

Iraq's Lost Generation: Impact and Implications

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INDEX

Index	1
Abstract	2
Introduction	3
(A) Assassinations and Attacks	3
University academics	3
Other academics, teachers and students	9
Impact on education	10
Medical professionals	11
Impact on health	12
The judiciary	13
Impact on law and order	13
Media and journalists	13
Sports and athletes	13
(B) Conclusions	14
(C) Recommendations	14
a. In the UK	14
b. Within Iraq	15
References	16

Abstract

Problems facing the intelligentsia of Iraq have been neglected in the scale of that country's ongoing tragedy. Since 2003, the new phenomenon of targeted and systematic assassinations, kidnappings and threats to professionals and academics has surfaced. These are escalating.

Over 830 assassinations have been documented, victims killed along with their families. Numbers includes: 380 university academics and doctors, 210 lawyers and judges, and 243 journalists/media workers but not other experts, school teachers or students; neither professionals displaced internally and externally. All aspects of life are affected.

The victims are often highly qualified, PhD or equivalent. Assassinations are not specific to sect or gender but victims are predominantly Arab.

Hundreds of legal workers have left Iraq in addition to those already killed and injured, thereby denying thousands of Iraqis their legal rights. Working lawyers numbers have decreased by at least 40% in the past year alone and hundreds of cases shelved.

Neither has sports escaped; the President and 36 member National Iraqi Olympic Committee were kidnapped in July 2006; the majority are thought to be dead. These were the only democratically elected Olympic representatives in the region.

The reported incidents are only the tip of an iceberg; many cases go unreported. This is in addition to the huge exodus to neighbouring countries and, for the lucky few, to Europe.

Unless urgent action is taken to redress this situation, it will be too late to save Iraq's intelligentsia for the immediate and foreseeable future; a disastrous situation for Iraq.

Introduction

Since April 2003, the material destruction of Iraq's infrastructure, indiscriminate killing of Iraqi civilians, kidnappings and ethnic and sectarian cleansing have left Iraq in a state of total anarchy.

This report is a summary of one facet of the disaster, the targeting of its intellectuals. This is addressed as follows:

- A) Assassinations and other abuses; impact and implications.
- B) Conclusions
- C) Recommendations.

(A) Assassinations and Abuses

1. University Academics

University academics and medical professionals are the worst hit; over 380 documented cases by April 2006. Many more cases go unreported because of fear of reprisals, the state of chaos and poor communications and failure of the authorities to record or publish figures.¹⁻¹⁹ (Figure 1).

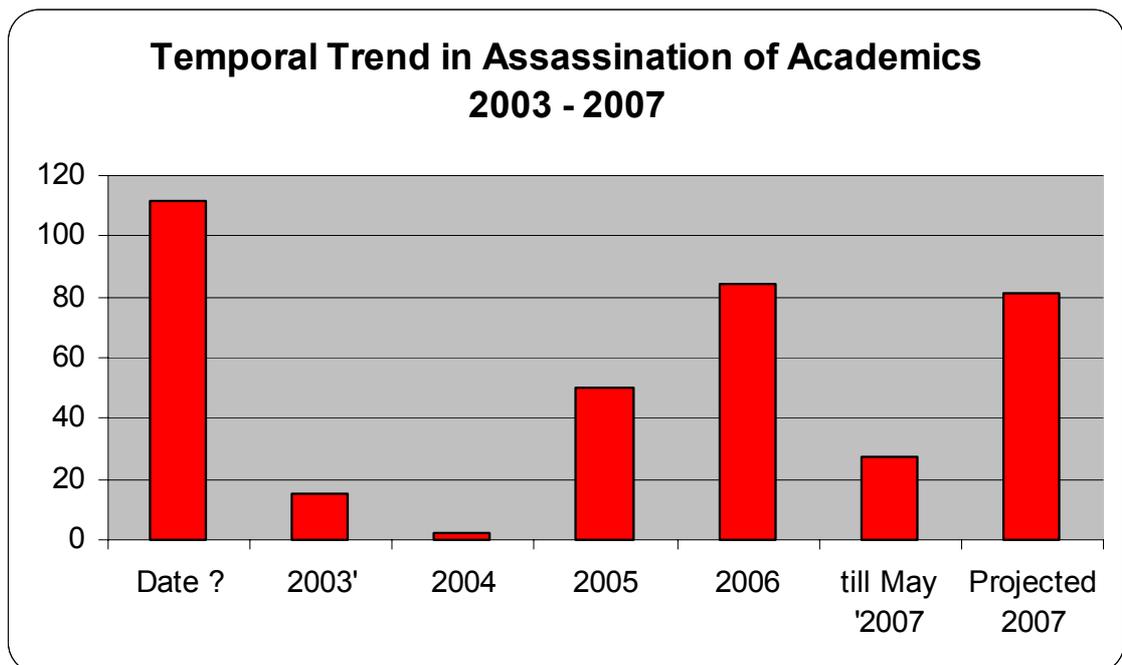


Figure 1: Temporal trend in assassinations of university academics and medical professionals – projected figures for 2006 and 2007 are relative to those left in Iraq

The Iraq Index, compiled by the Brookings Institute in Washington (16 April 2007), estimated up to 40% of Iraq's professionals have fled the country since 2003.¹¹

Pattern of Assassinations

The following analysis of named cases was undertaken by the author in April 2006 based on lists compiled by the Iraqi Teachers Association, BRussels Tribunal, Madrid list and feedback from academics and medics.^{1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 12, 13, 14}

The majority of victims are highly qualified, (PhD or equivalent) (Figure 2) who held senior university positions - 70% professor and above. (Figures 2 and 3)

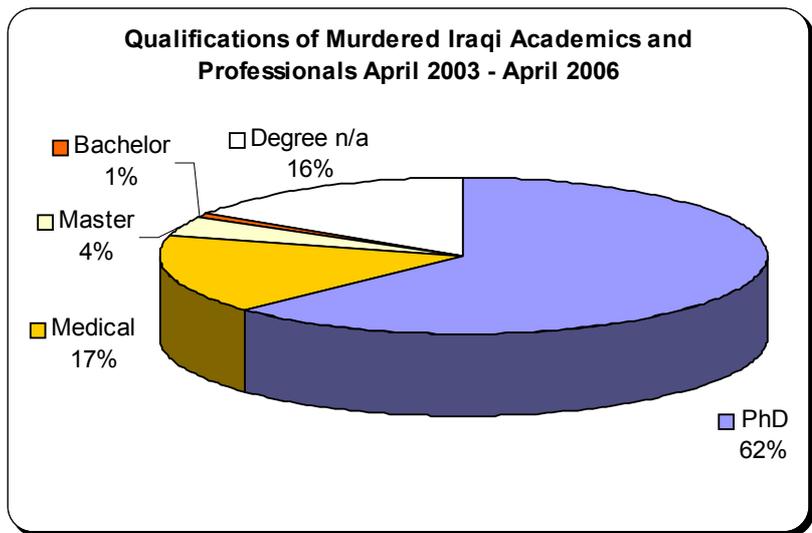


Figure 2: Postgraduate qualifications of murdered Iraqi academics and doctors

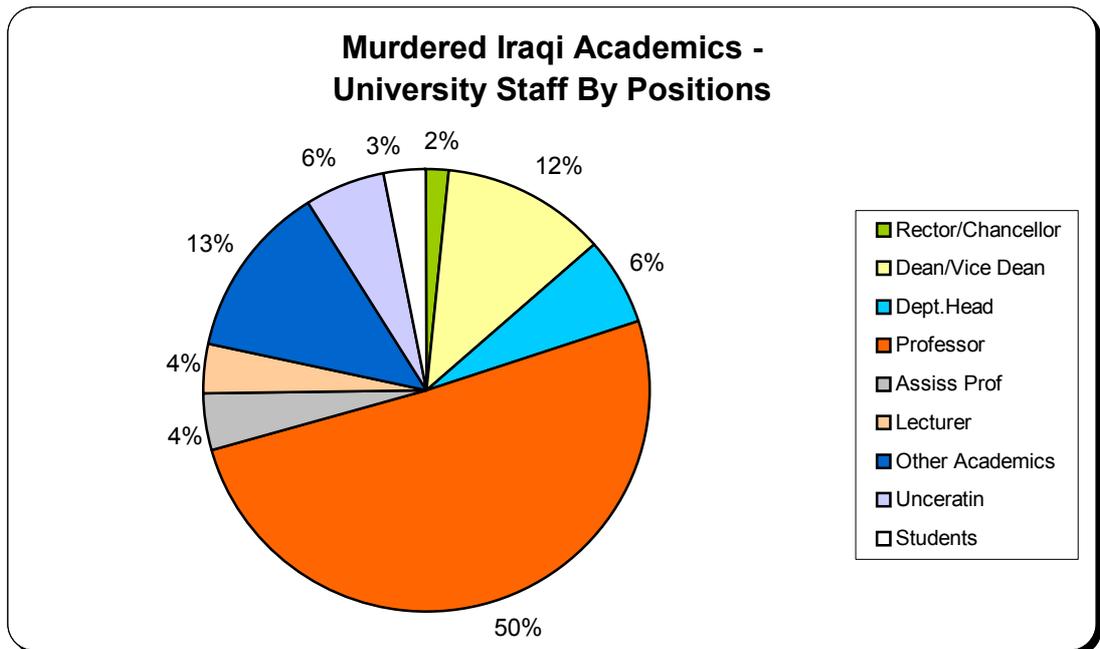
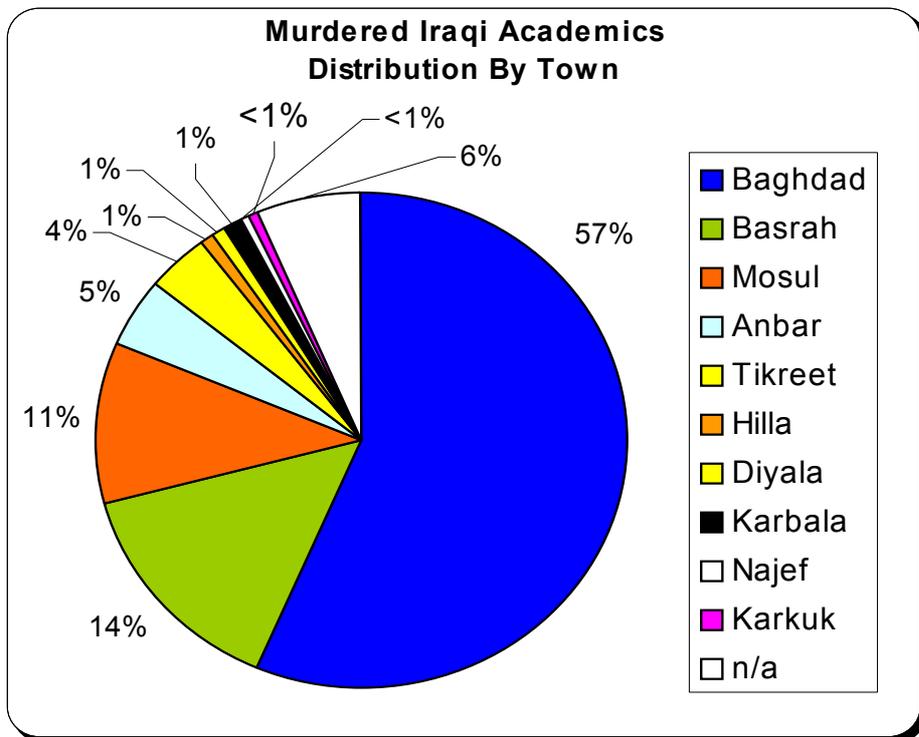
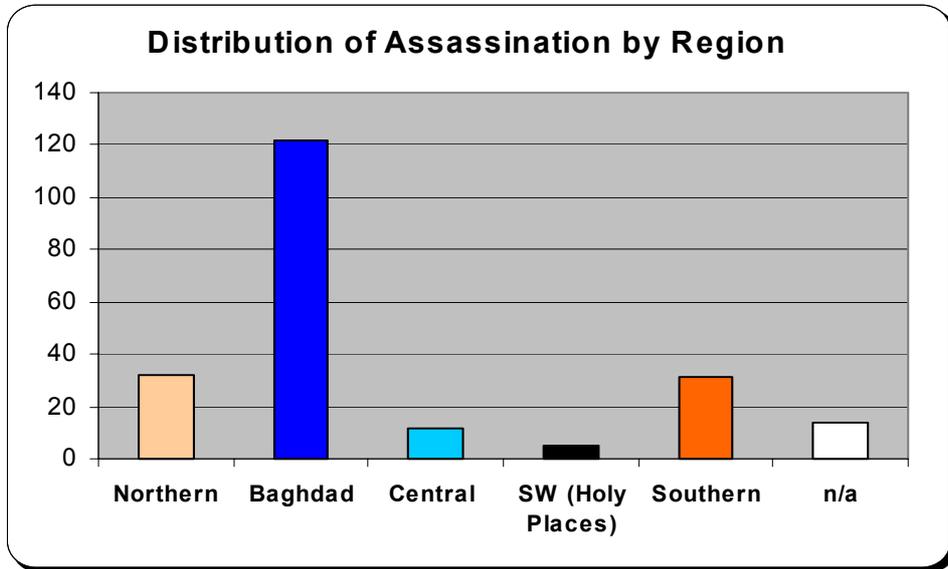


Figure 3: Grade and seniority of assassinated academics including academic medical professionals.

All universities in the Arabic regions from Mosul in the north to Basra in the south have seen their share of murders. Baghdad's 3 universities are the worst hit. (Figures 4a, 4b and 5).



Figures 4a and 4b : Distribution of assassinated academics and doctors by region and town.

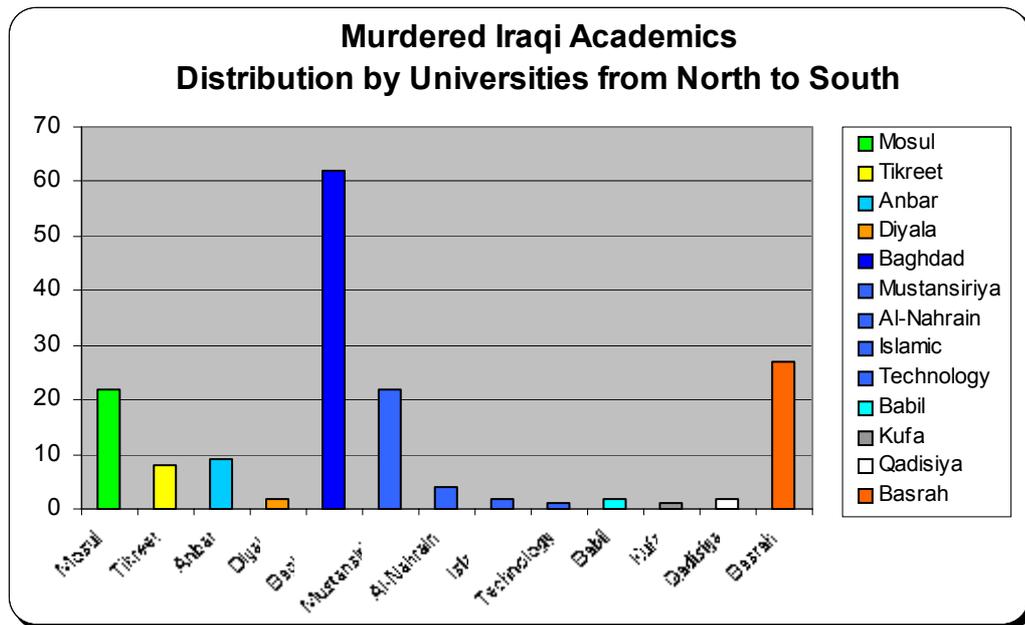


Figure 5: Distribution of assassinated academics and doctors per university

Assassinations are not specific to faith or sect; the higher numbers of Muslims reflect their current proportions within Iraq.

(Figures 5 and 6).

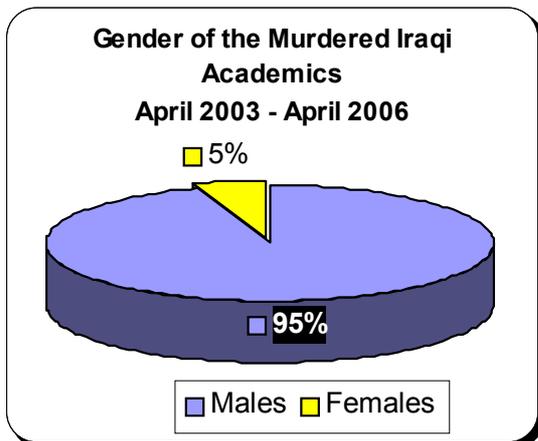


Figure 6: Gender of murdered academics and doctors by April 2006

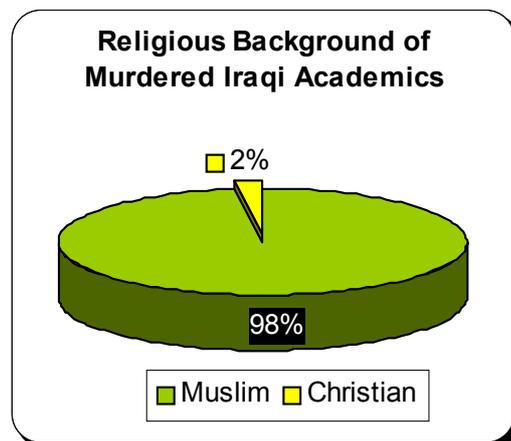


Figure 5: Religious background of murdered academics and doctors by April 2006

Those specialities most needed have seen the lion's share of assassinations.
(Figures 7, 8, 9, 10)

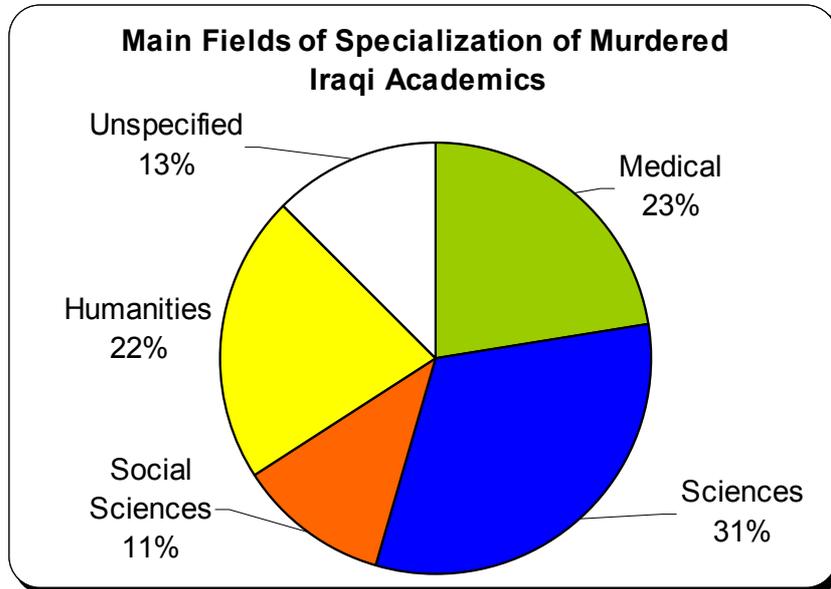


Figure 7: Distribution of assassinations by discipline by April 2006

Vital science specialities (Figure 8) such as engineering, agriculture and physics are worst hit. Among social sciences, educationalists fared worse, followed by politics, economics and banking (Figures 9, 10).

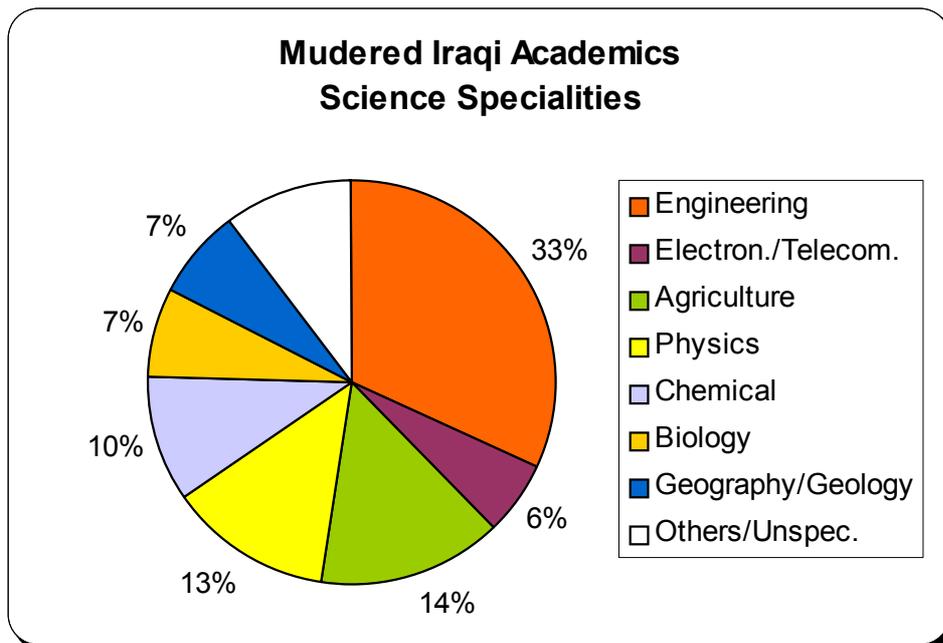


Figure 8: Murdered academics in science fields

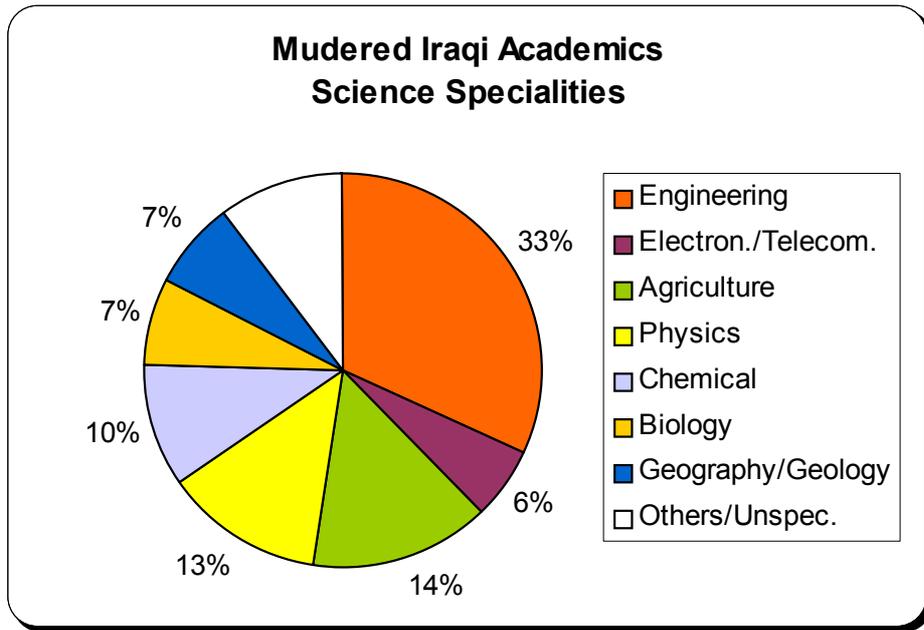


Figure 9: Murdered academics in social sciences

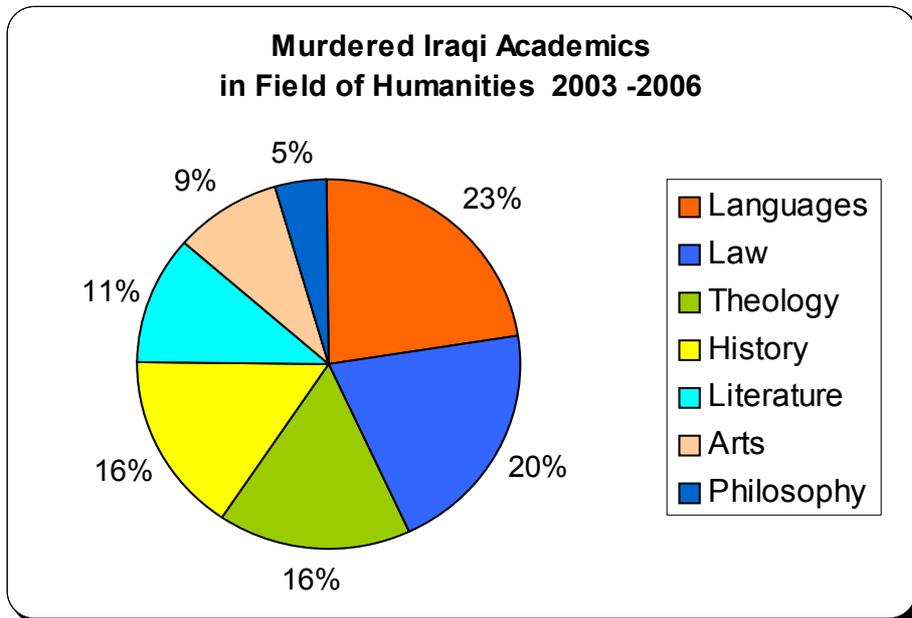


Figure 10: Murdered academics in humanities

Non-fatal incidents include arrests, failed assassination attempts, kidnaps, threats, assaults, house raids etc. Those who escaped assassination either left the county or were later assassinated (Figure 11)

All incidents (both fatal and non-fatal) have been increasing progressively with a temporal and rising increase. (Figure 12)

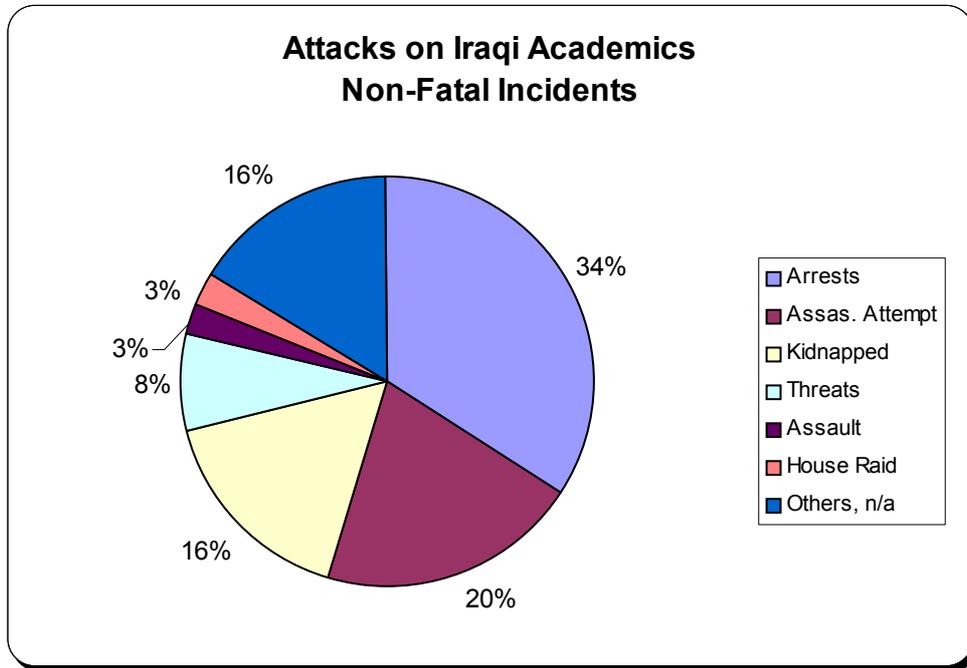


Figure 11: Non-fatal incidents against Iraqi academics and medical professionals.

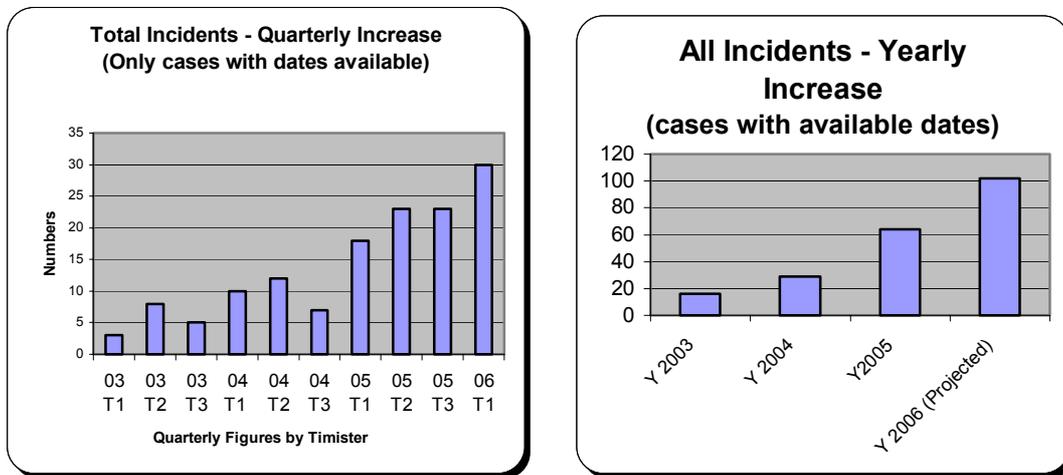


Figure 12: Temporal trends in all types of attacks on academics and medical professionals.

2. Other academics and Students

Attacks on non-university education have also increased. On 29 January 2007 an attack against a girls school in Baghdad left 5 students dead and more than 20 injured.²⁰ At least 110 children have been killed and 95 injured since 2005 in

such attacks. These numbers do not include children killed or injured on their way to or from school.²¹

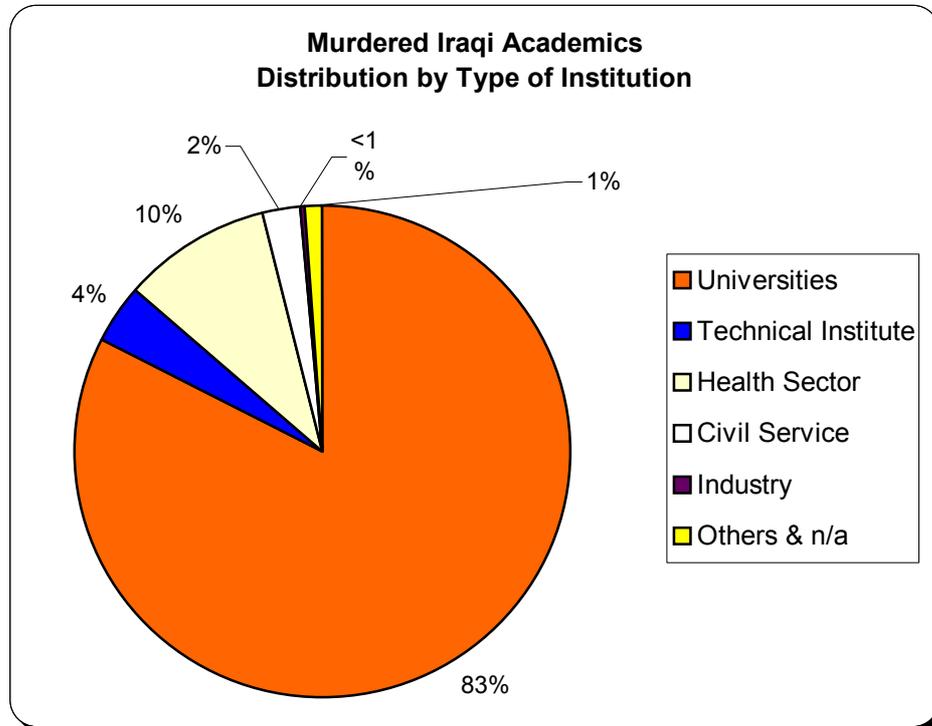


Figure 13: Murdered Iraqi academics by type of institution.

Impact on Education

There has been a sharp decline in school attendance. According to recent statistics from the Ministry of Education, only 30% of Iraq's 3.5 million school children are currently attending classes, compared to 75% in the previous school year.²² In a report released last year by Save the Children, 818,000 primary school children, representing 22% of Iraq's student population, were not attending school.²¹ A joint study by the Iraqi Ministry of Education and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) found that 74% of those not attending are female. Aid agencies estimate thousands of Iraqi parents do not send their daughters to school because of cultural reasons and general insecurity.²¹

The International Medical Corps reports the teachers' population in Baghdad has fallen by 80%. Universities are likely to continue emptying throughout 2007 if there is no letup in current levels of violence and resulting displacements. Iraq's education system is in shambles.²³

3. Medical Professionals

All medical and surgical specialities have seen their share of murders (Figure 10a, b).

The Deputy Minister of Health in February 2006 (who was later assassinated), claimed over 220 doctors were killed in Iraq between 2003 and February 2006. Initially, academics and doctors left Iraq after receiving death threats, being kidnapped or assaulted, but later from sheer fear of targeted or random killing.

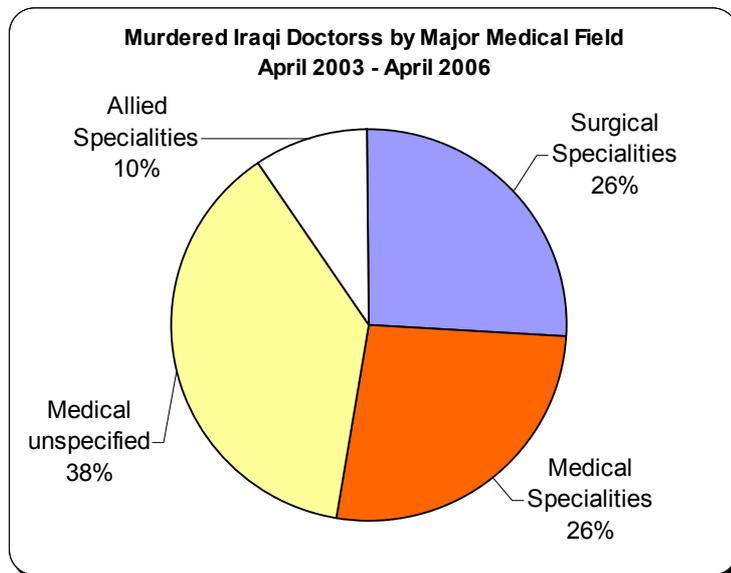


Figure 10: Distribution of major medical specialties among murdered medical professionals to April 2006

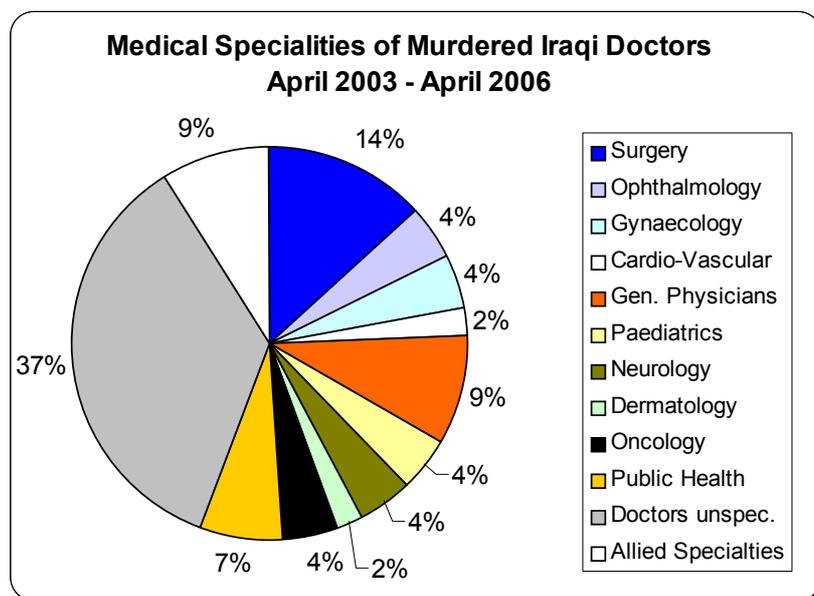


Figure 10b: Distribution of specialties among murdered medical professionals to April 2006

The Iraqi Ministry of Health in 2007 estimated that 25% of Iraq's 18,000 physicians left the country since the 2003 invasion.²⁴ One estimate puts the number of doctors kidnapped since 2003 at 250.²⁵ Low reporting means actual numbers are higher.

Of those who escaped assassinations, large numbers have received death threats in addition to large numbers kidnapped for ransom who, even after payment, were later found murdered and their bodies dismembered.

In addition to targeted assassinations, health workers are exposed to routine attacks, military occupation of hospitals and other medical facilities, harassment, arrest and maltreatment. The failure to provide adequate health services and resources, in spite of increased patient load, has taken an enormous toll.

Impact on Health

The scale of the exodus has had a devastating impact on the Iraqi health service. Seriously understaffed hospitals have to rely on inexperienced medical residents to undertake operations and procedures they are not qualified to perform. Public health monitoring is severely compromised by lack of security, hospitals are broken down and increasingly dangerous in the atmosphere of growing tensions. All men between 15-50 years going to a health facility could be detained by either US or Iraqi security forces as potential combatants. It is also widely reported that people from predominantly Sunni areas do not have equal access to medical care.^{27, 28, 29}

The precarious position, with many specialties no longer available, means those with means travel to Jordan and Syria for treatment. In addition to the difficulties already faced by the mass of the population, these problems will have a disastrous effect on future health services.

Iraq previously had a high standard of health care which was already in decline after 11 years of sanctions with significant increases in death, malnutrition and cancer rates over the past 17 years. Politics and conditions inside Iraq made it impossible to conduct epidemiological studies on the scale of the problem and this is further obstructed by current anarchy. The abysmal conditions of health care are well documented by the American researcher, Dahr Jamail²⁷ who demonstrated, with case studies, shortages of medicine and equipment, lack of water and electricity affecting medical care, corruption and crime and the failure

of any reconstruction plan or funding for health services together with interference by occupying military authorities.

4. The Judiciary³⁰

The Iraqi Lawyers Association report that at least 210 lawyers and judges have been killed since the 2003 invasion in addition to dozens of others injured in attacks. According to the UN Office for Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, hundreds of legal workers have left the country because of threats and persecution which have escalated in the past 14 months denying thousands of people their legal rights. The number of lawyers offering services in Iraq has decreased by at least 40% over the past year alone.

Impact on Law and Order

The toll on the justice system has seen hundreds of cases shelved and sectarian tension has put intense pressure on legal workers with judgements according to religious sect and pressure from armed militias and gangs who have the upper hand being commonplace. Fraud, property theft and forgeries of contracts, deeds etc, are thriving in Iraq.

5. Journalists/Media Professionals³¹

Between March 2003 and May 2007, 267 media professionals were killed including 24 non-Iraqis, (see Table 1). This does not include a further 57 non-Iraqi journalists who were kidnapped, the fate of which 8 remains unknown, and numerous others assaulted or threatened.

Journalists	135
Cameramen	19
Photographers	5
Administrators	37
Translators	12
Drivers	12
Security guards	13
Technicians	10
Total	243

6. Sports and Athletes³²

The President and 36-man National Olympic Committee of Iraq (NOCI) were kidnapped on 15th July 2006 during their General Conference in Baghdad by gunmen in police uniform. Of these, Mr Al-Samara'ie and 24 of the 36 members remain unaccounted for. The unusual aspect of this particular committee is that the President and committee were the only democratically elected sports leadership in the region.

B) CONCLUSIONS

Targeted assassination of professionals in Iraq is a new phenomenon in Iraq's history. Academia, doctors, indeed knowledge itself, have always been accorded the highest respect. The current problem commenced with the 2003 invasion and continues to escalate.

The pattern of atrocities which followed the invasion, and targeting of Iraq's intelligentsia followed a methodical period of looting and destruction of Iraq's heritage, infrastructure, universities and libraries. Many Iraqis, together with sections of international academia, believe this to be highly indicative of a plan to drain Iraq of its intellectuals and experts and dismantle its infrastructure along a pattern known as 'El-Salvador Option' used in that country by the Pentagon.⁷⁻⁸

The exodus from Iraq is grave and is already having dire consequences for the people of Iraq that can only worsen if the situation is not reversed.

C) RECOMMENDATIONS

The solution to this tragedy can only be achieved by restoring peace and security to Iraq but this is beyond the scope of this report.

However, many of the professionals and academics under threat were trained in the UK, Europe and the USA. Urgent assistance is required from the UK government to alleviate their plight and ensure that this valuable stratum of society is not lost completely for the future of Iraq and humankind.

Britain has an important role to play in the interim, not only for humanitarian reasons, but to ensure a viable stable Iraq whose citizens will not be obliged to join the current exodus.

a. In the UK

Short-term requirements are:-

1. Urgent action to persuade the Home Office to stop refusing applications by Iraq academics, doctors and scientists on the erroneous basis that Iraq is now a democratic, safe haven.

2. Facilities for those wishing to come to the UK to allow them to use that time updating their knowledge and expertise. This could be achieved through attachments to local universities and hospitals. Postgraduate training for many was suspended with sanctions in 1990 and severely disrupted since 2003.

The majority of Iraqis have an inherent desire to help in the restructuring of their country and would return back when the opportunity arose. For professional and middle class Iraqis, life outside will be infinitely worse both financially and professionally. Outside of their own country and milieu they suffer both psychologically and financially and, even more importantly, they are needed desperately to put a stable Iraq back on the map academically and professionally as well as raising the social and intellectual conscious of any new Iraqi state.

b. Within Iraq

Immediate action within Iraq, including recommendations from Iraqi Higher Education Organising Committee (IHEOC)⁴⁸, specifically for academics and other professionals to include:

1. Investigate the apparent systematic nature of the assassinations, kidnappings and threats in an open and honest manner and with the full backing of all groups within the Iraqi government and representatives of the various administrations.
2. Safeguarding those targeted and their families e.g. by offering accommodation in a restricted university area.
3. Preserving the sanctity of universities and preventing intrusion of political parties and religious groups.
4. Accord universities and hospitals special status and ensure that security forces abide by this.
5. Helping families and children of those murdered by according them their rightful pension rights.
6. Guarantee by legislation academic freedom, strengthening the rights of university professors to express their scientific opinion within the sanctity of a university.

The UK should work with other members of the EU, UN and Arab League to exert pressure on the US and Iraqi Government to achieve the above. The final solution to this predicament is to restore secular and properly representative democracy.

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