

Insurgents or Resistance Fighters?

The semantics of rebellion questions the legitimacy of the Iraqi government. By Nazneen Ahmed

An insurgent is a rebel or revolutionary, one who rises up against established authority. A resistance fighter is one who resists the authority imposed by an occupying force.

The difference between the two terms is this: *insurgent* focuses attention on the act of insurrection, on the disruption of established order; *resistance fighter* draws attention to the fact of occupation. Selecting between the two terms is to make a judgment about the ruling authority. If you call fighters insurgents, you imply that the authority being contested is legitimate and generally accepted. If you call them resistance fighters, you imply that the authority is illegitimate.

Not surprisingly, the authority in Iraq at the time chose to label the uprising in April 2004 by Iraqi fighters the acts of insurgents. To have done otherwise would have been to delegitimize themselves. What is interesting is how the media represents the fighters. Western-controlled media in various languages, almost without exception, refer to the Iraqi fighters as insurgents or rebels. Most Arab media, on the other hand, refer to the same Iraqis as resistance fighters.

This is a stark dichotomy of perception. The interesting part is the Western perception, which can only be interpreted as condonation of the invasion and the setting up of an at-best unrepresentative Iraqi government, at-worst a puppet government.

What needs to be done for a credible government to take over in Baghdad is at least the following:

- The US, UK, and its motley group of allies must hand over control of security

to UN and Iraqi forces, and set a timetable for the withdrawal of all foreign forces;

- Build up the Iraqi army and police, so that they are able to handle security on their own without having to depend on foreign forces;
- Remove all American military bases from Iraq;
- Allow Iraqi political parties to develop freely;
- Remove American ‘advisers’ from Iraqi ministries, and let Iraqis run their own ministries;
- Rebuild Iraqi bureaucracy, and organize international aid for infrastructure and public services.
- Hold free elections to elect a representative government—all over the country and as soon as possible.

Resistance fighters will be seen as insurgents by Iraqis, Arabs, and other straight-thinking people around the world only when the occupation of Iraq ends and a legitimate representative government is appointed. The current government is an appointed government—therefore unrepresentative—and its actions are carried out on the ‘advice’ of American ‘advisers’.

6 June 2004

SIDEBARS

Iraqi Constitution

Read the [Interim Iraqi Constitution of 2004](#) keeping in mind the US objective of building 14 military bases in Iraq and having control of key ministries.

Whose Country?

A Falluja resident on American soldiers: “They behave as though it is their country and we are all terrorists.”

SIDEBARS**Patronize the Puppets**

On the one side, terrorist fanatics and remnants of a brutal dictatorship who murdered hundreds of thousands of their own people and enslaved the rest. On the other side, people of immense courage and humanity who dare to believe that basic human rights and liberty are not alien to Arab and Middle Eastern culture.

– *Tony Blair, British Prime Minister, on the April uprising in Iraq.*