

US troops terrorize Baghdad in “Operation Law and Order”

Kate Randall
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Thousands of US troops went house to house through mostly Shiite areas in northeastern Baghdad February 13 in the opening phase of Operation Law and Order, the “surge” plan announced by the Bush administration January 10.

The plan aims to deploy an additional 21,500 US combat troops, the vast majority going to the Iraqi capital. The operation reportedly will involve a similar number of US support troops.

Additional Kurdish and Iraqi troops are being brought in from other parts of the country. At least 3,000 US troops and 2,000 Iraqis have arrived thus far, with the full increase in troop numbers not expected until May.

The aim of Operation Law and Order is to move into strongholds of resistance throughout Baghdad, arrest or kill insurgents, and occupy the neighborhoods.

The “surge” is part of US imperialism’s broader effort to extend its domination over the entire Middle East. The US has two aircraft carrier groups stationed in the Persian Gulf, the largest military presence since 2003, and Patriot missile defenses have been installed in other Gulf states as the US ratchets up its preparations for a military strike against Iran.

Early Monday, an attack by three suicide car bombers killed two American soldiers and eight Iraqi officers at an Iraqi police headquarters that is being used as a US base in Tarmiya, 25 miles north of Baghdad. The US military also confirmed that 17 US troops had been injured in what it referred to as a “coordinated attack.”

Attacks on such vulnerable bases—and the deaths of more US troops—can be expected to increase as the US counterinsurgency operation proceeds. The death toll of US troops now stands at 3,144.

The vast majority of Iraqis see the American military as their enemy and occupier. Recent polls show that the majority of Iraqis believe that killing American soldiers is justified.

Despite these well known facts, the US government and a compliant American media portray the US operation as a benevolent effort to protect the Iraqi people from what they often call “anti-Iraqi forces.” The absurd premise is that the American military, which is ultimately responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, is “pro-Iraqi,” while those Iraqis who resist the colonial conquest of their country and oppose the US-backed puppet government are, by definition, terrorists and criminals.

As the counterinsurgency operation got underway, with thousands of US troops sweeping through neighborhoods, supported by US fighter jets flying overhead, thunderous booms could be heard across the city. American forces set up small bases in the middle of communities, where they will be stationed instead of returning to their fortified bases in the Green Zone and elsewhere.

New checkpoints were set up around the city, with individuals frisked at gunpoint and cars and motorbikes searched from top to bottom. The US military announced on day two of the operation that it had cleared several areas of the capital in “intelligence-focused searches.”

British and Iraqi forces closed two border crossings with Iran in southern Iraq, blocking the gates with large metal shipping containers. They also expanded coastal patrols to monitor maritime traffic into southern Iraq. Basra, Iraq’s second largest city, was ringed with checkpoints in an operation the British military said would last for 72 hours.

In preparation for a major assault, security forces sealed off Sadr City, the densely populated Shiite slum in Baghdad that is a bastion of support for the Madhi Army of anti-American cleric Moqtada al-Sadr.

Haidar Karam described to the *Los Angeles Times* how some 50 troops suddenly emerged and circled his Shaab neighborhood in the city’s northeast. About 15 minutes later, a half dozen Humvees arrived and US snipers took up positions on rooftops. Troops stopped vehicles from

moving. The US military reported capturing 16 suspects and seizing three Kalashnikovs in the largely Shiite neighborhood.

The predominantly Sunni Dora neighborhood was also one of the first to be hit, with US troops targeting the Abu Disheer Shiite enclave. With Humvees and armored vehicles protected by aircraft, US troops set off stun grenades before smashing down doors and storming houses in search of insurgents.

The *Los Angeles Times* reported that in Sadiya, a nearby Sunni neighborhood, an Iraqi soldier searched a home for weapons, harassing a woman in her 70s. “What, grandma,” he said, “don’t you have any rocket-propelled grenades or roadside bombs?”

In the downtown Yarmouk district, streams of unmarked SUVs filled with masked security officers drove by, pointing assault rifles at motorists. Police pickup trucks patrolled the streets, with plates of armor attached in makeshift fashion to the vehicles’ sides.

American officials have released no estimate on the total number of arrests and casualties in the Baghdad operation.

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice made a surprise half-day visit to Baghdad on Saturday to underscore the Bush administration’s determination to carry through the operation in the face of popular opposition in the US and a non-binding resolution passed the previous day by the House of Representatives opposing the escalation. Her visit was also intended to increase pressure on the Iraqi government of Prime Minister Mouri al-Maliki. “How the Iraqis use the breathing space that [the operation] might provide is what’s really important,” she said during a 10-minute address in the heavily fortified Green Zone.

Those assembled for Rice’s brief talk included Maliki, a Shia, President Jalal Talabani, a Kurd, and Vice President Tariq Hashimi, a Sunni. The US has long demanded that Maliki confront the Mahdi Army and Al Sadr, upon whose support the prime minister has depended to retain his shaky hold on power.

Rice reiterated administration warnings that the “surge” would produce increased bloodshed. “There are going to be bad days for the Baghdad security plan,” she said, “when violence is up—not down.”

While in the initial days of the operation sectarian violence and deaths appeared to decline, by Sunday the death toll was nearing the 100-per-day Baghdad residents have come to expect. Three car bombs exploded in mainly Shia areas of the city, killing at least 67 and injuring more than 120.

The increased violence followed a video conference with President Bush last Friday in which Prime Minister Maliki described the first days of the operation as a “brilliant success.”

Since the US invasion, some 2 million Iraqis have moved outside the country and another 1.7 million have been internally displaced. The International Organization for Migration reported last Friday that another 1 million Iraqis could be expected to flee the country by the end of 2007 as a result of the unrelenting violence and the economic and social catastrophe resulting from the US occupation.

The US media has provided virtually no coverage of the actions of American soldiers in Operation Law and Order. The major media outlets are colluding with the Bush administration to keep the true nature of the operation from the American people.

Nevertheless, there is considerable anxiety within sections of the US ruling elite over the policy being pursued by the Bush administration. Earlier this month, the Council on Foreign Relations published a policy brief entitled “After the Surge: The Case for US Military Disengagement from Iraq.” The statement noted that the US intervention in Iraq “triggered the collapse of the Iraqi state, plunged the country into a civil war that brought about the deaths of tens of thousands of Iraqi civilians, wrecked the country’s already debilitated infrastructure, and spurred violence sectarian rivalries that threaten to spill over into the broader Middle East.”

It continued, “The crisis has now moved beyond the capacity of Washington to control on its own. The results of the midterm elections show that public support for the present course has buckled. The United States lacks the military resources and the domestic and international political support to master the situation.”

The main factor on which the war cabal around Bush depends in pursuing its reckless and incendiary policy is the cowardice and complicity of the Democratic Party. Leading Democrats, even as they criticize Bush’s “surge” on tactical grounds, repeatedly avow their “support for the troops” and opposition to a cutoff of funds for the war.



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