

Defend the Iraqi masses

By the Editorial Board
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The American and international working class has a responsibility to come to the defence of the Iraqi people. What is taking place in Iraq is a heroic and justified nation-wide uprising against colonial repression on the one hand and, on the other, a homicidal attempt by the Bush administration and American military to drown the Iraqi people in blood and intimidate them into accepting US rule.

Most of Iraq is in rebellion. The Shiite uprising provoked by the US outlawing of cleric Moqtada al-Sadr now embraces much of Baghdad and all the main cities of southern Iraq between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. The predominantly Sunni Muslim population of Fallujah and Ramadi are under siege and fiercely resisting an onslaught by US marines. Demonstrations and fighting have erupted throughout the Sunni areas of Baghdad, in central Iraqi cities such as Tikrit and in the northern city of Kirkuk.

The White House has variously labelled those taking part in the uprising as “thugs,” “assassins,” “minority extremists” and “terrorists.” This is a contemptible lie. The US occupation forces are confronting a movement of Iraq’s urban poor and most oppressed, who view the year-long rule of American imperialism as no better than the Baathist regime of Saddam Hussein. Iraqis as young as 13 are fighting with whatever weapons they have at their disposal. Shiite Iraqis are comparing the present situation to the 1920 uprising against the British, and the 1991 uprising to overthrow Hussein.

The common struggle of Sunnis and Shiites that is developing constitutes a devastating political blow to the Bush administration. It has shattered US attempts since the invasion to divide the Iraqi people along sectarian and ethnic lines and to stoke fears that an end to the occupation would spark a civil war. At least in Baghdad, where the communities live side-by-side, Sunni and Shiite youth are now fighting together against US troops. In response to direct calls by Sadr for the unity of all Iraqis, contact has reportedly been established between his “Mehdi Army” militia and the resistance organisations in Fallujah and elsewhere.

Sadr, the uprising’s main political spokesman and a man whose family was butchered by the Baathists, is also making a direct appeal for the American people to support the Iraqi uprising.

From Najaf, where he and thousands of his supporters are preparing for the same type of onslaught that the US military is conducting against Fallujah, Sadr declared yesterday: “I call

upon the American people to stand beside your brothers, the Iraqi people, who are suffering an injustice by your rulers and the occupying army, and to help them in the transfer of power to honest Iraqis. Otherwise Iraq will become another Vietnam for America and the occupiers.”

Sadr’s call displays a degree of political sophistication that is completely absent in the American political establishment. It is a direct appeal to the objective common interest between the Iraqi masses and American working class—who are both victims of the policies of the Bush administration and the American corporate elite. Contrary to the propaganda of the US media, there is no popular support for the occupation of Iraq among the majority of the American working class.

Millions of Americans are looking on with a mixture of numbness, shock and revulsion as the US military carries out a bloody campaign to crush the uprising. The atrocities that are being inflicted on the Iraqi population take their place beside those of the Nazis during World War II and those committed by US imperialism against the anti-colonial struggle in Vietnam. In the last four days, American forces have bombed mosques, strafed ambulances with machine-gun fire, laid waste to residential areas with tanks and artillery, and killed or maimed thousands of Iraqi men, women and children.

Since Tuesday, the people of Fallujah have held off a massive assault by thousands of American marines. Entire suburbs of the city have been the scene of protracted street-to-street fighting between marines and resistance fighters.

On Wednesday afternoon, US aircraft fired missiles and dropped two 500-pound bombs on the courtyard of the city’s Abdel Aziz al-Samarrai mosque, allegedly as people assembled for afternoon prayers. Iraqi witnesses claim as many as 40 people were killed. In direct violation of the Geneva Convention, US marines climbed the minaret of the al-Muadidi mosque and used it as a firing platform against the Iraqi fighters.

The exact number of Iraqi casualties in Fallujah is unknown. A spokesman for one hospital, however, reported to *Al Jazeera* on Wednesday it had treated over 200 wounded in the previous 24 hours. On Tuesday night, at least 53 people were killed in the city by US air strikes, including 25 members of one extended family whose house was destroyed by rockets.

Al Jazeera correspondent Ahmad Mansur—working with the only camera crew inside the city—has made passionate dispatches recounting the criminal conduct of the US forces and the horrific situation facing the people of Fallujah.

Mansur reported last night: “The situation is getting worse. An ambulance carrying casualties was attacked on its way to the medical centre. The American forces closed the road to

the city's hospital and everybody walking in the streets of Fallujah is now becoming a target. They are attacking residential neighborhoods. Residents of Fallujah call on the Arab world to intervene and lift the siege of this town of 300,000. They ask where are the Arab leaders in this time?"

Large numbers of civilian casualties have also been inflicted in four days of clashes between Shiite youth and American troops in the working class districts of eastern Baghdad. Two hospitals in the "Sadr City" suburbs had reported at least 68 dead and 238 wounded as of Wednesday morning, including a number of women and children. In cities across southern Iraq, the toll of dead and wounded is growing each day.

Desperation in US ruling circles

The attack on the mosque in Fallujah must be taken as a warning: after four days of attempting to suppress the uprising, the Bush administration and military are becoming desperate and unhinged to the point where they are prepared to do anything.

Despite more than two days of heavy fighting and the loss of scores of American dead and wounded, the marines have reported they are still only in control of 25 percent of Fallujah. An entire squad of 12 marines was wiped out on Tuesday in a single resistance attack near Ramadi.

American troops cannot enter into Sadr City except in armoured columns, with heavy machine guns trained on defiant and hostile crowds of youth that line the streets as they pass. Last night, Shiite militiamen joined with Sunni fighters to carry out attacks on US forces in northern Baghdad.

US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has admitted that the occupation forces have lost control of Najaf. The uprising also holds the nearby city of Kufa. Polish and Ukrainian troops have effectively been overrun by Sadr's militiamen in the cities of Karbala and Kut. Local police have handed over their vehicles to the uprising and, in many cases, joined it. Italian troops are barely keeping a grip over Nasiriyah. Japanese troops in the city of Samawa have retreated inside their fortress compound and British forces are now under daily attack by militiamen in Amara and Basra.

Amidst an international chorus of voices that the situation is spiraling out of control, as many as 24,000 American troops, who were due to leave Iraq over the next few weeks, are being issued new orders that they will be staying in the country.

The response within the US media and political establishment to the resistance of the Iraqi people and their challenge to the myth of American invincibility is a combination of panic, hysteria and demands that the Bush administration

order the military to carry out a bloodbath.

The *New York Times'* William Safire editorialised yesterday: "Having announced we will pacify rebellious Baathists in Fallujah, we must pacify Fallujah. Having designated the Shiite Sadr an outlaw, we must answer his bloody-minded challenge with whatever military force is required and with fewer casualties in the long run."

Washington Post commentator George Will declared in his column that the US "empire" had to establish a "monopoly on violence" in Iraq. "It is too late for debate about being in Baghdad," he wrote. "And the relatively pretty phase of empire—the swift dispatch of an enemy army—is over. Regime change, occupation, nation-building—in a word empire—are a bloody business. Now Americans must steel themselves for administering the violence necessary to disarm or defeat Iraq's urban militias..."

The US military has indicated it is preparing for a frontal assault on Sadr. General Mark Kimmitt told a press briefing yesterday: "We will attack to destroy the Mehdi Army. Those attacks will be deliberate, precise and they will be successful."

Democrat presidential candidate John Kerry has solidarised himself in advance with whatever the military does. In a speech at Georgetown University he declared: "No matter what disagreements over how to approach the policy in Iraq—and we have some—we're all united as a nation in supporting our troops and ultimately in our goal of a stable Iraq."

The blessing of the Democrats for atrocities has been matched by leaders such as Britain's Tony Blair, Italy's Silvio Berlusconi and Australia's John Howard, who have all publicly declared their support for whatever it takes to "finish the job" in Iraq.

The working class internationally cannot stand passively by in the face of the criminal actions of the Bush administration and its international political allies.

The *World Socialist Web Site* calls for rallies to be organised around the world to protest against the atrocities being committed in Iraq by the US and other occupation forces and to demonstrate the solidarity of working people everywhere with the Iraqi masses, who have the fundamental right to determine their own political future. The demand must be raised for an end to the slaughter and the immediate withdrawal of all American and foreign forces from Iraq. All those responsible for planning and organizing the war must be fully exposed, tried and punished as war criminals.

Above all, a genuine mass movement must be built in the US and internationally that stands irreconcilably opposed to US imperialism and its bloody program of militarism, global hegemony and colonial conquest.