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'US the Biggest Producer of Terror'

By Ahmed Ali and Dahr Jamail

BAQUBA, Jan 25 (IPS) - Broken promises have brought a dramatic increase in anti-U.S. sentiment across the capital city of Iraq's Diyala province.

Many people in Baquba, capital of Diyala 40 km northeast of Baghdad, had supported U.S. forces when they ousted former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. But failed reconstruction projects and muddled policies mean the U.S. has lost that support.

"The Americans based their strategy in Iraq on certain Shias here who have direct enmity with Sunnis and allegiance to Iran," resident Ayub Ibrahim told IPS. "This was the source of the gap between certain Shias which the U.S. backs, and certain Sunnis they back." Shias and Sunnis are different sects within Islam.

The U.S. has also alienated people through its policy of extensive detentions. Many believe that raids that lead to arrests are based on motivated information given to the U.S. military by Shia militiamen who have infiltrated the Iraqi army and police.

"We never witnessed an attempt to arrest Shia people either by the U.S. army or the Iraqi police and army," resident Abdul Sattar al-Badri told IPS. Most people see no reasonable basis for many of the arrests.

In November the International Committee of the Red Cross said that around 60,000 people are currently detained in Iraq.

"The Americans occupied our country and put our men in prisons," Dhafir al-Rubaiee, an officer from Iraq's previous army told IPS. "The majority of these prisoners have been arrested for nothing other than for being Sunni. Every one of these prisoners has a family, and these families now have reason to hate Americans."

Others blame the lack of security and the destroyed infrastructure for the increasing anti-U.S. sentiment.

"The lack of security is a direct result of the occupation," resident Abu Ali told IPS. "The Americans crossed thousands of miles to destroy our home and kill our men. They are the reason for all our disasters."

Another resident, speaking on condition of anonymity added, "We lived in need during the period of the Saddam government, but we were safe. We were compelled to work sometimes 20 hours a day to earn our living, but we were happy to see our children and relatives together." U.S. forces, he said, have ended all that.

Abu Tariq believes the U.S. military intentionally destroyed Iraq's infrastructure. "The Americans destroyed the electricity, water pumping stations, factories, bridges, highways, hospitals, schools, buildings, and opened the borders for strangers and terrorists to get easily into the country," he said.

The large number of Iraqis killed by U.S. forces has also hardly endeared the forces to the people.

"When targeted by a roadside bomb or suicide bomber, U.S. soldiers shoot at people randomly. Innocent civilians have been killed or injured," Yaser Abdul-Rahman, a 45-year-old schoolmaster told IPS. "Thousands of people have been killed like this."

The anti-U.S. sentiment in Baquba is now so high that people no longer hide their distrust of the U.S.

"At the beginning of the occupation, the people of Iraq did not realise the U.S. strategy in the area," Abu Taiseer, a member of the communist party in the city told IPS. "Their strategy is based on destruction and massacre. They

do anything to have their agenda fulfilled.

"Now, Iraqis know that behind the U.S. smile is hatred and violence," Taiseer added. "They call others violent and terrorists, but what they are doing in Iraq and in other countries is the origin and essence of terror. America is the biggest producer of terror, and they spend huge funds for creating and training death squads all over the world."

Despite the differing U.S. ways of dealing with Shias and Sunnis, the two sects seem one in their hatred of the U.S.

"Look at our country, it will need 30 years to get back again," Edan Barham told IPS. "This has nothing to do with sects; all of us are Iraqis, and we should think of Iraq in a better way than sectarian lines."

"People of Iraq of all sects now realise that it is the occupation represented by the Americans that has damaged the country," resident Khalil Ibrahim said.

Political analyst Azhar al-Teengane says the only Iraqis who support the occupation are those benefiting directly from it.

"The occupation is good for politicians who have made money, militiamen, contractors and opportunists," Teengane said. "These form not more than 5 percent of Iraqi people."

Self-rule could help lower anti-U.S. sentiment, said resident Jalal al-Tae. "In order to improve the situation, the U.S. army should let the people of this city run it."

*(*Ahmed, our correspondent in Iraq's Diyala province, works in close collaboration with Dahr Jamail, our U.S.-based specialist writer on Iraq who has reported extensively from Iraq and the Middle East) (FIN/2008)*