

Another round of US airstrikes on Fallujah

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American warplanes once again mounted heavy strikes on the Iraqi city of Fallujah on Saturday in what has become a daily exercise aimed at terrorising the rebel stronghold and its population of some 300,000 people into submission.

The bombing began late on Friday night when US aircraft attacked “an offensive obstacle belt” composed of concrete and earthen barriers. The warplanes returned later when a US base on the outskirts of the city was fired on by “insurgents” using fired rocket-propelled grenades and mortars. At least six houses were demolished in what were described as “precision raids”.

A US military spokesman declared that seven “insurgents” had been killed in the attacks and that there were “no noncombatant injuries or deaths”. No information was provided as to how the targets had been selected. Nor did the military explain how, in the dead of night, it had been able to count the dead and determine whether they were hostile fighters.

Dr Abdulrahman Mohammed of Fallujah Hospital contradicted the US claims, stating that at least eight people had died in the raids, among them two women, three children and an elderly man. Reuters TV showed images of an injured baby being taken out of the rubble of a bombed house and a woman covered in blood, who was alive, after being pulled out. An Associated Press report put the number of casualties higher—at 15 dead and more than 30 wounded.

The repeated discrepancies between official US statements on these “precision strikes” and the casualty figures released by hospitals have become so glaring that the US military has felt the need to respond.

Speaking to the *Los Angeles Times* over the weekend, a senior US military official condemned “reports of civilian deaths in Fallujah [as] ‘propaganda’ and suggested that local hospitals have been infiltrated by insurgent forces.” He brushed aside video images of the

injured declaring “we can’t authenticate that the individuals in the hospital are in the hospital because of [a US] attack that day.”

The absurdity of these self-serving claims is highlighted by the double standards applied. Hospital officials struggling to cope with the daily toll of dead and wounded are accused of manufacturing “propaganda” for “insurgent forces”. But those responsible for the indiscriminate killings offer no justification for their claims whatsoever and are not challenged by the media.

Fallujah has now been pounded from the air for weeks. On Sunday, Air Force Brigadier General Erv Lessel boasted to the media that more than 100 “insurgents” from the Tawhid and Jihad network run by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi had been killed. “We’re confident that, through these airstrikes, we have been able to thwart many large-scale attacks and suicide bombings that were in the planning process.”

But Al-Zarqawi and his followers, if they are present in Fallujah at all, have simply become the pretext for savage ongoing attacks on a city that has become a symbol of resistance throughout Iraq. US troops were forced to call off an offensive to seize the town in April when confronted with determined armed opposition and growing outrage over the ferocity of the destruction. As a face-saving device, control was handed to the “Fallujah Protection Brigade”, led by a former Baathist officer, but this force has all but disappeared. Neither US nor Iraqi troops have been able to enter the city for months.

The US is now preparing a major military offensive to retake the city, along with other “no-go” areas of Iraq including Ramadi, Samarra and Sadr City, the impoverished Shiite suburb of Baghdad. In interviews on Sunday, US Secretary of State Colin Powell, after admitting that the insurgency was “getting worse” and that there was “an increase in anti-Americanism in the

Muslim world”, indicated a “major thrust” was being planned in the near future to “deal with these so-called no-go zones”.

Interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi echoed Powell’s comments on Monday, warning that a “decisive military solution” could be carried out if a political one was not reached. “I think we [have] waited more than enough for Fallujah,” he said in comments to the Al-Arabiya network.

Powell attempted to dismiss the growing armed resistance as a last ditch effort to halt national elections scheduled for January. But like previous claims that the insurgency would die away following the “handover of sovereignty” in June, there is no reason to believe that stage-managed elections in January will stem the opposition to the US occupation any more the installation of the US puppet Allawi did.

The overwhelming majority of the Iraqi people are deeply hostile to the US subjugation of their country. The daily US abuses and killing of Iraqis are simply adding to the reservoir of anti-US sentiment and providing a fresh stream of recruits and sympathisers to the various armed resistance groups. The methods used by the US in Iraq are no different from the Nazi occupiers during World War II or the colonial powers of the 19th century: their aim is not to win over the Iraqi people, but to cow them into submission.

In a sign of the mood in US ruling circles, a comment in the *Washington Post* entitled “From Jenin to Fallujah?” on Monday argued for the application of Israeli methods to Iraq. After noting that suicide bombings in Israel have declined following Sharon’s “relentless warfare” including the flattening of the Jenin refugee camp, the writer concluded:

“The Israeli experience does suggest that it’s wrong to insist, as many in Washington do, that a military campaign against the terrorist bases could not substantially improve security conditions for both Americans and Iraqis. The visuals would be awful and the outcry loud, on al-Jazeera and maybe at the United Nations. But if the reality were modest civilian casualties and heavy enemy losses, the result might be an opportunity to pursue the nation-building that now is stymied.”

As plans for a bloody US military offensive are being prepared, the aerial punishment of Fallujah continues unabated. In the early hours of Monday morning, US

warplanes fired rockets into the city. A US military spokesman claimed that only “illumination rounds” had been used. But Dr Walid Thamer of the Fallujah General Hospital insisted that at least three people had been killed and nine wounded in that attack. According to hospital officials, another three people died and six were injured in air raids on Tuesday.

Sadr City has been added to the list of targets with successive air strikes on Monday and Tuesday. According to the US military, “precision strikes” were carried out on “positively identified” militant hideouts. Residents told the media that the pre-dawn air raids on Monday lasted for hours. Dr Qaddem Saddam at the Imam Ali hospital said that at least five people were killed and 40 wounded, including 15 women and five children.



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