

Massacre looms in Fallujah following the US election

James Cogan
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The reelection of the Bush administration is expected to be followed in short order by a massive US military push into the Iraqi city of Fallujah. The attack will be the spearhead of a broader offensive to bring 22 rebellious Iraqi cities and towns—including Fallujah, Ramadi, Samarra, Baquaba, Kut and the densely populated Shiite suburb of Sadr City in Baghdad—under US control by the end of the year. The aim is to drown in blood the mass opposition among the Iraqi people to the occupation and clear the way for sham elections in January in which only pro-US parties will be permitted to participate.

Fallujah is the prime target. Both within Iraq and internationally, the city has become a symbol of the Iraqi people's defiance of the greatest military power on the planet. Resistance groups in Iraq's western Anbar province have waged a constant guerilla war since Iraq was invaded, and effectively took control of Fallujah at the end of 2003. In April, the city withstood a three-week siege by US marines. The puppet Iraqi interim government has no authority or support in Fallujah and the surrounding area.

In perhaps the clearest indication that a ground assault is imminent, US-installed Iraqi interim prime minister Iyad Allawi—who ostensibly will give the final order—announced overnight the formation of a “government to take over Fallujah” following its conquest by the American military.

For weeks now, American jets and artillery have been “softening up” the Iraqi defences of the city with daily bombardments. The intensity is increasing as the ground offensive looms. On Wednesday, AC-130s, aircraft fitted out with large-calibre machine guns and cannons, circled over the city for an hour, raining bullets into buildings and streets. On Thursday, a sustained artillery barrage was unleashed on resistance positions in the outer suburbs. Sniping and skirmishing is taking place on the city outskirts.

US marines have been rehearsing for intense urban warfare, training to clear buildings that have been reduced to rubble. Abrams M-1A1 tanks will be used to spearhead the assault. The *Los Angeles Times* reported on November 3: “The 67-ton metal giants, with their imposing 120mm

cannons and arsenal of other weapons, are expected to rumble through the streets wreaking destruction.”

The streets they will be destroying are home to 250,000 civilians, including 60,000 who are still in the city and living in desperate conditions without electricity, sanitation or medical services. Tens of thousands of Fallujah residents have fled to Baghdad and other cities, wondering what will remain for them to come back to.

The stage has been set for mass killings of both Iraqi fighters and civilians. The American troops massed on the edges of the city have been whipped into a fever-pitch of blood-lust by US claims that the city is the headquarters of a terrorist network headed by Al Qaeda-aligned Jordanian extremist Musaab al-Zarqawi. A 19-year-old marine told the *Los Angeles Times*: “Guys are just itching to go. This is what we have been hoping for since we got to Iraq. This is why I joined the marines.” Another declared: “The marines are motivated. The enemy has been asking for us, and we’re ready to give them what they asked for.”

Part of the bravado among the young soldiers may also be that substantial American casualties are expected. The council leaders who govern Fallujah have repeatedly denied the allegation that the fighters in the city are foreign terrorists. Instead, they have stressed the resistance is popular and legitimate opposition to a foreign invader—US imperialism—and that they will defend their homes.

A November 2 report in the *Boston Globe* from Fallujah provided an insight into the six-months of preparations that have been taken to hold off the US forces. The city council declared that at least 15,000 fighters were ready to defend the city. Among their weaponry are surface-to-surface and surface-to-air missiles and artillery pieces. According to the report, fighters are “rigging narrow alleys with mines and remote-controlled bombs” and have dug tunnels to enable them to move out of the sight of US aircraft.

The reaction in American political and military circles to Fallujah's refusal to bow down to the occupation can only be described as psychopathic.

One of the more homicidal examples is a column by Ralph

Peters, a retired military officer and right-wing novelist/author. Peters is representative of many of the ideologues in and around the Bush administration who portray the eruption of US colonial aggression as a life-and-death clash of civilizations.

In the November 4 *New York Post*, Peters wrote: “We need to demonstrate that the US military cannot be deterred or defeated. If that means widespread destruction, we must accept the price. Most of Fallujah’s residents—those who wish to live in peace—have already fled. Those who remain have made their choice. We need to pursue the terrorists remorselessly...

“That means killing. While we strive to obey the internationally recognised laws of war (though our enemies do not), our goal should be to target the terrorists and insurgents so forcefully that few survive to raise their hands in surrender. We don’t need more complaints about our treatment of prisoners from the global forces of appeasement. We need terrorists dead in the dust. And the world needs to see their corpses...

“Even if Fallujah has to go the way of Carthage, reduced to shards, the price will be worth it. We need to demonstrate our strength of will to the world, to show that there is only one possible result when madmen take on America.”

Underlying the rage against the people of Fallujah is the fact the Iraq war has become a military catastrophe for US imperialism.

The projection of the Defense Department before the March 2003 invasion was that no more than 60,000 US troops would be needed to enforce US rule of Iraq. Ignoring the long history of anti-colonial struggle in the Middle East, American planners predicted that, following the overthrow of Saddam Hussein’s Baathist regime, there would only be minimal opposition to the takeover of the country by US imperialism. Eighteen months later, the scale of popular Iraqi resistance has forced the American military to once again increase troop numbers, to over 142,000.

The US military and CIA now assess the resistance as a complex array of well-organised groups, with at least 8,000 to 12,000 core fighters, and a periphery of 50,000 sympathisers and “part-time” guerillas. The resistance has access to vast quantities of explosives and other munitions. Between 80 and 100 attacks per day continually disrupt US operations and supply lines.

Throughout the first year of the occupation, a feature of US military briefings were the declarations that American front-line fighting and overall troop numbers could be reduced due to the recruitment and training of tens of thousands of Iraqi police, National Guard and Army personnel. This perspective has disintegrated.

During the nation-wide Iraqi uprising this April, thousands

of police openly sided with the Mahdi Army militia of Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr and the Sunni Muslim fighters in Fallujah and other areas, handing over their US-supplied weapons and vehicles to the resistance. In the months since, the Iraqi interim government has been compelled to purge more than half the US-recruited police force. Police numbers have reportedly fallen from 91,000 in May to just 40,000.

American soldiers regularly tell journalists that they believe many of the Iraqi National Guard (ING) troops are infiltrators working with the resistance. At a position in Anbar province, which includes the cities of Fallujah and Ramadi, a marine told the British *Telegraph*: “We know when this place is about to come under mortar attack because the ING suddenly disappear. We are supposed to be fighting together, instead we are sleeping with the enemy.”

An interim government official told *Newsweek*: “The infiltration is all over, from the top to the bottom, from decision-making to the lower levels.” In September, the commander of an entire ING brigade was arrested “for having associations with known insurgents”.

The answer of the Bush administration and the US military to the quagmire is stepped-up violence and repression—above all in Fallujah. The consequences are likely to be a tremendous upsurge in attacks on the occupation.

Coalition troops in other parts of Iraq are already girding themselves for intensified fighting. According to the British *Observer*, British troops who have taken up positions south of Baghdad have been warned that they may suffer 35 percent casualties if they are targeted for retaliation attacks. Three British soldiers were killed and eight wounded on Thursday by a suicide bomber—the largest single-day loss of British lives since April.



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