

Horrific scenes from the ashes of Fallujah

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Fallujah has been laid waste. It is a hell on earth of shattered bodies, shattered buildings and the stench of death. The city will enter history as the place where US imperialism carried out a crime of immense proportions in November 2004.

The US military has no idea how many Iraqis—combatants and noncombatants—have been killed by the thousands of tons of explosives and bullets it has unleashed on the city. Mortuary teams have only just begun collecting the dead in the city, while no attempt has been made yet to clear and search the rubble and debris, beneath which hundreds of bodies may be buried.

When questioned on the scale of Iraqi casualties, US marine spokesman Colonel Mike Regner told a press conference on Monday, “I don’t know”. The estimate that somewhere between 1,000 and 2,000 Iraqi fighters are dead is nothing more than a guess.

The testimony of Fallujans who fled the city during the onslaught has led Amnesty International to conclude “the toll of civilian casualties is high”. Out of a population of some 300,000, the International Committee of the Red Cross believes as many as 50,000 women, children, sick and elderly were in Fallujah when the assault began on November 7. Some 5,000 are known to have escaped during the fighting. Reports are beginning to appear of American troops uncovering groups of civilians, desperately short of food and water, sheltering in buildings that survived the bombardment relatively unscathed.

For the vast majority of people around the world, the 10-day offensive against the population of Fallujah is known only by the sound-bites and video rolls on television, or the descriptions and selected photos contained in the printed press. Even that has been enough to instill horror and revulsion among tens of millions.

Iraqi journalist Fadhil Badrani, reporting in the city for the BBC and Reuters, relayed on Tuesday: “I have seen some strange things recently, such as stray dogs snatching bites out of bodies lying on the streets. Meanwhile, people forage in their gardens looking for something to eat. Those that have survived this far are looking gaunt. The opposite is happening to the dead—left where they fell, they are now

bloated and rotting...

“We keep hearing that aid has arrived at the hospital on the outskirts of the city, which is now in the hands of the Americans. But most people in this area are too weak or too scared to make the journey, or even to leave their homes... Looking at Fallujah now, the only comparisons I can think of are cities like Beirut and Sarajevo.”

A small glimpse of the horror the assault has meant for the people of the city, and for hundreds of American soldiers, can be found at <http://fallujahpictures.blogspot.com/>. The site contains a collection of images taken by photojournalists working for agencies such as Getty Images, World Picture News and Agence France Presse, who accompanied the US military into Fallujah. In most cases, the images have not been used in the mass media as they are deemed too “graphic”.

The site’s creator explains: “I created this site because I was angry at my country and couldn’t understand how we could let this happen... I have learned that most Americans have never seen what is being done in their name. We should face the realities of this war before we give it our support.”

The images include scenes of the devastated landscape of the city; the bloodied and fly-covered corpses of young Iraqi men lying in the streets or stacked in rows amidst the rubble; a headless body; women and children fleeing with the few possessions they have left; mortuary teams collecting the dead; wounded American soldiers being treated for shattered limbs; and Fallujah infants being treated for horrific injuries in Baghdad hospitals. The site also features headshots of the American troops who have been killed thus far in the fighting this month.

US general John Sattler declared on Sunday: “We have liberated the city of Fallujah.”

The assault on Fallujah is Nazi-style collective punishment, not liberation. The city has been reduced to rubble because its political, religious and tribal leaders, motivated by Iraqi nationalism and opposition to the presence of foreign troops in their country, organised a guerilla resistance to the US invasion. In April, the city withstood an assault by US marines and became a focus of

broader resistance, particularly in the Sunni Muslim regions of central and northern Iraq. In June, Fallujah's leaders refused to accept the legitimacy of the US-installed puppet interim government headed by prime minister Iyad Allawi.

The aim of the US assault is to make Fallujah an example to the rest of Iraq of what will happen to those who oppose the transformation of their country into a US client state. It is the spearhead of an orgy of killing intended to crush and drive underground every voice of opposition and ensure that elections next year result in a venal, pro-US regime. The American military is planning similar attacks on as many as 21 other cities and towns in Iraq.

Comments by American soldiers testify to the fact they view the entire population of Fallujah as their enemy and their mission as punishing the city. An officer overseeing the collection of Iraqi bodies, Captain P.J. Batty, told Associated Press (AP) following the discovery of two Iraqi men and two women buried in a shallow grave outside a house: "This exemplifies the horrors of war. We don't wish this upon anyone, but everyone needs to understand there are consequences for not following the Iraqi government."

Hundreds of Iraqis are still resisting in various parts of Fallujah and being portrayed by the US military as irrational fanatics. Military spokesman Colonel Regner told journalists "they are fighting to the death".

The men of Fallujah were given no alternative but to fight, as the American military prevented any males between 15 and 55 leaving the city. The indiscriminate US bombing and the execution of wounded Iraqis have provided further incentive to fight to the death or prepare suicide attacks. US marines have described coming up against, and killing, an armed 12-year-old boy. Partisans in occupied Europe fought no differently when trapped in hopeless situations by the forces of the Nazis.

The propaganda continuing to be told to the American people to justify the assault—and still being repeated ad nauseum in the American and international media—is that Fallujah was being held "hostage" by foreign terrorists led by Jordanian extremist Abu Musaab al-Zarqawi.

This is as much of a lie as the claim that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. The US military has now admitted that of the 1,052 men it has taken prisoner in Fallujah, at least 1,030 are Iraqis, mainly from the city itself. Embedded journalists have noted that most of the corpses appear to be those of Iraqi teenagers or young men in their 20s. Only 24 bodies of non-Iraqi citizens have been reported among the hundreds of dead.

Fallujah's leaders consistently denied they had any knowledge of Zarqawi's whereabouts or even his existence. On numerous occasions, they denounced the US claims for what they were—a pretext to attack the city—and alleged the

Bush administration had "invented" Zarqawi.

Without any attempt to refute the charges, the US military now claims that Zarqawi left Fallujah before their attack. A new US intelligence report, predictably taken as good coin by the American press, has declared he has "most likely" moved to Mosul, where another bloody assault by occupation forces is underway.

The triumphal gloating taking place in US political and media circles that the "victory in Fallujah" has shattered the Iraqi will to fight is self-delusion.

The fighting that has erupted over the past 10 days—from Mosul in the north to the suburbs of Baghdad, and across the Sunni Muslim regions of Iraq—demonstrates that the assault on Fallujah will not result in a lessening of the armed struggle against the US occupation. It has served to reinforce the view among millions of Iraqis—a view derived from decades of experience with colonial oppression—that they will only be able to determine their own future when the last American and foreign soldiers are driven out.

An unnamed US special forces officer now working as a security consultant in Baghdad, summed up his assessment in the November 17 *Washington Post*: "We are without allies among the Iraqi populace, including those who have benefited from the ouster of Saddam. Across Baghdad, Latifiyah, Mahmudiyah, Salman Park, Baqubah, Balad, Taji, Bajji, Ramadi, and just about everywhere else you can name, the people absolutely hate us... The Iraqi people have not bought into what the Americans are selling, and no amount of military activity is going to change this fact."

The responsibility of opponents of militarism the world-over is to defend the Iraqi masses and demand the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all occupation forces.



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