

US assault leaves Fallujah in ruins and unknown numbers dead

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The US assault on Fallujah is a criminal and barbaric operation. The descriptions of the thrust through Fallujah's northern suburbs make clear the city is being destroyed, and its poorly-armed defenders slaughtered, by 10,000 American soldiers over whom all moral constraints have been lifted.

A *Christian Science Monitor* journalist embedded with a marine unit wrote Wednesday: "Every vehicle is treated as a potential car bomb and every person as a possible enemy. Approval even came over the radio to shoot dogs with shotguns, to prevent them carrying explosives."

As the American forces advanced into the city, a *Chicago Tribune* journalist reported that a psychological operations unit trailed behind, blaring out Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries"—the music used by film director Francis Ford Coppola to accompany the scene in *Apocalypse Now* in which US troops massacre civilians in a Vietnamese village.

Iraqi fighters in Fallujah's north were overwhelmed by the firepower and the murderous tactics of the US military. While American infantry waited a safe distance away, jets, helicopters, tanks and other armoured vehicles pounded the buildings ahead of them with rockets, shells and heavy-calibre machine-guns to clear them of any defenders. Explosive coil designed to clear mine-fields was fired down city streets and detonated. Artillery bombarded residential areas with phosphorous rounds, which explode into a fireball that cannot be put out with water. No attempt has been made by the US military to avoid civilian casualties.

Iraqi journalist Fadil al-Badrani, reporting for Reuters from Fallujah, recounted on Tuesday: "Every minute, hundreds of bombs and shells are exploding... The north of the city is in flames. I can see fire and smoke. Fallujah has become like hell..."

"Electricity is cut off because of damage to the main power station from the bombardment. The water supply has been cut off too. People, particularly children and women, tend to stay at home, fearing being mistaken for a military target."

On Wednesday, Badrani reported to Al Jazeera that "almost half" of the city's 120 mosques "have been destroyed after being targeted by US air and tank strikes".

According to the *New York Times'* correspondents, more than half the houses in the northern suburbs of Jolan and Askeri have been destroyed. They reported Wednesday: "Dead bodies were scattered on the streets and narrow alleys of Jolan, one of Fallujah's oldest neighborhoods. Blood and flesh were splattered on the walls of some of the houses, witnesses said, and the streets were full of holes."

Other reports by journalists embedded with US units include references to five-storey apartment complexes and hospitals being raked with tank fire and heavy machine-guns, after Iraqi fighters engaged US troops from them. Women and boys as young as 12 are among those who have taken up arms to defend their city against the invasion force.

The contrast between the firepower being unleashed by the US military and the capacity of the Iraqis to fight back was graphically contained in a report by the *Los Angeles Times* on the capture of the Al Hadra al-Muhammadiya mosque, the focus of the popular resistance in Fallujah to the US occupation of Iraq.

A marine captain told the newspaper: "This is the nerve centre of the resistance—and we're here." The weapons found in the "nerve centre" consisted of only rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), AK-47s, obsolete rifles, materials for homemade bombs and improvised blasting caps.

How many people in Fallujah have been killed in the inferno of bombs, bullets, collapsing buildings and fire is not known, and may not be known for weeks or months. By the US military's own estimate though, between 100,000 and 150,000 civilians were still in the city before it began its rampage.

A Marine Corp spokesman declared on Wednesday that the US military has "no information of anyone [civilians] being hurt". The only conclusion that can be drawn is that they are not looking for such information. A Fallujah resident told the British *Guardian* by phone: "People cannot reach the clinics or the hospital and there are many wounded people. Most people are staying in their houses... There are a lot of people dead who I saw with my own eyes."

As the assault progresses and it is clear that the US military is treating the entire population as a target, the Bush administration has abandoned its cynical propaganda that the city was being attacked to "liberate" it from foreign terrorists headed by Abu Musaab al-Zarqawi before elections are held in January.

An unnamed military official in Washington told the *New York Times*: "The important idea to consider is that this is not an operation against Zarqawi and his network. It is just one of the many steps that need to be taken in order to defeat a complex and diverse insurgency, in which the Zarqawi network is but one element." US generals and officials are now stating it is likely Zarqawi and the "foreign terrorists" have left Fallujah—without providing any evidence to refute the claims of the Fallujah resistance leaders that they were never in the city in the first place.

The US media, which dutifully reported every airstrike on Fallujah over the past five months as a "precision strike" on Zarqawi safehouses, has barely commented on the shifting rationale for the attack on the city. It can be predicted with virtual certainty, however, that it will prominently report US military claims that Zarqawi has "surfaced" in Ramadi, Samarra, Baquba or whichever is the next Iraqi city slated for destruction.

The savagery in Fallujah is the real face of the US occupation of Iraq. The claim by the Bush administration that the slaughter taking place in the city will facilitate "democratic elections" in January is obscene. Fallujah is being razed to the ground as part of

a perspective of killing or driving underground every voice of opposition to the US presence in the country. The only participants in any elections will be the venal pro-occupation organisations that joined the puppet Iraqi interim government headed by Prime Minister Iyad Allawi.

The occupation of Iraq will not give rise to "democracy", but a pro-US police-state that sanctions the indefinite presence of American troops and the looting of the country's oil resources by American corporations. Allawi, the intended head of such a regime, is earning the nickname that Iraqis have given him—"Saddam without the moustache". Already accused of personally murdering prisoners, he has invoked martial law across most of the entire country and requested that the US military conduct bloody offensives against the resistance in as many as 21 other Iraqi cities and towns. On Tuesday night, Allawi rejected outright an appeal for a four- or five-hour truce in Fallujah so that the injured and noncombatants could be evacuated from the city.

The fighting in Fallujah is continuing in the southern suburbs and is likely to rage for days to come. The conquest of the city, however, will have the opposite effect to that intended by the Bush administration and the US military. Far from weakening or intimidating the opposition to the occupation, resistance groups have already stepped up their attacks throughout the predominantly Sunni Muslim regions of central and northern Iraq. Clashes between US troops and guerillas have taken place over the past 48 hours in Baghdad, Mosul, Ramadi, and other smaller towns.

The reports of occupation casualties are climbing as a result, even without accurate figures on the number of American dead and wounded in Fallujah. So far in November, 30 US troops have been confirmed killed in action, as well as four members of the British Black Watch regiment that the Blair government made available to the US military for the Fallujah operation.



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