

# The War against People has Never been More Globalized

Iraq, on the first anniversary of the US-led invasion, March-April 2004

Andrew Stern

2004

The U.S.-led invasion has taken what was already a nightmare and turned it into a catastrophe where everyone seems numb and shell-shocked. Thirty-five years of a brutally repressive dictatorship, 11 years of crippling sanctions, and two invasions in the past decade have warped this country into the bloody hellhole that it is today. Iraq is the ultimate confluence of the three types of warfare: military, economic, and psychological.

Fear has become normalized. Security is little more than superstition because there is nowhere that is really safe. Conspiracy theories about who is behind the attacks crackle on the streets. Many Iraqis are convinced that the Americans are somehow involved. Regardless of whether it's true, the United States is directly responsible for the loss of thousands upon thousands of lives, by turning Iraq into a pit of despair—and for the worst of reasons, cold hard cash, and lots of it. *The Economist* referred to the economic reforms being imposed here as turning the grand cookie jar that is Iraq into a “capitalist’s dream” economy, and the amount of dollars to be looted here is immeasurable.

But there is resistance beyond the armed militias which have confronted Coalition forces in April and May. On March 20, there were protests around the world sending a resounding message to the Bush administration that the world rejects their lethal policies. In at least 575 cities spanning five continents, millions of people came out into the streets to show solidarity with the Iraqi people. And yet there was virtually no coverage of the protests in the place where it matters most: Baghdad.

On March 19, thousands of Shia and Sunni Iraqis marched from opposite sides of the Tigris River to join together in a powerful show of unity between the two religious groups. Emotions ran high as the two groups converged. “Some Iraqis see what happened to Iraq as liberation, yet the majority see this as occupation,” said Hazem al-Araji, a speaker at the demonstration.

“It’s not Sunni or Shia, but an Islamic unity,” said one of the banners.

Resistance means many things to different people. In Iraq, it is a word you say quietly because it has come to be associated with armed resistance. But it’s not only about bombs and guns. People resist in many ways, and in Iraq just like everywhere else, some of the most powerful examples we have come from our daily experiences rather than big protests.

In Buenos Aires, it’s the *piqueteros* baking bread in the barrios, making sure their children get enough to eat. In Baghdad, it’s groups in the impoverished Sad’r City region taking a collection up from the community to create useful jobs for the unemployed, despite the fact that none of the billions being spent on “reconstruction” have reached them. Resistance is talking to your neighbors. Resistance is organizing, whether for militant actions or for creating community and networks of mutual aid and solidarity.

The war against people has never been more globalized. But we have these moments, spaces that are created seemingly from nowhere, but actually are the result of extremely committed people's visions and determination. The trick is to believe that it's possible.

"We are time bombs at the call of the honorable Hawza," said Al Araj, a cleric who is calling for a non-violent Jihad, referring to a Shia religious school in Najaf. "Once they order us to destroy the U.S. occupation, we will do so."

# fifth Estate

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