

US troops gun down Iraqi demonstrators

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US troops opened fire on a night-time demonstration by students and youth in the Iraqi town of Fallujah on Monday, April 28. Thirteen Iraqis are dead, as many as 75 are wounded and there is an outpouring of bitterness and anger. Throughout Tuesday, thousands of people demonstrated through the town, carrying the coffins of the dead, denouncing the US and demanding the withdrawal of American forces.

According to Fallujah residents, the demonstration was a spontaneous expression of opposition by students to the takeover of the town's school by the US military. A company of 150 American troops from the 82nd Airborne occupied the school on the weekend and converted it into a base for operations in the area. Vehicles began entering and departing the area day and night and US troops established posts in surrounding streets and on the roof of the building. Anger was also reportedly fueled by rumors that the American troops were using binoculars and night-vision equipment to peep at local women.

According to an Associated Press report, some 200 to 300 youth gathered after evening prayers and marched toward the school to demand that the building be vacated as lessons were scheduled to begin the following day. Local residents claim those in the crowd ranged in age from five to 20 and were not armed.

An 18-year-old who was wounded during the incident told Associated Press the US troops "waited until we came very close, and then they started shooting." American soldiers confirmed to the media they began firing when the protesters were within 10 feet of their positions. The close range contributed to the high number of fatalities and injuries. At least three of those killed were children under the age of 10.

Ahmed Karim, a 21-year-old who was wounded, told the British *Independent*: "We were shouting 'there's no god but Allah'. We arrived at the school building and were hoping to talk to the soldiers when they began

shooting at us randomly. I think they knew we were unarmed but wanted a show of force to stop us from demonstrating."

Nearby residents also told the press the US troops fired indiscriminately. Edtesam Shamsudeim and her husband were both wounded inside their house. She told Associated Press: "We were sitting in our house. When the shooting started, my husband tried to close the door to keep the children in, and he was shot. The Americans are criminals." Her brother was killed on the demonstration.

Others accused the US troops of continuing to shoot at people moving in front of them for up to three hours. Jassim Awad, whose 15-year-old brother was wounded, told the *New York Times*: "It took me three hours to get him out. I even walked with a white flag so they knew we only wanted to get our bodies and injured out, and they just said no, no, no!" Doctors at a local hospital said that their ambulance crews also came under fire and were prevented from recovering the wounded.

The US military version is that people within the crowd were carrying AK-47 rifles and that they fired both into the air and at the school. Washington claimed that US troops only fired at those bearing arms. The US Central Command stated: "The unit exercised its inherent right to self defense and returned fire."

Contradicting the US claims, the British *Independent* correspondent Phil Reeves reported April 29: "Yet there are no bullet holes visible at the front of the school building or tell-tale marks of a firefight. The place is unmarked. By contrast, the houses opposite—numbers 5, 7, 9, and 13—are punctured with machine-gun fire, which tore away lumps of concrete the size of a hand and punched holes as deep as the length of a ballpoint pen. Asked to explain the absence of bullet holes, [US] Lieutenant-Colonel Nantz said that the Iraqi fire had gone over the soldiers' heads. We were taken to see two bullet holes in an upper window

and some marks on a wall, but they were on another side of the school building.”

The Associated Press has also reported that there is no evidence of gunfire damage to the school.

The details of the incident strongly suggest panic on the part of American troops, and a cover-up by their commanders. In an attempt to defuse tensions, the US soldiers responsible for the shootings have been withdrawn from both the school and the town. An investigation has apparently been ordered.

Whatever such an investigation may find, this massacre is the inevitable product of the predatory and illegal US invasion ordered by the Bush administration. Similar bloodbaths will be repeated again and again until US forces are finally withdrawn from Iraq.

At almost the exact time as Iraqi youth were being killed on the streets of Fallujah, George Bush was standing before Iraqi émigrés in Dearborn, Michigan telling them: “As freedom takes hold in Iraq, the Iraqi people will choose their own leaders and their own government. America has no intention of imposing our form of government or our culture. Yet, we will ensure that all Iraqis have a voice in the new government and all citizens have their rights protected.”

The exact opposite is the case. The US is in Iraq precisely in order to impose a puppet regime. Washington’s goal is the creation of a client state in Baghdad that will agree to the plunder of the country’s wealth by American corporations and give a fig leaf of legitimacy to an ongoing US military presence. The Iraqi people—who do not want to be ruled over by puppets installed from Washington—will have no say in the matter.

This political reality is shaping both the attitude of Iraqis toward the American troops and the conduct of the American military toward the civilian population. Across the country, the US invasion has been transformed into a brutal campaign of repression and intimidation.

In the city of Mosul, where marines gunned down Iraqis protesting against the US on both April 15 and 16, the 101st Airborne division entered the city on April 23 to suppress popular opposition. Describing their conduct, the *Washington Post* reported: “US tanks moved through Mosul’s streets, AH-64 Apache gunships zoomed overhead and soldiers paced the sidewalks, fingers on the triggers of their automatic

rifles. Two companies of soldiers seized the governor’s office, the symbol of local political power, which US forces had abandoned last week after coming under repeated attack.”

Summing up the mentality in the US military after more than a month of confronting the hostility of the Iraqi people, Special Forces Colonel Robert Waltemeyer told the *Post*: “The people of Mosul do not realize they have lost a war. They continue passive resistance. Big Army’s firepower and manpower will convince the population of US resolve.”

In one particularly vicious incident in Baghdad, US troops forced four accused looters to strip naked at gunpoint, painted “thief” on their bodies in Arabic and paraded them through the streets. Amnesty International has condemned this barbaric punishment as a breach of Geneva Convention stipulations on the treatment of prisoners.

The outrage provoked several demonstrations, including one outside the Palestine Hotel in the center of the city. One protester told the media: “This is a disgusting way to treat people without trying them. How do we know these men were thieves? Even if they were, this is no way to treat them. If this is US democracy, they can keep it. It’s just another way of keeping people in their place. I believe it will cause big trouble.” One of the young men humiliated by the American troops declared: “Now I want to find a hand grenade and throw it at the soldiers. I hate them for this.”



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