

Iraqi hatred for US occupation erupts in Fallujah

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In scenes captured by television cameras, crowds of Iraqi men hacked apart and lynched the bodies of four Americans killed yesterday in the restive city of Fallujah.

According to witnesses interviewed by Associated Press (AP), a convoy of three unmarked civilian SUVs was ambushed as it travelled along a Fallujah street. Iraqi resistance fighters threw hand grenades into two of the vehicles and raked them with machine gun fire, setting them ablaze and killing the four men inside. The occupants of the third vehicle sped off and escaped. The US military has reported only two vehicles were involved.

Jubilant locals gathered around the burning vehicles, cheering, dancing and hurling bricks at the corpses inside. One body was pulled from the wreckage and dismembered with shovels. Bodies and body parts were filmed hanging from a telephone pole and a bridge over the Euphrates River, and being dragged through Fallujah behind cars and donkey carts.

Throughout the incident, men in the crowd chanted “Viva the mujahadeen,” “Down with the occupation,” “Long live the resistance” and “Down with America.” According to AP reporters, a nearby group of Iraqi police did not intervene. No effort to recover the bodies was made by either the US military or other Iraqi security forces for 10 hours.

Inevitable comparisons have been made with the 1993 incident in Somalia, when the bodies of dead Army rangers were paraded through the streets of Mogadishu by triumphant Somalis opposed to the US military presence in their country.

Eleven months after George Bush declared combat in Iraq over, the US military is still confronted with a hostile population and an ongoing guerilla war across the country. American combat casualties in March

increased to 35 dead and 291 wounded, up from 16 combat deaths and 147 wounded in February. Five of the military deaths took place yesterday just outside Fallujah, when a convoy was hit by a massive roadside bomb.

The US government and military have stated that the four Americans were contractors working for the private security firm, Blackwater Security, and employed to protect food deliveries in the Fallujah area. No explanation has been given as to why they were so far inside the city. AP cameras filmed a US Department of Defence identification card among the wreckage, giving rise to suspicions that the men may have been American intelligence operatives.

The passions of the crowd reflect the hostility toward the US invasion and ongoing occupation of Iraq. In the last week, the American military has intensified the repression of the 500,000 residents of Fallujah. On March 24, the California-based First Marine Division took over control of the area, which has been one of the centres of opposition and armed resistance to the US. The newly arrived troops have been attempting to assert their control using brutal tactics.

Last Friday morning, hundreds of marines with tanks and armoured vehicles deployed into the city in force—the first time American troops have done so for months. Exchanges of mortar and gunfire flared throughout the day, especially in the working class suburb of al-Askari where the marines fought battles with local resistance fighters. Most of the 15 Iraqis killed and many of the wounded were non-combatants gunned down by the Americans.

A farmer, Jamal Mahesem, told the *Washington Post* he was shot in the leg while he was walking down a road. “I didn’t even see the American soldiers,” he said. “I don’t know why they started shooting. I didn’t

hear anyone shooting at them.”

Another wounded man, Ahmed Yusuf, who claimed he was shot as he turned his car into a side street, told the *Post*: “They think that they’re going to control the city by doing this? They’re wrong. They will never be able to control the city like this. They will turn the situation here to a war situation.” The man in the car behind him was shot in the head.

Among those killed by American bullets was Mohammed Mazhour, a freelance cameraman working for US ABC News. Hospitals reported treating at least 25 wounded, including five children.

The marines’ offensive continued over the following days. The major roads in and out of Fallujah were blockaded by US tanks and troops until Tuesday, with hundreds of people being subjected to vehicle searches. On Monday and Tuesday, marines carried out house-to-house searches for insurgents in three suburbs, including al-Askari. An unknown number of men were detained. A local, Khaled Jamaili, told AP: “If they find more than one adult male in any house, they arrest one of them. Those marines are destroying us. They are leaning very hard on Fallujah.”

As they rampaged through the city, the marines tossed Arabic leaflets into the streets that provocatively read: “You can’t escape and you can’t hide.”

The offensive has inflamed what was already a population fiercely opposed to the US occupation. Fallujah was a centre of support for the former Baathist regime and fighting has not stopped since the US-led invasion. As a result, the city has suffered considerably at the hands of the USA military. In April 2003, unarmed demonstrations were fired on by American soldiers, killing and wounding scores of civilians. In the months since, resistance fighters have killed and wounded dozens of Americans.

Last November, in an attempt to reduce casualties, the US military withdrew to the outskirts of Fallujah and ostensibly left security in the hands of the local forces it had recruited. The city immediately came under the sway of the insurgency. This was demonstrated on February 14 when up to 75 heavily armed men stormed the police station to free a group of captured guerillas. Dozens of the US-trained police were killed or wounded.

Yesterday’s incident has set the stage for a further escalation of violence and greater US reprisals against

the civilian population. American general Mark Klimmit told a press conference: “The Marines, like their predecessors, will continue to maintain control. There often are small outbursts of violence. As we’ve seen today, they will go in, they will restore order, and they’ll put those people back in their place.”

In the face of a constant cycle of death and mayhem, the political and military spokesmen for the Bush administration continue to assert that only a minority of Iraqis oppose the US presence and that the security situation is improving. The hatred and anger shown yesterday on the streets of Fallujah, however, is not confined to a few hundred men in one city. To one degree or another, it is shared by the vast majority of Iraqis.

The increased US casualties are partly due to stepped-up operations against the Iraqi resistance ahead of the scheduled June 30 transfer of power to an Iraqi puppet government. Far from bringing greater stability, however, the military offensive has only fueled opposition and the determination among Iraqis to resist the US plans.

It is likely that sections of the American establishment will attempt to exploit the four contractors’ deaths to argue for greater numbers of American and foreign troops to be sent to Iraq in order to guarantee “security.” Against such calls, the demand must be raised for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of US and all foreign troops from the country.



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