Iraqi civilians gunned down in US military raids

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The US military is continuing its campaign of preemptive raids in Iraq, rounding up Iraqi civilians and suspected "Baath Party operatives." In the most recent operation, dubbed Soda Mountain, US forces picked up 600 individuals, many of whom are being detained in deplorable conditions at the Baghdad airport and other locations.

In the aftermath of the July 22 killing of Saddam Hussein's sons, US military actions have grown increasingly provocative and brutal. On July 28 alone, US forces conducted 29 raids and arrested 241 people.

On the same day that American forces killed Uday and Qusay Hussein, a crowd of 40 to 50 protesters gathered in Karbala seeking entry to the Imam Hussein Mosque. When US Marines denied them entrance, the men reportedly began shouting and some threw rocks. According to witnesses, Marines fired shots into the crowd, killing one man.

The following Friday 2,000 demonstrators—some dressed in suicide-bomber garb and carrying mock explosives—demanded an apology from the US for violating the holy shrine and killing the Iraqi man.

One of the most bloody assaults by US forces took place in the wealthy Mansur district of Baghdad on July 27. The troops staged a raid on the home of Prince Rabiah Muhamed al-Habib in search of Saddam Hussein. Residents claim that up to 11 passersby were killed in the assault. Four days later, Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez admitted at a Baghdad press conference that "up to five" might have been killed, but refused to accept blame for the deaths.

Robert Fisk of the *Independent*, a British daily, gave a detailed account of the incident. He wrote July 28 that the US forces opened fired on scores of civilians in a crowded street, killing as many as 11, "including two children, their mother and crippled father." He continued: "At least one civilian car caught fire, cremating its occupants."

The raid was the work of Task Force 20, the unit assigned to hunt down Hussein and other key members of the ousted regime. At 1:30 p.m., July 27, a car with Task Force 20 forces dressed in civilian clothes pulled up two blocks from Prince al-Habib's residence. According to witnesses, the task force used barbed wire to block off roads leading to al-Habib's home, but failed to block off some side streets. The raid began several hours later.

According to a report in the British *Guardian* newspaper, unsuspecting motorists who drove onto the scene were gunned down by the US troops without warning. Shopkeeper Ahmed Ibrahim told the *Guardian* that soldiers were firing indiscriminately. Chaos ensued as US troops loaded bullet-ridden vehicles onto trucks to remove them from the area. Crowds screamed at the soldiers while the task force attempted to stop cameramen from filming.

There are also widespread reports of US troops beating Iraqi civilians at checkpoints. *Agence France Press* (AFP) reported the story of Rahim Nasser Mohammed, an electricity department employee, who was stopped by two army vehicles on the night of July 3.

After finding a small handgun in the car, a soldier began to beat him. "He cuffed my hands behind my back and taped my mouth and started to beat my face, hands and stomach using his rifle," Mohammed told AFP. He was then shoved into an Iraqi police car, where he was put on the floor, beaten and had a rifle put to his head.

A US military police officer, speaking to AFP on condition of anonymity, commented on the reports of beatings and killings of civilians by US troops: "It's an

embarrassment for us. A lot of this has to do with the war being over, and there being not a lot for us to do, and soldiers getting killed and then their friends taking it out on a regular civilians."

He added, "They should do certain things like sting operations and arrest those soldiers like common criminals. A lot of them should be relieved and reassigned.... That's not happening." He reported personally witnessing at least 20 cases where soldiers had beaten or robbed civilians at checkpoints.

The Pentagon announced July 26 that four US soldiers were under investigation for beating Iraqi prisoners.

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