

US war crimes in Fallujah

Stop the slaughter in Iraq

The Editorial Board
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Before the eyes of millions of people around the world, the US military has begun a systematic and deliberate slaughter in the Iraqi city of Fallujah. Speaking at the White House yesterday, President Bush publicly lifted all restraints on the conduct of the US troops. American forces, Bush declared, “will take whatever action is necessary” to subjugate the city.

On Wednesday, for the third day in a row, Fallujah suffered concerted bombardment by US warplanes and helicopter gunships. During the afternoon, jet fighters targeted an area of the southern suburbs with 10 laser-guided bombs, including a 1000-pound bomb that sent a massive explosion into the sky. As evening fell, jets and gunships launched missiles against buildings in the northwestern working class suburb of Jolan, which had also been subjected to heavy bombing on Tuesday. In the western area of the city, gunships strafed buildings and streets with 105mm cannon and machine gunfire well into the night.

The number of Iraqi casualties over the past several days is not known. What is known is that residential districts have been pounded. According to Associated Press, ambulances could not reach the areas that were attacked last night. Witnesses reported “large numbers of dead and wounded”. At least 25 buildings were reduced to rubble. One hospital reported to Al Jazeera that it had taken in 10 wounded after the shelling in the afternoon.

It is necessary to cut through the fog of lies, distortions and Orwellian double-speak that the American establishment is attempting to cast over what is taking place in Fallujah.

Amidst the footage of an assault by state-of-the-art American air power, General Mark Kimmitt told the media that the US forces were respecting a “ceasefire” and only carrying out “a series of defensive responses” to attacks by fighters within the city. The Iraqi defenders have been repeatedly slandered in official press conferences and media reports as isolated supporters of the former Baathist regime or foreign terrorists. The only objective of the US assault is declared to be arresting those responsible for killing four American contractors on March 30.

The reality is that the attack is a deliberate and calculated reprisal against the entire population of the city for defying the US occupation of Iraq. The continued resistance to the US that is organised from within Fallujah—despite massive repression—has made it a symbol of the Iraqi people’s opposition to the invasion and subjugation of their country.

When US troops first entered the city just over a year ago, they were met with demonstrations demanding they leave. American paratroopers responded by murdering 13 people and wounding as many as 100 more. In retaliation for subsequent guerilla attacks on US forces, the city was subjected to numerous raids last year. Hundreds of men were dragged away to prison camps. The resistance, however, continued to grow, to the point where US troops withdrew from the city last December.

The current US offensive is the revenge. It was planned long before the events of March 30 and had already been delegated to the marine division that had moved into the area several weeks earlier. Marine General John Sattler boasted Wednesday: “When the marines came in [to Fallujah], they brought a substantially larger force than the one they replaced, with the intent of making sure they had the forces that were necessary to go in and reestablish or establish law and order.... The intent all along was to go into Fallujah.... It was a calculated, stepped-up process....”

The killing of the four contractors was simply used as the pretext to launch an attack.

Fallujah has been under siege for close to a month. As many as 700 people were killed during the first US blitz from April 5 to April 9, with many of the dead buried in shallow graves in backyards and football stadiums. At least 70,000 people have been forced to flee the city. There is no electricity. Parts of the city have no water. There is no functioning sewerage system; no garbage collection; and the hospitals are breaking down under the volume of wounded.

Now, after weeks of preparation, the US military has launched an offensive aimed at forcing the 150,000 or so people still defending the city into a humiliating submission. At the same time, US forces outside Najaf and in Baghdad

are stepping up attacks on the Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr's militiamen and supporters who rose up this month against the tyranny of the occupation. Dozens of Shiite fighters have been killed over the past two days.

General Kimmitt implied on Tuesday that the US military was prepared to sit outside Fallujah and bomb the areas not under its control for as long as "six to eight weeks". Marines and armoured units, however, are positioned for a ground assault whenever the city's defences have been sufficiently weakened. The *New York Times* reported yesterday that a column of tanks and other vehicles was moving through checkpoints to the city's west. Marine commanders reportedly requested tank reinforcements after the city's defenders halted the first attack.

What is unfolding in Fallujah is on a par with the atrocities committed by the Nazis against the occupied people of Europe. The calculation of the Bush administration is that by inflicting death and destruction on the people of Fallujah, it will intimidate the entire Iraqi people into accepting the reduction of Iraq to a client-state of US imperialism. On June 30, a puppet Iraqi government, made up of only those who have, to one extent or another, collaborated with the American occupation, will be installed. It will have no powers over its territory or its armed forces.

The US media is playing an utterly criminal role in facilitating this agenda. Leading newspapers such as the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* have editorially called for and endorsed the assault on Fallujah. The cable stations, from CNN to Fox, are literally buying for blood and demanding the marines go into the city.

An inevitable logic lies behind both the views of the American establishment and the bloodbath being unleashed in Fallujah. Iraq was not invaded to bring democracy but in order to reduce it to the status of a colony and plunder its wealth and energy resources for the benefit of US transnationals and banks, as part of a broader perspective of using military power to overcome American capitalism's long-term economic decline.

There is no turning back for the American ruling elite. Driven by its economic crisis, it is attempting to reorganise the globe under its hegemony. The oil- and resource-rich regions of the Middle East and Central Asia are central to its strategy. Republicans and Democrats alike are committed to continuing the occupation of Iraq and are therefore driven to call for murderous methods to crush the resistance of the Iraq people, which has threatened the US grip over the country in the past four weeks.

Millions of Americans, and working people around the world, are watching the scenes from Iraq with horror and disgust. A war carried out on the basis of lies and deception has degenerated into the slaughter of mass Iraqi resistance,

with rapidly increasing US casualties. At least 1,000 young American soldiers have been killed or wounded this month alone.

The American and international working class is the only social force that is capable of defending the people of Fallujah and Iraq, and ending the atrocities. Rallies and meetings should be organised to demonstrate solidarity and to demand the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all American and other occupation troops from Iraq, with the payment of war reparations to the Iraqi people. Those responsible for the war and the massacres being committed by the occupation forces are guilty of war crimes and should be prosecuted.

This includes the international allies of the Bush administration in Britain, Australia, Italy and elsewhere, who continue to justify and defend the actions of US imperialism. Bush's principal ally, Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair, declared in parliament yesterday as bombs rained down on Fallujah: "It is right that the American forces try to make sure that order is restored to that city."

The carnage in Iraq poses the need for more than immediate political action however. It highlights the incompatibility between the interests of the vast mass of the world's population and imperialism, in which a handful of powerful states dominate every aspect of the globe's economic and political life on behalf of the major corporations and wealthy. A unified international socialist movement needs to be built that can lead the working class into a struggle against the profit system and the future it is offering of colonialism and war.



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