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THE ROVING EYE THE RAT TRAP

Part 2: Why the resistance will increase

By Pepe Escobar

Part 1: [How Saddam may still nail Bush](#)

BAKU - Former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) asset Saddam Hussein is - already was - totally beside the point. Only in the past few months have we learned the extent to which the Saddam system sub-contracted a great deal of decision-making to different Iraqi elite - from tribal sheikhs to businessmen and Sunni and Wahhabi religious leaders. They may originally have been cajoled by Saddam with carrots and sticks to be incorporated into the Ba'athist regime. But now they are totally free to command their own agendas.

To top it all, they really have a common agenda for the first time in their lives: a war against American occupation. The resistance will persist because Saddam was never its political, religious, spiritual or moral guide. The *mukawama* - resistance against foreign occupation - is now a full-blown nationalist, religious movement. The most popular political party on the sprawling campus of Baghdad University is not the widely-despised Ahmad Chalabi's neo-conservative-backed Iraqi National Congress. It is the Iraq Islamist Party.

A recent peaceful mass demonstration in the south-central city of Hilla brought down the local "collaborator" governor. People were shouting: "Free elections now!" Sources in Baghdad tell Asia Times Online that avalanches of people are just waiting for June 2004 to see what kind of government the Americans will allow, and if they are not satisfied, then they will join the resistance. But there are also many people - Sunni and Shi'ite - who fear that some Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) members may turn violent, afraid of losing power. Rival Kurdish chieftains Jalal Talabani and Masoud Barzani - both on the IGC - keep their strong *peshmerga* private armies. Chalabi has his own CIA-trained army, complete with American weapons. According to new Iraqi policemen who defected to Amman, Jordan, the bulk of the new Iraqi police is also inclined to join the resistance.

The increasingly sophisticated attacks in the Sunni triangle are being coordinated by the Committee of the Faith. They are Sunni, and most of all, they are Wahhabi - and they had the freedom to proselytize and act even under Saddam. As the relentless *mukawama* will expose day by day the fallacy of the Anglo-American mantra - according to which the attacks are perpetrated by "remnants of Saddam's regime" - expect from Washington another change in the screenplay: the blame will shift to "foreign" al-Qaeda or "Syrian-backed terrorists".

The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) is making things even worse. According to Iraqi-Canadian journalist Firas al-Atraqchi, the CPA wants Kurdish *peshmergas* patrolling the explosive Sunni triangle and Mosul - which is predominantly Arab: "Sunni religious leaders have expressed outrage over the proposed deal and have warned, in no ambiguous terms, that the Sunni areas will not tolerate being patrolled or policed by Kurdish (or Shi'ite) militia. They warn that a civil war would be inevitable."

The non-aligned mujahideen

Meanwhile, in Europe, anti-terrorist specialists warn that the four bombings in Istanbul last month were also messages to the European Union - because some countries, like Britain, Italy and Spain, are collaborating with the Americans in Iraq, and also because they have dismantled jihadi cells in Europe. Experts at the European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center (ESISC) in Brussels are extremely worried of a fallout from Iraq and an imminent attack on one of the European Union countries.

European investigations are centered on Sheikh Abderrazak, an Algerian who was based in Milan and who is now under arrest in Hamburg, and who was a member of al-Tawhid, an organization directed by Abu Mussab al-Zarkawi, a Jordanian and an al-Qaeda planner who was identified before the Iraq war by US Secretary of State Colin Powell as the "missing link" between Saddam and Osama bin Laden. Nobody in Europe at the time - apart from Britain's Tony Blair, Italy's Silvio Berlusconi and Jose Aznar of Spain - was convinced of the link. Now, however, European investigators tell Asia Times Online that things have changed and Zarkawi "is indeed part of the Iraqi resistance. The Americans invaded Iraq as part of their 'war on terror', and ended up bringing terror to Iraq."

Zarkawi - loaded with German contacts - is suspected of recruiting "more than a thousand jihadis to Iraq": they are Arab-Afghans, jihad veterans, with European passports. August Hanning, president of the German security service (BND), told German television that most of these jihadis, and some extra volunteers, have already left to Iraq from Great Britain, Bosnia and Germany, infiltrating via Syria and Saudi Arabia. Hanning is convinced that Iraq is about to become "the crystallization point for extremist Islamists the world over".

Experts in Brussels have even a "top ten" list of countries most likely to be victims of a next wave of terror attacks: they are, from top to bottom, the US, Britain, Israel, Australia, France, Belgium, Italy, Spain, Germany and Poland. The experts are all assuming the working hypothesis that al-Qaeda cells which are not directly related to bin Laden anymore are using an "al-Qaeda trademark" to mobilize jihadis and increase the repercussion of their particular attacks.

The ESISC has thus detected the last word in the "war on terror": the emergence of the "non-aligned mujahideen". These people are skilled, totally isolated and practically undetectable. Alain Chouet, in a study from the French Institute of International Relations, stresses that since December 2001, only five attacks can be attributed with full certainty to al-Qaeda. Chouet stresses that al-Qaeda has definitely mutated into "a multitude of small entrepreneurs or local sub-contractors, with tortuous and indirect strategies".

Breakdown: The Iraqi resistance

The invasion of Iraq was widely perceived as an attack on the Arab world. That's why the resistance is turning pan-Arab. Once again: this is a nationalist and religious resistance movement.

Asia Times Online has ascertained that at least 12 independent

guerrilla organizations from different tribes are involved in the *mukawama*, all vaguely in touch with each other. This loose organization may be about to extend its reach nationwide. But the Iraqi guerrilla movement is extraordinarily complex. These in essence are the main actors:

The former army. The majority of the 400,000 Iraqi soldiers demobilized by US proconsul L Paul Bremer were nothing but victims of the Ba'athist regime. Humiliated and frustrated, they inevitably turned to the resistance - and they were not being financed by Saddam Hussein, as Asia Times Online reported from the Sunni triangle. At least 100,000 soldiers from the Republican Guard and Special Republican Guard didn't even receive a meager financial compensation from the Americans. Big mistake: they were the best trained, the best equipped, the best motivated, and now they are totally engaged in the resistance. They are nationalists demonstrating in practice how the whole thing is not about Saddam's return to power, but about getting rid of a foreign invader.

The tribes. An extremely complex tribal game is in play in Iraq. Saddam was a master in this business. An example: Ramadi and Fallujah, in the Sunni triangle, home to some of the most vicious anti-American attacks, are controlled by the huge Doulayimi tribe - which always had a turbulent relationship with Saddam. The reason for the attacks were not \$100 bills showered around by Saddam's henchmen, but repeated blunders and massacres of civilians by the 82nd Airborne Division. The Americans themselves fed the infernal cycle of violence with their string of arbitrary arrests and daily humiliations. *Tha'ar* (revenge) is the absolute norm for these extremely proud Bedouins. Meanwhile, local tribes around Kirkuk are attacking oil pipelines just as a means of finally getting paid for protecting them. The Americans then dissolved the so-called "oil police" and sub-contracted regional security to a South African private firm, which for its part sub-contracted security to - who else - the local tribes.

Remnants of Saddam's regime. They are reduced to nothing more than the *fedayeen* of Saddam - the private militia established by his late son Uday - the surveillance apparatchik and the tribes in Tikrit. It's fair to expect much accumulated rage to explode in the form of attacks now that Saddam is in captivity. These people are armed to the teeth - with weapons caches dispersed all over the country. It still remains to be discovered how they connect with and how they provide logistical assistance to the professional jihadis that Hanning says are coming from Syria and Saudi Arabia.

The jihadis. An elite among them comprise the instigators and perpetrators of the suicide bombings. There are a few dozen survivors of Ansar al-Islam who crossed to Iranian Kurdistan, fleeing American bombing last March: they don't make much of a difference. Most of all there may be a few thousand jihadis who came before, during and after the war. They are Yemenite, Lebanese, Sudanese, Syrian, Egyptian, Jordanian - the pan-Arab character of the resistance. They are loosely linked with local, small groups of *salafis* - an extremist interpretation of Sunni Islam.

American blunders only inflame the resistance. Samarra was a classic case. The Americans said that the guerrillas were Saddam *fedayeen*. Asia Times Online has been to Samarra: it's a very religious, conservative city which never bowed to Saddam. Sources say that the bulk of the local resistance was from a group called the Mujahideen of Mohammed. Residents insist that there are no *fedayeen* in the city and accuse the Americans of being the terrorists, massacring civilians.

A new resistance tactic is to join the Iraqi police - recruited and paid for by the Americans - earn some \$50 a month, train with American-

provided weapons and gather valuable intelligence on the foreign invader. Meanwhile, the American military are now performing an exact replay of the Israeli military occupying Palestine: they surround large tracts with barbed wire and ultra-intimidating security checks, bulldoze houses and round up all men for lengthy interrogations. *Tha'ar* will come.

The American tactic of now Iraqifying the war is nothing but a replay of "Vietnamization". Washington's push to make over a complex society in its own image will fail - as it failed in Vietnam. Iraqis, politically very sophisticated despite decades of dictatorship, detect crystal-clear the American plan, imposed at tank point, to privatize the whole country by selling its assets and fabulous natural resources to American - and a few European - corporations. This, most of all, is what is fueling the resistance. They know they cannot let people like Chalabi or Talabani in the IGC decide the future of the nation.

As author and commentator Tariq Ali has forcefully pointed out on the website *Counterpunch*, this is the "21st-century colonial model: Specialist companies are now encouraged to provide 'security'. They employ the mercenaries, and their profits are ensured by the state that hires them. They are backed up by the real army and, more importantly, by air power, to help defeat the enemy. But none of this will work if the population remains hostile. And large-scale repression only helps to unite the population against the occupiers. The fear in Washington is that the Iraqi resistance might attempt a sensational hit just before the next presidential election. The fear in the Arab east is that [President George W] Bush and [Vice President Dick] Cheney might escalate the conflict to retain the White House in 2004. Both fears may well be justified."

While Saddam awaits his trial, this is what the headlines will be about: a massive popular resistance movement fighting 21st-century colonization, while the new actors of jihad bet on a context of endless war. Saddam may be history, but it will be interesting to hear what he has to say. It ain't over till this desert "rat" sings.

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