

US shaken by barrage of attacks from Iraqi resistance

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A spate of rocket and car bomb attacks on Sunday and Monday dealt a shattering blow to US efforts to project an image of steady success in the drive to pacify Iraq.

Washington's plans to mark the six-month anniversary of Bush's declaration of an end to major military operations with allusions to the donors' conference in Madrid and a triumphant tour of Iraq by Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz ended ignominiously. On Sunday, a shaken Wolfowitz had to flee the rocket-damaged Al Rasheed Hotel, and the following morning three Baghdad police stations and the headquarters of the International Committee of the Red Cross were bombed in coordinated attacks that occurred within the space of 45 minutes.

The attacks demonstrated that the armed resistance to the US occupation of Iraq is gaining strength and that American officials and their local collaborators are not secure even in the most heavily guarded and fortified enclaves of the capital city.

Speaking from the White House on Monday, with Paul Bremer, the head of the US occupation regime in Iraq seated beside him, Bush reaffirmed his commitment to "stay the course" and hinted at intensified counterinsurgency operations. Other US officials, including Bremer, attributed the stepped-up guerrilla attacks in Iraq to foreign fighters and pointed the finger at Iran and Syria.

No one should doubt that the response of the American government to the growing sophistication and effectiveness of the Iraqi resistance will be a brutal escalation of attacks on the Iraqi people, combined with increased provocations and war preparations against Iraq's neighbors to the east and west.

The rocket attack on the Al Rasheed Hotel, the living quarters for most American civilian and many military officials, was the culmination of a series of guerrilla attacks that dogged Wolfowitz's tour, which began on Friday and included stops in Kirkuk and Saddam Hussein's home town of Tikrit.

The main purpose of the trip was to make the case that the security situation and conditions of life were improving throughout Iraq. Wolfowitz made a point of visiting Iraqi police installations as well as US bases, to promote the notion that the Iraqis themselves were increasingly taking over the job of policing the country and suppressing the anti-American resistance.

A poll released on the eve of Wolfowitz's tour, indicating that the opposite was the case on both counts, was largely ignored by the US media. The poll, released last Thursday by the independent, privately funded Iraq Center for Research and Strategic Studies, reported that more than 60 percent of Iraqis had little or no

confidence that US and allied forces would improve their safety. It further reported that the percentage of Iraqis who viewed the Americans as liberators had declined from 43 percent six months ago to 14.8 percent today.

Nor has Washington's PR offensive shifted public opinion in Europe. A poll conducted for the European Commission showed that two-thirds of European Union citizens believed the invasion of Iraq was unjustified and thought the United States should pay to rebuild the country.

For the most part, the US media served as an uncritical medium for Wolfowitz's propaganda efforts. The *New York Times*, for example, published a gushing article on Sunday headlined "Wolfowitz Is Cheering and Cheered in Iraq."

Left largely unreported were a series of more troublesome facts. The Pentagon official's tour coincided with the shelling of US bases in the cities of Samara, Baquba and Balad—attacks that resulted in dozens of casualties, several of them fatal. A power station in Baghdad was also hit.

The chief of police in the southern province of Amarah was gunned down over the weekend, and on Saturday a US Black Hawk helicopter came under guerrilla fire and was destroyed outside a base in central Iraq, shortly after Wolfowitz visited there.

Sunday's attack on the Al Rasheed Hotel marked the first serious guerilla assault on an American facility within the so-called "green zone," a heavily barricaded and guarded enclave in the center of Baghdad that is off limits to ordinary Iraqis. The zone surrounds the nerve center of the US occupation regime: the Republican Palace, which serves as the headquarters for Bremer and his top assistants, the building that houses the offices of the US-backed Iraqi Governing Council, and the Hotel Rasheed, perhaps the most prominent symbol of American colonial rule.

The attack was all the more significant since Wolfowitz was the guest of honor at the hotel when it occurred. One of the rockets hit the floor below his room, suggesting that the attackers may have had inside intelligence. The deputy defense secretary barely escaped with his life.

The Al Rasheed, surrounded by a high concrete wall and concertina wire, was considered one of the most secure compounds in Baghdad. The guerrillas overcame the physical defenses by rigging up an improvised multiple rocket launcher, which they hid in a trailer painted to look like a portable generator. They hauled the launcher to within 450 yards of the hotel and wired it to fire its missiles shortly after 6 AM. Eight to ten air-to-

ground 68 mm and 85 mm rockets, normally fired from helicopters, hit the hotel, killing an American colonel and wounding 17 other officials.

On Sunday night, two other explosions occurred close by the hotel. All of the hundreds of civilian and military personnel were evacuated from the compound and moved into other quarters.

The unsettling impact of the Al Rasheed attack on the Bush administration was reflected in appearances by leading officials on the Sunday morning television news programs. Secretary of State Colin Powell said on NBC's "Meet the Press" program that the administration had not expected Iraqi postwar opposition to "be quite this intense and this long."

Bremer acknowledged that the guerrilla forces were becoming more sophisticated, but reiterated the administration line that they in no way reflected widespread popular opposition to the US occupation. He declared that all attacks on US and US-backed forces were the work of "killers," whom he divided into three categories: Saddam Hussein partisans, common criminals, and foreign terrorists.

The next morning, the first day of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, Baghdad was devastated by the four car bomb explosions that hit in rapid-fire fashion, beginning at about 8:30 AM. Forty-two people were killed in the attacks, including one US soldier, two Iraqi employees of the International Red Cross, and eight Iraqi police officers. Another 224 people were wounded, including 65 Iraqi police. It was the bloodiest day in Baghdad since the start of the American occupation.

The International Committee of the Red Cross announced it was withdrawing all of its foreign personnel from Iraq, thereby becoming the second Western-based institution to drastically reduce its presence as a result of the escalating guerrilla war. Last August the United Nations withdrew the bulk of its foreign personnel following the car-bombing of its Baghdad headquarters.

In addition to the Army colonel killed at the Al Rasheed Hotel and the American soldier killed in the car-bomb attacks, three other US soldiers were killed in unrelated attacks in Baghdad on Sunday, bringing to 113 the toll of American troops killed by hostile fire since Bush declared "mission accomplished" on May 1.

At the same time, the toll of Iraqi civilians killed by US troops continued to mount, with the shooting death of a group of civilians in Fallujah on Monday.

The smoke had hardly cleared from Monday's car-bombings when some US military spokesmen and officials of the US-backed Governing Council sought to place the blame on terrorists infiltrated from Syria or Iran. Brigadier General Ahmed Ibrahim, the deputy interior minister, claimed that one would-be car bomber, who was shot before he could blow up a police station, was carrying a Syrian passport. At a press conference held later in the day in Baghdad, US Brigadier General Mark Hertling declared, "We have not seen attacks we could attribute to foreign fighters before. We have seen these today."

These claims were contradicted by other American military officials. Major General Raymond Odierno, the commander of the US Army's 4th Infantry Division, in charge of American forces in the so-called "Sunni triangle," said foreign fighters accounted for

only "a very, very small percentage" of the resistance forces. Brigadier General Martin E. Dempsey, the commander of the 1st Armored Division, which is responsible for the security of Baghdad, said on Sunday, "We have not seen any infusion of foreign fighters in Baghdad."

Such differences notwithstanding, a campaign within the US political and military establishment, and within the Bush administration, has already begun for a drastic intensification of counterinsurgency operations. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld fired the first public shot when he called, in his internal memo leaked to the press last week (by Rumsfeld himself, according to some accounts) for "bolder measures" in Iraq.

What Rumsfeld had in mind was indicated by a long op-ed piece published in Sunday's *Washington Post* under the headline "The Right Fight Now: Counterinsurgency, Not Caution, Is the Answer in Iraq." The column was co-authored by two denizens of right-wing think tanks associated with Rumsfeld and other war hawks such as Wolfowitz and Richard Perle. Tom Donnelly, one of the authors, is a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, and Gary Schmitt, the other, is the executive director of the Project for a New American Century.

They argue that the Iraqi insurgency must be "decisively defeated" and hark back to Vietnam, where "classic counterinsurgency strategies and tactics proved successful—when given time and effort."

"The United States knows how to fight such wars," they declare, and go on to say: "In Iraq, that would mean that coalition forces, assisted by newly trained Iraqi police and soldiers, would have to swamp a given area in order to root out insurgents and their supporting infrastructure..."

"A successful counterinsurgency campaign would also require American ground forces to carry out tasks and operations that today's 'transforming' military, which increasingly is trading manpower for precision firepower, finds hard to perform."

What tasks and operations? What is meant by "swamping" an area and rooting out insurgents and their "supporting infrastructure?"

It means a full-scale reversion to the mass terror tactics that were employed in Vietnam and became synonymous with American imperialist barbarism: the Phoenix Program's campaign of assassinations, the herding of civilians into Strategic Hamlets (a euphemism for concentration camps), and similar methods. Such is the inevitable trajectory of US policy in Iraq and, if not prevented by an independent movement of the American and international working class, other countries yet to be "liberated."



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