

# Mosul resistance attack reveals US disarray in Iraq

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Nineteen US soldiers were reported killed Tuesday by a suspected rocket or mortar attack on a major US military base just outside of the northern city of Mosul. A military spokesman reported a total of 24 dead, including contractors and Iraqis, although there have been conflicting reports on this figure. Approximately 60 others were injured.

The attack came as hundreds of troops were eating lunch under a large dining tent constructed of canvas and metal. Jeremy Redman, a *Richmond Times-Dispatch* reporter embedded with the troops, described what occurred: “The force of the explosions knocked soldiers off their feet and out of their seats. A fireball enveloped the top of the tent, and shrapnel sprayed into the men.... Scores of troops crammed into concrete bomb shelters outside. Others wobbled around the tent and collapsed, dazed by the blast.”

The attack represents the worst single incident for the US military in Iraq, eclipsing the loss of 17 soldiers in November last year, when two Black Hawk helicopters collided and crashed after they came under insurgent attack.

The latest strike by the Iraqi resistance has enormous ramifications, for both the US strategy in Iraq and the Bush administration’s political fortunes. It constitutes a devastating blow to the Bush administration’s Iraq strategy, which stands in disarray. If Iraqi fighters can penetrate and strike a US military base in broad daylight it is impossible to believe that any part of the country is secure.

While few details of the attack have yet emerged, the apparent sophistication and coordination of the operation indicates that the insurgents had inside knowledge of the base’s layout and soldiers’ schedule. If this was the case, it represents further proof of the US’s failure to marshal an Iraqi proxy force capable of

suppressing resistance to the occupation.

All of this will inevitably exacerbate the political crisis faced by the Bush administration. There is an ongoing dispute in Washington over the future of Donald Rumsfeld. A number of prominent Republicans, including Senator John McCain, have called for the appointment of a new secretary of defense. Bush, however, has staked his credibility on the performance of Rumsfeld, and has expressed his full confidence in the management of the war.

As well as exacerbating the internecine warfare that is taking place within ruling circles, the latest incident will intensify the widespread opposition that exists against the occupation. Despite Bush’s recent election victory, opinion surveys demonstrate that the majority of Americans are opposed to the war.

For many people, the Mosul attack is likely to come as something of a shock. The White House insistently repeats that Iraq is on the path to democracy, and that the violence there is the work of “terrorists” and “enemies of freedom.” The media goes along with this by routinely ignoring the daily attacks on US forces in Iraq. The enormity of the Mosul base strike, however, is such that it cannot be dismissed.

In the Vietnam War, the Tet Offensive of 1968 in one stroke blew up the credibility of the Johnson administration’s foreign policy. The Mosul attack is, of course, of a different nature and lesser scale than Tet. Nevertheless, there is little doubt that the incident will further damage the Bush administration, and may contribute to the reemergence of an antiwar movement.

Mosul, the third largest city in Iraq, with a population of 1.2 million, has become an important focal point of the Iraqi resistance, particularly since the US offensive against Fallujah last month. The latest strike is by no means an isolated incident—US forces and their Iraqi

collaborators have come under daily attack over the past few weeks. The US base outside the city has come under mortar attack on more than 30 occasions this year.

On the same day as the latest attack, insurgents and police fought for control of a police station in the city. On Sunday, two roadside bombs and a car bomb targeted US troops in three separate strikes.

The Iraqi resistance stepped up its operations in Mosul on November 10, as the US stormed Fallujah. Insurgents launched a number of attacks on police stations and against Kurdish peshmerga militia, briefly holding sections of the city before US forces regained some semblance of control.

Unlike in Fallujah, however, relatively few of the Mosul fighters were killed by the occupying troops, as they withdrew into the local population and hid their weapons. Rather than face annihilation through open confrontation, the insurgents prepared to rely on local support and fight a protracted guerrilla war.

Prior to the November uprising, which resulted in mass desertions, there were 8,000 Iraqi police working with US troops in the city. Currently just 1,000 remain, and according to the London *Independent's* Patrick Cockburn, of those left, only 400 are considered reliable. In the past six weeks, more than 150 police, National Guard and other security forces have been assassinated.

Much of the city center is now a “no-go” zone for these forces and for US troops. On December 17, gunmen ambushed a car carrying Turkish police through one of the city’s main streets. The four occupants were immediately executed.

The Mosul region “is right at the tipping point,” an unnamed US intelligence official told the *Los Angeles Times* after the incident. “It’s a very bad situation. It’s teetering back and forth, on the edge of being a second Anbar [province, which includes Fallujah], a full-scale war.”

The disastrous situation faced by the US troops in Mosul is indicative of the deepening quagmire faced by the occupying forces throughout Iraq. The northern city was previously presented as a model success story, with far fewer guerilla attacks than in Baghdad and other cities. Opposition soon mounted, however, as terrible social and economic conditions fueled nationalist sentiment. The conduct of the occupying forces further

exacerbated local resistance. Only last Sunday, hundreds of students demonstrated in the city center against US raids on their homes and mosques.

The fraudulent elections scheduled for January 30 will do nothing to lessen the massive Iraqi opposition to the occupation. So long as the occupation is maintained, more insurgent attacks like that which occurred in Mosul are inevitable.



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