

Another US atrocity in Iraq: Eleven civilians massacred in Ishaqi

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The BBC on Thursday aired video footage of yet another atrocity committed by US forces against Iraqi civilians. The video evidence contradicts the initial US account of the events of March 15, 2006 in the village of Ishaqi, in the Abu Sifa district near Balad, some 60 miles north of Baghdad, which resulted in 11 civilian deaths.

The news follows widespread coverage of the unprovoked killings by Marines of 24 unarmed civilians last November in the town of Haditha in Anbar province. The military launched a serious investigation into that incident only after *Time* magazine reporters last January confronted officials with extensive evidence contradicting the official story that the civilians had been killed from the detonation of an improvised explosive device followed by a firefight with insurgents. The cover-up of the Haditha massacre began to unravel when *Time* published a detailed account of the killings in March.

In the latest exposure, Iraqi police and local residents of Ishaqi contend that 11 civilians were deliberately killed by US Army troops. US officials said at the time that the soldiers were engaged in a firefight and that heavy shooting led to the collapse of a house, resulting in the deaths of four people—including two women, a child, and a man they claimed was a suspected Al Qaeda supporter.

According to the BBC, however, a report filed by Iraqi police accused the US troops of rounding up 11 people in the house and executing them before blowing up the building, apparently to destroy the evidence of the massacre. The dead included five children and four women. The videotape shows dead children and adults with gunshot wounds to their heads and upper bodies.

The cameraman who shot the video arrived on the scene before the house had collapsed. The footage shows bullet holes everywhere, including on the walls inside the house. The bodies of the dead clearly indicate that they were killed by bullet wounds. In the video, the faces of the dead have been blurred to obscure their horrific injuries.

The BBC obtained the videotape from a Sunni group and said it has cross-checked the images with others taken at

the time to verify its authenticity. Other news reports corroborate evidence captured in the video footage and provide further details of the atrocity.

A March 26 report in the *Sunday Times* of London quoted Harat Khalaf, a 33-year-old security officer guarding oil pipelines, who said he saw a US helicopter land near his home the night of March 15. US soldiers stormed out of the Chinook and approached his brother Fayez's house, firing their weapons.

The *Times* wrote, "Khalaf ran from his own house and hid in a nearby grove of trees. He saw the soldiers enter his brother's home and then heard the sound of women and children screaming. 'Then there was a lot of machinegun fire,'" he recounted.

"After that there was the most frightening sound of all—silence, followed by explosions as the soldiers left the house."

Khalaf's account was corroborated by a neighbor, Hassan Hurdi Mahassen, who said that the soldiers dropped several grenades on the house, causing it to collapse. He said villagers searched the house and found the victims "all buried in one room."

Mahassen added, "Women and even children were blindfolded and their hands bound. Some of their faces were totally disfigured. A lot of blood was on the floors and the walls."

A US reporter for Knight Ridder newspapers obtained an official Iraqi police report, which read, "The American forces gathered the family members in one room and executed 11 people."

Graphic photographs taken by Agence France Press in the aftermath of the Ishaqi massacre—but not distributed by major US media outlets—show the gunshot-ridden bodies of children, some of them babies.

CNN reported on Friday that it was told by a Balad police official at the time that witnesses said US soldiers held an entire family in a room before spraying them randomly with bullets. The official said police found bullet casings in the house that would only have been used by US forces.

Another video shot by an Associated Press Television News cameraman at the time shows at least five children and one adult male dead, most with entry wounds to the head.

The Associated Press video includes an interview with an unidentified man who says that, “children were stuck in the room, alone and surrounded.” He continues: “After they handcuffed them, they shot them dead. Later, they struck the house with their planes. They wanted to hide the evidence. Even a six-month-old infant was killed.”

In Iraq, outrage over the civilian deaths has prompted leaders of the US-installed government to demand that American officials turn over their investigative files on the Haditha killings. Deputy Prime Minister Salam al-Zubai commented, “As you know, this is not the only massacre, and there are a lot.”

Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki denounced the killings, saying violence against civilians by US-led coalition forces had become a “daily phenomenon.” The American forces, he charged, “do not respect the Iraq people.... They crush them with their vehicles and kill them just on suspicion or a hunch.”

There are undoubtedly other cases of Iraqi civilians killed execution-style by US troops that have yet to come to light, in addition to the ongoing loss of Iraqi life as a result of bomb attacks on populated areas, soldiers shooting into homes, and killings at US checkpoints. One gruesome example of the latter occurred on Tuesday, when two Iraqi women, including one about to give birth, were gunned down near an American checkpoint in Samarra.

These incidents are not mere aberrations, but arise inevitably from the nature of the conflict—an illegal war of conquest and colonial-style occupation, carried out to secure US domination of the country’s vast oil resources and advance the geo-strategic interests of American imperialism.

The response of the military and the Bush administration to the exposure of these crimes, as with the revelations of prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib, is to foist the entire blame on the individual perpetrators while rejecting any responsibility themselves for the inevitable results of their policies.

At the same time, they have taken measures aimed at limiting the political damage both internationally and at home and stemming the growing crisis within the American occupation force in Iraq.

On Thursday, US Army Lt. Gen. Peter Chiarelli directed commanders in Iraq to provide training to their troops within 30 days on “professional military values and the importance of disciplined, professional conduct in combat.” The course on “core warrior values” will include a slideshow on ethical standards under fire in the battlefield.

There is genuine concern within the military brass over the increased incidence of wanton killings and executions of

civilians by US soldiers. Such incidents are textbook symptoms of an army infected with plummeting morale and verging on outright collapse. The notion, however, that this can be reversed by a few slide shows and lectures, when the soldiers are fighting a population determined to free itself of foreign occupiers and the military situation on the ground continues to deteriorate, is patently absurd.

The same military, moreover, that now proposes “sensitivity training” systematically cultivates among its recruits an attitude of contempt for the local population, along with a thirst for killing. A former British soldier, who served in Iraq as an operative of the elite SAS (Special Air Service), described to the BBC his impression of the conduct of US troops in Iraq: “I was disturbed by the general day-to-day attitude of the American troops. They treated Iraqis with contempt, not like human beings. They had a complete disregard for Iraqi lives and property.”

This element of gratuitous violence and cruelty reflects the violence and backwardness of American society as a whole. Inevitably, the American army brings with it wherever it goes the consequences of a deliberate campaign by the media and the political establishment over a quarter century to coarsen and degrade public consciousness and the national culture. The promotion of a cult of violence, egoism, worship of wealth and power—the examples of which abound, from the multitude of Rambo-type films, to the promotion of popular music that glorifies exploitation, sexual and otherwise—has left its mark.

Given the nature of the military, and the criminal character of the war, it is no wonder that individual products of this culture, indoctrinated with propaganda and sent off to kill and be killed, can carry out atrocities such as Haditha and Ishaqi.



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