out by attackers wearing the blue camouflage uniforms of police commandos. They stormed the building after clearing the area in the guise of providing security for a visit from the U.S. ambassador, ... They forced dozens of men and women into separate rooms, handcuffed the men and loaded them aboard about 20 pickup trucks." "More than 100 academics -- more than 180, by some estimates -- have been slain since the U.S.-led invasion in 2003, and 40 percent of Iraq's professional class has fled the country since that year, according to an estimate by the Brookings Institution. Abdul Sattar Jawad, ... onetime dean at two universities in Baghdad, ... 'This is the rule of the militias, the mob, the riffraff of people. They don’t like education, they don’t like intellectuals,’ Jawad, now a fellow at Duke University, said from North Carolina. 'And now the campuses are overruled by the firebrand clerics, by the religious militias.' Many past attacks on Iraqi academics have probably been committed by Sunni insurgent groups, said Juan Cole, a Middle East expert at the University of Michigan. "The Sunni Arab guerrilla movement wants to destabilize Iraq. ... they also do target other kinds of pillars of the establishment." "At the higher education building, those
kidnapped included employees and visitors, janitors and Ph.D.s, even a deputy general director of the agency. They included Sunni Muslims and Shiite Muslims, Kurds and Christians." "Al-Maliki, who leads a Shiite-dominated Iraqi government, appeared to minimize the importance of Tuesday’s kidnappings. 'What is happening is not terrorism, but the result of disagreements and conflict between militias belonging to this side or that,' ...

_The Guardian_ reports that "[k]idnappers who abducted scores of Iraqis from an education ministry building in Baghdad have tortured and killed some of them, a government official said today. ... details of the hostages’ ordeal had been revealed by people who had been freed. ... Around 70 have ... been released. ... The education minister, Abed Theyab - a member of a Sunni Arab party in Iraq's Shia-led government - has reiterated his decision to boycott the government until all the hostages are released, ...

As mentioned, this is part of an all-too-familiar trend. A few examples:

- **Sep. 2003**: Chemistry professor at el-Basrah University killed ([The BRussells Tribunal n.d.](#))
- **Jan. 2004**: dean of Political Studies at el-Mustansiriyyah University killed in a drive-by shooting ([Middle East Studies Association](#) November 5, 2004)
- **June 2004**: dean of Mosul University’s Law School murdered ([Middle East Studies Association](#) November 5, 2004)
- **Dec. 2004**: assistant dean of Baghdad’s medical college killed ([Crain](#))
- **May 2005**: researcher in the Date Palm Research Center at el-Basrah University killed ([The BRussells Tribunal n.d.](#))
- **July 2005**: Art History professor at el-Basrah University assassinated ([The BRussells Tribunal n.d.](#))
- **Apr. 2006**: Psychology professor killed, University of Karbala ([The BRussells Tribunal n.d.](#))
- **Aug. 2006**: 2 University of Diyala professors gunned down in Baqubah ([al-Makhzoomi](#))
- **Aug. 2006**: Dr. Donny George, Chairman of the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage, flees ([IW&A Documents, 10](#))
- **Oct. 2006**: Geology professor at Baghdad University, head of the (Sunni) University Professors Union, gunned down outside his home ([Salaheddin](#) and _The BRussells Tribunal October 30, 2006_)

Did I mention that the general academic climate isn’t exactly conducive to learning already? As the Middle East Studies Association and the American Association of University Professors recently stated: "Virtually every Iraqi institution of higher education is at risk. Universities, colleges, and research institutions operate under severe political duress and without adequate resources, transparent funding mechanisms, or the civil and legal protections needed to nurture and promote a vibrant intellectual climate and civil society." The only discussion left is how many
professors/academics have already been killed and how many have fled in exile since the start of the Iraq War. These are the estimates I've come across:

- 20 to 300 killed, 100 to 2,000 exiled (Crain, Jan. 2005)
- 78 killed (Middle East Studies Association, Nov. 2004)
- 100 to 180 killed, 40% exiled (Stannard, Nov. 2006)
- 180 killed, 3,250 exiled (Salaheddin, Oct. 2006)
- 227 killed (Jalili, May 2006)
- 300 killed, 4,000 exiled (al-Makhzoomi, Aug. 2006)

The most thorough study so far into this dark phenomenon was done by Dr. Ismail Jalili; the two pie charts included in this post are taken from his research.

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The war on intellectuals claims lives and hope

The exodus of the academics and professionals threatens Iraq's universities and teaching hospitals with collapse. What will remain will be no more than facades and emblems. It is ironic that the proponents of the "clash of civilisations" are presiding over the destruction of one of humanity's cradles of civilisation, learning and knowledge. Britain's academic institutions should be particularly concerned by the events in Iraq. And not only because the British Government joined in the invasion and occupation of Iraq. Many of the assassinated academics, scientists and others fleeing the country graduated from British universities, which regard them as "lifelong members". These institutions have a moral duty to remember the dead and to defend the living among these "associates". Academics, staff and student unions could help to highlight the plight of colleagues in Iraq and indeed the plight of the Iraqi people as a whole.” - Sami Ramadani from London

Sami Ramadani
The Times Higher Education Supplement
Published: 24 November 2006

If the police "cannot protect themselves, how can they protect us?" Khalid Al-Judi, the dean of a Baghdad university, asked some two years ago. An even more disturbing question was raised by last week's mass kidnapping from the research directorate of the Ministry of Higher Education: if the police themselves are turning on Iraq's academics, can anyone offer them protection?

Controversy surrounds the assassins of some 300 of Iraq's academics since the 2003 invasion. Four months before Professor Al-Judi asked his question, he had a brush with death, having been shot while driving to a degree ceremony. Independent journalist Patrick Cockburn was unable to see him in hospital but spoke to his bodyguard. He described being overtaken by a General Motors four-wheel-drive vehicle filled with men in flak jackets carrying American rifles. One opened fire as the vehicle overtook Professor Al-Judi's car. Mr Cockburn noted: "A GMC with the windows down so the men inside can shoot quickly usually indicates former soldiers working for a foreign security company. They were as likely to be South African or British as American."

South African? Yes, because foreign security companies, most of them contracted to the Pentagon, have recruited fighters from the old apartheid state, Chile, Israel and elsewhere. More than 50,000 such mercenaries operate throughout Iraq, earning up to $1,000 (£528) per day. All were placed outside Iraqi jurisdiction by Paul Bremer, the American proconsul, in one of his final decrees.
But whoever is behind the killings, the disturbing reality is that Iraq's leading academics and scientists are being systematically liquidated or hounded out of the country. They are men and women; Kurd, Arab and Turkoman; Shia, Sunni and Christian; believer and atheist alike. The backgrounds of those killed reflect Iraq's thousands-of-years-old mosaic, but the land of Mesopotamia has never before experienced anything resembling such rigorously indiscriminate brutality towards its intellectuals and academics.

There are glib and lazy explanations about the "sectarian conflict" in Iraq, but the historical reality is that such differences never descended into communal killing and destruction. Today's mayhem, despite its depiction by officials as a sectarian tit for tat, is no exception. Most Iraqis, including academics, perceive the violence gripping the land as a product of the occupation and think that it could be drastically reduced and brought under control only after the occupying forces depart. A recent opinion survey conducted by the University of Maryland confirms these attitudes. About two thirds of all Iraqis, including a significant Kurdish minority, support armed resistance to the occupation, while 100 per cent "disapprove" or "strongly disapprove" (97 per cent) of terrorism.

Like all other public-service institutions, the educational system faces disintegration. The post-invasion looting of most universities, the burning of ancient and modern libraries and the destruction visited on humanity's cultural heritage in museums and historic sites have dealt the educational system an almost fatal blow. Even so, Iraq's strongly anti-occupation intelligentsia has persevered in trying to save Iraq's cultural and historic foundations. But the assassinations, kidnappings and threats are forcing thousands of academics, doctors and scientists to flee the country.

Not even Saddam Hussein's brutal dictatorship succeeded in spreading so much indiscriminate terror among such people.

The exodus of the academics and professionals threatens Iraq’s universities and teaching hospitals with collapse. What will remain will be no more than facades and emblems. It is ironic that the proponents of the "clash of civilisations" are presiding over the destruction of one of humanity's cradles of civilisation, learning and knowledge. Britain's academic institutions should be particularly concerned by the events in Iraq. And not only because the British Government joined in the invasion and occupation of Iraq. Many of the assassinated academics, scientists and others fleeing the country graduated from British universities, which regard them as "lifelong members". These institutions have a moral duty to remember the dead and to defend the living among these "associates". Academics, staff and student unions could help to highlight the plight of colleagues in Iraq and indeed the plight of the Iraqi people as a whole.

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Iraq's violent 'brain drain' called a threat to future

Killers target academics, professionals

By Bryan Bender and Farah Stockman, Globe Staff | November 30, 2006

WASHINGTON -- Dozens of Iraqi academics and their families have been attacked and killed by extremists in recent weeks in what human rights groups say is an effort to eliminate remaining intellectuals and skilled professionals -- and destroy whatever prospects might exist for establishing a functioning democratic society.

As many as 250 Iraqi educators and other leading professionals have been assassinated since the US-led invasion in 2003, and thousands more have fled the country, according to researchers and human rights groups.

Earlier this month authorities found the body of Dr. Najdat Al-Salihi, a psychology professor for 35 years at Mustansiriya University, in Baghdad. Salihi, who had disappeared three weeks earlier, was shot to death.

Within days, Dr. Mohammed Jassim Al Thahbi, dean of administration and economy at Baghdad University, and his wife and young son were attacked and killed while entering the campus.

Among many others, Issam Al-Rawi, a Sunni political activist who headed the University Professors’ Union and had been keeping a record of the growing number of murdered colleagues, was himself gunned down on Nov. 1 while leaving his Baghdad home.

As Baghdad's morgues overflow with civilian victims of Iraq's expanding war, the targeted assassinations of the country's intellectual elite is fueling a "brain drain" that will have longterm...
Stop the Assassination of Iraqi Academics!
A campaign of The Brussels Tribunal and Campana Estatal contra la Ocupación y por la Soberanía de Iraq

consequences for the country’s ability to maintain a middle class, the linchpin to a successful and stable society, Iraqi leaders and private specialists say.

Professors, doctors, lawyers, and engineers are among the professionals who provide the human capital necessary to run the basic institutions of any healthy society and help forge a new generation of leaders. By removing those building blocks, the leaders and specialists say, the insurgents are aiming to eliminate all support for a democratic society, making it more likely that a Saddam Hussein-like strongman will return, or Iraq will become a theocracy like Iran.

"I think it is getting worse day by day," said Abdul Sattar Jawad, a visiting scholar and professor of literature at Duke University who left Iraq after threats on his life last year. "We need liberal people -- lawyers, engineers -- to build the country," Jawad said in an interview. "The intelligentsia has been beaten down, murdered, or fled."

The recent spate of assassinations -- including at least six medical professors killed in Baghdad during August and September -- does not appear to be the work of a single group, according to US and Iraqi officials and specialists. Rather, the assassinations are seen as a concerted effort by extremists on all sides of Iraq’s ethnic divide to snuff out the educated classes and dash the chances for a moderate, pluralistic government.

"The killing has become systematic," said Nimrod Raphaeli, an Iraqi native who is now a senior analyst at the Middle East Media Research Institute in Washington, which tracks daily reports from the Iraqi government and press. "Clearly what is going on is targeted killings of professors and doctors. They are taking doctors from hospitals and killing them. It is likely Shi’a militias but also Sunnis who are killing intellectuals to keep Iraq poorly managed and poorly governed."

Some estimates put the total number killed over the past 3 1/2 years at nearly 250, but there are no official figures. A European anti war group, brusselstribunal.org, maintains a list of 272 Iraqi academics killed as of Nov. 21. That group has petitioned the United Nations to investigate what it calls the "systematic liquidation" of Iraq’s educated class.

Tahir Albakaa, who served as Minister of Higher Education in Iraq from 2004 to 2005, said that more than 200 academics have been killed -- many whom he knew personally -- and that another 2,000 researchers have fled the country. "When you take away a country’s scientists, you are targeting Iraq itself," said Albakaa, who survived four attempts on his life before he moved to Boston last year as a visiting scholar at Harvard’s Graduate School of Education and Suffolk University.

The recent rash of killings comes on top of an exodus of professionals since the 2003 invasion. The Iraq Index, compiled by the Brookings Institution in Washington, estimated that up to 40 percent of Iraq’s professionals have fled the country over the past 3 1/2 years.

The medical profession has been hit especially hard, according to independent statistics. In a report earlier this year, Medact, a British-based global health charity, estimated that a quarter of Iraq’s 18,000 physicians have fled the country since 2003, and doctors and other health workers "are being attacked, threatened, or kidnapped daily.”

"They don’t want educated people," Jawad, the former dean who fled to the United States last year, said of those perpetrating the killings. "They regard educated and open-minded people as pro-West."

Those who have remained in Iraq have been engulfed by fear.

Merry Fitzgerald, a Belgium-based peace activist who is married to an Iraqi and keeps track of the killings, said in an e-mail interview with the Globe: "I live in constant fear for the safety of my relatives and friends who are in Iraq. Our family has suffered several losses -- an investigating judge and a retired university professor have been assassinated by ‘unknown gunmen.’"
Said Raphaeli: "Those who are perpetrating these killings are trying to undermine the stability of the country and any chance Iraq has."

- **UCU calls on members to support Iraqi academics** - 30 Nov 2006.

UCU has added its backing to an emergency fund for Iraqi academics.

The fund, launched by the Council for Assisting Refugee Academics (CARA), will lobby the UK government to provide sanctuary for fleeing Iraqi academics and provide ways to help those still in the country.

Hundreds of academics have been killed in Iraq since March 2003. The Iraqi minister of education has said that 296 members of education staff were killed in 2005 alone. According to the UN office for humanitarian affairs 180 teachers have been killed since 2006, up to 100 have been kidnapped and over 3,250 have fled the country.

In the past fortnight at least six academics have been assassinated following the kidnapping of scientists from the higher education ministry. Ali Kadhim Ali, a professor of technology at the Technological University of Baghdad, and his wife Baida Obeid, a gynaecologist, were killed two days after the raid. Two professors from Babil University were also murdered by gunmen.

UCU joint general secretary, Sally Hunt, said: 'This continued violence against the academic and educational community is creating a massive brain drain from Iraq which will be hard, if not impossible, to recover.

'Academic freedom is the bedrock of a democratic society and all academics, wherever they are in the world, have the right to teach free from violence and fear. We hope our members will give generously to help Iraqi colleagues who are fleeing for their lives or still in the region.'

Donations can be made through the CARA website at [http://www.academic-refugees.org/](http://www.academic-refugees.org/)

- **Iraq's universities are in meltdown** - Independent, 07 Dec 2006.

**Iraq's universities are in meltdown**

**As Iraq descends into chaos its scholars are calling on Tony Blair for help**

**By Lucy Hodges**

Published: 07 December 2006 - [http://education.independent.co.uk/higher/article2049192.ece](http://education.independent.co.uk/higher/article2049192.ece)

Universities in Iraq are in meltdown. On 30 October 2006, Professor al-Rawi, head of the University Professors' Union, was shot outside his home, the victim of unknown gunmen. He was trying to highlight the dangers on Iraq’s campuses - and he was not alone in his fate.
A few weeks later a Baghdad University dean, Jassim as-Asadi, was returning home with his wife and son when gunmen drove alongside and sprayed his car with automatic weapons. All three were killed.

Since the war began in 2003, hundreds of Iraqi academics have been kidnapped or murdered - and thousands more have fled for their lives, many ending up in Britain. So far more than 470 academics have been killed. Buildings have been burnt and looted in what appears to be a random spree of violence aimed at Iraqi academia, a conference organised by the Council for Assisting Refugee Academics (Cara) at University College London was told last week. No one knows who is responsible for the mayhem.

The sense is that Iraq's leading scholars are being systematically liquidated or hounded out of the country in an orgy of mindless terrorism by local militia and other factions. Planned acts of assassination against academics are taking place daily. The kidnapping of staff at the Scientific Ministry in Baghdad is one illustration of this. It is thought to be no coincidence that afterwards the Iraqi government closed all universities. "What we are seeing today in Iraq is a cynical and ruthless strategy of destabilisation," said Dr John Withrington of Exeter University, chairman of the British Universities Iraq Consortium. "The strategy is to intimidate, to introduce anarchy instead of order, despair instead of hope."

This a tragedy for the individuals affected and their families, and it is a serious threat to the intellectual foundations of modern Iraq, putting the recovery of that country at risk. Because of the urgency of the situation, Cara has decided to take immediate action to help Iraqis. Set up in the 1930s by William Beveridge when he was director of the LSE with the help of eminent scholars such as Maynard Keynes and Lord Rutherford, it sought to help the Jewish intelligentsia being persecuted in Germany.

"Now we have a crisis that is comparable in magnitude to the 1930s," said John Ashworth, president of Cara and a former director of the LSE. "In the 1930s Jews were not only being encouraged to emigrate but were also being murdered. We intend to support Iraqi academics wherever they may be."
Stop the Assassination of Iraqi Academics!
A campaign of The B Russell's Tribunal and
Campana Estatal contra la Ocupación y por la Soberanía de Iraq

To this end Cara has decided to change one of its rules. Until now it has only ever agreed to help people who have won formal refugee status in the UK. From now on it will help Iraqis who aren't officially classed as refugees. And it is immediately allocating £100,000 for this purpose.

Last week, the organisation wrote to Tony Blair asking him for both moral and financial support for Iraqi academics. Professor Ashworth called on all universities in the UK and all student unions to "adopt" an Iraqi - to give an Iraqi academic work or give a student a place at a British university.

When Professor Ashworth was a student in the 1950s at Exeter College, Oxford, he and other students adopted a Hungarian refugee, George Radda, who came to Britain to study law and quickly switched to chemistry. That charitable act had important repercussions for Radda, who subsequently became Sir George Radda, after a long and distinguished career in the UK, ending up as secretary of the Medical Research Council and a fellow of the Royal Society.


Iraqi Professionals Targeted for Abduction, Murder
by Mohammed Salih
ARBIL - The call from his mother changed Dr. Harb Zakko's life. "Someone has been calling me to open the door, saying he has something for you," his mother said.

Soon after, apparently the same person called him at his clinic, asking personal questions. The doctor got the message. He returned home and asked his family to pack. Two days later they drove out of their ethnically mixed Karrada neighborhood in Baghdad and headed for Arbil in Kurdistan to the north.

The calls had sounded like the beginning of an abduction threat. They came only 10 days after a colleague's son was abducted. The family paid $10,000 ransom, but got back only the body of their son.

Such stories are common in Karrada neighborhood, home to many academics and professionals.

"It's a mess in Baghdad, there is no law there - it's militias who are ruling the streets," Zakko told IPS. The doctor now works at a beauty center in the predominantly Christian district Ainkawa north of Arbil.

Zakko is among hundreds of Iraqi professionals who have been leaving the "blind violence" behind them to move to Kurdistan, the northern region of Iraq, or to other countries.

This migration has created fears of a brain drain from a country already paralysed by years of isolation and wars. Iraq was placed under sanctions after the first Gulf War in 1991, and faced the U.S.-led invasion in 2003.
Professionals seem to have become a particular target. "Experts and academics are killed almost daily," Fuad Massoum, head of the Kurdistan Alliance Slate in the Iraqi parliament, told IPS in a phone interview from Baghdad. "This will do tremendous harm to Iraq and its infrastructure, a significant part of which is these professional people."

He said that the issue of targeting of the professional elites has been discussed frequently in parliament. "But it is the government that must take action on that since parliament has no executive authority."

There are varying, but alarming figures about the number of professionals being affected by violence in Iraq. According to the Washington-based Brookings Institute, an independent think tank, 40 percent of Iraq’s professionals have left the country since 2003.

The Britain-based charity Medact says that 120 doctors and 80 pharmacists have been killed over the past three years, and more than 18,000 medical professionals have fled Iraq.

The Brussels Tribunal, an anti-occupation group, has produced a list of 281 university professors killed in Iraq from April 2003 to late November 2006. More than 70 other names are on a list of academics who have been threatened or kidnapped, according to the group.

Many professionals who move to Kurdistan are being employed in local government institutions, and have filled gaps in areas of their specialty.

Rezan Sayda, a senior official in the Kurdistan Regional Government’s health ministry, told IPS that her ministry has employed 600 doctors who fled insecure parts of the country, and that another 320 doctors are on a waiting list for employment. Ten to 12 physicians move to the Kurdish region daily, among them some big names in their field, she added.

"The Iraqi government does not give permission to the doctors who want to be employed in Kurdistan, because they fear that will encourage others to come here," Sayda said. But the doctors come anyhow.

The motives of those who target professionals vary from political and sectarian to plain crime by highly organized gangs who kidnap for money.

"They target academics randomly, and the famous have been threatened a lot," said Dr. Qasim Hussein Salih, 57, a professor of psychology who left Baghdad in late 2004. Salih, who was educated in Britain, was head of Iraq’s Psychology Association.

"What is going on in Iraq now is an attempt to stop life in this country," said Salih, who now teaches psychology at Arbil’s College of Education. "If this continues, then the final disaster is only a matter of time."

The professor is struggling to survive. The salary he gets is not enough even for bare needs, he said.

Salih lost two of his colleagues during the mass kidnapping of staff at Iraq’s Higher Education Ministry last month. He says he can hardly bear the pain.

"When I am alone at night, I cry for my friends who were killed, and for my country," he said. "Iraq is a rich country and it is very sad to see Iraq like this, and I blame America for that."

(Inter Press Service)
Academics are being forced to flee certain death in Iraq - but face a very uncertain life in the UK

Francis Beckett
Tuesday December 12, 2006
The Guardian

This morning, Baghdad University lecturer Dr A will have the chance to tell the all party parliamentary group on poverty about the desperate plight of Iraqi asylum-seekers. He has a terrible tale to tell: of escape from Iraq after death threats; of a wife and three teenage children now in hiding outside Baghdad because their names have been added to his on a death list, and whom Britain will not admit; and of six months in Britain, denied state benefits and not permitted to take paid work.

His fare to Westminster from the countryside, where he is staying with an English academic colleague, will be paid by the Council for Assisting Refugee Academics (Cara), for Dr A has spent the small amount of money he managed to bring with him and is now destitute. He would starve on the streets without the hospitality of his academic colleague and handouts from Cara, though his high reputation in his field and his excellent English could win him useful work.

The first warning to Dr A (his name does not start with A) came early last year. His high academic profile had led to media interviews on his subject, and a colleague told him that his name was on an execution list held by one of the militias. In November last year he heard that, while he was abroad at an academic conference, a strange car parked outside his home and heavily armed young men were watching the house. He told his family not to worry, since he was not involved in politics or religion.

Leave or die

But in April this year came the dreaded telephone call. A series of insults was followed by a threat that many of his colleagues had heard before - and they had all been killed soon afterwards. "Leave the country or you'll die," the caller told him. "This time I took it seriously," he says.

In July, the family travelled to Amman in Jordan. He had been invited to an academic conference in London, so was able to get a visa. He hoped to regularise his position here quickly, so that his family could follow.

His wife and children waited in Amman as long as they could, but eventually their money and Jordanian visas ran out. They thought that, without him, they might be safe back at home in Baghdad. They were wrong. They watched the militias massacre their neighbours. Then came the warning: leave your home or be killed. They fled to relatives 200 miles away. They had to leave everything they owned, and have lost it all. "They are living like me, as refugees in their own country, from hand to mouth," he says. Dr A must be granted asylum before his family can come here.

He has no state benefits because he was in Britain for more than a week before he applied for asylum. He has made nine visits to the Home Office, at its request, travelling from the Home Counties during the rush hour using money he has not got, but each time he was told he cannot have any money, and his application for refugee status has not yet been processed.

How long will it take? "Anything from four months to a year," says Cara's director, John Akker, with the sad certainty of a man who has seen it all before. "If we are lucky, and they do not lose the file - which they often do - he may have a decision in late January or early February. Meanwhile, they have taken his passport, so he can't go anywhere else, and he can't open a bank account. We are helping him and we have to give him money in cash."
There is a theoretical alternative. Because of Dr A's reputation, he could apply for a high quality visa, granted to those with highly desired skills. But Akker says: "That application costs £400 and could take a long time."

About 500 academics from Baghdad and Basra universities have been murdered since the invasion of Iraq. Hundreds more have been kidnapped, and hundreds fled the country after getting one of the dreaded "leave or die" messages. Unesco believes that academics are targeted because they are key to reconstruction. An additional reason is that many of them were members of the Ba'ath party. "In Saddam's day, you had to be a member if you wanted to be a teacher," said Professor Issam al-Rawi, president of the Association of University Professors, last year. "Most of us were members only in name, not by conviction, but now it's come back to haunt us. Any day now I expect them to come for me." They did. Rawi was murdered a year ago.

Professor B managed to avoid joining the Ba'ath party, and has kept a very low profile since the war, making sure his name does not appear in the media. In London for an academic conference recently, he said: "I'm going back - I have not yet had the 'leave or die' message. My wife and son and students are there, and a man should go home if he can."

He gave a vivid account of life for a university teacher in Baghdad.

"The police will open places by shooting them up. It starts with your journey to work, past shooting matches between militias - and it's not just the militias you have to fear. Convoys of VIPs drive through Baghdad and shoot at cars. Many roads are blocked, either by police, or by militias, or by private companies. These companies rent all the houses in the road and have them blocked off by their own security guards, mostly foreigners. No one can do anything about them. Then you walk into your classroom past groups of very young men holding their weapons in their hands."

Worse than Saddam

Life is far worse than under Saddam, he says. "The Ba'athists might have imprisoned you for not attending the right religious ceremony; the militias will kill you for it. Before, we feared the regime itself. You couldn't speak about the president or his two sons, but everyone else was safe ground. Now you don't know, you could say a word out of place with someone and get killed. There are no longer any police to go to for protection, because they are divided between the militias."

Professor B has no doubt whose fault it is. "The British and Americans dissolved the army and police - even traffic wardens were banned from working. So the country was in chaos. They even created some of the militias, and most people believe there are foreign agents provocateurs. The militias go on killing and no one is ever arrested for it.

"You cannot keep track of all the academic colleagues who have been killed. The destruction of the Iraqi mind is the fault of many people, and your British government is one of them."

Which makes his colleague Dr A's plight in Britain the more unforgiveable. Britain helped to create the chaos from which Dr A has been forced to flee. Now it is putting obstacles in the way of Dr A living here and bringing his family out of the nightmare.

Cara believes the crisis facing Iraqi academics is so serious that, for the first time since Nazi persecution of the Jews in the 1930s, it is helping not just those in Britain, but those in other countries, and spending some of its reserves. "We had a little money we have been saving for a rainy day," says John Ashworth, president of Cara. "Now the rainy day is here."

• Cara welcomes donations. See academic-refugees.org.
Mandatory university attendance in unstable Iraq angers many

By Nancy A. Youssef
McClatchy Newspapers

BAGHDAD, Iraq - An odd thing has happened at Baghdad's universities: the professors have begun hiding their education by donning ratty clothes, pulling on traditional Arab head scarves and driving to campus in beat-up cars.

It's all part of an effort to keep from getting fired.

With the threat of violence emptying university campuses, Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki took the rare step earlier this month of ordering students and professors back to class. Anyone who doesn't obey could face dismissal or expulsion.

Maliki's aides defend the order, saying that education is the lifeblood of Iraq and its collapse would threaten the government and the nation.

But those forced to obey the order complain that they're risking their lives as unwilling pawns of a government that can't guarantee their security.

"I heard about the prime minister's order, and it is ignorant about what is happening in Iraq. The government doesn't know what life is like, not only for professors and students, but for all people," said Khamis al Badri, a political science professor at al Mustansiriya University in Baghdad.

Iraq's universities have been a target for insurgents and militias alike almost since the war began in 2003. Professors tell of armed gangs taking over buildings and classrooms and even issuing threats about grades. Thousands of students have requested transfers to campuses where their sects - Sunni Muslim or Shiite Muslim - are in the majority. Thousands of professors and students, seeking to avoid violence and threats, have fled the nation to pursue their studies in neighboring countries.

Around Baghdad, many campuses are desolate. Many families refuse to let their children, particularly women, finish their education for fear of what will happen either en route to class or once they get there.

According to the Iraq Students and Youth League, a university advocacy group, at least 10 violent incidents racked Baghdad's two main universities in the first week of this month, when Maliki issued his order. Among them were attempted kidnappings in front of Iraqi police officers, who didn't try to stop the attacks.

At Baghdad University, only 6 percent of student and professors attended in early December, the group found. The highest attendance level was 59 percent at private universities.

Ali Adeeb, a top Maliki adviser, said he recommended to the prime minister that he issue the order after a Sunni insurgent group, Ansar al Sunna, posted fliers around campuses threatening to kill students and professors for coming to campus.

"We have to confront this psychological war," Adeeb said. "I know if the studies stop, the country will really be chaotic."

Badri, the professor, said it wasn’t fair to expect academics to defy violence when no one else in Iraq was forced to. He pointed out that the nation’s 275-member parliament often can’t meet because too
many members don’t attend, sometimes because the roads leading to the heavily fortified Green Zone are too dangerous.

Even the Sunni minister of higher education’s office complains that there isn’t enough security at the campuses.

"We have asked the government to provide us with security, and they did that to certain degree. What is happening in the street is out of our control," ministry spokesman Basel al Khatib said.

Iraq’s universities were among the Middle East’s premier institutions, but their state now reflects the nation’s turmoil. Rogue groups target professors and students for kidnapping and murder, either for money or because some perceive their educational pursuit as un-Islamic. Universities in the restive Anbar and Diyala provinces have shut down briefly or delayed resuming the school year several times in the last two years. Diyala University is scheduled to reopen this week, in part because of Maliki’s order.

Al Mustansiriya University, which sits near the impoverished Sadr City neighborhood, is one of Iraq’s liveliest campuses. Walls and walkways are covered with photos of rebel cleric Muqtada al-Sadr’s father, Grand Ayatollah Mohammed Mohammed Sadeq al-Sadr, interspersed with fliers warning students that they’ll fail if they don’t show up for class. Hanging above that are pictures of young men who’ve been killed.

Only one police truck sits in front of the main entrance.

Left to their own devices for protection, many look to the university, not the government. At some campuses, university officials have suggested that those with obviously sectarian names change them to avoid being picked up at illegal checkpoints, where Shiite or Sunni partisans search for members of the rival sect.

Armo Heshan, an economics lecturer at al Mustansiriya and a Sunni, said he began to dress down in an effort to disguise his standing as a teacher. He said he didn’t need an order to get back to work.

After the Persian Gulf War in 1991, he recalled, "the universities stopped for six months. It was like life itself stopped. But when schools and colleges opened back again, everything started up again. Life went back to normal. That is why I am here now."

Nawar Jaleel, a Shiite professor who was sitting next to Heshan, said he kept coming because he wasn’t any safer at his nearby home.

"Education and knowledge are the most important elements of life," he said. "If they go, there is no life left."

McClatchy Newspapers special correspondent Zaineb Obeid in Baghdad contributed to this report.
Stop the Assassination of Iraqi Academics!
A campaign of The Brussels Tribunal and
Campaign National and for the Sovereignty of Iraq


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Iraqi academics at grave risk
On 14 November 2006 paramilitary gunmen uniformed as Iraqi National Police commandos raided a Ministry of Education building in Baghdad. Arriving without warning, they swiftly arrested roughly 100 members of staff whose names were on their list, along with others.

In broad daylight, the paramilitaries handcuffed and blindfolded aging academics, younger professors, secretaries, parents and visitors alike. Then they drove off with the detainees to a clandestine prison, where some suffered bone-breaking torture and an unknown number were killed, according to witnesses.

Why were these teachers and intellectuals targeted in such a brutal way? What does their experience mean for academic freedom in Iraq? Tragically this harrowing incident is only the latest in an escalating pattern of violence against Iraqi academics.

Prime Minister Maliki declared that it was not a case of terrorism, but a dispute between “militias.” Within days, the government said all detainees had been released after a series of dramatic police raids. Several senior police officers were reportedly arrested and questioned over possible complicity. The Education Ministry also insisted that both Sunnis and Shiites were among those illegally detained.

In a letter to officials, EI Secretary General Fred van Leeuwen informed the government of Iraq that Education International would contact the United Nations Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions to request that the growing violence against academics and teachers in Iraq be investigated.

Hundreds of academics have been killed in Iraq since the U.S.-led invasion and the overthrow of Saddam Hussein’s regime in March 2003. The Iraqi Minister of Education has stated that 296 members of education staff were killed in 2005 alone. According to the UN Office for Humanitarian Affairs, 180 teachers have been killed since February 2006, and up to 100 have been kidnapped.

In his letter Van Leeuwen pointed out these devastating facts and added: “Not only do abductions of teachers constitute serious violations of the right to live and work in a secure environment, but of the right to life itself. Education International does not only refer to the recent mass kidnapping in the Ministry of Higher Education’s scientific research directorate. Abduction and murder ravage families and put at stake the future of Iraq. The killings of teachers and closures of schools punishes the young people and does not give a message of optimism and hope.”

Because education is so critical to the future of the country, van Leeuwen warned that the dramatic escalation of violence is prompting a mass exodus of academics and teachers. More than 3,250 teachers have fled Iraq to date. “The resulting massive brain drain of teachers is a catastrophe which affects the reconstruction and nation-building process significantly, and will continue to do so for years to come,” he said.

The violence against education institutions and teachers has also prompted a sharp decline in school attendance. According to recent statistics from the Ministry of Education, only about 30 percent of Iraq’s 3.5 million school-aged children are currently attending classes, compared to 75 percent in the previous school year.

“Educational institutions and teachers should be supported and given the resources to promote peace and tolerance through education, rather than being targets of violence,” van Leeuwen urged.

Education International is not alone in its concern for the safety of Iraqi academics. The Brussels Tribunal, a network of human rights activists, has launched an urgent appeal to save Iraqi academics. Among the more than 10,000 names on their petition are two former UN Assistant Secretaries-
Stop the Assassination of Iraqi Academics!

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General, eminent academics including Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn, writers such as Eduardo Galeano and Nobel laureates Dario Fo, Jose Saramago, J.M. Coetzee and Harold Pinter.

For more information, visit: www.brusseltribunal.org

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To know more about EI’s policy and work in this area, please visit the following section: Status of Teachers
Iraq's academics targeted by militias - BBC, 05 Jan 2007.

Hundred's academics, doctors and other specialists have been murdered in Iraq since the US-led invasion in 2003.

Many more are among the thousands of people fleeing the country, adding to the brain drain.

BBC Arabic.com asked four Iraqi academics, all based outside Iraq, why they thought they were being targeted, and what could be done to help.

Muhammad al-Rubai, adviser to the Iraqi president on scientific affairs and professor at British and Irish universities

These assassinations have hit nearly every academic discipline and every university in Iraq - except perhaps those in Kurdistan.

The abduction and murder of Iraqi academics has become a common event. It is disrupting university life and forcing Iraqi talent to flee the country.

Those behind the attacks can be from all sides. They include people from the former regime who have lost their position and influence. They also include people who seek to "cleanse" universities of those who collaborated with the former regime.

They include sectarian forces who want to get rid of academics who don't belong to the majority sect of the area.

Some political and religious groups want universities to reflect their own version of Islam.

They interfere with the daily activities of faculties and impose certain practices which are irrelevant to academic life.

To help address the situation, we urge foreign countries and international organisations to lend material and moral support to Iraqi scholars.

It's extremely important to spread the principles of freedom, justice and democracy inside universities.

It's extremely important to spread the principles of freedom, justice and democracy inside universities, irrespective of sectarian or ethnic affiliation.

Samir Kalander, radiology specialist, currently in Jordan

I don’t exaggerate when I say that since the invasion of Iraq there has been a concerted effort to wipe out the country's academics.

I believe those behind it wish to destroy life and civilization in Iraq.

There are many foreign forces seeking to do this. Add to this the lack of state authority and the growing influence of militias, who...
are unhindered by any religious, ethical or legal values.

Why does the Iraqi government not see the importance of protecting academic independence?

Why does it leave its scholars at the mercy of political parties and extremists, instead of taking its proper responsibility in promoting science, culture and education?

Specialists in different disciplines in Iraq are now powerless. Those who remain in the country are likely to be killed or abducted.

When I left Iraq, I left my job as head of section in a specialist university hospital. I also left my patients and my private business.

I had to start from scratch. Though I have a job now, I feel I have lost my stability forever.

**Ismail Jalili, professor and consultant of ophthalmology, based in the UK**

What is happening to Iraqi academia amounts to the destruction of our country’s human resources.

It’s part of a plan to weaken this country and to finish it off as a strategic power in the region.

A strong, rich and advanced Iraq would not be welcome.

Therefore, international and regional powers are seeking to weaken it.

The policy of targeting Iraqi brains and talent is just another manifestation of this plot.

The United Nations, the Arab League and other international and humanitarian organisations need to get involved to stop this brain drain.

**Abbas al-Husseini, Westminster University in London and general secretary of UK’s Iraqi Higher Education Committee**

Iraqi academics and scholars are being targeted in a plot to destroy Iraq. It’s part of an attempt to disrupt reconstruction and to halt political progress.

Academics are being killed by groups with links to the former regime - in collaboration with armed foreign and Iraqi men.

This crisis can be addressed by supporting the political process and by spreading democracy in political and social life.

All political and sectarian activity should be stopped inside universities in Iraq.

Security around universities and the roads leading to them should be tightened.

Transport used by university teaching staff should be well guarded. Accommodation should be provided for them on campus or nearby.

The Iraqi Higher Education Committee in the UK organised a day of solidarity with Iraqi academics recently. A number of Iraqi scholars in Britain and Ireland took part.
Stop the Assassination of Iraqi Academics!
A campaign of The British Russell Tribunal and
Campana Estatal contra la Ocupación y por la Soberanía de Iraq

We handed a plea for help to the head of UNESCO.

- The exodus of academics has lowered educational standards - IRIN, 7 Jan 2007.

**IRAQ: The exodus of academics has lowered educational standards**

**Photo: Afif Sarhan/IRIN**

Dr Hamida Bakri is preparing to leave the country

BAGHDAD, 7 January 2007 (IRIN) - "You are on the list of the teachers who are going to be killed this month for not obeying our demands to leave Iraq," said a handwritten letter which was left at Dr Hamida Bakri's door.

Now the 41-year-old professor of gynaecology at the college of medicine at the University of Baghdad, is ready to leave the country with her family before death threats become reality. She said two of her colleagues had already been killed.

"My friend, who was a pharmacist and doing his doctorate in toxicology, was killed a week ago just because he was a doctor and nothing else. He was one of the good remaining professionals in Iraq and we have lost dozens who have been killed in recent years," she added.

Until she leaves the country, two bodyguards accompany Bakri to the college and clinic. Two months ago, she escaped an attempt on her life but one of her bodyguards was killed.

"There are no good professionals in Iraq anymore. The good teachers have fled or were killed...leaving the country without hope of a better education system," Bakri said as she hugged her 10-year-old daughter.

According to the Ministry of Higher Education, at least 280 academics have been killed since the US-led invasion in 2003 by insurgents and militias.

"The targeting of such academics is generating a mess in our country. The health and educational systems are depleted of good professionals. Nearly one third of those living in Iraq before 2003 have fled violence," said Dr. Mustafa Jaboury, a research investigator at the Ministry of Higher Education.

"Shi’ite militias and Sunni insurgents are killing intellectuals to ensure Iraq is poorly managed and poorly governed," Jaboury added.

Jaboury noted that there has been an increase in the targeting of such professionals since the beginning of 2006.

**Threat to the future**

Experts have raised concerns saying that if professionals continue fleeing Iraq on a daily basis the country will be depleted of academics and the level of education in Iraq will drop drastically.

"By removing those groups [of people such as intellectuals], the insurgents are aiming to eliminate all support for a democratic society. And militias hope that by targeting academics Iraq will become theocratic like Iran," said Paul Colley, a London-based independent analyst.

"Students who are graduating have the same level of information like a first year undergraduate during Saddam's regime. This shows how the structure of education has deteriorated and will bring serious problems in the future," Colley added.
The Ministry of Displacement and Migration said that at least 30 per cent of the total numbers of professors, doctors, pharmacists and engineers in Iraq have fled to neighbouring countries like Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and United Arab States (UAE) but some have travelled to as far as the US, Canada, Australia and Britain.

"Some academics are lucky to get a good job and good salary but the majority are suffering and are having difficulties in having their university documents recognised [abroad]. Others accept poor salaries offered by foreign countries," Abir Youssef, senior official at the Ministry of Displacement and Migrations said.

Youssef noted that the numbers of academics fleeing the country or killed could be higher and the ministry has no latest figures.

The Iraq Index, compiled by the Brookings Institution in Washington, released on 21 December 2006, estimated that up to 40 percent of Iraq’s professionals have fled the country since 2003, with doctors and the pharmacists topping the list.

In a report earlier this year, Medact, a British-based global health charity, estimated that a quarter of Iraq’s 18,000 physicians have fled the country since 2003. Meanwhile, doctors and other health workers in Iraq continue to be attacked, threatened, or kidnapped daily.

The international human rights group, Amnesty International has said that it was greatly concerned about the continuing killings of civilians in Iraq and the lack of safety for ordinary people which are forcing many to leave the country.

"There has been a clear failure by the Iraqi authorities to provide security to end the killings and bring the perpetrators to justice. Amnesty International is calling on the Iraqi government to take concrete steps to promptly, thoroughly, impartially and independently investigate these killings and to ensure that the perpetrators are identified and brought to justice," said Nicole Choueiry, a press officer for Amnesty International, Middle East and North Africa.

Students in Iraq say they too are worried about their future.

"Ninety percent of our teachers have changed in the past two years. The ones who have come to replace them are not well prepared or have no experience, leaving us without a good professional for teaching and training," said Saeed Mounir, 23, a student of medicine at Baghdad University.

as/sz/ar

- Double bombing kills 65 students at Iraqi university - The independent - 17 Jan 2007.

Double bombing kills 65 students at Iraqi university

By Kim Sengupta

Published: 17 January 2007

At least 65 students were killed and 110 others injured in a double attack on a university in Baghdad yesterday. The slaughter coincided with the release by the United Nations of figures showing that almost 35,000 people were killed in sectarian violence in the country last year.
Stop the Assassination of Iraqi Academics!

The UN figures, more than three times the numbers reported by the Iraqi government, come as the first batch of 20,000 US troops deploy for the "surge" into the Iraqi capital widely seen as George Bush's last-ditch attempt to salvage victory in Iraq.

The bombs targeting Al-Mustansiriyah University were the first direct, large-scale attacks on students in Iraq. They went off in a mainly Shia part of the Iraqi capital. However, both Shia and Sunni Islamist groups had warned the universities against continuing mixed teaching of young men and women and also disseminating secular education.

The first blast was carried out by a suicide bomber who detonated his car packed with explosives in a square near the entrance to the university as students were boarding minibuses after finishing classes at about 3.45pm. The second bomb followed soon after as panicked students rushed back into the building.

About half an hour later, gunmen killed 10 people at a market near the university. Fifteen more people were killed when two bombs went off at another market and an explosion on a bus killed four others.

Professor John Akker, of the UK-based Council for Assisting Refugee Academics, said: "This is just another example of the deliberate targeting of university staff and students in Iraq. Since the occupation over 280 staff have been assassinated and countless more students have been killed. There is a deliberate policy of targeting those connected with education and many are on lists of the factions and groups awaiting assassination."

The UN estimate of the number of deaths - contained in its two-monthly human rights report on Iraq - drawing on data from hospitals and morgues, put the civilian death toll for 2006 at 34,452, or 94 each day. Just over 4,730 of the deaths were in Baghdad, most as a result of gunshot wounds. The report also noted that figures from some governates had not been included in the total for December.

Much of the violence has been blamed on Shia militias, particularly the Mehdi Army led by Muqtada al-Sadr, who is a key supporter of the Iraqi Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki.
The head of the UN human rights mission in Iraq, Gianni Magazzeni, said: "Without significant progress on the rule of law, sectarian violence will continue indefinitely and eventually spiral out of control. The situation is particularly grave in Baghdad, where most casualties and unidentified bodies that are daily recorded also bear signs of torture."

**Mr Maliki’s government, which had claimed the last UN report on Iraq casualties was grossly exaggerated, had banned its officials from giving casualty statistics to the organisation.**

In Washington, a White House spokesman said: "Unfortunately it is a war. The actual number, whatever it is, is too high."

Speaking about the university bombing, Mr Maliki blamed "terrorists and Saddamists" and said the deadly explosions were the work of those seeking revenge for the hanging of Saddam's co-defendants.

* The brother of the murdered British hostage Ken Bigley has welcomed reports that an alleged al-Qa’ida militant has been questioned in Turkey about his death. Loa’i Mohammed Haj Bakr al-Saqa, a Syrian, has been interviewed by a Turkish prosecutor in the presence of British police. Stan Bigley, from Wigan, said he was hopeful it would lead to his brother’s body being found.

http://news.independent.co.uk/world/middle_east/article2160084.ece


**Bomding latest blow to colleges**

By James Palmer
THE WASHINGTON TIMES
Published January 19, 2007

**BAGHDAD** – Even before bombings at a university killed at least 70 persons this week, Iraq’s universities were on the verge of collapse with scores of professors and students killed by Islamist militants.
Violence since the U.S.-led invasion nearly four years ago has driven thousands of students away, with enrollment off by more than half at some universities in the past year alone, officials say.

Terrorist attacks have killed at least 280 academics since 2003, and 3,250 others have fled the country, according to Iraq’s higher education ministry.

That fits into a pattern described in a U.N. report Tuesday, which noted the deliberate targeting of "various professional groups, including educators, medical professionals, journalists, judges and lawyers, religious and political leaders."

Government officials say they are determined to keep the schools open despite the dangers. "It would be a big blow against all of Iraq if universities closed down now," said Basil Al-Khaleeb, spokesman for the higher education ministry. "We didn't stop during the past two wars, and we're working to continue during this war."

He spoke shortly before Tuesday's attack on Mustansiriya University in Baghdad, in which at least 70 persons died, mostly women.

Images of bloodstained notebooks and a burned-out minivan that students had been boarding were shown on satellite TV stations.

Sais Hussein, 21, a junior majoring in geography at Baghdad University, said he is unlikely to finish the school year.

"My mother was crying today because she saw the dead students and imagined I could be one of them," Mr. Hussein said by telephone. "I would like to continue my classes, but my parents decided it’s too dangerous for me to return to school. I don't know what to do."

A spokesman in the administrative affairs office at Baghdad University said earlier this month that enrollment at the school's main campus in the southern Jadiriyah section was down as much as 40 percent. At its Adhamiya campus, enrollment is down by more than half.

"Many, many have postponed their studies or come to campus just once a week," said Zaineb Abdulmohee, a senior computer science major at Baghdad University.

Miss Abdulmohee, a 21-year-old in a head scarf and ankle-length skirt, was interviewed last month at the College of Women's Education on the main campus of Baghdad University.
She estimated that 85 students had begun the year in her program, but there were no more than 35 before this week's attacks.

Mustansiriya University, whose students are mainly Shi’ite Muslims, closed for two days of mourning after the attack.

Baghdad University's main campus had closed for five days following recent threats, students and professors say.

"If [the violence] keeps up, I'm going to stop coming to my classes," said Ehab Hassoon, a 21-year-old senior in his final semester at Baghdad University's College of Science. "Life is more important than a diploma."

Students are not the only ones suffering.

The Brookings Institution in Washington estimates that up to 40 percent of Iraq's professionals have fled the country since the U.S.-led invasion.

"We don't know who is doing this or why," said Baghdad University political science professor Nabeal Younis, who has taught for more than two decades. "But we keep losing our colleagues."

College instructors earn $1,000 to $1,500 per year, and those still teaching are taking extreme measures.

Nihad Al-Rawi, an assistant dean at Baghdad University and a professor of electrical engineering, has a gun in his office.

"I don't want to use it, but what am I supposed to do if someone breaks into my office and tries to kidnap me? It's a fact of life here nobody can deny," Mr. Al-Rawi said as he displayed an old U.S.-made revolver.

- University Failures Threaten Iraq's Professionals - NPR, 29 Jan 2007

The kidnapping of three law professors and a student on Monday and the deaths on Sunday of five students at a girls’ secondary school underscores the collapse of the Iraqi educational system brought on by the American invasion.

Both incidents occurred in the Baghdad area. The law professors, teachers at Nahrain Law School, were Adnan al-Abid, Amar al-Qaisi, and Abdul-Mutaleb al-Hashimi. Dr. al-Hashimi’s son, a student at the school, was also kidnapped. The four were seized as they were leaving the premises of the university.

The five girls, ranging in age from 12 to 16, were killed when the Kholoud Secondary School came under mortar fire at about 11:00 a.m. More than 20 other students were wounded in the attack.

According to the New York Times, primary and secondary schools have been targeted in the past month. Ten students were killed at the Gharbiya Secondary School in Baghdad. In early December, a girls’ high school in a Christian neighborhood of Baghdad was closed down after posters appeared that threatened to kill the students.

The worst atrocity occurred on January 17, when bombs exploded at the prestigious Mustansiriya University in Baghdad, killing more than 70 students, most of them female, and wounding scores more. The blasts occurred when students were lining up in front of minivans to taken them home.

The attacks were anticipated. According to journalist Nir Rosen writing on IraqSlogger in December, the Sunni fundamentalist group Ansar Al Sunna had put up posters and banners in Sunni neighborhoods calling for a boycott of universities by Sunni students. Mustansiriya University, in particular, had been targeted.

In response, a banner had been hung up at Mustansiriya University saying, “We will not surrender to terrorism, and that is our response.”

Students from the Iraqi College of Dentistry had earlier written an appeal to the Iraqi government protesting the relocation of their institution to Mustansiriya University, calling it “the campus of horror and dread.”

The massacre at Mustansiriya University prompted student protests. Approximately 60 students from the University of Technology in Baghdad staged a sit-in, demanding protection for faculty and students.

One of the students, Yasmin Mohammad, told Aljazeera about the January 17 bombing: “This attack is not targeting a specific sect. The university has students who are Shiites, Sunnis, Kurds and Christians. It is a war on everything associated with Iraq.”
On January 23, a Professor of Economics at Mustansiriya University, Diya al-Meqoter, was shot in the head and chest. Meqoter had hosted a popular television show that granted poor people funds to start small businesses. Meqoter was also the head of the Consumers’ Association, a group that combated price gouging by businesses.

More than 300 University professors have been assassinated since the US invasion of 2003. Nearly 40 percent of Iraq’s professionals have left the country, including more than 3,000 professors. Hundreds more have flowed into the relatively safe haven of Iraqi Kurdistan.

A report issued by the United Nations in 2005 found that fully 84 percent of Iraq’s higher education facilities had been “destroyed, damaged and robbed” since the US invasion two years earlier.

In 1982, UNESCO awarded Iraq a prize for eradicating illiteracy. At the time, Iraq had one of highest rates of literacy for women. In 2004, UNESCO estimated that the literacy rates for adults—after a year of American occupation and 12 years of UN-sponsored sanctions—stood at 74 percent. A UNESCO survey conducted in January 2007 estimated that only 37 percent of women in the countryside are now literate.

According to the same survey, only 42 percent of boys and 30 percent of girls of school age attend classes.

Universities in other parts of the country are open, but have become deserted. Many schools in Basra, Mosul, and Diyala are empty. Parents are keeping their children home from primary and secondary school.

The destruction of Iraq’s cultural infrastructure began with the looting of the National Museum in April 2003. The American occupation forces allowed this disaster to happen. Since then, the destruction and occupation of schools (30 percent of schools are occupied by American forces in Ramadi) and the nurturing of sectarian hatreds by the Bush Administration have caused a nearly total collapse of the Iraqi educational system.

This can only be by design. To the extent that a population is deprived of education and knowledge, it is easier to subject it to semi-colonial domination. Thus, school has become impossible for millions of youth. Teachers and professors are shot. Libraries are shut, and newspapers are bombed.

See Also:
Hundreds of Iraqi academics and professionals assassinated by death squads [6 March 2005]
How and why the US encouraged looting in Iraq [15 April 2003]
Iraqi Education System Caught in Crossfire of Continued Conflict

The bomb that tore through Mustansiriya University in January killed some 70 people including many female students and marked a new low in the Iraq's long struggle to build a new post-Saddam Hussein educational system.

Despite the carnage, the death count would have likely been higher if not for the endemically low attendance across southern Iraq. In December, the Iraq Students and Youth League estimated a 6 percent attendance rate at Baghdad University, stemming from the threat of violence and kidnapping to students, faculty and education ministry staff. Schools at every level in the Anbar and Diyala provinces are shut down because of deficient security.

According to tallies from international human rights groups and Iraqi officials, between 169 and 300 academics were assassinated between 2003 and 2006. Many were killed for their perceived moderate or un-Islamic views.

Tolls for primary and secondary school teachers run even higher, with at least 300 reports of teachers killed in 2006 alone.

The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees categorized these killing as "systematic." Abdul Jawad, a former department chair at al-Mustansiriya, went so far as to call schools the most dangerous places in Iraq.

"The campuses mainly are overruled by the fanatic students, religious animals, militias. They harass and threaten and kill. ... They don’t want education," said Jawad, who recently fled Iraq after narrowly missing a bomb attack that destroyed the English-language Baghdad Mirror newspaper he founded.

The Brookings Institution and officials from the Ministry of Higher Education now estimate that 40 percent of professionals have left Iraq, depleting the country's academic infrastructure. Jawad left in October 2005, following thousands of other professors who left during post-Persian Gulf war sanctions.

Decline of the education system

Iraq’s school system, once seen as a model of Arab education, has been in continuous decline after 25 years of wars and sanctions. Despite hundreds of millions of dollars in international aid for education since 2004, indicators show a precipitous drop in quality since the 2003 invasion.
The World Bank now estimates a basic literacy rate of 60 percent, a 20 percent drop from 2003. Before 2003, schools enjoyed near 100 percent attendance; in the current academic year, estimates from Save the Children, UNICEF and Iraq’s Ministry of Education put 20 percent to 30 percent of Iraq’s 3.5 million public school students at home, in fear.

"In Baghdad, parents are choosing between education and safety," said Maman Sidikou, a senior project officer for education with UNICEF, who believes the effects of sectarian violence will echo for generations through Iraq’s weakened education system.

Sidikou said girls are kept home in higher numbers than boys, which could affect women’s rights in the social and political life of future Iraq. For boys, the concern is greater in the short term.

"We are well aware [that] the 12 to 18 year olds, left alone, with no education, with no occupation, would go and would most probably be enlisted by the insurgent groups," Sidikou said.

Many schools are still missing the basics -- electricity, drinking water, sanitation and, Sidikou said, separate areas for girls. Teachers are missing the tools of instruction -- desks, maps, pens and paper -- and many have not received pedagogical training since the early 1980s.

**Rebuilding schools**
In 2003, the World Bank said 80 percent of Iraq’s 15,000 schools were in need of repair.

As of late 2006, about one-third had been rebuilt, short of the original goals laid out by the Iraq Reconstruction and Relief Fund.

And rebuilt schools become targets for bombing and looting. The United Nations recently reported that rockets hit five of their rehabilitated schools and that unknown gunmen kidnapped five primary school teachers.

Sidikou says timelines for school rehabilitation have stretched from three months to nine months as violence continues to impede work and as inflation makes it more costly. A school that cost $45,000 to build two years ago, now costs $90,000, according to the UN Human Settlements Program.

He laments the lack of consistent international support and the end of USAID contracts in 2006 that
Stop the Assassination of Iraqi Academics!
A campaign of The 
Russell

Tribunal and

Campana Estatal contra la Ocupacion y por la Soberania de Iraq

were instrumental in reintroducing students to the education system, and keeping them out of harm’s way.

UNICEF now says 4,000 schools are in need of reconstruction and 2,000 in need of rehabilitation.

"We have to think of alternative ways to just take care of business. ... Children cannot afford to wait for a better time to come [to school]," he said.

**Higher education**
Higher education woes have paralleled those of the primary and secondary schools. A 2005 UN report found that more than 80 percent of higher education buildings had been at best robbed and at worst destroyed.

Tahir Albakaa, former president of the recently bombed al-Mustansiriya, was forced to close graduate university programs because of the destruction of lab space and libraries as well as the unavailability of professors.

Funds once allocated by the Iraqi government to university rebuilding were marked for security efforts as insurgent violence escalated, further hindering the recovery of the higher education system.

But in March, a group including Barham Salah, a deputy prime minister in Iraq, is planning to break ground on an American University of Iraq, where Arab students would have the chance to learn about democracy, Western philosophy and compromise.

"I think that's a good goal," said Albakaa, who, as the former minister of higher education, had sought ways to introduce foreign education into Iraq while retaining its countrymen.

"The main goal is to create a league that will hopefully be the leaders of Iraq. And we think that that cannot be created by keeping on doing the same," said Azzam Alwash, the executive secretary of the university’s board of trustees.

The university would be built in Sulamaniya, in Iraqi Kurdistan, far from the violence of Baghdad and Iraq’s south.

The safety appeals to professors like Jawad, now teaching as a visiting lecturer at Duke, who is determined to return to Iraq and who says he’s been approached to teach at the American University.

"I want to serve my country and students, actually. I pray to go back to my school and my students,” Jawad said.

-- By Adnaan Wasey, Online NewsHour
Bomber strikes near Baghdad college

Up to 16 people are reported to have been killed and 27 wounded after a suicide bomber detonated explosives in a van near a Baghdad college, police say.

Police sources said women and children were among the victims after the vehicle exploded in a car park between the College of Economic Sciences in western Baghdad and a food warehouse.

Twelve people were reported to have been killed or wounded when their house collapsed after the blast on Tuesday.

The explosion follows multiple bombings in crowded markets in the Iraqi capital on Monday that killed about 120 people and injured more than 150 others.

Monday's bombings came as Iraqis marked the first anniversary of a Shia shrine bombing that pushed the country to the brink of civil war.

Overnight, mortar shells had crashed into Suwaib, a suburb in the south of the city, killing three civilians, the security official said.

House collapse

Speaking of Tuesday's bombing, a security official said: "There were women and children among the victims, including 12 people from the same family killed or wounded when their nearby house collapsed."

US soldiers joined their Iraqi counterparts in securing the scene.
The carnage came despite a massive security operation by US and Iraqi forces, and one day after a series of bombings in market areas killed at least 79 people outright and saw 165 taken to hospital.

In the Mansur district, near where Tuesday's suicide bomber struck, traffic was funnelled on to main roads by concrete barricades and protected by Iraqi checkpoints.

Brigadier-General Abdel Karim Khalaf said that three suspects - including two whom he described as "Asians" - were being interrogated after being arrested following Monday's blitz on the capital's commercial centre.

"If I told you any more, it would hurt the investigation, but we are making progress," the interior ministry operations chief told AFP.

Terrible blow

The attacks - three car bombs in a bustling wholesale trading area and an explosive device in a popular market area - struck a terrible blow to Nuri al-Maliki's authority as he paraded his security plan.

Television coverage of a speech the Iraqi prime minister gave on Monday calling on Iraqis to back the deployment of thousands of police and military reinforcements showed his team flinching as the sound of the explosion echoed round Baghdad.

On Tuesday, his troops were once more out in force, manning checkpoints around the city, but for many war-weary Iraqis the timing and scale of the attacks confirmed suspicions that the situation is beyond his control.


‘Security forces’ rob Baghdad academics

Hala Jaber and Ali Rifaat

WHEN Iraqi soldiers and police smashed their way into Mohammed al-Jabouri’s home on the first day of Baghdad’s latest security crackdown last week, he did not imagine they would steal the family’s life savings.

The security forces separated the men from the women and then ordered Jabouri’s wife to give them a suitcase filled with jewellery and £20,000 in cash. When she argued they threatened to shoot her. Then they destroyed the furniture and broke the windows of the cars in the garage.

“The same militiamen who used to raid our areas in the past are now conducting the security crackdown, using this as a chance to attack us further,” Jabouri said.

Later the same night, security forces raided a compound containing the homes of 110 university professors and their families. Professor Hameed al-Aathami described what happened: “They dragged us out of our beds as we slept with our wives and children, took us outside, bound our hands and blindfolded us. They beat, cursed and insulted us.”

Dr Salah Bidayat, the dean of the school of law, fired two shots from his licensed gun in the air to get the soldiers’ attention. “They caught him, lay him on the ground and proceeded to beat, kick and curse him in the most aggressive manner and when he explained we were teachers and professors they told him you are all a bunch of asses and terrorists,” Aathami said.
"They gathered all the men in the centre of the compound and proceeded to their homes, where they broke furniture, stole money, mobile telephones and jewellery as we sat outside listening to our women and children scream and cry," he said.

“It was very hard for us to go through this. This is the security crackdown they have been bragging about. There is no such thing as a security plan; it is all an attempt to rid the country of the few remaining educated and decent people,” said Aathami, who is planning to leave Iraq as soon as he can.

Baghdad’s latest security offensive was intended to regain neighbourhoods from Shi’ite militiamen and Sunni insurgents. Many believe the advance publicity surrounding the crackdown allowed many militiamen to escape.

American and Iraqi military yesterday reported a drop in violence in Baghdad since the start of the security offensive. They attributed the success to increased troop presence but also to a decision by Sunni and Shi’ite militants to lie low. Sources close to Moqtada al-Sadr, the leader of the Iranian-backed Mahdi Army, confirmed that he had fled Iraq for Iran at dawn on February 8 with 27 senior aides.


**Iraqi Professors Targeted in Baghdad Security**

**No Indication Why Housing Compound Was Suspect**

02/21/2007 10:46 AM ET

One night last week, Iraqi security forces, as part of the operation to secure Baghdad, raided a compound housing 110 homes of university professors and their families.

Professor Hameed al-Aathami told a correspondent from The Times of London how the raid went down:

"They dragged us out of our beds as we slept with our wives and children, took us outside, bound our hands and blindfolded us. They beat, cursed and insulted us."

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- Death batters at the doors of Iraq’s universities - 28 Feb 2007.
Death batters at the doors of Iraq’s universities

By Michaela Cancela-Kieffer

BAGHDAD: The Iraqi minister was at a loss. “What can we do?” he asked in a trembling voice after a woman suicide bomber detonated an explosive vest at a Baghdad business college, slaughtering 40 people.

“We cannot search everybody,” he said, recounting how the sectarian violence gripping the country has driven away students and teachers alike, threatening the futures of tens of thousands of young Iraqis.

Higher Education Minister Abed Dhiab al-Ujaili, who describes himself as an “optimist” despite Iraq’s relentless descent into chaos, said the blast came as students were preparing for examinations.

Security officials said most of those killed in Sunday’s blast at the entrance to Mustansiriyah University’s School of Economy and Administration in eastern Baghdad were students.

Such acts of violence, linked to attacks in which lecturers and professors are deliberately targeted, have taken a heavy toll on higher education in war-ravaged Iraq, according to students and teaching staff.

Nevertheless, Ujaili says student numbers have in fact increased to around 380,000, but he acknowledges that at least 195 university professors have been killed and another 60 kidnapped since the sectarian violence erupted a year ago.

Thousands more academics have fled the country, he said.

With the academic year severely disrupted, the ministry has announced that mid-term exams that are due about now can be postponed if necessary.

“We have a standard: the syllabus must be covered and the actual attendance must be at least 30 weeks of the year,” Ujaili said. “We gave colleges the flexibility to choose the date for mid-term exams because some colleges were late.” Daily bombings and mortar and gun attacks in Baghdad have made students and teachers fear for their lives.

In Baghdad universities, class attendance varies from 20 to 70 per cent, depending on the perceived danger level. “It is not good,” a university lecturer from the University of Baghdad, who asked not to be named, told AFP a few days before the School of Economy and Administration blast.

“You know the circumstances. It is very difficult to work. The road is not safe, the university is not safe,” added the 63-year-old lecturer.

She risks going only once a week to give classes at her campus.

“I usually change the day and I have a bodyguard,” she said.

When the universities are affected “society collapses,” she added. “We need training very, very much because we were very closed (during Saddam Hussein’s rule) and did not know what was happening in the world.” She said her students, both Shia and Sunnis, get along well.

“The problem is political, it is not social. Students do get along. There is no problem to live together. This is Iraq – we already did so.” A political science student spelt out some of the hardships of trying to attain a degree in a country sliding towards civil war.—AFP
Iraqi scholars fighting for an education
By Hugh Sykes
BBC News, Baghdad

Violence, and fear of violence, are corroding educational standards in Iraq.

Even the planning expert at the Ministry of Education, Nabil al Mira, admitted to me that he keeps his 15-year-old son at home after bomb attacks in Baghdad.

He only lets him go back to school when the city has been quiet for two days.

So his son has been at home a lot.

Getting to school or university is a daily struggle.

Students and teachers are frequently delayed by bomb attacks, or by traffic jams near checkpoints.

At a primary school, 10-year-old Ali tells me: "I want Baghdad to be Dar-es-Salaam as it used to be."
Dar-es-Salaam - City of Peace - is an old name for the Iraqi capital.

In the English department at Baghdad University, linguistics teacher Shatha al Jeidi sniffs and struggles to hold back tears.

"From the moment I get out of my house, I think of inevitable death, at any moment... that I may not see my family again and they fear the same," she said.

Exam challenges

She says her students have to endure this too - so how, she wonders, can they concentrate on their studies and do well?

Students sit the same exams on different days depending on when they can get to campus. They have to be trusted not to reveal the questions to their friends.

On a bookshelf, there are four photographs of colleagues who have been killed. One shows a smiling middle-aged man with gold-rimmed spectacles and a moustache. This was Rafi.

Rafi, an English-language lecturer, received a warning one day not to give low marks. He ignored the warning and continued to apply the usual standards to students' exam papers.

Rafi was shot dead getting into his car to go to work at the university.

Bullet threat

Two other lecturers have received death threats.

One found a bullet on her desk with her name written on it.

Another came to work one morning to find a message scrawled on her office wall: "Warning - you risk the same fate as Rafi."
Students have been threatened too. A 19-year-old told me a man approached her near her home, and said women shouldn't study, and that she would be killed if she carried on going to college.

She is still going to college.

Story from BBC NEWS:
http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/middle_east/6491443.stm

- Hassan Khalid Hayderi, Iraq “Either you give us good marks or you will die” - IRIN, 05 April 2007.

**IRAQ: Hassan Khalid Hayderi, Iraq “Either you give us good marks or you will die”**

BASRA, 5 April 2007 (IRIN) - Hassan Khalid Hayderi, 54, is a professor of mathematics at Basra University, 550km south of the capital, Baghdad. He and his family are leaving Iraq as soon as his brother finds him a job in Jordan because he has received death threats from students demanding easy exams and better marks.

“After 20 years as professor of mathematics in Basra and Baghdad, I have decided to leave my job and the country. Teachers in Iraq have been targeted since the US-led invasion in 2003, but from February last year our situation has worsened because of threats from inside our classrooms.

“Students started demanding easier exams and if they don’t pass the year, it might mean your death. Either you give good marks or you are going to be killed.

“When I leave my home every morning to go to the university, I fear a bullet is going to rip through my head or chest. I constantly find notes with demands of good marks or sometimes shorter lessons from students on my desk.

“Lessons that used to last for one hour are given nowadays in half-an-hour to meet such requests.

“Two of my colleagues have been killed in the past months for refusing to cater to such requests. Sometimes even fathers come after you asking for good marks for their sons. Once I refused to listen to one of them and the result was the kidnapping of my 23-year-old son, Abdel-Kader. He was released after I let a student - who scored very badly in exams - pass the year.

“A week ago I received another threat. I know who sent it. It is a student who failed an exam before the summer holiday. Unfortunately in this case, he is not asking for a better mark, he said outright that he was going to kill me because his father beat him due to his poor marks.

“The situation is even worse for women teachers. You barely find them giving lessons because most of them either have fled the country or have been forced to leave the colleges. Today, they are suffering without a job to support their kids.

“The government isn’t doing anything to protect us. In the southern areas especially you depend on [local] tribes to give you the minimum of protection but with violence increasing, even tribal leaders are becoming useless. The best way to guarantee your life and the life of your family is to flee Iraq.

“The only thing that I ask from God is protection until I leave this hell that Iraq has turned into so that I can save myself and my family.”

as/at/mw

- Blood on Textbooks: Campuses Under Fire - 16 April 2007
Blood on Textbooks: Campuses Under Fire
As VA Tech Mourns, Iraq Universities Know Violence's Toll
04/16/2007 8:59 PM ET

The nation reacted in horror as students counted their dead by the dozens, all innocent victims of an indiscriminate attack violating the sanctity of the university campus.

Today, it’s Virginia Tech, the site of a horrific mass murder in which at least 33 students are confirmed dead in a shooting rampage by an as-yet unidentified gunman.

In Iraq, universities struggling to operate in the midst of a war zone have been struck repeatedly by bombings, shootings, assassinations, and abductions that have left behind hundreds of killed and wounded, victims and forced thousands of students and professors to stay away, or even leave the country.

On Monday, the same day as the Virginia Tech mass shooting, two separate shooting incidents struck Mosul University, one killing Dr. Talal Younis al-Jelili, the dean of the college of Political Science as he walked through the university gate, and another killing Dr. Jaafar Hassan Sadeq, a professor from the Faculty of Arts at the school, who was targeted in front of his home in the al-Kifaat area, according to Aswat al-Iraq.

In January, Baghdad’s Mustansiriya University suffered a double suicide bombing in January that killed at least 70 people, including students, faculty, and staff. A month later, another suicide bomber struck at Mustansiriya, killing 40.

Kidnappings of students and faculty are another all-too-common occurrence on Iraq’s campuses. Members of the university community have been abducted and murdered for sectarian reasons, or simply held for ransom. At a Baghdad University, one student reported to Slogger that he was
abducted by sectarian thugs working in cooperation with the National Guard Forces who were supposed to be protecting the campus.

In January, students reported that violent events so threatened students that attendance rates at Baghdad University had dropped to six percent.

Earlier this month, the Dr. Qais Jawad al-Azzawi, head of the Geneva-based Committee International Committee of Solidarity with Iraqi Professors said that 232 university professors were killed and 56 were reported missing in Iraq, while more than 3,000 others had left the country after the 2003 invasion.

In January, the Ansar al-Sunna, a militant organization, distributed leaflets at threatening students and staff with violence if they did not refrain from attending university until Fall 2007, in what may have been a precursor to some of the violent attacks.

Photo by Wathiq Khuzaie/Getty.

Students look at the scene of two explosions in front of Mustansiriya University on January 16.
Stop the Assassination of Iraqi Academics!

A campaign of The Russell Tribunal and Campaña Estatal contra la Ocupación y por la Soberanía de Iraq.

Photo by Ali al-Saadi/AFP.

Bodies of Iraqi students in the back of a police vehicle at Mustansiriya University, January 16.

Photo by Ahmad al-Rubaye/AFP.

Iraqi university students carry a banner reading "We condemn the barbaric terrorist attacks against Mustansiriyah University’s students" during a demonstration outside Baghdad’s Technological University, 17 January 2007.
Stop the Assassination of Iraqi Academics!

A campaign of The BRussell's Tribunal and

Campaña Estatal contra la Ocupación y por la Soberanía de Iraq


Iraq’s education system on the verge of collapse.
Only an end to US/UK occupation can stop the liquidation of Iraq's academics.

Dirk Adriaensens, member of the BRussell's Tribunal executive committee (18 April 2007)
Read also: Despite Baghdad "Security" plan: increase in assassinations of Iraqi academics

(Dirk Adriaensens, 19 April 2007)

[El sistema educativo de Iraq al borde de la quiebra]

1. The assassination of Iraqi academics continues unabated.

- Dr. Khalid al-Naid

When we were celebrating Easter, the following sad message arrived in the BRussells Tribunal mailbox, sent by Dr. Saad Jawad, professor of political science at Baghdad University, head of Iraq's University Professors Association, and member of our Advisory Committee.

This is in memory of the brutal assassination of Dr. Khalid al-Naid, Dean Assistant, Medical College, al-Nahrain University

With great sadness and sorrow and on behalf of Khalid’s family, I'm writing to inform you of his murder by militias on Thursday 29th March 2007, twelve hours after he arrived from Australia.

He arrived in Baghdad on the evening of Wednesday 28th and could not go to see his wife and newly born son Tariq who was born when he was with you in Australia.

The next day he went to the Nahrain Medical school to report his return and do some paper
work. His wife and newborn son were supposed to come from their grandfather’s house across sectarian city divides to see him.

He only stayed in the Medical School for 3 hrs and left with a colleague. He was picked at the gate and taken by the Militia which controls the area of the Medical School. His body was dumped few kilometres away with five bullets in his head and neck.

I am his cousin and Godfather. His wife’s son and the rest of the family would like the world to know how cruel and lawless Iraq has become. Scientist are a prime target and Khalid was threatened with death a year or so ago but he always said: “I have harmed no one, and never believed the cruelty of a civil war.”

His marriage was a mixed one and his priorities in life revolved around his scientific work.

Khalid’s father, the late Prof Hamdi was the Dean of Baghdad Medical School and my Mentor. We would like to have any additional information from you relating to his latest work as we plan to write to scientific and other news organisations on the realities in today’s Iraq. It is entirely up to yourselves if you feel you would like to report this murder to the Scientific press in Australia.

May god bless Khalid and give his wife Manal and his son Tariq the strength to carry on .

Another horrendous murder, another Iraqi intellectual’s life wasted.

- Prof Dr Majid Naser Husien al-Ma’amoori

We keep on receiving messages from Iraqi professors who report the killings of colleagues:

Dear Dirk,
I am sorry to bother you again. I know it is sad news but I have no other choice because you are the only organization to document the assassinations of Iraqi academics.

Prof Dr Majid Naser Husien al-Ma'amoori was killed just outside Veterinary College, Baghdad University on 17 Feb 2007.

Kind regards

Dr. Ali

- Professor Dr Tala Al-Jalili and Professor Jaffer Hasan Sadiq

On April 16 we received the following message from Dr. Ismail Kaidar Jalili, Chair and Secretary General of National Association of British Arabs (NABA):

**We’d like to report the assassination of 2 academics in Mosul today Monday 16th April 2007**

2:37

The assassination of Professor Dr Tala Al-Jalili, Dean of Faculty of Political Sciences in Mosul University this morning Monday 16th April 2007 in front of his faculty at AL-Majmou’a Al-Thaqafiya, east (left) bank of Mosul.

12:14

The assassination of Jaffer Hasan Sadiq, Professor at the Department of History, Faculty of Humanities, Mosul University in front of his house in Al-Kafaa’at district, north east of Mosul City.

The massacre of Iraqi intellectuals hasn’t stopped since the invasion of 2003. The number of assassinations has not decreased since the Brussels Tribunal started a campaign to save Iraq’s academics, in cooperation with the Spanish based CEOSI (Campaña Estatal contra la Ocupación y por la Soberanía de Iraq) [1]. To the contrary. Since the beginning of 2006 more than 100 academics have been assassinated, according to our sources. And as the cases above show: an end of the killings is not in sight.

2. Brain drain and murder threaten Iraq’s academia.
Since the war began in 2003, hundreds of Iraqi academics have been kidnapped and/or murdered - and thousands more have fled for their lives (...). So far more than 470 academics have been killed. Buildings have been burnt and looted in what appears to be a random spree of violence aimed at Iraqi academia[2].

The Iraqi minister of education has said that 296 members of education staff were killed in 2005 alone. According to the UN office for humanitarian affairs 180 teachers have been killed since 2006, up to 100 have been kidnapped and over 3,250 have fled the country[3][4]. The BRussells Tribunal’s list of murdered Iraqi academics contains 302 names[5]. Anyone who can help us in documenting the killings, the threats and forced emigration of Iraqi academics is welcome to write us: we’re not planning to give up monitoring, certainly not now, at a time when our solidarity is needed most.

Also yesterday we received a message from an Iraqi professor, who has been able to escape the Iraqi Armageddon:

\begin{quote}
Dear Mr. Dirk Adriaensens,

I am a female Iraqi academic forced to leave Iraq on 2 August 2006. On 17 July 2006 I was kidnapped, tortured and threatened to be killed with my daughter if didn’t leave Iraq within few days. I have a PhD in (omitted) and was a member of staff at (omitted), University of Technology in Baghdad, Iraq.

I had no time to contact the Iraqi Academic Association to report the incident because I hid when received the threat until I fled Iraq.
\end{quote}
Thank you for your effort to document the assassinations and threats to Iraqi academics. The real situation in Iraq is much worse than anything mentioned in the news or any report. Not all the incidents were documented in your website. Personally, I knew many academics at University of Technology were threatened and forced to flee Iraq after the occupation and for one reason or another they might not have the time to report the threats to the Iraqi Academic Association. Among them Head of Control and Systems Eng. Dept., Prof Dr Ali Althamir, Spectrum specialist at Applied Sciences Dept., Dr Mohammad Radhi, a member of staff at Building and Construction Dept., Dr Ghanim Abdul Rahman and many others.

The Ministry of Displacement and Migration said that at least 30 per cent of the total numbers of professors, doctors, pharmacists and engineers in Iraq have fled to neighbouring countries like Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and United Arab States (UAE) but some have travelled to as far as the US, Canada, Australia and Britain. He noted that the numbers of academics fleeing the country or killed could be higher and the ministry has no latest figures.[6]

The universities, which are directly linked to Iraq’s future, are on the verge of collapse.[2]

A report issued by the United Nations in 2005 found that fully 84 percent of Iraq’s higher education facilities had been “destroyed, damaged and robbed” since the US invasion.

The intimidation campaign against educational institutes persists. On 11 December 2006, a car bomb exploded in a car park of Al-Ma’amoon College in Al-Iskan district in Baghdad, killing one person and injuring four. One student was killed and another 6 injured in a roadside bomb explosion on the same morning in front of the Al-Mustansiriyyah University.[8]

On 16 January 2007, at least 65 students were killed and 110 others injured in a double attack on targeting Al-Mustansiriyyah University in Baghdad.

Violence since the U.S.-led invasion nearly four years ago has driven thousands of students away, with enrollment off by more than half at some universities in the past year alone, officials say. Universities in other parts of the country are open, but have become deserted.
The situation of total absence of law and security has also led to a worsening situation because of threats from inside the classrooms. Hassan Khalid Hayderi, 54, is a professor of mathematics at Basra University, 550km south of the capital, Baghdad. He and his family are leaving Iraq because he has received death threats from students demanding easy exams and better marks. “The situation is even worse for women teachers. You barely find them giving lessons because most of them either have fled the country or have been forced to leave the colleges. Today, they are suffering without a job to support their kids. The government isn’t doing anything to protect us. In the southern areas especially you depend on [local] tribes to give you the minimum of protection but with violence increasing, even tribal leaders are becoming useless.” [82]

3. Iraq’s education system in shambles.

Universities are not the only sector of Iraqi education that is collapsing. On 29 January 2007 an attack against a girls’ school in Baghdad left five students dead and more than 20 injured [9]. Mohammed Abdul-Aziz, a statistician at the Ministry of Education, told IRIN that at least 110 children had been killed and 95 injured since 2005 in attacks on schools. These numbers do not include children killed or injured on their way to or from school.[10]

The violence against education institutions and teachers has also prompted a sharp decline in school attendance. According to recent statistics from the Ministry of Education, only about 30 percent of Iraq’s 3.5 million school-aged children are currently attending classes, compared to 75 percent in the previous school year [11],

The International Medical Corps reports that populations of teachers in Baghdad have fallen by 80% and medical personnel seem to have left in disproportionate numbers [12].

The Iraq Index, compiled by the Brookings Institution in Washington, released on 16 April 2007, estimated that up to 40 percent of Iraq’s professionals have fled the country since 2003 [13].

According to a report released last year by NGO Save the Children, 818,000 primary school-aged children, representing 22 percent of Iraq’s student population, were not attending school. [14]

A joint study by the Iraqi Ministry of Education and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) found that of those who do not attend school, 74 percent are female. Aid agencies estimate that
Stop the Assassination of Iraqi Academics!

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thousands of Iraqi parents do not send their daughters to school for cultural reasons and because of the general insecurity in the country. [15]

They add that schools and universities are likely to continue emptying throughout 2007 if there is no let up to current levels of violence and the displacement it causes.

\textbf{4. The Occupation is responsible}

Iraqi professors direct most of their ire towards the failed U.S. occupation. Dr. Bakaa, who was also president of Iraq’s second largest university, Al Mustansiriyah University, from 2003 to 2004, says he had received almost no additional funding for academic life since the occupation. Buildings destroyed during the first Gulf War were rebuilt in two months under Saddam’s regime, yet the Americans have repaired nothing, he said. When professors are threatened or killed, there is never any investigation. [16]

“Iraqi professors are being killed by everyone, and nobody has told us if any killers have been caught. Nothing has been done,” Dr. Saad Jawad says. “One U.S. soldier was kidnapped and Baghdad is on full alert, but the killing of an Iraqi professor? Nothing happens.” [17]

The incident on Tuesday 14 November, when paramilitary gunmen in the uniforms of Iraqi National Police commandos raided a building belonging to the Ministry of Education in Baghdad’s Karrada district and arrested around 100 members of staff from two departments and around 50 visitors, in broad daylight, 1km from the Green Zone, exposed the extent of the danger facing educators, and particularly those in higher education. An unknown number of those arrested was later found killed, and again, there was no investigation. [18] Again, there was ample evidence of involvement of Iraqi official bodies, creating chaos and mayhem instead of establishing security. It is equally clear that US authorities in Iraq have no interest in carrying out an investigation or restraining the killers.

\textbf{5. Who is eliminating Iraq’s middle class?}

Nor the Iraqi puppet government, nor the Iraqi police, nor the US occupation forces can guarantee security, education, healthcare, electricity or any other basic needs. To the contrary: there are plenty of
indications that the US and UK can be held responsible for many of the “terrorist” activities, and involvement in death squads activities.

A. MILITIAS.

Long before the invasion, the US and its allies were involved in the training and arming of tens of thousands of militias and anti-Iraq collaborators. The most conspicuous of these militia groups are:

1. The Iraqi National Congress (INC) led by Ahmed Chalabi.

2. The Iraqi National Accord (INA) led by Iyad Allawi, the U.S./Britain most preferred ‘strongman’.

Both groups constitute of Iraqi expatriates (including ex-Ba’athists), trained and armed by the U.S. and Britain.

3. The Badr Brigade, the armed wing of the Da’awa/SCIRI religious ‘parties’ led by Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, Ibrahim al-Jaafari and Nuri al-Maliki. This group constitutes of thousands of Iraqi expatriates and illegal Iranian immigrants expelled from Iraq in the 1980’s. The group is trained and heavily armed by Iran and the U.S.

4. The Kurdish militia (the Peshmerga) led by warlords were trained and armed by the U.S. and Israel. [19]

There is also the Sadr movement (known as the Mehdi Army), led by Muqtada al-Sadr. The movement has been accused of many crimes and sectarian killings since the Sadr movement entered the political process.

Since the invasion, each militia group has mutated into several groups of death squads and criminal gangs such as the Wolf Brigade, the Karar Brigade, the Falcon Brigade, the Amarah Brigade, the Muthana Brigade, the Defenders of Kadhimiyah, and the special police commandos. They are armed and financed by the U.S. and its allies, and fully integrated into the Occupation. Each group is carefully used by the occupying forces for terrorising the Iraqi civilian population in a campaign designed to erode the civilian population’s support for the Iraqi Resistance against the Occupation. U.S. military sources have openly admitted that the population, where support for the Resistance is high, “is paying no price for the support it is giving to the [Resistance] … We have to change that equation”, (Newsweek, 14 January 2004). In other words, Iraqis civilians are deliberately targeted for rejecting the Occupation, writes Ghali Hassan. [20]
B. BRITISH TERRORISTS IN IRAQ.

An article in the Sunday Telegraph points towards evidence that a secretive and elite unit of the British army is actively engaged in recruiting and training Iraqi insurgents and terrorists as double agents. It is led by Lt. Col. Gordon Kerr, heading the Special Reconnaissance Regiment (SRR), a large counter-terrorism force made up of unnamed “existing assets” from the glory days in Northern Ireland and elsewhere. And America’s covert soldiers are right there with them, working side-by-side with their British comrades in the aptly named “Task Force Black,” the UK’s Sunday Telegraph reports. [21]

This confirms what many have speculated for a long time, that Britain and the US are deeply involved in bombings and attacks inside Iraq which are subsequently attributed either to Sunni insurgents or shadowy terrorist cells such as “Al Qaeda in Iraq”. Conclusion: there is clear evidence British special forces are recruiting, training terrorists to heighten ethnic tensions. An elite SAS wing with bloody past in Northern Ireland operates with immunity and provides advanced explosives [22]. Some attacks are being blamed on Iranians [23].

C. FACILITIES PROTECTION SERVICES.

There is also the claim of Iraq’s interior minister Jawad al-Bolani, speaking to a small group of reporters in Baghdad on October 12 2006, who blamed the Facilities Protection Service, or FPS, a massive but unregulated government guard force whose numbers he put at about 150,000. [24] “Whenever we capture someone, we rarely find anyone is an employee of the government ministries,” Bolani said. “When they are, they’ve turned out to be mostly from the FPS, with very few individual, actual incidents involving anyone from the Ministry of Interior or Ministry of Defense.” [25]

Private US and UK security firms are closely allied to Mr. Bremer’s ‘Facilities Protection Service’ programme in Iraq. Newsweek (24.04.06) suggested 146,000 belong to this ‘security’ force. The former Interior Minister, Bayan Jabr, associated the FPS with the endemic ‘death squads’ operating inside the police forces, which are hastening the disintegration of Iraq [26] So definitely these mercenaries are involved in covert operations.

D. SPECIAL POLICE COMMANDOS.
According to Greg Jaffe of the Wall Street Journal, the “special police commandos” are being used throughout Iraq and have been conducting criminal assassinations known as the “Salvador option” with the full knowledge of U.S. forces. There is ample evidence of that in the articles on the BRussells Tribunal website [27] and in the articles of Max Fuller [28]. According to an article recently published in New York Times Magazine, in September 2004 Counsellor to the US Ambassador for Iraqi Security Forces James Steele was assigned to work with a new elite Iraqi counter-insurgency unit known as the Special Police Commandos, formed under the operational control of Iraq’s Interior Ministry.

From 1984 to 1986 then Col. Steele had led the US Military Advisory Group in El Salvador, where he was responsible for developing special operating forces at brigade level during the height of the conflict (...) The Police Commandos are in large part the brainchild of another US counter-insurgency veteran, Steven Casteel, a former top DEA man who has been acting as the senior advisor in the Ministry of the Interior. Casteel was involved in the hunt for Colombia’s notorious cocaine baron Pablo Escobar, during which the DEA collaborated with a paramilitary organization known as Los Pepes, which later transformed itself into the AUC, an umbrella organization covering all of Colombia’s paramilitary death squads. [29]

On April 30 2006, the Organisation for Follow-up and Monitoring wrote: “After exact counting and documenting, the Iraqi Organisation for Follow-up and Monitoring has confirmed that 92 % of the 3498 bodies found in different regions of Iraq have been arrested by officials of the Ministry of Interior. Nothing was known about the arrestees’ fate until their riddled bodies were found with marks of horrible torture. It’s regrettable and shameful that these crimes are being suppressed and that several states receive government officials, who fail to investigate these crimes.”

6. Conclusion

All these actors help to destroy the Republic of Iraq, kill and expel its people, annihilate its middle class, all this with the active support of the US occupation. So instead of bringing stability to Iraq, the US occupation is doing everything it possibly can to create chaos and terror, to incite civil war and sectarian strife, in order to defeat the National Popular Resistance and to break the aspirations of the Iraqi people to live in a sovereign state and decide its own future.

Consequently the only possible road to a solution is the total and immediate withdrawal of all foreign troops from Iraqi soil. US forces must negotiate an immediate withdrawal with the Iraqi resistance.
Stop the Assassination of Iraqi Academics!

The peace movement has to understand that these demands are crucial to achieve a peaceful solution. Then, and only then can the elimination and exodus of Iraq’s academics and Iraq’s middle class be stopped.

In the meantime people can still support the Bersisters Tribunal campaign by signing the Petition to save Iraq’s academics: http://www.petitiononline.com/Iraqacad/petition.html. 10.000 persons already endorsed the petition.

We urge Iraqi academics to distribute the questionnaires to be completed by affected families and send them to info@brusseltribunal.org.

Academics of Western universities can show their solidarity by developing initiatives to help their exiled Iraqi colleagues.

More resources and information about the Iraqi Academics’ killing fields can be found at http://www.brusseltribunal.org/AcademicsResources.htm

Dirk Adriaensens, member of the BRussells Tribunal executive committee (18 April 2007)

[2] http://education.independent.co.uk/higher/article2049192.ece
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[22] http://www.brusselstribunal.org/BritishBombers.htm#britishbombers
[26] The jumping off point for this research was E. Knickmeyer's Washington Post story Iraq Nears Consolidation of Paramilitary Unit (11.05.06) and Iraq Begins to Rein In Paramilitary Force (14.05.06)


**Despite Baghdad "Security” plan: increase in assassinations of Iraqi academics**

Dirk Adriaensens, member of the BRussells Tribunal executive committee (19 April 2007)

The following is the complete translation of a document (copied underneath) issued by the Iraqi Association of University Professors and lecturers. The Association protests against the deterioration of the security situation in the universities, and the growing number of assassinations among academic personnel.

March 2007 was a deadly month for Iraq's academics, despite the "surge" of US troops, despite the different security plans. They all failed and will continue to fail, because, to put it in very simple words: the Iraqis don't want foreign occupation.
The new security plan of "gated communities" - whose genesis was in the Vietnam War - has been used - and has spectacularly failed - in the past. The system of "gating" areas under foreign occupation failed during the French war against FLN insurgents in Algeria and again during the American war in Vietnam. Israel has employed similar practices during its occupation of Palestinian territory - again, with little success", writes Robert Fisk in the Independent on April 11.

How much more useless blood must be spilled before the US understands that it has to leave Iraq? That it's time for them to go? How much more educators must be assassinated before the international community fulfils its duty and denounces the illegal occupation of Iraq?

THE ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS AND LECTURERS

Date : 7.4.2007

STATEMENT ABOUT THE CONTINUING ATTACKS ON STUDENTS, PROFESSORS AND LECTURERS

As part of the continuing and unceasing criminal attacks on university lecturers and Iraqi education facilities, terrorist groups have carried out the killing and attempted assassinations a number of university lecturers. They have assassinated the following:

1- Dr. Ridha Abdul Hussein Al Qureaishi

Mustansiriya University

Assistant to Dean of The Management and Economics College

Kidnapped on Wednesday 28.3.2007 and found assassinated on Thursday 29th March 2007.
Stop the Assassination of Iraqi Academics!

A campaign of The B\textit{Russell}s Tribunal and

Campaign Estatal contra la Ocupación y por la Soberanía de Iraq

2 - Prof. Dr. Khalid Tariq Al Naid

Assistant ot Dean of Medical School for Higher Studies

Al Nahrain University

Kidnapped on Wednesday 28th March and found assassinated on Thursday 29th March 2007 in The Morgue.

3 - Professor Khalid AL Hassan

Secretary to Dean of Political Science College

Baghdad University

Found assassinated in March 2007

4 - Dr. Munthir Ahmed Al Ani

(Medical)

Found assassinated with his wife and 2 sons, by the militias, in Al Seydiyya District on Saturday 31st March 2007

5 - The Physicist, Thair Ahmed Jebr,

Physics Department

College of Science

El Nehrain University


in the terrorist bombing of Al Baghdadiya Satellite Station
6 - The Lecturer, Ameer Mekki El Zihairi
Technology Institute of Baghdad
Assassinated March 2007

7 - Prof. Dr. Sami Sitrak
Prof. of English in The College of Law
Al Nahrain University

Was acting Dean of the College of Law, since the resignation of the Dean after an attempted terrorist attack as well as after the assassination of the 3 Law Professors on the 29th March 2007

We hold The Iraqi Government and The Occupation Forces responsible for the deterioration of the security situation in the universities, and we hold them responsible for the targeting of the lecturers, the educational and scientific facilities, the students and the staff. We demand that the Iraqi Government takes up its responsibilities and orders a serious investigation and takes all necessary measures to protect the lecturers, students and universities. We ask them to protect this important aspect of the Iraqi Society as well as to expose those who are committing these ugly crimes, which have increased exponentially as a result of the total absence of law enforcement, the lack of investigation into these crimes, and as a result of the cover-up at times.

Signed by

Dr. Ahmed Kamal Ahmed
Head of The Association
Stop the Assassination of Iraqi Academics!
A campaign of The Russell Tribunal and
Campaña Estatal contra la Ocupación y por la Soberanía de Iraq

بيان حول تواصل الاعتداءات على أساتذة الجامعات والطلبة

هم الله الرحمن الرحيم

 ضمن مسلسل الاعتداءات الإجرامية المتواصل دون انقطاع على أساتذة الجامعات والكفاءات العراقية، قامت مجموعات إرهابية بقتل ومحاولة اغتيال عدد من أساتذة الجامعات فقد اعتقل كل من:


3 - الأساتذة محمد سمير / أحد أساتذة كلية العلوم السياسية / جامعة بغداد اعتقل في عام 2007.


لا ندري ولكن الحكومة العراقية والقوات المسلحة مسؤولة عن التدهور الأمني في الجامعات وانتشار الأعمال الإرهابية والمتجهة نحو الطلبة والمعلمين. ويقومنا نطالب الحكومة العراقية بتحمل مسؤوليتها معتمدة على إعداد حماية المستفيدين من هذه الاضطهادات والاعتداءات. نثمن جميع الذين يعانون الإحرامات ونثمن كل من يساهم في تحقيق هذه الاعتداءات ونثمن كل من يساهم في تحقيق هذه الاعتداءات.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

رئيس الدراسة
د. أحمد خالد العباد

المدرسة العليا
Stop the Assassination of Iraqi Academics!
A campaign of The Russell Tribunal and
Campana Estructural contra la Ocupacion y por la Soberania de Iraq

- Doctor father who was never to see his son - Sunday Times, 29 April 2007.

Doctor father who was never to see his son
For four months after the birth of her first baby Tariq, Manal al-Musawi yearned to see her husband return to Iraq from his research post at an Australian cancer hospital and hold the child close, writes Hala Jaber.

Professor Kahlid al-Naib had started his job at the Peter Mac-Callum Cancer Centre in Melbourne while she was seven months pregnant, leaving her in the care of her family. She had missed him desperately.

But when he telephoned last month to surprise her with the news that he had just landed in Baghdad, her euphoria was tempered by an outbreak of fighting that prevented him from making the 25-mile journey from the mainly Shi'ite west of Baghdad to their flat in the predominantly Sunni district of Ghazaliya in the east.

“He said it was too dangerous to cross the city and he did not want to risk either of our lives,” Musawi explained. He ended the call with the words: “I will see you tomorrow. I can’t wait.”

Excitedly, Musawi started to prepare a lunch of his favourite things for the following day. Because their flat had been damaged by a bomb, she decided to serve it at her cousin’s house nearby. She dug out her video camera to film the first meeting of father and son - the first kisses, hugs and smiles.

At the same time, Musawi, 40, was acutely aware of the dangers her 43-year-old husband might face once word of his return had spread. Shortly after being invited to Melbourne, he had been sent a handwritten letter.

“Don’t come back to Iraq,” it said. “If you do, we shall cut off your head.”

The only explanation Musawi could think of was that her husband, the vice-dean of the Nahrain medical school, was a Sunni in a Shi’ite-controlled institution.

Musawi, a Shi’ite, a scientist and a university lecturer, initially begged him to stay away. But Naib, an immunologist who was popular with his students, had laughed off the threats.

“I’ve harmed no one, and I don’t believe that I’m going to get dragged into a civil war,” Naib said repeatedly.

While in Australia he had been offered a chance to teach at Mosul University in the Kurdish north of Iraq, where he felt he would be safe. But he needed to pick up some papers from his old medical school so on the morning of Thursday, March 29, he popped into his office on the way home. It was to prove a terrible mistake.

While he was chatting to friends, someone tipped off the local Shi’ite militia. As he left to see his wife and son, a car filled with Mahdi Army gunmen swooped past. He was ordered to get inside.

Across town Musawi was dreaming of their reunion when the telephone interrupted her reverie.

“I was holding our baby when our friend called to tell me the bad news. When I heard the word ‘kidnapped’, I started crying and shouting. Someone took the baby away from me,” she sobbed.

The caller, a university colleague, told her to wait by the telephone in case the kidnappers called and demanded a ransom.
“I stayed by the phone for two days. I kept on praying and crying. ‘Please God, keep him alive for me and Tariq, please God return him alive to me and Tariq’,” she said. “It was impossible for me to think that he might not be coming back.”

But the call that came on Saturday morning was from Baghdad’s main morgue, al-Tub al-Adli, where thousands of corpses dumped by death squads have been taken over the past two years.

As a prominent doctor, Naib was immediately recognised by the forensic team processing his body, which bore the wounds from five bullets fired into his head and neck.

“He never got to see his son,” Musawi said, over and over again. “He was crazy about him. He saw Tariq’s pictures on e-mail and heard him gurgle when I put him on the phone. If only he had seen his son once, my heart would feel less anguished.”

Naib’s ambition was that Tariq would eventually choose a medical career, just as he had followed his own father into the profession.

But in today’s Iraq, this choice would be fraught with risk. “They are targeting the lecturers and scientific people - they are targeting good people and for what?” Musawi asked.

The country’s academic talent is literally bleeding away. Nearly 300 academics have been murdered since 2003 and more than 2,500 have fled the country.

For the educated middle class whose liberal values are despised by the thugs on both sides of the sectarian conflict, there is little choice but to get out.

Musawi is most likely to go to Bahrain where her brother-in-law, also a professor, lives and works. As for Tariq, Musawi vowed to fulfil Naib’s wishes, see the boy through medical school and towards a career in which he can help others.

“I look at Tariq and wonder what will I tell him about his father’s death. I really don’t know what I will say when one day he asks me, ‘Where is my daddy?’”

Fifty-five people were killed and 70 wounded in a car bomb attack in Kerbala yesterday.

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**Iraq’s public education in crisis**

Students brave violence, damaged schools; teacher shortages plague nation

*The Associated Press*

Updated: 5:49 p.m. ET May 14, 2007

BAGHDAD - Saif Abdul-Karim’s path to school is often blocked by car bombings and gunbattles. Many of his teachers have quit. Most of his classmates have dropped out, fearing abduction.

As high school seniors across America giddily try on prom dresses and plan graduation parties, Iraqi students consider just making it to school a cause for celebration.
The security situation is so shaky that some schools have canceled graduation ceremonies and many have closed for weeks at a time. Education officials are in talks with the security services, tribal leaders and politicians to ensure schools are protected when students take final exams next month.

The education crisis mirrors the breakdown of nearly all public institutions across Iraq.

Educators fear, however, that the collapse in schooling will have some of the deepest repercussions for the country, leaving a generation with little education and little hope.

“Iraq’s future is at risk,” said Waleed Hussein, the spokesman for the Education Ministry. “Its children are prevented from getting educated just as the country is in dire need of moving forward.”

Abdul-Karim, a 17-year-old high school senior, senses his envy of American students deepening as the war in his homeland rages. “They can get and do many things, while here we are living in a tragedy,” he said.

Studies interrupted by fighting
Students and educators in Baghdad and in other violence-plagued areas of the country tell harrowing stories of the challenges they face trying to reach graduation day.

Mustafa Ali, an 18-year-old student in Sadr City, says it is difficult for him to study at night — or even to sleep — because of the sound of explosions and gunfire in his Shiite neighborhood from clashes with U.S.-led forces or rival Sunni gangs.

Wajeda Ahmed, the principal of Dijlah primary school for girls in the mostly Sunni Mansour neighborhood of western Baghdad, said the school has no power or drinking water. Nearby roadside bombs and car bombs have damaged the school’s doors and shattered many of its windows. About 25 percent of her students have left because their families have fled the violence, she said.

Mousa Halim, principal of a high school in Diwaniyah, 80 miles south of Baghdad, said a firefight several weeks ago between U.S. soldiers and the radical Shiite Mahdi Army militia outside the school sent students and teachers scrambling to take cover.

“The top priority was to send the students home without any casualties,” he said. “We had to make them jump over the low wall at the back of the school instead of taking the risk of leaving from the main gate near the clashes.”

It took another week before he was able to coax the staff and students back to school, he said.

The general breakdown in society has also eroded traditional classroom discipline. Several students linked to the Mahdi Army threatened their teachers if they did not help them pass exams, Halim said.
“The situation was better” under Saddam Hussein, he said. “There was security and the students used to respect their teachers.”

On Monday, students at the Sahel Ibn Saad high school in Sadr City had to study in the faint sunlight coming through dirty windows because of a power outage. Their desks were cracked and chunks of paint had chipped off the yellow walls.

A Quranic verse pasted over the blackboard in one class read: “God, make this country peaceful.” Next to it was a picture of Muqtada al-Sadr and a quote from the anti-American Shiite cleric calling on Iraqis to unite to force out “the occupiers.”

Abdul-Karim, the high school senior, said four of his teachers at the school quit because of the violence and were replaced by new college graduates with no experience. Only 300 of the school’s 800 students show up anymore, and many of the classes are mostly empty, he said.

Unable to safely get to school

He makes it to school only three days a week because violence often blocks his path. His grade point average has plunged from about 80 to 65, he said. Nevertheless, he hopes to attend college next year and plans to become a journalist to “report the truth and the misery of my people,” he said.

Another student at the school, Ahmed Shawal, said he wanted to be a doctor — “but in such conditions I don’t think I’ll be able to achieve my ambition.”

While many schools are indirectly affected by the violence, others are intentionally targeted, said Hussein, the spokesman for the Education Ministry. Last week, gunmen broke into a primary school in Khalis, 50 miles north of Baghdad, grabbed a teacher and his wife and killed them execution style in front of the horrified students, he said. The motive of the attack was not clear.

More than 300 teachers and Ministry of Education employees were killed last year and 1,158 were wounded, the ministry reported. A U.N. report released last month said the killings continued “at an alarming level” this year.

The attacks have paralyzed the government’s plan to build 1,000 new schools this year and even forced it to close existing schools across the country, Hussein said.

Ahmed Qassim, a 19-year old student at Nissour High School in the northern city of Mosul, was forced to miss three exams during the first semester last year because the bridges linking his house to his school were sealed off. He had to miss the whole second semester because of insecurity.

Now he is repeating his senior year.
Always playing catch-up

With the unrelenting security concerns regularly forcing classes to be canceled, many of his teachers are making up for lost lessons by passing out handwritten lectures to be studied at home, he said. Others are charging for private tutoring sessions at students’ homes to fill in the gaps. Qassim said he has already paid about $55, a substantial sum here, for four private lessons.

The school has abandoned its traditional small graduation ceremony for fear it will be targeted by extremists, Qassim said.

If he manages to graduate, he hopes to leave Iraq, but worries that his education has suffered so badly he will never be able to compete with students abroad.

Though he seethes with envy when he thinks of the relatively easy life of students in America, he hopes eventually to get a scholarship there.

“I want ... to show the Americans the difficulties I had to overcome because of their government’s policy,” he said.

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Iraq’s Universities Near Collapse
Hundreds of professors and students have been killed or kidnapped, hundreds more have fled, and those who remain face daily threats of violence

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Slideshow: View scenes from Iraqi universities. Above, Students at Al-Mustansiriya U.’s college of economy and administration walk through a security checkpoint. (Max Becherer, Polaris)

Article tools
By ZVICKA KRIEGER
Saad Jawad does not like to take chances. The University of Baghdad political-science professor goes to the campus only once or twice a week, varying the days to throw off any would-be assassins. His courses are less than one-third full, and he often has to wait hours until students show up.

When a class does finally convene, he assigns enough work to keep students busy for as long as possible because he does not know when they may meet next.

"I used to attend the college five days a week, stay there, and mix with my students," Mr. Jawad says, by telephone. "Not anymore." He does most of his work and research at home over the Internet, and most of his private meetings with students are by phone.

"Other than my short trips to the campus, I'm at home almost 24 hours a day, seven days a week," he says.

The enormous challenges Mr. Jawad faces every week are just one example of how fragile Iraq's higher-education system has become. Thousands of academics have fled the country, classes are frequently canceled, students often stay away for fear of attack, and research is at a standstill.

Four years ago, in the immediate aftermath of the takeover of Baghdad by U.S. forces, the situation looked, if not promising, then at least possible to improve. A number of American university delegations toured Iraqi campuses, looking for ways to help revive a higher-education system depleted of resources and isolated from the rest of the world during the years Saddam Hussein was in power. And American advisers were lobbying international agencies to rebuild the country's universities.

But then sectarian violence began to mushroom, and academe became one of its earliest targets. Estimates of the number of professors killed since the 2003 invasion range from 250 to 1,000. At the University of Baghdad alone, 78 professors have been killed, according to the London-based Council for Assisting Refugee Academics.

"Terrorism is targeting scholars in an almost unprecedented way," says Allan E. Goodman, president and chief executive of the Institute of International Education, in New York. "It's hard to say there even is a higher-education system in Iraq anymore, with so many students and professors being killed and kidnapped on a daily basis."

For Mr. Jawad, each day seems to bring new horrors. Last month the body of one of his close friends, a professor at Al-Nahrain University College of Medicine, was found a few kilometers from the university with five bullets in his head and neck. The friend had returned hours earlier from a yearlong sabbatical in Australia and was expecting to see his newborn son for the first time.
A few weeks ago, one of the deans at Mr. Jawad’s university disappeared and has not been heard from since. Two months earlier, one of Mr. Jawad’s colleagues in the political-science department was assassinated — one of almost a dozen colleagues whom he has lost to Iraq’s mounting sectarian violence.

In recent months, scores of professors throughout Iraq have encountered bullets sent through internal mail, death threats tacked to their office doors, or anonymous voices on the phone suggesting they not show up for work anymore. The situation has become so grave that the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research recently announced that university researchers may come to campuses just twice a week to reduce the risk of being attacked.

"It is difficult to say that my colleagues are longing to go back to Saddam’s rule," Mr. Jawad says. "But they are longing to go back to some sort of stability and security."

Near Paralysis

To John Agresto, senior adviser to the higher-education ministry in Iraq from 2003 to 2004, it is clear why academics are targets. "University professors are usually more secular than the general population, more open-minded, interested in things other than religious proselytizing, devoted to academic interest more than religious causes," he says. "Their secular nature is what is getting them targeted."

The threats and assassinations have had their desired effect. The Iraqi Ministry of Displacement and Migration estimates that at least 30 percent of all professors, doctors, pharmacists, and engineers in Iraq have fled since 2003. To stem the exodus, the higher-education ministry recently adopted a policy that requires medical and dental students to work in Iraq for several years after graduation in order to receive their diplomas.

"All the students that graduate go to be employed outside Iraq, so now the ministry doesn’t give them their degree right away," said Ahmad Kamal, president of the Iraqi Association of University Lecturers and the head of the physics department at Al-Nahrain University, in Baghdad. "All the students prefer not to work in Iraq because of the danger." The situation has become so grave that many graduates have chosen to leave without their diplomas.

Many classes at universities across Iraq are now being taught by underprepared master’s and Ph.D. students.

"Most of the Iraqi professors do not even know how to use the Internet and the computer," says one high-ranking administrator at a university in one of Iraq’s most dangerous regions, who asks not to be identified for fear of retribution for speaking to an American publication. Two of his colleagues have been killed in recent weeks, he says. He has had to take over supervision of their graduate students in addition to his already heavy workload.

To overcome staff shortages, many universities in Baghdad have begun pooling their resources, says Moussa Jawad Al-Musawi, president of the University of Baghdad.

"But of course the loss of so many professors definitely will affect the performance of the university," he says.

According to Mr. Jawad, the political-science professor, more than 100 courses at the university have been canceled this semester for lack of instructors. At Al-Nahrain University, says Mr. Kamal, some departments have lost all their faculty members.
In addition to assassinations, insurgents have bombed university campuses, killing dozens of students and faculty members. And in their quest to secure sectarian enclaves, militias have made universities throughout the country unsafe for anyone of the "wrong" ethnic group.

The higher-education ministry recently decided to allow students and professors to transfer to other universities in the face of such threats. More than 1,000 academics and 10,000 students chose that option this year. But an even larger number of students, especially women, have stopped going to college altogether, with some universities operating at 10 percent to 20 percent of their usual capacity.

The result is a near paralysis of Iraqi universities. Almost all academic research in Iraq has halted because fieldwork and data collection are nearly impossible. Even the most mundane activities have become a challenge.

"I spoke to one professor in Mosul, who has a Ph.D. from a British university, who has no electricity so has to write his academic papers by hand," says Elizabeth Stone, an archaeologist at the State University of New York at Stony Brook who has been involved in research and researcher training in Iraq. "Who is going to publish that?"

Sectarian politics have also prevented much-needed funds from reaching universities. "The budget for the ministry of higher education and four other ministries combined is equal to the budget of the office of the prime minister to spend at its own discretion, which means bribes," said Isam Khafaji, an economist and former member of the Iraqi Reconstruction and Development Council, in Baghdad. "Terrorism is a major cause for the deterioration of the higher-education system, but corruption is so widespread that no money is coming to the universities."

Sectarian battles have further effects in the classroom. According to a new Unesco report, academic posts that previously were distributed to Baath Party loyalists are now being distributed according to sectarian interests.

The same shift in bias can also be found in the way research money is distributed. "The irony is that under the Baath regime, research grants were given only to members of the Baath Party," Mr. Jawad says. "Now grants are given to members of the sectarian and religious government parties, so nothing has really changed."

Before the invasion, Mr. Jawad says, he used to "encourage students to analyze, to criticize — of course without touching Saddam or his two sons. But we used to assure them that whatever they say is between the students. Now you can speak freely about the Baath Party or the Baath experience, but there are things, like the sectarian way of thinking or sectarian leaders and religious leaders — you cannot touch them or their thinking or even criticize them."

The armed militias that control Iraq have also begun using their power to control curricula.

"One Iraqi professor told me how one day, a group of thugs — young men with guns — showed up in her office, demanding that she add certain things to her curriculum," says Magnus Bernhardsson, an assistant professor of history at Williams College and a member of the American Academic Research Institute in Iraq, who has been involved in various projects with Iraqi academics since 2003. "She was teaching a very traditional humanities syllabus, with Heidegger and Kant, and they demanded she include writing of some radical Shia cleric. Needless to say, she complied."

Unfulfilled Promises From America

Many Iraqi professors are frustrated with the unfulfilled promises made by the U.S. government and American universities.
"In my own college, we received more than 20 to 30 delegations from American universities and coalition forces, all giving promises, assuring us they will help us," Mr. Jawad says. "But we never heard from them again."

American academics who had hoped to help restore Iraq’s higher-education system also despair. They have watched their programs collapse along with the Iraqi security situation.

Ms. Stone, of Stony Brook, was the recipient of a higher-education-development grant from the U.S. government to develop training projects for archaeologists in Iraq.

"We submitted our final work plan a few days before the contractors were strung up in Fallujah," Ms. Stone says, referring to insurgents’ murder and mutilation in March 2004 of four Americans working as security guards. Her project was soon downgraded from three years to one, and then "essentially the plug was pulled by the U.S. government" because of security concerns, she says. "We tried to get Iraqi archaeologists to have field opportunities, but it became too dangerous to do any real fieldwork in Iraq."

The practical difficulties of communicating with Iraqi academics are compounded by the danger faced by any Iraqi suspected of collaborating with the American forces.

After having much success with videoconferencing between his students at Williams and classes at the American University in Cairo and Tel Aviv University, Mr. Bernhardsson approached a colleague at the University of Baghdad to replicate the project with her students.

"We both agreed that it would be great to get young Iraqis and young Americans to talk, to bring down these political boundaries," he says. But when Mr. Bernhardsson offered to provide her with the necessary technical equipment for the videoconferencing, he was briskly rebuffed.

"She said, 'I think I’ve had enough of American charity, thank you,’ and that was the end of it," Mr. Bernhardsson says. "Even having her class associated with some American technology could have a negative affect on their safety."

With going out to buy groceries a matter of life and death, it has also become difficult to find academics concerned with their careers.

"We planned a training session for the use of satellite imaging in tracking archaeological sites," Ms. Stone says, "but one of the participants’ cousins and family all got blown up a few days before, and he couldn’t just leave family behind."

Even efforts at remote communication have been hampered by intermittent access to electricity and phone service in Iraq. "I feel badly not doing more than I'm doing," Ms. Stone says, "but at a certain point it becomes impossible."

Topsy Smalley, an instruction librarian at Cabrillo College, in California, got involved with professors in Iraq through a book drive she helped organize for Iraqi universities in 2003. The first flurry of e-mail messages she received from Iraqi professors were thanks for her books. "The Arabs send us terrorists to kill us and destroy our country while the Americans send us books to help us learn," read one.

But the messages soon turned desperate.

"Terrorists are the master of the city," wrote one high-ranking university administrator last December, to whom Ms. Smalley had sent books. "I hate to ask, but I really need your help."
Stop the Assassination of Iraqi Academics!

One week later, he wrote: "Yesterday, six persons were killed in my area. Three of them are my close friends. They hadn’t done anything. They were killed because they are teachers."

The following week came another message: "Yesterday was the first time in my life I have seen how terrorists kill people. I saw them killing three men in the middle of the street, then they cut their heads and separated the heads from their bodies. It was really horrible."

And in January: "Today one of my friends told me that one of the terrorists was arrested and there was a list of university professors in his pocket. My name was on that list. He confessed his task was to kidnap or kill us."

Ms. Smalley has been desperately trying to help the administrator get a job elsewhere, and has contacted universities in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Bahrain, but to no avail. "Reaching out counters, but does not erase, the despair and constant worry," Ms. Smalley says in an e-mail message.

As her experience illustrates, the dire circumstances in Iraq have left the majority of Western academics with but one way to help professors: get them out of Iraq.

Groups like the Council for Assisting Refugee Academics and the Institute of International Education have devoted much of their energy to resettling Iraqi academics who are at risk. The institute says it used to receive about two requests for help every month from Iraqi academics at the start of the war. It now gets 40 a week.

"We’ve been doing this since the 1920s," says Mr. Goodman, the institute’s president. "Our first rescues were from the Bolshevik Revolution. You would have thought that in the 21st century we wouldn’t be still having to do this. But this crisis could turn out to exceed all of those — including South Africa and Nazi Germany — combined."

Despite the good will of universities in Europe and the United States, resettling the professors can be tricky. Although obtaining funds is a challenge, the largest problem has proved to be securing visas.

"The U.K. government is hung up on its policy on Iraq," says John Akker, executive secretary of the Council for Assisting Refugee Academics. "Because it believes things will be settled in Iraq and that there are some safe areas, they are not giving any kind of refugee status to those who have genuine fears for their life."

Even if Iraqi academics can get to other countries, it is often difficult to place them at universities there. The degradation of Iraqi academe caused by economic sanctions imposed on the country following the first Persian Gulf war has prevented most scholars from keeping up with their fields.

On the most basic level, many do not have adequate language skills to interact on an American campus. While a few Iraqi professors have found senior positions at American and European universities, and some have been actively courted, many of them have been given research fellowships or laboratory placements that do not require them teach.

Even those Iraqis who are qualified to teach often face intense discrimination in the job market. "Someone at a center for English-language studies in Saudi Arabia wrote that the policy there was to not employ Iraqis," Ms. Smalley says.

For those fortunate enough to find accommodations, most situations were meant to be temporary, in the hope that the situation in Iraq would improve. But many of their beneficiaries have yet to return home.
"I'm having the Iraqi grad students we admitted doing more complicated projects, some of them TA-ing for Arabic class — anything so they can draw out their stay," says Ms. Stone, who personally raised the funds to subsidize the four students.

"They want to go home and train people and use their skills, but there is no point in training somebody and letting them go home and get killed," she says. "I don't dare let them go home."

At the age of 60, Mr. Jawad, the political-science professor, feels that it would be too difficult for him to begin a new life elsewhere, so he has chosen to stay in Iraq. "Am I going to beg for some people to give me asylum or a place to stay?" he asks.

But many of his colleagues have done just that — a trend that will do lasting damage to the future of higher education in Iraq.

"The numbers that we have lost cannot be replaced easily," Mr. Jawad says. "These people have 10 to 20 years of experience. How can you replace them with newly graduated students from universities in Baghdad with no experience, with no training abroad, with no foreign languages? It will take at least 20 to 30 years to furnish universities with professors of this caliber again."

http://chronicle.com

Section: International

Volume 53, Issue 37, Page A35


IRAQ: Extremists threaten new gov't Internet project in universities

BAGHDAD, 27 May 2007 (IRIN) - Islamic extremists who believe that the Internet can spread immoral and un-Islamic behaviour say that they will sabotage plans by the Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research to link the country’s science centres electronically and offer free Internet access to students.

"On the Internet, the youth can find different kinds of information, many of which is unhealthy. Couples strike up friendships through the Internet and spread vice," said Abu Muhammad, who said he is a spokesman for the Islamic Army, an armed insurgent group in Iraq.

“We don’t agree that such services should be offered and will do whatever is needed to prevent this system from working properly in Iraq. Pornographic sites are easily accessible and the youth adopt bad habits which cannot be accepted in an Islamic country,” Abu Muhammad added.
Nearly 200 Internet centres are to be set up in universities across the country with the aim of helping students do their research work.

“The use of the Internet was banned under [former President] Saddam Hussein’s regime. The ban led the country to lag behind in information technology. The current proposal is to improve the culture of our students and help them to acquire more knowledge about what is happening in the rest of the world,” said Hisham Abdul-Azim, a senior official in the education ministry and one of the project designers.

“The threats received from Islamic extremists are unacceptable and we should be strong enough to prevent our country from being backward just because some groups believe that it [the use of the Internet] might hurt their ideology,” Abdul-Azim added.

IRIN asked those who claim to be members of the Islamic Army why they would prevent the use of the Internet in Iraq when their own organisation has a website and they admit to using the Internet themselves.

“Our [Internet] work is only to find methods and information with which we can fight the occupying troops but the youth are using it to look for girlfriends and pornography. Iraq should be kept far away from such terribly disturbing behaviour,” Abu Muhammad said.

With people forced to stay at home as a result of the increase in violence in Iraq, the Internet has been the only source of escape and entertainment available for thousands of families.

“The number of Internet subscribers keeps increasing and the sale of computers has become brisk business in Iraq today. We will have to expand our signals because, unlike before, even small towns now require Internet services,” Muhammad Nouri, Urulink Internet service administrator, told IRIN. Urulink is Iraq’s only Internet provider and is handled by the government.

“Internet subscriptions have nearly tripled when compared to 2004 numbers. For local people, the Internet is the best thing that has happened to them as it gives them a way of forgetting the daily violence and also enables them to communicate with their relatives and friends who have fled the country,” Abdel-Azim said.

However, with the boom in Internet usage in Iraq has come a growing opposition to it by Islamic extremists. Many Internet cafes have been targeted countrywide, especially in areas where extremists are prevalent.

“The threats received from Islamic extremists are unacceptable and we should be strong enough to prevent our country from being backward...”

“Many districts were forced to close their Internet centres, which makes it now more important for our project to run as students will have access to the Internet in a safer and calmer environment, in their own college,” Abdel-Azim added.