

# US rampage through Baghdad kills thousands

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The American military has officially claimed the 64th Armored Regiment of the US Third Infantry Division killed between 2,000 and 3,000 Iraqis during a three-hour rampage through southwestern Baghdad on April 5. In the aftermath of the assault, the Red Cross reported the city's hospitals filling with hundreds of wounded, both military and civilian, and morgues receiving dozens of bodies.

From a staging area in the southern outskirts of Baghdad, the 64th Armored launched a "reconnaissance in force" north along Highway 8 and parallel roadways toward the centre of the city. The armored column then turned west and cut a swath through industrial and residential suburbs of southern Baghdad alongside a major expressway to the airport, which American forces had seized on the evening of April 3.

A dispatch posted on the *New York Times* site April 6 reported: "This was not a hurried drive-by through hostile territory, but a three-hour journey along two of the city's major arteries, bringing the soldiers into contact with thousands of Iraqi paramilitary and other fighters... The M1 [Abram] tanks and M2 Bradley fighting vehicles left a trail of destruction, blowing up 30 Iraqi trucks, one tank and one armored personnel carrier..."

The *Washington Post* reported: "US forces killed between 2,000 and 3,000 Iraqis during Saturday's show of force, which drew fierce but futile resistance from Iraqi soldiers and militiamen regarded as President Saddam Hussein's last line of defense."

Troops of the 64th Armored described the attack to the *New York Times* as "a blistering gauntlet of death and destruction that engulfed civilians as well as Iraqi fighters". According to the *Times*: "The Iraqi fighters... fired from streets, from groves of trees, from highway overpasses. Many mingled with the civilians caught up in the unexpected armored thrust. Some people ran.

Others waved white clothes or held up their hands." At the airport, a US trooper stated: "People were lying all over the side of the road. I couldn't even count how many."

The reported American casualties were one dead and several wounded.

The US military has admitted the action on April 5 had no military objective. US Central Command spokesman Captain Frank Thorp told a press conference in Qatar: "This isn't about taking or holding ground. At this point, that was not an objective, to hold any territory in Baghdad. This was an opportunity that the ground force commander saw to move troops through a major area of Baghdad, and [he] jumped on it." Major General Buford C. Blount, the field commander of the Third Infantry Division, told journalists: "We just wanted to let them know that we're here."

The discrepancy in casualty figures is itself sufficient proof that the actions of the 64th Armored Regiment amounted to a slaughter of defenseless Iraqi soldiers and civilians. From the safety of their heavily armored tanks and protected by US aircraft circling overhead, the officers and personnel of the unit spent three hours gunning down whoever, and whatever, came in their path. The operation's only purpose was to inflict death, destruction and terror on the people of Baghdad.

The carnage will be repeated over the coming days. The operation of the 64th Armored Regiment is a demonstration of the strategy the US military intends to pursue in bringing about the surrender of Baghdad. The US is encircling the city but does not have sufficient troops to conduct a major urban assault. US military planners have therefore divided Iraq's capital into sectors and intend to attempt to wipe out the defenders, section by section. The *Washington Post* reported April 5: "US Special Operations and armored forces would attempt to seize those sections one by one and clear

each of Iraqi soldiers and the irregular militias fighting alongside them.”

Supporting the ground assaults into Baghdad will be a range of jet fighter-bombers, A-10 anti-tank aircraft and helicopter gunships. Air Force General Michael Moseley informed journalists on April 4 the airpower of the US Air Force and Navy had began shifting from attacks on Republican Guard units outside the city to what he described as an aerial form of house-to-house combat inside Baghdad. Moseley told the press: “We’re not softening them up [Iraqi troops]. We’re killing them.”

The atrocity carried out by the 64th Armored Regiment and the morally degenerate conduct of the American military in Iraq during the past week have a deep political and social significance.

There is no question that the atrocities that are being committed by the US military—and the gratuitous slaughter of massively outgunned soldiers who are not in a position to offer resistance is nothing less than murder—are in accordance with the strategic objectives of the Bush administration. The purpose of such killing sprees is to provoke fear not only in Iraq, but throughout the world. In an article entitled, “Viewing the War as a Lesson to the World,” *New York Times* correspondent David Sanger reports that “Some hawks in the administration are convinced that Iraq will serve as a cautionary example of what can happen to other states” that provoke Washington’s ire. That is, what is happening in Baghdad today can also, at some point in the future, happen to Tehran, Damascus, Beijing and even Paris or Berlin.

The conduct of the American military raises further disturbing issues. The establishment of a “volunteer” army has deepened the chasm between the military and general population. In a conscript army, the militarism and anti-democratic prejudices that run rampant within the officer caste find little support in the average soldier, who sees his stint in the army as an unpleasant interruption from the life to which he or she longs to return. In a professional army, the extent of deeply reactionary political sentiment is far greater. For the soldiers whose life has become the military, civilian life and democratic sentiments seem increasingly alien. The act of killing is seen as a routine part of their professional life, not as a hideous aberration from social norms.

The killing fields of Iraq are creating the social types who will be able to carry out mass repression within the United States.



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