

A daily toll of US atrocities in Iraq

The Editorial Board
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The cold-blooded slaughter of civilians in Haifa Street in central Baghdad on Sunday underscores the completely criminal character of the US occupation of Iraq. Day after day, scores of Iraqi civilians are being massacred in concerted offensive aimed at terrorising the population and stamping American control over the country in the leadup to next year's elections.

At least 13 people were killed and 55 injured when a US attack helicopter fired on unarmed demonstrators who were dancing around the remains of a burnt-out Bradley Armoured Vehicle on Haifa Street. Among the dead were a 12-year-old girl and a 28-year-old Palestinian journalist Mazen al-Tameizi, who was reporting on fighting in the area for the Al Arabiya television channel.

A column of US armoured vehicles had moved into the street around 3am and set off stun grenades, provoking fierce clashes in a neighbourhood known for its hostility to the US occupation. The Bradley Fighting Vehicle was crippled by a car bomb about 7am, forcing the crew to flee after an exchange of fire that left at least six US soldiers wounded. As the US forces retreated, a jubilant crowd gathered on the street.

Mazen al-Tameizi and cameraman Seif Fouad captured the scene on camera. As they were filming, a US helicopter appeared, flying low and, without warning, fired on the crowd. The footage showed the armoured vehicle exploding and Tameizi stumbling away from the blast, shouting "I am dying, I am dying". Rajih Khalil, a friend of Tameizi, told the British-based *Telegraph*: "People trying to help us were wounded or ran away. After a minute, the helicopters came back and fired again. They came three or four times."

A US spokesman dismissed reports of civilian deaths, declaring that the helicopters had "fired upon anti-Iraqi forces and the Bradley, preventing the loss of sensitive equipment and weapons". The military later claimed

that "insurgents in the vicinity of the vehicle" had fired on the helicopters. Either way, this wanton disregard for the lives of innocent civilians simply means that the Pentagon regards all Iraqis as "insurgents", "terrorists" and "anti-Iraqi forces".

The tragic events in Haifa Street are not an isolated incident. Following the end of last month's protracted siege of Najaf, the US military has intensified its operations against major strongholds of anti-American resistance—Fallujah, Ramadi, Sadr City in Baghdad, Tal Afar and others. The only difference between what happened in central Baghdad on Sunday and indiscriminate attacks elsewhere in Iraq is that the slaughter was captured on video footage.

More than 60 people were killed in Iraq on the same day. In all, 37 died in Baghdad and another 10, including women and children, in Ramadi when US tanks and helicopters opened fire on a residential district. Around 2,000 US and Iraqi troops, backed by armoured vehicles and F-16 fighters, launched a major predawn assault on Tal Afar to end a bitter two-week siege of the northern town. After the attack, American forces sealed off the area and refused to allow desperate residents back into the town. But an Associated Press report described scenes of devastation, with bodies lying in the streets and buildings reduced to rubble.

The US attacks continued yesterday. For the sixth day running, US warplanes bombarded the city of Fallujah, long a symbol of Iraqi resistance. At the end of the day, a US military spokesman repeated the same mantra—"precision strikes" had been launched against "terrorist safe houses". These bare-faced lies were denounced by officials at the Fallujah General Hospital, who explained that one of their ambulances had been hit, killing the driver, a paramedic and five patients.

Hospital director Rafayi Hayad al-Esawi told the British-based *Independent* newspaper: "The conditions here are miserable—an ambulance was bombed, three

houses destroyed and men and women killed. The American army has no morals.”

What is taking place in Iraq on a daily basis constitutes a terrible war crime. One has to go back to the Vietnam War or to the atrocities carried out by Nazi armies in Europe to find a parallel for such a systematic slaughter of civilians. The Bush administration is resorting to the same methods as colonial oppressors down through the ages: punitive raids and massacres aimed at instilling fear and terror in a population that is overwhelmingly hostile to the US occupation and its Iraqi puppet regime.

The current military offensive is a deliberate response to the rising tide of armed opposition throughout the country that has turned one town after another into no-go zones for the US military and its allies. In chilling statements last Friday, senior White House officials bluntly spelled out Washington’s determination to crush any resistance prior to national elections due next January.

US National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice told the media that the US military would “keep the insurgents at bay. We’ve been doing a lot of damage to the safe houses of terrorists and will do more.” Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld warned: “We know what will take place in Fallujah, and that is that it will be restored to something under the control of the Iraqi government eventually. What we don’t know is whether it will be done peacefully or by force. But one way or another, it will happen.”

In emphasising Washington’s determination to regain control over the no-go areas, US Secretary of State Colin Powell declared on Sunday to NBC’s “Meet the Press”: “When the insurgency is put down, what the people of the world will see are Iraqis in charge of their own destiny... This is not the time to get weak at the knees or faint about it, but to drive on and finish the work that we started.”

The language is truly Orwellian: indiscriminate attacks on civilians are termed the destruction of terrorist safe houses, the levelling of Fallujah is justified as returning the town to the control of the Iraqi government, and all of this is described as putting “Iraqis in charge of their own destiny”. It recalls the US military’s infamous remark during Vietnam War: to save the village, we had to destroy it.

Not a word of protest has been uttered by the

presidential contender John Kerry or any of the Democrats against this slaughter. It is not even an issue in the election campaign. Nor has any section of the American media issued a protest. The war crimes are being carried out in the name of the American people with the complete complicity of the entire political establishment which, whatever tactical disagreements may exist, is committed to the neo-colonial subjugation of the Iraqi people and the country’s vast reserves of oil.

These barbaric actions must be condemned by working people around the world. The demand must be raised for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US and allied forces from Iraq, the payment of reparations to compensate the Iraqi people for their immense suffering, and the prosecution for war crimes of all those who planned and executed the invasion of Iraq.



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