

Iraq aflame over mass killings in Fallujah

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The collective punishment of the people of Fallujah by the Bush administration has entered its sixth day.

What is taking place is not so much a battle as a homicidal rampage by the US military against every Iraqi male trapped inside the city. Since the assault began on Sunday, Fallujah men aged between 15 and 55 have been prevented from leaving. As American bombs and shells rained down, they were left little choice but to fight for their lives against the advancing US troops.

An Iraqi journalist in Fallujah told Associated Press: “The Americans are shooting anything that moves.”

The US forces have carried out a massive and indiscriminate bombardment from the air, making no attempt to avoid casualties among the estimated 100,000 civilians still in Fallujah. The city, a *Los Angeles Times* reporter wrote, is “a tableau of destroyed buildings, burned-out cars, battered mosques and piles of rubble”.

While US armour and infantry waited several blocks back, the air power was used to pound office complexes, mosques, schools and homes being used by Iraqi fighters to try and hold off the attackers. The concentration of US aircraft in the skies over Fallujah has been christened the “wedding cake” by American officers, as it consisted of multiple layers, from low altitude helicopter gunships, to AC-130 gunships, to jet bombers, to high altitude unmanned spy planes.

“Our air superiority is incredible,” a marine sergeant told Associated Press. “All we can do now is clear through the city and look for survivors. Air power is our best friend.”

Iraqi fighters, armed with little more than AK-47s and rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) launchers, have fought a heroic defence against the overwhelming American firepower. To dislodge just one Iraqi sniper holding up US marines on Wednesday, an embedded *New York Times* journalist reported that a three-storey complex was hit with two 500-pound bombs, 35 155mm artillery shells, 10 120mm shells from Abram tanks and some 30,000 rounds from machine guns and small arms. The building, the journalist noted, was left a “smoking ruin”.

According to American military spokesmen, US troops have captured more than 80 percent of Fallujah, with heavy fighting still taking place in the southern suburbs and flaring again in the city’s north. The US military claims to have killed at least 600 Iraqis. At least 22 American troops have been killed and several hundred wounded.

Every building in the captured areas of the city is being searched by US or interim government Iraqi troops. From the footage coming out of Fallujah, the method of “searching” by the American troops is to hurl grenades and pour machine gun fire into houses before entering. Every male found alive is being dragged away, bound and hooded, to detention centres.

There is every reason to believe that the number of Iraqi dead in Fallujah—when the toll is finally able to be counted—will be in the thousands. Hundreds of fighters and civilians are likely buried beneath collapsed buildings. Embedded journalists have noted the stench of decomposing bodies that hangs over the city. A crime of immense proportions has been perpetrated and it will be neither forgotten nor forgiven.

There have been virtually no medical personnel to treat Iraqis injured by the relentless American onslaught. A number of Iraqi doctors and nurses were killed on Monday in a US airstrike on one of the few functioning clinics in the city. A second clinic was destroyed later in the week.

Abbas Ali, a doctor in the city, told Al Jazeera on Friday: “I’m one of the few medical cadres that survived last Monday from the massacre. We are in a very tragic situation. Hundreds of dead bodies are spread in the streets. Even the injured are still there. We cannot transfer them. We cannot do anything to save them.

“We call on all organisations and the whole world to help us. The US forces have told us through loudspeakers to get out and raise white flags. But all the city’s areas are under fierce bombing. We don’t know what to do. Stay in our place, which is under bombardment, or get out and get shot?”

The Iraqi Red Crescent Society has been denied entry into the city. Fardous al-Ubaidi, a spokeswoman for the organisation, told Associated Press: “There is no water, no food, no medicine, no electricity and no fuel and when we asked for permission, we were only allowed to approach the Fallujah outskirts but had no access to Fallujah itself.” Thousands of elderly, women and children who have escaped since the assault began remain in refugee camps on the city’s fringes, without access to clean water or sanitation.

George Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair yesterday hailed the atrocity in Fallujah as showing the determination of the US and Britain to “help Iraqis achieve their liberty and to defend the security of the world”.

The reality is that Fallujah is being destroyed precisely because the resistance fighters in the city had demanded liberty—from the US occupation of Iraq. The city’s council refused to recognise the legitimacy of the US-installed puppet interim government headed by CIA asset Iyad Allawi, and had upheld the moral and political right of Iraqis to conduct an armed struggle against the American invasion.

The US military has not been able to produce any credible evidence supporting the months of propaganda—which was consistently denied by Fallujah’s leaders—that hundreds of foreign terrorists, led by Jordanian extremist Abu Musaab al-Zarqawi, were holding the city “hostage”. The people who have fought and died in Fallujah have been overwhelmingly Iraqis defending their homes.

On Thursday, US troops claimed to have found the body of Abdullah Janabi, the elderly and courageous Sunni cleric who has acted as one of the main spokesmen for the people of Fallujah and their defiance of the US invasion of their country. In August, Janabi declared in an interview: “Honest resistance is a legitimate right against the occupation all over the world... During Saddam’s time I was tortured and prevented from preaching. If you say the truth you will become an outlaw and wanted. Saddam was unjust and the Americans are also unjust...” The corpse was so badly disfigured that a positive identification could not be made.

Over the next two months, the US military has been ordered to slaughter or drive underground all opposition to the occupation and to Allawi’s regime, and to ensure that the only participants in sham elections planned for late January are pro-US parties and groups. Attacks are being prepared against 21 cities and towns where

resistance is widespread.

The assault on Fallujah, however, has inflamed the Sunni regions of central and northern Iraq and is presenting the US occupation with the most serious military challenge since it began. Fighting or increased attacks on occupation troops are being reported in Ramadi, Samarra, Tikrit, Kirkuk, Baquaba and Baghdad, where a US helicopter was shot down overnight.

In the biggest blow to the occupation, the centre of Mosul, with a population approaching three million, has been taken over in the last several days by hundreds of Iraqi resistance fighters. US air strikes are now being carried out against the city, and hundreds of extra troops rushed to the area. A resistance leader, Saif al-Deen al-Baghdadi, declared in an interview: “We chose the path of armed jihad and say clearly that ridding Iraq of the occupation will not be done by ballots. Iyad Allawi’s government ... represents the fundamentalist right-wing of the White House and not the Iraqi people.”

American troops arrested leading Sunni cleric Mahdi al-Sumaydai in Baghdad yesterday after he made a call for Iraqis to rise up against the occupation. US forces also raided the home of Harith al-Dhari, the head of the Sunni Association of Muslim Scholars, which is calling for a boycott of the elections over the atrocities being committed in Fallujah.

The main Shiite religious leader, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, who has remained silent throughout the bloodbath in Fallujah, is coming under pressure to condemn it. Before his arrest, al-Sumaydai stated: “We reproach Sistani for not officially taking a position on the offensive and we call on him to do so.”

Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr is also under pressure to issue a call for his supporters to resume fighting against the occupation. Sumaydai’s statement reminded Shiites that the Sunni groups had spoken out in solidarity with Sadr’s Mahdi Army fighters during the US assaults on the cities of Karbala and Najaf.

The US mass killings in Fallujah will prove to be a Pyrrhic victory. They have served only to broaden the resistance of the Iraqi people and deepen the revulsion and opposition internationally to the criminal war on Iraq.



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