

## A shameful day in American history

# US blitzkrieg turns Baghdad into an inferno

The Editorial Board

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The US bombardment of Baghdad, which began in earnest Friday, is a horrific, brutal and cowardly attack. It is being carried out for predatory imperialist aims—above all, the seizure and control of oil wealth—against the defenseless population of a nation that represents no threat to the American people. March 21, 2003 is a shameful day in US history.

In the first day of the campaign of “shock and awe”—the modern equivalent of the Nazi blitzkrieg—as many as 3,000 lethal bombs and cruise missiles rained down on Iraqi cities, principally Baghdad, a metropolis of some five million people. American military officials have indicated that they intend to unleash in the opening phase of the current war ten times the destructive power employed twelve years ago in the initial stage of the first Persian Gulf war.

According to Rear Admiral Matthew Moffit, aboard the USS Kitty Hawk, some 320 missiles were launched on Baghdad. Each missile can carry a 1,000-pound warhead and is designed to fly at low altitudes near the speed of sound to hit “high value” targets.

Reported upon with undisguised glee by the American media, the bombs and missiles exploded with terrifying force in Baghdad, creating enormous fire-balls, deafening explosions and sending mushroom clouds into the sky. During the first wave of attacks, at around 9 p.m. Iraqi time, Reuters correspondent Khaled Oweis reported, “The earth is literally shaking in Baghdad.”

A second wave of bombs and missiles hit an hour or so later. At that time CBC News reported that “large parts of Baghdad [were] already in flames.” Jordanian journalist Tamara al-Karram told CBC, “You can’t even know what places are the targets now. There is no safe place in Baghdad now.” Other eyewitnesses confirmed that sections of the city had been turned into an inferno.

Jean-Pierre Perrin of *Libération*, the French daily newspaper, described bombs that “on striking the ground, give the impression of transforming into huge balls of fire” and eventually turn into “thick columns of black and grey smoke visible for kilometers around.” He continued: “Each

explosion makes the downtown buildings shake and the bomb blasts can be felt some kilometers from the point of impact.”

A reporter for *IslamOnline.net* described “a ferocious and terrifying aerial assault on the Iraqi capital.” The report went on to say, “The air was thick with clouds of smoke as missile after missile whistled through the sky, followed by furious explosions as they slammed into targets across Baghdad, including the Republican Palace. ... It was impossible to count how many buildings had been hit. Balls of choking black smoke rose in the sky as Baghdad was repeatedly pounded.”

According to Reuters, “Fires broke out in wrecked buildings. Ambulances, fire engines and police cars rushed around otherwise deserted streets of the city, sirens wailing. Fires raged in different parts of the city.” Associated Press reporter Hamza Hendawi wrote, “A huge fire raged to the south of the city; the red glow of the flames illuminated the horizon.”

Other journalists spoke of a “flood of fire.” A headline in the Saudi English-language newspaper *Arab News* read, “Hell Rains Down on Iraqis.” The article described a family of eight killed when their vehicle overturned as they attempted to flee the bombing.

Attacks of similar ferocity were launched on the northern Iraqi cities of Mosul and Kirkuk and on Basra, in the south.

The number of Iraqi civilians killed in the March 21 attacks is impossible to determine. No one watching the ferocious assault can doubt that casualties were high. The US government, in the person of one of its chief thugs, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, insisted that “no comparison” could be made between the US-led bomb attacks on Baghdad and those of World War II. “The weapons that are being used today have a degree of precision that no one ever dreamt of in a prior conflict,” Rumsfeld said.

When one reporter at the Pentagon press briefing pointed out that hundreds of targets in Baghdad were being hit and asked if that alone did not raise the likelihood of civilian

casualties, Rumsfeld dodged the question.

In fact, a comparison between the Nazi invasion of Poland in 1939 and other fascist outrages of the 1930s and 1940s and the current US campaign is entirely apt. In terms of sheer firepower, the American assault on Baghdad undoubtedly surpasses the German Luftwaffe's pounding of Polish cities.

No regime has launched such a one-sided military campaign since that time—until now. The scenes of downtown Baghdad in flames make abundantly clear why US officials insisted on covering up a reproduction of Pablo Picasso's "Guernica" at the UN Security Council during Secretary of State Colin Powell's February 5 presentation of the American case for war against Iraq. Picasso's painting commemorates a Basque village devastated by a German bombing raid in April 1937 during the Spanish Civil War.

In any event, the public is intended never to know how many Iraqis are slaughtered by the US military machine. As a *Financial Times* article published March 19 pointed out, the American government has refused to publish an official estimate of Iraqi casualties in the first Persian Gulf War. Unofficial estimates range from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands killed and hundreds of thousands more wounded.

The reduction of sections of Baghdad to smoldering rubble, on only the first day of the all-out assault, exposes the US government's nauseating claim to be "democratizing" Iraq. Only a deranged ignoramus, impervious to world public opinion, like George W. Bush could declare against the backdrop of flames and mushroom clouds in Baghdad that "We're making progress" toward the "liberation" of the country.

The *Washington Post* was obliged to report: "US officials have declared that the liberation of Iraq is at hand, but few residents in Baghdad, even in private moments, have framed the conflict in those terms. While Hussein's government remains distinctly unpopular and even more feared, the mood seems to break along several fault lines. Anxieties over the destruction that a sustained US air attack may bring mix with worries about looting and lawlessness that could follow the government's collapse.

"This war was imposed on us," said Affaf al-Naimi, carrying yogurt out of a store in the wealthy neighborhood of Palestine. 'Liberate us by bombs? The bombs are going to liberate us? We didn't ask them to liberate us. We sat in our houses relaxed, we were safe, we entertained ourselves. We don't need someone to come here to be our godfather.'"

The manner in which the second Gulf War began speaks volumes about the Bush administration's goals, as well as the moral makeup of its personnel. The assault on Iraq began early Thursday with an assassination attempt on Saddam

Hussein, in the language of the Mafia, a "hit."

Iraqi Information Minister Mohammed Saeed Sahhaf aptly compared the Bush administration to gangsters. "You consider them superpowers. Well, this is a disgrace, a complete disgrace. They are a superpower of villains. Al Capone is the typical official of America in these days."

One of the great lies quickly exposed is the mantra that this war has "nothing to do with oil." US and British troops made the capture of the oil fields in the south and north their first major objective. After initially claiming that the Iraqis had set fire to 30 oil wells, officials later acknowledged the number was seven. The Iraqis asserted that they were not wells at all, but oil-filled trenches set alight.

The US and British governments claimed they were making seizure of the oil wells a priority on "environmental" grounds. But the *Financial Times* admitted that "London and Washington are risking the accusation that the war is as much to do with Iraq's huge petroleum wealth as its alleged weapons of mass destruction by making oil fields early targets."

MSNBC reported, "Allied forces are now in control of the oil fields of southern Iraq and are bringing in contractors to extinguish fires burning at seven oil wells... Oil markets seemed to take comfort from the speed of the US-British advance and shrugged off the news of the well fires. The lack of an impact from the war on oil shipments from Kuwait also inspired confidence."

A CBS News correspondent reported Friday night that the US military planned to attack 1,000 more Iraqi targets in the next 24 hours, firing 600 cruise missiles "and using virtually every type of warplane in the American arsenal, including the B-2 stealth bomber."

The assault on Baghdad, whatever its immediate outcome, will prove a political disaster for the Bush administration and American capitalism. No regime can long survive such a horrendous crime. Tragically, American civilians may also pay a price, as the bombing will inflame public opinion in the Middle East and encourage more terrorist attacks.



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