

US officer threatens to turn Fallujah into “a killing field”

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An unnamed senior American officer told yesterday's *New York Times* that the US forces besieging the predominantly Sunni Muslim Iraqi city of Fallujah could turn it into “a killing field in a couple of days”. The statement, filled with murderous intent, is only one of the more chilling indications that the Bush administration has ordered the military to drown the city of 300,000 in blood and make it an example of what will happen in other areas of Iraq if the three-week uprising against the US occupation continues.

The two-week ceasefire in Fallujah is on the verge of a complete breakdown. The US terms for a “peaceful” end to the siege are so unpalatable that they were clearly meant to be rejected. The US is demanding that the fighters defending the city hand over all their heavy weapons and stand by passively as marines and Iraqi police come in to carry out mass arrests and drag hundreds of young men off into prison camps.

On Wednesday, in defiance of a US agreement with unnamed city leaders that the resistance would turn in their rocket-propelled grenade launchers, mortars and machine-guns, the defenders handed over only a truck-full of dysfunctional and obsolete weapons.

General James Conway, the commander of the marines preparing to attack the city again, was forced to note: “We are somewhat questioning whether they [the negotiators] represent the people of Fallujah.” Conway gave a timeframe of “days, not weeks” for marines to launch a renewed assault on the city, which he admitted would be “costly” for both the population and his troops.

Attempts are being made by US officials to justify before American and international public opinion the destruction of the city and massive Iraqi casualties.

Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) spokesman Dan Senor demonised the thousands of young men defending Fallujah on Thursday as “foreign fighters, drug users, former Mukhabarat [Baathist secret police], Special

Republican Guard, former Fedayeen Saddam [irregular Baathist fighters] and other serious, dangerous, violent criminals...”

General Conway declared: “If the situation comes to it, we will demand that noncombatants leave the city... We'd like the good people of Fallujah, who see that their country has a future, to separate themselves from those who have nothing to live for and are here to die fighting the infidels.” By implication, those who remain and are killed in the indiscriminate US attacks that follow, have only themselves to blame.

The ceasefire itself has been an utter travesty. Its main purpose from the standpoint of the US military was not to negotiate a “peaceful solution,” but to kill as many defenders as possible while at the same time boosting the US forces around the city.

Loud music, insults and bursts of gunfire have been directed at Iraqi positions to try to provoke fighters into launching attacks. On at least half a dozen occasions, helicopter gunship raids and air strikes have been called in on parts of the city. Marines have launched attacks on several towns and villages near Fallujah that were also being held by the Iraqi resistance.

American snipers have literally stalked the city, murdering as many people as they can. The *Los Angeles Times* reported on April 17, six days into the ceasefire: “Marine sniper teams are spread in and around the city, working night and day, using powerful scopes, thermal imaging equipment and specially modified bolt-action rifles that allow them to identify and target armed militants from 800 yards away... The Marines believe their snipers have killed hundreds of insurgents.” One 21-year-old sniper claimed to have killed 24 Iraqis already.

Over the past two weeks, 3,500 marines have massed around Fallujah, backed by logistical support, squadrons of tanks and armoured fighting vehicles, helicopter

gunships and ground artillery. The US Air Force is flying at least 50 combat missions each day over the city and western Iraq.

In a sign of an impending attack, marines have reportedly been issued two to three days worth of combat rations, water and ammunition. A 500-strong Iraqi unit, the 36th battalion of the Iraqi Civil Defence Corp (ICDC), will also be involved in any assault. It has been confirmed that this unit is the special battalion recruited last December from pro-US militias, such as the Kurdish *peshmerga* and the forces of Ahmad Chalabi of the Iraqi National Congress.

Fallujah has been slated for destruction because the city, along with Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr who is besieged with thousands of his supporters in the holy Shiite city of Najaf, has become a symbol of an uprising that has shaken the US occupation of Iraq to the core. The majority of Iraqis, whether Shiite or Sunni, are uniting around a common demand—that the American military get out of their country.

The entry of thousands of Shiite fighters into active resistance on April 4, alongside the long running guerilla war being fought in predominantly Sunni areas, has forced US and allied forces to retreat inside fortress compounds in many parts of the country.

The uprising has also triggered the virtual disintegration of the US-recruited Iraqi security forces. According to the commander of the US First Armored Division, 10 percent of the Iraqi police and civil defence troops outright joined the uprising, while another 40 percent deserted.

The inability of the US military to provide security has led to a breakdown in the economic functioning of the occupation. At least 1,500 engineers and contractors hired to work for the CPA have fled the country. Other contractors, such as truck drivers, are refusing to work. Halliburton, the Republican party-connected company with a contract to supply the US military with food, water and fuel, has had to reduce its convoys by 35 percent.

Fighting and unrest has spread to areas of Iraq that until now had been relatively quiet. Last weekend, US forces fought a major battle in the town of al-Qaim, in the far west of Iraq on the Syrian border. The depth of animosity toward the occupation was highlighted yesterday, during the funerals of dozens of people killed by the bomb blasts at five Iraqi police facilities in Basra on Wednesday. Led by a cleric loyal to al-Sadr, police and the families of the dead blamed the British forces for the bombing and demanded they leave the country.

Afraid of being embroiled in a quagmire, the Spanish,

Honduran and Dominican governments have announced they are pulling out their troops. The Thai and Philippines governments are considering following suit.

The disarray in Iraq has emboldened the European Union to suggest that US control over Iraq should be weakened—undoubtedly to the benefit of the European powers. EU foreign policy minister Javier Solana declared on Wednesday that there would be “big battles” if the new UN resolution being sought by the Bush administration to legitimise the formation of a caretaker Iraqi government on June 30 placed the Iraqi security forces under US command. Control of the Iraqi forces, Solana asserted, was “still an open question”.

The reaction in the US political establishment has been an increasingly impatient demand that the Bush administration and military reassert control—regardless of the cost in Iraqi and American lives.

The *Wall Street Journal* editorial of April 20 is a case in point. Declaring Fallujah had to be “cleared out as a terrorist sanctuary” and condemning the ceasefire, it warned the White House: “The fastest way for Mr. Bush to lose support at home would be if Americans see soldiers *restrained* from doing what it takes to win by UN statements or political control. That’s when his own base begins to walk.”

A murderous logic is at work in Iraq. Having staked so much on the conquest of the oil-rich and geo-politically strategic country, as part of a broader agenda of global domination, US imperialism is signalling it cannot and will not retreat. The entire discussion within the political establishment, from both Republican and Democratic quarters, revolves around sending more troops, allocating more finances to the war and crushing the Iraqi uprising.

Republican senator John McCain summed up the mood sweeping Washington in a speech yesterday. Calling for another 10,000 troops to be sent to Iraq and for greater military spending, McCain declared Iraq was the “biggest foreign policy test in a generation”, that would be “very expensive, difficult and long”.

Those who will pay the price, unless US militarism is defeated, are the Iraqi people and hundreds more young American soldiers.



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