

Guerilla attacks increase as US forces continue air raids against Fallujah

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American-led occupation forces are confronting a surge in Iraqi guerilla activity in the predominantly Sunni Muslim regions of the country. Attacks on the occupation have increased by as much as 30 percent in the last two weeks, with between 80 and 100 taking place each day.

The escalation in resistance is taking place amidst an offensive by the American military, particularly against the city of Fallujah in Anbar province, one of the main centres of opposition to the US invasion and occupation of Iraq.

Several thousand US marines have Fallujah under siege and it is being bombarded by air strikes every day. Iraqi defenders and American troops are skirmishing on the city outskirts, while tens of thousands of people have been turned into refugees, fleeing the city to escape the American bombing and shelling. Dozens of civilians—including women and children—have been killed or maimed this month alone. According to witnesses interviewed by the Arab cable network Al Jazeera, US tanks shelled Fallujah's main al-Mathidi mosque on Monday, as fighters and civilians left the evening prayer service.

The plight of Fallujah, and the criminal conduct of the US military, has fueled mounting resistance against the occupation.

In the northern city of Mosul, two contract truck drivers transporting supplies for the American military were killed in an ambush on Saturday. On Monday, car bombs exploded outside government and police offices in the same city, killing a tribal leader working for the occupation and wounding a number of guards. The head of the local police only narrowly escaped death. On Tuesday, an American convoy was hit by multiple roadside bombs.

Iraqi interim president Ghazi Ajil al-Yawar specifically warned earlier this month that there could be an eruption of unrest in Mosul if Fallujah were stormed. With close to three million people, it is the most populated Sunni Muslim city in Iraq.

A video aired over the weekend showed an Iraqi who worked for the US military in the city being executed by masked men. Before being killed he was forced to state: "I

am telling anybody who wants to work for the Americans, not to work for them. The mujaheddin have very accurate information."

There are ample indications that resistance groups have thoroughly infiltrated the Iraqi government, along with the military and police institutions created by the occupation since the invasion. The timing and coordination of many ambushes suggest prior knowledge of the movement of occupation forces.

On two occasions this month, mortar attacks have been carried out on buildings as they were being visited by US-installed Iraqi interim prime minister Iyad Allawi.

On Saturday, insurgents reportedly dressed in Iraqi army uniforms used a fake checkpoint 95 kilometres east of Baghdad, in Diyala province, to stop three buses carrying around 50 unarmed US-recruited Iraqi national guardsmen. The interim government troops were taken from the vehicles and summarily executed as collaborators. The deputy governor of the province told the media: "There was probably collusion among the soldiers or other groups. Otherwise, the gunmen would not have gotten the information about the soldiers' departure from their training camp and that they were unarmed."

In nearby Baqubah, guerillas attacked a US base on Tuesday and fought street battles with American troops. Iraqi national guard posts in the city have been attacked with car bombs for four consecutive days. At least 14 guardsmen have been wounded.

In Baghdad, six US soldiers were wounded on Saturday in a dawn ambush as their convoy traveled to the airport. A roadside bomb set one of the American armoured vehicles ablaze.

On Sunday, "Camp Victory", a major US base near the airport, was mortared. Ed Seitz, an agent with the US Bureau of Diplomatic Security, was killed and an unspecified number of people wounded. A car bomb exploded as a US patrol passed near the infamous Abu Ghraib prison, causing unknown casualties. According to Al Jazeera, a massive bomb on the Kharnabat bridge in western Baghdad severely

damaged an American tank. Before it could be salvaged, the tank reportedly fell into the Tigris River.

The attacks continued on Monday. One US soldier was killed and five wounded by a roadside bomb in the west of the city. An explosion ripped through a market as an Estonian patrol passed by, killing one of the Estonian troops and wounding five. A car bomb exploded near the Australian embassy, hitting an Australian convoy just minutes after it had left the embassy and hurling one of the armoured vehicles off the road. Three Iraqi bystanders were killed and 13 wounded, while three Australian soldiers suffered injuries.

In the Shiite city of Karbala, a car bomb killed a Bulgarian soldier and wounded two others on Sunday. This means that six Bulgarian troops have now been killed in Iraq. In British-controlled Basra, a police station was car-bombed over the weekend.

Also in the south of Iraq, insurgents fired a rocket into the middle of the heavily fortified Japanese camp outside the town of Samawah. The rocket had no fuse and therefore did not explode. But it has been taken as a signal that Japanese troops can be targeted. A video released yesterday in the name of Al Qaeda-aligned terrorist Abu Musaab al-Zarqawi alleged that a Japanese citizen in Iraq is being held hostage and will be beheaded if the Japanese government does not agree to withdraw its forces.

Fighting is continuing in Samarra, which was subjected to a bloody US assault in September and is still under curfew. A car bomb on Saturday reportedly killed four national guardsmen, while clashes took place on Sunday between guerillas and US troops in the city's suburbs. Two children were killed in the cross-fire. On Monday, an American vehicle was damaged by a roadside bomb.

Guerillas have also launched attacks in recent days in Anbar province, the region surrounding Fallujah. On Saturday, a car bomb exploded outside a US base in the town of Baghdadi, near the provincial capital of Ramadi. At least 16 Iraqi police were killed and 40 other people injured. Another US base outside Ramadi was bombed on Monday and a convoy car-bombed near the town of Khaldiya. Two US convoys were hit by roadside bombs yesterday.

The intensity of the fighting occurring in the vicinity of Ramadi was underscored by an article in the *New York Times* on October 21. The Second Battalion, Fifth Marine Regiment, was deployed to the city in early September. In just six weeks, six of its personnel have been killed and 72 wounded. A sergeant told the newspaper: "They [the guerillas] know we're here; they know what we do; they know our routine. We're used to coming in [and] blowing stuff up. Now we wait to get hit."

Roadside bombs have been found every 500 to 600 metres

along major roads traveled by the marines. A young marine told the *Times*: "This is Vietnam. I don't even know why we're over here fighting. We're fighting for survival. The Iraqis don't want us here. If they wanted us here, they'd help us. They're certainly not helping us in this city." A 21-year-old marine from Nashville, Tennessee, said: "The funny thing that we laugh at sometimes is that the terrorists and us want the same thing. We don't want to be here and they don't want us here."

In Fallujah, the US military is continuing to build up its forces for a full-scale assault. British troops of the Black Watch Regiment have begun moving into position around the town of Iskandariyah, relieving US marines to redeploy to Anbar province.

As the prospect of a US entry into the city draws closer, Moqtada al-Sadr, the leader of the Shiite uprising that has flared on and off since April, broke weeks of silence on Saturday and declared his support for the resistance fighters in Fallujah. A spokesman for Sadr told the press he was only offering "moral support" at this stage and not calling for his Mahdi Army militiamen to take up arms.

The main Sunni religious body, the Association of Muslim Scholars, however, has issued a call for a boycott of the elections being planned for January 2005 and is warning of a massive backlash from the Sunni population unless the occupation forces halt the offensive on Fallujah.

A statement endorsed at a conference of 200 clerics last week was released on Sunday. The group's spokesman, Mohammed al-Faidhi, declared: "In the event that Fallujah is invaded or if it continues to be struck by planes, the clerics of Iraq will call on Iraqis to boycott the elections. This condition has already been breached as occupation forces have struck the town since the conference and it is now possible to take this decision. A follow-up committee will meet and announce this decision at the appropriate time..."

"We will consider the [election] results null and void. Elections that come with the blood of Iraqis, the burning of their properties and the killing of their women and children, are a farce that does not deserve respect."



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