

# Iraqi troops massacred from the air as US advances to Baghdad

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After a week of massive air attacks, the two-pronged offensive by US army and marine units launched on April 1 quickly pushed through the Iraqi Republican Guard divisions and regular army units defending the southern approaches to Baghdad. According to CNN, MSNBC and Fox television broadcasts throughout Thursday, April 3, US armoured columns have advanced into the outskirts of Iraq's capital and are engaging Iraqi defenders around the Saddam Hussein International Airport. The city's power has been cut off and it is under sustained bombardment from US aircraft and artillery.

Amid the shameless celebration by the US media of the American assault, it is necessary to call things by their right name. What is unfolding in Iraq is a slaughter. It is one of history's most unequal military conflicts. The US and British invasion forces are utilising their unchallenged control of the air and overwhelming technical supremacy to rain down death on Iraqi troops.

Harlan Ullman, one of the authors of the US "shock and awe" policy of physically and psychologically crushing any enemy of US imperialism, gloated to the April 3 *New York Post*: "To appreciate why we're making such progress, you have to understand the extraordinary advantages our forces have over the Iraqis. It's a matter of overwhelming might. Our air power is unstoppable. And our ground power has massive capability to destroy the enemy with minimum losses to us."

US and British bombers and fighters are flying more than 1,000 sorties over Iraq per day. The majority of air strikes over the past week have targeted the defensive positions of Iraqi Republican Guard units south of Baghdad. The US has kept 150 strike jets in the air continuously to enable constant "opportunity" attacks

on any attempt by Iraqi soldiers to re-deploy, re-supply or retreat.

As many as 12,000 precision-guided bombs have been dropped since the invasion began, as well as thousands more "dumb" bombs. The Iraqi units that have withstood the aerial attacks have been subjected to massive artillery bombardments and assaults by jet fighters, A-10 tank-buster aircraft and Apache helicopter gunships.

The US and British military are not even giving official estimates of the number of Iraqis killed or wounded. The *New York Times* reported on April 1 that American officials say a death toll is "not a statistic that interests them." A British air force officer told the *Times*: "We don't do head counts and we certainly don't publicise them."

All indications, however, are that the casualty rate among Iraqi troops is horrific.

The *Washington Post* reported on April 2 that the 12,000-strong Medina Republican Guard Division positioned to the southwest of Baghdad around the town of Karbala had suffered a "relentless pounding in recent days by Air Force planes, including B-52 bombers." The *Post* commented: "Scores of blown-up Iraqi vehicles and dozens of bodies lined the roads as the US troops passed by."

The *Los Angeles Times* reported that "burned and blasted wreckage of Iraqi military vehicles littered the sides of Route 9 just east of Karbala." The Associated Press reported on April 3 that the road from Karbala to Baghdad was lined with "hundreds of burning vehicles, both civilian and military" and added "hundreds of dead Iraqis, most in uniform, lay next to the vehicles."

The British *Guardian* reported on April 3 that the Baghdad Division of the Republican Guard defending the town of Kut and the southeast approaches to the

capital had suffered “intense” bombardment over the past week. This included the dropping of two 15,000-pound “daisy cutter” fuel-air bombs on their positions.

Daisy cutters detonate above the ground, engulfing a square mile in a firestorm that sucks out all oxygen, incinerating or asphyxiating everyone in the area. One description of their impact reads: “Those not incinerated are injured by the massive blast or the vacuum. Typical injuries include concussion, blindness, rupture of the eardrums, seared airways and collapsed lungs, multiple internal hemorrhages, displaced and torn internal organs.”

US Marine commanders told the *Washington Post* that long before their forces reached the lines of the Baghdad Division, 5,000 or more of the Iraqi unit’s 11,000 men had already been killed or wounded from the air, and 75 percent of their equipment destroyed. A Pentagon official told the *Guardian*: “They’ve been broken up and we’re taking them out one tank at a time. They’re sitting ducks.”

An embedded *New York Times* journalist with a Marine unit reported, “The bodies of Iraqi soldiers lay about in the wake of the American advance” and there was “a large pile of the Iraqi dead rotting in the morning sun” to the west of the Tigris river crossings.

Reinforcements were also cut off by US air power. The *New York Post* reported on April 3 that B-52s dropped six new CBU-105 cluster bombs on April 2 on a column of Republican Guard—believed now to be from the Al Nida Division—which was attempting to reinforce Iraqi positions. Dropped from as high as 40,000 feet, the CBU-105 releases 10 bombs above the battlefield, each of which fires four armour-penetrating warheads. Using infrared targeting, the warheads lock onto any vehicles within a 30-acre radius. According to the claims of the US Central Command, the new hardware wiped out an Iraqi force consisting of dozens of tanks and vehicles.

Despite their losses, the Iraqi military and civilians have continued to resist the American invasion. Numerous reports testify that Iraqi soldiers have launched heroic attacks to slow the advance of the US tanks and armoured vehicles, often with nothing more than pick-up trucks, rocket-propelled grenades and small arms. Survivors of Iraqi Guard units that have been flanked or bypassed by the US columns are

attempting to retreat to Baghdad to join with defenders inside the city proper.

Summing up the military situation, a senior American military officer told the April 3 *New York Times*: “The enemy is taking what forces he can muster and is ordering them back into the city. He is bringing in the Republican Guard for a last stand. We have been trying to kill anything that is moving toward the city.”

The slaughter accompanying the US advance on Baghdad demonstrates again the character of the Bush administration’s war to “liberate” Iraq. The resistance of the Iraqi people has inevitably seen the invasion degenerate into a campaign to wipe out the vastly outgunned Iraqi armed forces and traumatise and intimidate the population into accepting rule from Washington. A legacy of hatred has been created that will endure for decades to come.

With US forces encircling Baghdad from the south, west and east, the potential is now looming for a bloodbath. Significant sections of the Iraqi army have taken up positions in the capital for a last ditch battle to prevent a US entry into the city. The recklessness and desperation for victory of the Bush administration is such it may well order a street-to-street assault—at immense cost in both military and civilian lives.



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