

Washington unleashes bloodbath in Iraq

The Editorial Board
28 April 2004

With thousands of troops massed outside the besieged cities of Fallujah in central Iraq and Najaf in the south, the Bush administration has unleashed a bloodbath against the Iraqi people.

In Fallujah, US forces on Tuesday escalated their attack, with AC-130 gunships firing cannon rounds into crowded residential areas. The city was also pounded by fire from helicopter gunships, jet fighters, tanks and machine guns.

In one instance, tank fire was used to topple the minaret of a local mosque. Marines reportedly closed the last entrance to Fallujah, barring any more of the residents who had fled earlier fighting from returning to their homes. The action was seen by observers as the prelude to the renewal of a full-scale assault on the city of 300,000, which has been a center of resistance to the US occupation.

One Marine commander referred to the city—comparable in size to Birmingham, Alabama or Newark, New Jersey—as a “huge rats’ nest.”

In Najaf, Pentagon officials claimed Tuesday that US occupation forces killed scores of members of the Mahdi Army, a militia loyal to Shiite leader Moqtada al-Sadr. Missile-firing helicopter gunships were called in to mow down some 60 militiamen, according to US officials. Local hospital staff, however, reported that the casualties included unarmed civilians. It was also reported that US troops had seized a major hospital and were denying access or supplies to those seeking to treat wounded Iraqis.

In the aftermath of the clash, throngs of Najaf residents carried the coffins of seven of the slain fighters through the streets, vowing to resist any attempt by US forces to take control of the city.

“We’re going to drive this guy into the dirt,” a commanding officer of the US 1st Armored Division said of Sadr.

What is being prepared is a wave of mass killing aimed at terrorizing the Iraqi people into accepting the continued occupation of their country by the US military. Lacking anywhere near the forces necessary to police a country of 25 million people, Washington is determined to make an example out of Fallujah and Sadr’s movement, much in the same fashion that the Nazi occupiers of World War II Europe leveled the Czech town of Lidice and razed the Warsaw ghetto.

Given the sadism and backwardness of the occupant of the White House, who is said to be making the ultimate decisions on the two sieges, the looming assaults are no doubt also driven by a thirst for revenge. Since the beginning of April, 122 US troops have lost their lives in combat. During the same period, ten times as many Iraqis have been killed, many of them women and children.

Laying siege to cities, attacking hospitals and mosques, denying medical care, food and other essential services to entire civilian populations and imprisoning close to 20,000 Iraqis without charges or hearings are all war crimes, and they are being carried out in the name of the American people.

The original pretexts advanced for invading and occupying

Iraq—from weapons of mass destruction to supposed ties between Baghdad and Al Qaeda—have long since been proven lies. Now, the claim that Washington is seeking to bring “freedom” and “democracy” in Iraq is being exposed as a fraud as the full horror of Washington’s dirty colonialist war becomes increasingly evident.

While millions of Americans oppose this war and watch with revulsion as the killing escalates, the onslaught against the Iraqi people enjoys the full support of the US establishment and both of its political parties. That the bloodletting in Iraq is the consensus policy of the entire ruling elite was made clear by editorials appearing in two influential dailies this week.

In an editorial entitled “The Fallujah Stakes,” the *Wall Street Journal* on Monday gave vent to the thirst for blood that predominates among the right-wing Republican layers that are politically closest to the Bush administration. These elements are increasingly agitated over what they see as a retreat from the administration’s unilateralist policy in Iraq. This has intensified since Bush’s announcement that he will allow United Nations envoy Lakhdar Brahimi to effectively select the personnel for the so-called interim government that is to be installed on July 1.

The *Journal*, which in response to the first Persian Gulf war coined the infamous slogan, “Force works,” wants to see blood soon and in great quantities. The newspaper warned Monday that the Bush administration must not “shrink from the military campaign that is inevitable.” It continued:

“Sooner or later the Baath remnants, jihadists and criminals who have used Fallujah as a sanctuary have to be killed. They can’t be bargained with, they can’t be reasoned with, because for them a peaceful transition to Iraqi control after June 30 means defeat...[S]ooner or later the insurgents have to be defeated, and at the point of a gun, not by diplomacy. If we’re not prepared to do that, Mr. Bush might as well order the troops home now.”

The day before, the *New York Times* published an editorial entitled “A Stronger Force in Iraq” that corresponded in large measure to the positions taken by Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry. It called upon the Bush administration to confront “unpleasant realities,” including the prospect that an additional 50,000 troops or more will have to be sent to occupy Iraq, and that the occupation will continue well past 2006. It complained that the Bush White House was denying “our forces and the Iraqi people the protection that adequate troop strength would provide.”

The editorial concluded: “We may, in the end, find that the task Mr. Bush has laid out for the brave men and women in the military and the brave Iraqi citizens who are struggling to create a better future is simply impossible to achieve. But we have not reached that point. *This is not the moment for retreat and it certainly is not the moment for half measures.*” (Emphasis added).

The meaning of this last sentence—written in the context of the

sieges mounted by the US military against Fallujah and Najaf—is unmistakable. No “half measures” means unleashing the full force of the US military against a popular uprising that cannot be crushed without massive civilian casualties.

Both the Bush administration’s most fervent right-wing backers and its supposed political opponents in what passes for the liberal establishment have come together to employ the same lies to justify the slaughter in Iraq. They both claim that the US occupation forces are in Iraq as armed missionaries of “freedom” and “democracy.”

For the *Wall Street Journal*, the transition to “Iraqi control” is possible only through the slaying of those Iraqis who are resisting foreign occupation. For the *Times*, “security” for the Iraqis is to be achieved through a massive escalation of a US occupation that has already claimed the lives of well over 10,000 civilians.

This killing of Iraqis and the pointless sacrifice of hundreds of young American soldiers’ lives is being carried out not for any of the preposterous reasons—freedom, democracy, security—put forward by the war’s defenders. Rather, US imperialism has decided to conquer and occupy an entire country and suppress its people in order to seize control of its vast oil resources and assert its hegemony over one of the world’s most strategically vital regions.

In the run-up to what US officials and the American media describe as “handing over sovereignty” to the Iraqi people scheduled for June 30, the cynicism of the US colonial project is undeniable. In an interview with Reuters news agency Monday, US Secretary of State Colin Powell made clear that the so-called “sovereignty” of a new group of hand-picked Iraqi officials will not extend beyond their desks.

“It’s sovereignty, but (some) of that sovereignty they are going to allow us to exercise on their behalf and with their permission,” said Powell. “It is not as if we are seizing anything away from them.”

There will be nothing to seize. The US military will continue to occupy the country, exercising powers amounting to martial law. And Washington will resist any attempts by the new body to pass laws or amend those decreed by the occupation authority. All political and economic decisions will be made by the incoming US ambassador, John Negroponte, who will be backed by an embassy staff approaching 4,000—the largest anywhere in the world—and will exercise the authority of a colonial viceroy.

That the US occupation is an expedition devoted to looting rather than liberation was spelled out last month in a revealing interview by the American official first placed in charge in Iraq. Retired General Jay Garner told BBC reporter Greg Palast that the US administration had drawn up detailed plans for the privatization of the Iraqi economy and its oil wealth as early as 2001. Garner was removed from his post, he said, because his call for early elections cut across US plans to implement by decree this economic program of plunder and seizure. Nothing could more clearly testify to the fact that the invasion and occupation of Iraq have nothing to do with “democracy,” and everything to do with transferring the country’s wealth into the hands of the US oil monopolies, banks and corporations.

Part of the plan, Garner added, was to establish Iraq as a US military base for operations throughout the Middle East. He said Iraq would serve much the same function as the Philippines did in projecting US naval power in the Pacific after the crushing of nationalist guerrillas in that country at the end of the 1898 Spanish-American War.

“I think it is a bad analogy, but we should look right now at Iraq as our coaling station in the Middle East, where we have some presence there and it gives us a ... strategic advantage there,” said Garner.

These words, from the horse’s mouth, provide indisputable confirmation that this war marks the resurgence of brutal and unabashed colonialism.

The cynicism and hypocrisy of the US ruling elite and its political servants have no limit. One need only recall that Ronald Reagan in the 1980s hailed the CIA-funded Afghan mujaheddin who fought against Soviet military occupation as “freedom fighters” and the modern equivalent of America’s founding fathers. Yet those who fight today against the American military occupation of Iraq are branded criminals.

Tens of thousands of Iraqis are resisting—with undeniable popular support—the overwhelming military superiority of the occupation forces. While they are routinely described by US officials and the media as “terrorists,” “thugs,” and “extremists,” they have every right to fight for an end to the illegal occupation and colonial conquest of their country.

The demand must be raised with redoubled strength in the US itself for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US troops from Iraq and the payment of war reparations to the Iraqi people. Those responsible for dragging the American people into this war based on lies are guilty of war crimes and should be subjected to criminal prosecution.

The “liberal” argument that the US occupation must continue because without American troops Iraq would descend into civil war is as old as colonialism itself, and merits only contempt. The worst alternative in Iraq would be the “success” of this imperialist project. It would entail the permanent occupation of Iraq and endless bloodletting, while paving the way for new and even more catastrophic wars.

The Democratic and Republican parties are united in their determination to exclude from the elections any debate over the continuation of the US occupation. For both Kerry and Bush, the antiwar sentiments of tens of millions of Americans are illegitimate and must be suppressed.

The struggle against war cannot be waged on the basis of the facile politics of “anybody but Bush.” It requires the building of a new and independent mass political movement of American working people fighting to unite their struggles with those of working people internationally.

The Socialist Equality Party is intervening in the 2004 elections to lay the foundations for the building of a mass socialist party of the working class. Only our candidates are demanding an immediate end to the criminal war in Iraq. We call on all those who oppose this war to support the SEP campaign.

Help place our presidential and vice-presidential candidates, Bill Van Auken and Jim Lawrence, on as many state ballots as possible. Come forward to place SEP candidates for Congress on the ballot in your state and locality. Strike a blow against militarism and imperialist war by actively backing the SEP election campaign.

Click here to participate in the SEP 2004 campaign

Click here to donate online to the campaign



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact