

Ten Marines killed in Fallujah blast: more carnage in a colonialist war

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The death of 10 Marines, killed Thursday by an improvised bomb while on foot patrol in Fallujah, brings home the grim and tragic reality behind the calls by Bush, echoed by the Democrats and the media, for “victory” in Iraq.

Coming one day after Bush’s war speech at the Naval Academy, the explosion, which also injured 11 other Marines, was deemed by the entire US establishment an inopportune reminder of the mounting American death toll and the US military’s failure to suppress the Iraqi insurgency. It was all the more unwelcome because the carnage, the deadliest attack on US forces in nearly four months, occurred in a city that the American military had supposedly secured by reducing to rubble just over one year ago.

The military did not announce the deaths until Friday. The news sent shock waves through the communities surrounding Camp Pendleton in California and Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, where the Marine units are based, as parents, spouses and children awaited the devastating knock on the door that brings a grief that never goes away.

Bush, who was informed of the deaths on Thursday and given a further briefing on Friday, did not even mention them when he went before the cameras Friday in an unscheduled White House appearance to tout what his administration viewed as a positive economic report released that morning. He left it to his press spokesman, Scott McClellan, to deliver the pro forma statement: “We are saddened by the loss of lives.... Our hearts and prayers go out to their families....”

To downplay the significance of the event, both in human and political terms, McClellan added the qualifier, “whether it is one soldier who loses his or her life, or 10 or 11...” The suggestion that, after all, nothing particularly extraordinary had occurred pointed to the utter indifference of the administration toward the devastating consequences of its war policies for American families as well as Iraqi.

The media, which has volunteered its services in the

government’s campaign to defend the war and counter growing anti-war sentiment, gave the Fallujah bombing front-page coverage on Friday and then promptly dropped it. The operative view was evidently “The less said, the better.”

The Democrats were notably muted in their response to the events in Fallujah. Senator Joseph Lieberman, the former vice presidential candidate and foremost Democratic war hawk, had published, on the eve of Bush’s speech, a column in the *Wall Street Journal* headlined “Our Troops Must Stay.” Lieberman bemoaned the growth of “pessimism” about the war and admonished fellow Democrats for harping on the lies the government had used to justify the invasion.

Howard Dean, who supposedly represents the “anti-war” wing of the Democrats, gave a speech Saturday to the fall meeting of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) in which he repudiated the call by Rep. John Murtha for an early withdrawal of US troops. Dean, the chairman of the DNC, touted a paper published by the Center for American Progress that opposes a “hasty withdrawal” and instead advocates increasing the size of the Army, keeping tens of thousands of American troops in Iraq for two more years, and maintaining indefinitely a strike force of 14,000 in Kuwait.

For Republicans and Democrats alike, and the ruling elite whose interests they both serve, ten, twenty, a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand more dead soldiers—not to mention the uncounted toll in Iraqi lives—are an acceptable price to pay to grab control of Iraq’s vast oil resources.

Thursday’s explosion in Fallujah brought to 205 the number of US combat deaths in the western province of Anbar in the last nine months. According to a web site that maintains an unofficial count, a total of 2,127 US servicemen and servicewomen have died in Iraq since the March 2003 invasion. Eighteen of these occurred in the 72 hours ending midnight Friday.

Far from suggesting any letup in the military meat grinder, the subtext of the government’s most recent pronouncements is an escalation of the carnage. The *New York Times* reported Sunday that Bush’s “Plan for Victory”

is influenced by a rising star within the national security establishment, Peter D. Feaver, a Duke University political scientist who was brought onto the National Security Council last June. Feaver's central thesis, according to the *Times*, is that "Americans would support a war with mounting casualties on one condition: that they believed it would ultimately succeed."

What was so troubling for both the administration and its Democratic "critics" about Thursday's events in Fallujah was not the death of 10 more soldiers, but the negative impact it would have on a belief in "victory," within the military as well as among the public at large. Just over a year ago, thousands of American and Iraqi troops surrounded the city, then a stronghold of the Sunni insurgency, and leveled it, indiscriminately bombing homes, factories and mosques and turning a city of 250,000 into a free-fire zone.

Since the American government does not bother to count Iraqi casualties, no estimate of the thousands of dead and wounded has ever been given. But the city, which remains cordoned off by means of fortified checkpoints, was declared to be "secure."

The events of last Thursday have put paid to this fiction, and further undermined public confidence in the official picture of the situation in Iraq provided by US military and civilian authorities. Reflecting the dismay within official circles, Senator John Warner, the Republican chairman of the Armed Services Committee, said Friday that the Marines who were killed were in a location they thought was "perfectly safe."

The US deaths in Fallujah have thus exposed two critical facts. First, that the military situation for the US throughout Iraq is verging on disaster, and second, that US atrocities, such as the destruction of Fallujah, have only increased the determination of the Iraq masses to free themselves from US colonial domination.

The *Washington Post* on Saturday carried a revealing report about the US situation in Fallujah: "Asked how many insurgents there were in Fallujah, a US official said, 'It's hard to say, but there's sympathy for the insurgency. Basically everyone here has the potential to be an insurgent.'"

This stands in stark contrast to US government propaganda. The Bush administration has repeatedly hailed the fact that some 90 percent of Fallujah's inhabitants went to the polls last October to vote in the constitutional referendum. It has barely mentioned that 80 percent voted "no."

American atrocities have, in fact, produced a bottomless well of anger and hatred for the occupiers. As the *Post* noted, "Residents still complain that heavily guarded checkpoints are dangerous and stifle economic activity and

that US soldiers on patrol are too willing to shoot first when encountering residents.

"'It seems we lose someone every week who is killed by the Americans for the wrong reasons,' said Fawzi Muhammed, the deputy chairman of the city's reconstruction committee, who said his cousin was shot dead by US soldiers this year while standing in front of his home."

The article went on to quote a local engineer and candidate in the national assembly elections set for December 15, who said of last year's assault: "It was like an earthquake. After Hiroshima and Nagasaki, there was Fallujah."

What are the two enduring symbols of the US invasion of Iraq? Abu Ghraib and Fallujah. These are war crimes, in the strictest sense of the word. But the price among Americans is being paid not by the conspirators who orchestrated the crimes, but rather by the soldiers who have been sent to serve as cannon fodder.

There is only one way to stop this monumental and homicidal squandering of lives and resources—both Iraqi and American. All US troops must be withdrawn immediately and unconditionally, and all those who conspired to launch an illegal and unprovoked war of aggression must be criminally tried and held accountable.

Those opposed to the war must draw the political lessons of the conspiracy of lies that prepared it and continues its prosecution—above all, the complicity of all sections of the American political establishment and both of its parties.

A struggle against imperialist war and militarism requires a complete break with the Democratic Party and the building of an independent political movement of the working class based on a socialist program to defend living standards and democratic rights at home and unite the working masses of the world against imperialist barbarism. This means building the Socialist Equality Party as the mass party of the working class.



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