

Razing of Fallujah fails to break Iraqi resistance

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Last month US Lieutenant General John Sattler hailed the destruction of Fallujah as breaking “the back of the insurgency” in Iraq. The US military claims to have killed over 1,200 Iraqi resistance fighters during its murderous assault on the city and taken prisoner another 2,000 suspected fighters. The city is in ruins, laid waste by thousands of tonnes of American shells, missiles and bullets. Fallujah’s population has been turned into refugees inside their own country, with an estimated 120,000 living in shanty towns and tents in and around the town of Amiriyah, and another 100,000 taking refuge in Baghdad and other cities.

Some four weeks after the assault was launched, however, the claim that this atrocity would intimidate Iraqis and end support for the armed resistance is refuted by what is taking place across Iraq. The slaughter in Fallujah has done nothing to stem the fighting against the US occupation. Hundreds of Iraqi interim government troops, police, officials and mercenary contractors have been killed or wounded over the past month, while American military casualties in December are running at an average of over two killed and 25 wounded every day.

Most attacks on US forces go unreported. Bombings, mortar strikes and ambushes are daily occurrences in Baghdad, with the targets ranging from the Italian embassy to the Green Zone fortress that houses the US embassy and the offices of the interim government. The predominantly Sunni Muslim northern suburbs are effectively war zones. A shopkeeper told *Time* magazine that the suburb of Adhamiyah was a “little Fallujah in the middle of Baghdad”. For close to a month, US, British and government troops have been attempting to root out the numerous guerilla cells in the towns and villages to the south of Baghdad.

Last weekend alone, insurgents in the capital killed an American soldier, three senior police officers and four men believed to be government employees. On two occasions in the past three weeks, insurgents have launched bold daylight assaults on Baghdad police stations. On November 20, more than 300 insurgents attacked a station in Adhamiyah, triggering a battle that raged for several hours. On December 2, Iraqi fighters successfully seized a station in the city’s south, killing 11 police and freeing over 50 prisoners.

The inability of the US military to secure the capital was

highlighted in graphic fashion on December 3. Australian defence minister Robert Hill was unable to even travel from Baghdad airport to the Australian embassy due to fears for his safety. The American military was so stretched at that time that no helicopter was available to pick up the dignitary and fly him across the city.

Three days later, insurgents staged a demonstration in the main Haifa Street district adjacent to the Green Zone, to show their ability to exert control over areas just blocks away from the centre of the occupation. Before American troops in armoured vehicles arrived to drive them off, the guerillas publicly executed a government employee.

According to classified intelligence reports obtained by *USA Today* and published last weekend, the US military regards the armed opposition not as disconnected, regional-based guerilla groups, but as a sophisticated insurgency, with a centralised command structure that was established before the invasion. While largely based in the predominantly Sunni Muslim regions of central and northern Iraq, the resistance is capable of coordinating operations across the country. US intelligence now estimates that a minimum of 20,000 are actively involved in the armed struggle.

Knowing they could not hope to defeat a concerted US assault on Fallujah, it appears that large numbers of fighters left the city and linked up with resistance cells in other cities and towns. Some of the Iraqis killed during one of the attacks on Baghdad police station were reportedly identified as being from Fallujah.

The leader of the Fallujah council, Sheik Abdullah al-Janabi, released a statement on December 5 declaring the council’s commitment to “continue the jihad against the occupiers and their agents until they leave Iraq”. Fallujah, he said, was “the symbol and voice of all oppressed in the world and a solid platform of the resistance”. The US military and Iraqi interim government had claimed that Janabi was killed during the fighting in Fallujah but it appears certain that he, along with other opposition leaders and spokesmen, escaped from the city.

The city of Ramadi, just hours from Fallujah and the capital of Anbar province, is now a focus of the armed resistance. The American troops in and around the city exert little control and come under almost constant attack. The vast bulk of the US-

recruited police has deserted or joined the insurgency.

One Iraqi policeman told the *Washington Post* last week: “Life is normal in Ramadi if there are no Americans. But when the Americans enter, the clashes start. The resistance goes out to face them immediately, just like a swarm of bees.” Last Wednesday, two US convoys were attacked on the outskirts of the city. One of the American marine battalions based in the area lost eight dead and scores wounded in November alone.

In the city of Samarra, which US forces claimed to have “secured” in October, resistance fighters carried out a series of attacks on US and police targets in the space of 40 minutes on December 8. A police station was stormed, weapons taken and the building blown up. Another station was mortared and raked with bullets. Fighters engaged American troops in the city centre with rocket-propelled grenades and small arms fire. The home of the city police chief was fired on, prompting him to resign later in the day.

The head of the Mosul police has also resigned, after the vast majority of the city’s 5,000 police deserted last month when insurgents took to the streets and fought a week of battles with American troops and Kurdish peshmerga militiamen who were rushed to the city. No more than 1,200 police have returned to duty and they rarely leave their compounds.

Since melting back into the population of Mosul, insurgents have waged a systematic campaign of attacks on US troops and Iraqis working for the occupation. The bodies of more than 160 Iraqi National Guardsmen—most of them Kurdish peshmerga—have been found in Mosul’s streets. A suicide bomber detonated a car bomb in the midst of a peshmerga patrol on December 4, killing at least 16. Over the weekend, insurgents were fought off when they attempted to seize a police academy in southern Mosul.

American positions and patrols in Mosul are being regularly ambushed or mortared. On Sunday, eight American troops were wounded in an ambush near a weapons storehouse. A US jet was on hand at the time to pound the suspected guerilla position with 500-pound bombs and prevent further American casualties. With the insurgency broadening, however, and the American military stretched to breaking point, it is only a matter of time before US forces begin to suffer qualitatively higher numbers of dead, wounded and captured.

The areas in and around the Sunni cities of Baquaba, Haditha and Tikrit, as well as the oil-rich region near the city of Kirkuk, are also the scene of regular clashes between Iraqis and the occupation forces. On December 5 in Tikrit, guerillas ambushed a bus full of men assisting the US military to destroy munitions. At least 17 of the Iraqi contractors were killed. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that the men were believed to have been from southern Iraq, as “few locals are willing to work for the American military”.

Guerillas are carrying out successful sabotage attacks on the main oil pipelines in the Kirkuk area with impunity. The interim government oil ministry estimates that attacks between

August and October cost the occupation \$US7 billion in potential revenues.

The inability of the US occupation to secure the major highways and the decrepit state of Iraq’s infrastructure has resulted in severe fuel shortages in the energy-rich country. Queues for fuel in Baghdad stretch for miles, while households are suffering from a lack of kerosene for heating and cooking. Last week Reuters cited official US documents warning: “The supply of fuel products in the Baghdad area has dropped to critical levels. If the current situation does not improve quickly, public confidence in the government may deteriorate significantly.”

The number of young Iraqis who have been killed or wounded fighting the occupation is unknown. It certainly runs into the hundreds every month. However, the willingness to resist continues. The 1990-91 US-led war against Iraq, followed by more than a decade of UN sanctions, created an economic and social catastrophe for the Iraqi people. The current US occupation is recognised by the majority of the population as an attempt to transform the country into a de-facto American colony and plunder its wealth for the benefit of US corporate interests. The interim government is regarded as nothing more than a puppet regime, with the US embassy vetting every significant decision in the background.

The elections slated to take place on January 30 will not alter this. In three predominantly Sunni provinces, as well as the Sunni areas of Baghdad, next to no registration or campaigning is taking place. Sunni political parties are predicting widespread abstention. Regardless of the turnout, large sections of the Iraqi population—including Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds—will view whatever emerges from elections held under US occupation as illegitimate and unrepresentative, and continue to sympathise with the armed resistance.



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