

US media and liberal establishment: accomplices in the assault on Fallujah

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A murderous operation is under way in Fallujah and the entire media and political establishment in the US is an accomplice in the crime. The unfolding massacre in the Iraqi city has failed to elicit an outcry, or even significant questioning of the assault, from these circles.

No editorialist at a major newspaper or television news commentator has even hinted at moral qualms over the American onslaught. Not one columnist at the *New York Times* or *Washington Post* thinks Fallujah worth mentioning. Last week's Democratic Party presidential hopeful hasn't a word to say.

This universal complicity is the symptom of a terminal malaise. The upper echelons of American society are hopelessly corrupted and morally decayed.

Even as thousands of marines poured into Fallujah in an attempt to eradicate the Iraqi resistance fighters, American commentators blandly spoke of the action as the most natural and uncontroversial of events. Here is a city, surrounded and cut off, whose male population between the ages of 15 and 50 faces being "put to the sword" by the US military, and no one in the media can stir himself to raise an objection.

The deliberate demolition of a major urban center by a great power is unlike anything since World War II. The phrases used by the media—warplanes and tanks are "softening the defenses;" the city of 300,000 is being "cleansed" of insurgents—are meant to conceal from the American public the true character of the assault: a homicidal operation aimed at destroying a major source of opposition to the colonialist US occupation and its puppet regime.

Madeleine Bunting in the *Guardian* ("Screams Will Not be Heard") notes the foul and unreal character of the American propaganda war: "The city is being 'softened up' with precision attacks from the air. Pacifying Fallujah has become the key to stabilising the country ahead of the January elections. The 'final assault' is imminent, in which the foreigners who have infiltrated the almost deserted Iraqi city with their extremist Islam will be 'cleared,' 'rooted out' or 'crushed.' Or, as one marine put it: 'We will win the hearts and minds of Fallujah by ridding the city of insurgents. We're doing that by patrolling the streets and killing the enemy.'"

With only those journalists "embedded" with US forces on the scene, Bunting points out, "In an age of instant communication, we will have to wait months, if not years, to hear of what happens inside Fallujah in the next few days."

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's assurances that "There

aren't going to be large numbers of civilians killed, certainly not by US forces," are worth less than nothing, coming from a notorious war criminal. Rumsfeld's comment that innocent people will be able to stay out of the way and that only the "terrorists" will be killed simply means that all the future dead in Fallujah will be labeled "insurgents" by the Pentagon. Or, as a US military official told Agence France-Presse, "There is no confusion, if you're on the street, you're a bad guy. Ninety percent of the population has left."

That would still leave 30,000 people in the city, presumably all of whom are fair game for lethal American weaponry. Rumsfeld promised that this time the operation in Fallujah, known as "Phantom Fury," would be pursued to the end. "I could not imagine that it would stop without being completed," he said.

Bloodthirstiness pervades the American media, as it attempts to brutalize public opinion. On Fallujah, the differences between the right-wing gutter press and the more respectable liberal outlets are hardly worth speaking of.

Ralph Peters in Rupert Murdoch's *New York Post* advises the US military "to burn out the plague of fanaticism and prove to Iraq's people that the forces of terror will not be allowed to enslave them. We need to demonstrate that the United States military cannot be deterred or defeated. If that means widespread destruction, we must accept the price."

The "liberal," pro-Democratic *Detroit Free Press* speaks contentedly of "breaking the back of the insurgency" and hopes that "if thousands of them are killed in Fallujah" other Iraqi fighters may draw the conclusion that resistance is "no longer worth it." The *New York Times* takes the opportunity on the day of the assault to editorialize on the need for 40,000 more US troops in Iraq.

This disgusting blood lust dominates official America, under conditions in which tens of millions have registered their opposition to the war through protests, polls and in the recent elections. Some 80 percent of Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry's 55 million voters—or 44 million people—oppose the Iraq war. This sentiment is being systematically excluded and suppressed.

People from all walks of life are against the war and its latest, even more deadly phase. There are countless political organizations, scholars and experts who could testify to the conflict's criminality and the real, but concealed, motives behind the US intervention. Yet the American establishment has not seen

fit to allow anyone who opposes the Iraq war to make his or her case in front of the media. There is no equal time here—in fact, no time at all. This alone belies the claim that the conflict in Iraq has something to do with “democracy.”

All the noisy chatter in the media cannot hide the shameful reality. Bush’s election, won by terrorizing and deceiving the public, is now being used to legitimize past crimes and justify new and even greater ones. Whatever the political confusion that exists in the US, the massacre in Fallujah does not express the will of the American people.

The battle is obscenely one-sided and, on the American side, thoroughly cowardly. The US military employs the most modern and horrific weapons to eradicate a few thousand lightly armed fighters.

An Iraqi journalist told Al Jazeera, “US tanks, armoured vehicles, F16 and C130 fighters are taking part in the attack on Fallujah. Violent clashes are now going on in the western areas of the city. US forces are backed by tanks and helicopters. Clashes have also erupted in Julan neighbourhood. Resistance in these areas is fierce. The city’s defenders are responding to the US attacks with everything at their disposal.”

In an attempt to justify the destruction of Fallujah, the stooge government headed by Prime Minister Ayad Allawi and the Pentagon claim the resistance is composed of “terrorists” and “criminals.” But even in the American media, this Big Lie cannot be completely sustained. Darrin Mortenson, in the *North County [California] Times*, writes: “After the Marines’ last advance on Fallujah was halted in early April [2004], the troops held onto their hard-fought foothold in the first few blocks of the city while the politicians politicked and the planners planned.

“They realized they were up against not only entrenched fanatics and foreign fighters, but also against a city full of patriotic Iraqi civilians defending their city. Many said they would be doing the same if someone attacked their hometown, and admired the tenacity of their enemy.”

Only the most stupid and dishonest in the media deny that mass opposition to the US presence exists and increases on a daily basis. Yet this fact is not allowed to contradict the general presentation of the American mission as “nation-building” and “democratizing.”

Vietnam bequeathed the infamous phrase about “destroying a village to save it.” Now, US imperialism is engaged in destroying an entire country to “save” it.

What is the crime of the resistance forces in Fallujah—even if one accepts the unproven and dubious claims about the presence of alleged arch-terrorist Abu Musab Zarqawi? That they resist by force of arms a foreign occupier, who has designs on the country’s territory and natural resources.

If this is a crime, then so was the resistance to the Hitler regime’s occupation of much of Europe. Why not retroactively endorse the repression meted out by the Nazis to the French or Italian resistance? Perhaps it is time to recognize the essential wisdom and maturity of German policy during World War II. After all, the Nazis too claimed that their opponents were “terrorists” and “criminals.”

There is no serious examination in the American media of the opposition in Iraq. Who are these people? Why are they fighting?

Who is dying at the hands of the American military? These questions interest the embedded journalists and their superiors at home almost as little as they interest the Pentagon.

The US media treats the butcher Allawi, his hands dripping with blood, as the “legitimate” Iraqi head of state. This once and future CIA asset visited the main US base outside Fallujah and exhorted his troops—those who had not deserted—with the following words: “Your job is to arrest the killers, but if you kill them, so be it.” The press reports this filth without comment.

During the Vietnam War, sections of American elite public opinion turned against the government’s policy. The level of violence itself delegitimized the conflict, not only in the eyes of masses of people, but even among some sections of the political and media establishment. It was not possible then, nor is it today, to ascribe “democratic” and “progressive” aims to a war that entails the deliberate mutilation or death of hundreds of thousands of innocents.

Some 100,000 Iraqis are now dead as a result of the US occupation. Fallujah will add many more. This willingness to raze a city to the ground because it has become a pole of resistance to imperialist occupation sums up the entire Iraq conflict.

The city will be leveled to “teach a lesson” to the Iraqis and anyone else who dares resist the American drive to dominate the globe. Retired Marine Col. Gary Anderson told the *Wall Street Journal*, “This is primarily a political battle. Fallujah has little to no military significance. But every day the insurgents hold that city is a political and psychological victory for them.”

In other words, what is being carried out in Fallujah is a policy of exemplary and collective punishment—a practice associated with the Nazi SS and Wehrmacht, and explicitly labeled a war crime and banned under the post-war Geneva Conventions.

The assault on Fallujah will resonate across generations as an atrocity. Despite the torrent of lies and misinformation, the truth will emerge. If the American military pursues its aims to the murderous end, the name of the Iraqi city will take its place alongside Guernica, My Lai and other symbols of imperialist barbarism.



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