

Letters to US newspapers reflect widespread revulsion over Fallujah attack

Rick Kelly
11 November 2004

As the US continues its assault on the Iraqi city of Fallujah, the American media maintains its systematic exclusion of any expression of opposition or criticism of the criminal operation. The pro-war propaganda, by both the so-called “liberal” and overtly right-wing print and broadcast media, is being disseminated despite the deep hostility towards what is happening in Iraq felt by millions of ordinary Americans—a sentiment of which the media establishment is well aware.

The only place where revulsion over the slaughter in Fallujah finds scattered expression is in the “letters to the editor” pages of some US newspapers. These same newspapers carry “news” reports that retail the press handouts of the Pentagon, and editorials that echo the government line equating the Iraqi resistance to “terrorism” and justifying the crushing of popular opposition to the US occupation and its puppet government as essential to the creation of “stability” and “democracy” in Iraq.

Many of their readers, however, clearly reject this framework, and oppose the mass killing being carried out in the name of the American people. This is evident in responses to the attack on Fallujah. On November 8, the *New York Times* published an editorial calling on the Bush administration dispatch 40,000 more troops to bolster the occupation. (See “*New York Times* calls for more troops in Iraq”.)

The following day the newspaper published four letters on the events in Iraq. Three of these were fiercely opposed to the Fallujah assault, while the other proposed an Iraqi referendum on the timing of the withdrawal of US troops.

“Let us be clear about what is going on: ‘taking’ Fallujah means destroying it, and this is exactly what is about to happen,” Lawrence Houghteling wrote to the *Times*. “In Vietnam, one of our military leaders once

remarked that his troops had been forced to destroy a village in order to save it, and many of us were horrified. Now we are destroying a medium-sized city in order to save it. How long will it be until we destroy an entire country in order to save it?”

Another reader, David Greenstein, wrote: “As American troops begin the attack on Fallujah, may we stop for a moment to ask what offense its inhabitants have committed? We all know that they did not attack American soil on 9/11 or at any other time. We know that they did not threaten the world with weapons of mass destruction. It seems that their only crime is resistance to occupation by a foreign army. Isn’t this something that the United States, with its own history of rebellion against a foreign occupier, should respect?”

The fact that all of the letters on Iraq published by the *Times* on Tuesday expressed opposition to the attack on Fallujah and the war as a whole suggests that the newspaper has been inundated with letters expressing opposition to US policy and anger over the pro-war stance of the *New York Times* itself.

On Tuesday, the *Los Angeles Times* published an editorial endorsing the attack on Fallujah. “Iraqi insurgents based in Fallujah presented US military forces with two choices, one bad and the other worse,” the editorial read. “Marines opted for the bad one Monday, assaulting the city with the understanding that civilians as well as fighters would be killed and Arab passions would be inflamed far outside Fallujah and Iraq. The worse option was to do nothing, cede the town to the guerrillas and make it a model for other cities in Iraq.”

This grotesque line was immediately challenged by readers of the newspaper. The following day, the *Los Angeles Times* published three letters on Iraq, all of which angrily condemned the Bush administration and

its policies in the Middle East.

Evan Puziss noted how the attack on Fallujah was held off until after the US presidential election. “One can only conclude that the Bush administration has played partisan politics with the blood of our troops and innocent Iraqi civilians,” he wrote. “There is a word to characterize such behavior, and it is a word that the administration’s evangelical supporters are quick to use against political opponents. That word is ‘evil’.”

Ruth Caper wrote: “[B]arely six days after winning the election, the battle of Fallujah has been restarted, martial law is declared in Iraq and, to add to the cynical stew, the world is presented with another front-and-center from the man who brought us Abu Ghraib: the one and only Donald Rumsfeld. And they won the elections because of their ‘moral values’. Darkness descends.”

Other letters opposing US operations in Iraq were published across the country. Lt. Col. Val Johnson wrote to the *Seattle Times* on Wednesday: “I was a lifelong Republican until this last election. It will be interesting to see how our commander-in-chief ends the war in Iraq that has already killed over 100,000 civilians. I learned long ago in Vietnam that it was impossible to ram our way of life down the throats of individuals using 1,000-pound bombs and napalm. It might be necessary to kill every Iraqi who does not agree with our definition of freedom to end this war, and that could take many years. I am sorry we never learned a single lesson from another misguided and costly war that was also started by manipulating intelligence.”

Virginia Lore wrote to the same newspaper: “Last night I saw a picture of a toddler wounded in the attack on Fallujah and he looked so much like my own son. It broke my heart. I understand the current administration’s goal to secure the city so that Iraq can have a democracy, but I don’t understand how anything good can emerge out of destroying neighborhoods, breaking up families, dropping huge bombs and killing civilians. Does the end justify the means? How can anyone who has lost a child to US bombs welcome an imposed democracy? It’s not just ironic; it seems futile. Beyond futile. Wrong.”

On Wednesday, the *San Francisco Chronicle* published a letter from Scott Faylor. “Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was indeed right when he

explained at his Monday news conference with a calm certainty that Iraqi citizens will turn against the ‘violent foreign extremists’ as the atrocities and slaughter mount,” it read. “The catch is, the ‘violent foreign extremists’ in the eyes of most Iraqis and much of the world are the US Marines.”

These responses to the crimes of US imperialism in Fallujah and Iraq provide a small but telling indication of the chasm that separates millions of ordinary Americans from the entire political establishment—Democratic as well as Republican—and the corporate-controlled media.



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