

# US media covers up American war crimes in Iraq

**Barry Grey****15 September 2004**

Every day, US military forces in Iraq are attacking civilian populations in a calculated effort to drown a growing popular insurgency in blood. But one would hardly know the dimensions or brutality of the atrocities being carried out in the name of the American people from the sparse and sanitized coverage provided by the major press and broadcast outlets that purport to disseminate “the news.”

The US media—owned and controlled by a handful of huge corporate conglomerates—play an indispensable role in the mass murder of Iraqi men, women and children. Together with the Bush administration and the two major parties of US imperialism—the Democratic Party and its presidential candidate John Kerry, no less than their Republican rivals—the media are complicit in a crime against humanity of immense proportions, one that dwarfs any crimes committed by the various political leaders who have been targeted for destruction by the American ruling elite in recent years: from Panama’s Noriega, to Serbia’s Milosevic, to Saddam Hussein himself.

One can stare at the 24-hour cable news networks from sunup to sundown and get no sense of the carnage in towns and cities from Baghdad, to Fallujah, to Ramadi, to Hilla in the south and Tal Afar in the north that is left in the wake of US rockets, bombs, tank shells and sniper rounds. The evening news reports of the major networks provide at most a fleeting image of the death and destruction, inevitably hedged with absurd avowals from the US military that “precision” attacks were carried out against “terrorist” and “anti-Iraqi” targets.

As for the press, one day’s front-page report of US helicopter attacks on unarmed civilians or air strikes against urban centers is eclipsed the next day by the latest hurricane threat or new poll numbers on the upcoming election—an election in which no discussion of the legitimacy of the US subjugation of Iraq or the real war aims behind the bogus ones used to promote the war is permitted.

No country’s media is more cowardly, or more artful in churning out the official line and excluding any serious criticism or analysis, than that of the USA. It would be

absurd to hold up the British media as a model of conscientious and objective reporting, but even there, articles occasionally appear that provide some insight into the reality of the situation in Iraq.

The *Guardian* newspaper, for example, on Tuesday carried an eyewitness account on its front page of the American helicopter attack on unarmed Iraqis that occurred Sunday in central Baghdad. Thirteen Iraqis were killed and dozens were wounded when US copters repeatedly fired rockets into a crowd that had gathered around a disabled American armored vehicle on Haifa Street, near the Green Zone that houses the US and British embassies and the offices of Washington’s puppet government.

For the benefit of our readers around the world, and especially in the US, we give here some excerpts from the chilling and tragic account provided by *Guardian* columnist Ghaith Abdul-Ahad, who was himself wounded while covering the US assault.

Abdul-Ahad describes at least four separate rocket strikes by American helicopters against the unarmed Iraqis—documenting that the helicopters returned several times to fire on those seeking to remove the dead and wounded from the first missile strike.

“When I was 50 m away I heard a couple of explosions and another cloud of dust rose across the street from where the first column of smoke was still climbing,” he writes. “People started running towards me in waves. A man wearing an orange overall was sweeping the street while others were running. A couple of helicopters in the sky overhead turned away.”

He runs for cover, and then: “A few seconds later, I heard people screaming and shouting—something must have happened—and I headed towards the sounds, still crouching behind a wall. Two newswire photographers were running in the opposite direction and we exchanged eye contact.

“About 20 m ahead of me, I could see the American Bradley armoured vehicle, a huge monster with fire rising from within. It stood alone, its doors open, burning. I stopped, took a couple of photos and crossed the street

towards a bunch of people. Some were lying in the street, others stood around them. The helicopters were still buzzing, but further off now."

The reporter continues: "I felt uneasy and exposed in the middle of the street, but lots of civilians were around me. A dozen men formed a circle around five injured people, all of whom were screaming and wailing."

Abdul-Ahad's belief that the presence of so many unarmed civilians afforded protection from a further US strike was shattered in short order. "I had been standing there taking pictures for two or three minutes when we heard the helicopters coming back. Everyone started running, and I didn't look back to see what was happening to the injured men. We were all rushing towards the same place: a fence, a block of buildings and a prefab concrete cube used as a cigarette stall.

"I had just reached the corner of the cube when I heard two explosions. I felt hot air blast my face and something burning on my head. I crawled to the cube and hid behind it. Six of us were squeezed into a space less than two metres wide. Blood started dripping on my camera but all that I could think about was how to keep the lens clean. A man in his 40s next to me was crying. He wasn't injured, he was just crying.

"I was so scared I just wanted to squeeze myself against the wall. The helicopters wheeled overhead, and I realised that they were firing directly at us."

The helicopters moved away, and the reporter went back onto the street to record the carnage and help the wounded and dying. Then: "More kids ventured into the street, looking with curiosity at the dead and injured. Then someone shouted 'Helicopters!' and we ran. I turned and saw two small helicopters, black and evil. Frightened, I ran back to my shelter where I heard two more big explosions.... I reached a building entrance when someone grabbed my arm and took me inside. 'There's an injured man. Take pictures—show the world the American democracy,' he said."

It is hardly necessary to point out that no major US media outlet has taken note of the *Guardian*'s damning account of Sunday's bloodletting in the center of Baghdad. Most US newspapers on Tuesday relegated to their inside pages news reports of yet another round of US air and artillery attacks on Fallujah, carried out Monday.

The Iraqi Health Ministry said 20 were killed and 39 wounded in the strikes. *Aljazeera* reported that those killed included the driver of an ambulance and six passengers, whose vehicle was struck by a jet-fired missile near the northern gate of the city. "Every time we send out an ambulance, it gets targeted," the director of the Fallujah hospital told the Arab newspaper.

*Aljazeera* also reported that US missiles destroyed three homes in the city's al-Shurta neighborhood, American shells hit a market place, and US tanks fired on homes in the al-Jughaivi neighborhood near the city's northern gate.

The *Washington Post*, in a page-19 article, noted the attacks on Fallujah neighborhoods and the ambulance fatalities, but reported without comment the official US line that the attacks were directed against a "suspected hideout" of associates of Abu Musab Zarqawi. It printed the Goebbels-like handout from the US military: "Based on the analysis of these [intelligence] reports, Iraqi Security Forces and multi-national forces effectively and accurately targeted these terrorists while protecting the lives of innocent civilians."

The *New York Times* ran a front-page commentary focused not on the death and suffering being inflicted on the Iraqi people, but rather on the danger that the US military's bloodletting against insurgent towns could backfire. It warned of the "classic dilemma faced by governments battling guerrilla movements: ease up, and the insurgency may grow; crack down, and risk losing the support of the population."

This description is itself a cynical deception, as the *Times* well knows. The very fact that the US feels obliged to step up the slaughter and target civilian populations testifies to the fact that Washington and its stooge government are hated and despised by the Iraqi masses. Talk of a risk of "losing the support of the population" is an attempt to maintain the myth that the anti-US resistance is the work of a small minority of Baathist "hard-liners" and foreign terrorists, and the equally absurd claim that the US is in Iraq to establish "democracy."

In reality, the US media's disinformation operation is among the most striking and significant expressions of the collapse of American democracy.



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