

US air strikes kill 34 Iraqis

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On October 11, US forces killed 34 Iraqis during air strikes on a home northwest of Baghdad. The military has acknowledged that at least 15 among the dead were civilians, including nine children, making the civilian toll one of the largest admitted by US forces since the 2003 invasion.

The US military has not released specific details of the incident. According to a *Washington Post* report published Friday, troops raided a residence during a “suspected leadership meeting of al-Qaida in Iraq,” a Sunni insurgent group, near Samarra in western Iraq.

The latest death toll is the product of a campaign of aggressive US raids throughout the country aimed at smashing armed resistance. In the week before the air strikes, US forces killed at least 52 other “suspected insurgents” and detained 47 more, according to military accounts.

The military says troops called in an air strike on the home after they were fired upon. In the first air attack, the military said, “four terrorists” were killed. Troops then tracked fleeing survivors and called in further air strikes. Among the dead in subsequent strikes, the military listed 15 more “terrorists,” six women, and nine children. Another three children, one woman, and two men were wounded, according to the military.

While pledging a full investigation, US officials have barely bothered to conceal their indifference to the atrocity. In public statements, the military has blamed the death toll on “terrorists” and characterized the use of air attacks as appropriate force.

“We regret that civilians are hurt or killed while coalition forces search to rid Iraq of terrorism,” military spokesman Major Brad Leighton told the Associated Press after the incident. “These terrorists chose to deliberately place innocent Iraqi women and children in danger by their actions and presence.”

Similarly, Rear Admiral Greg Smith told the *New York Times* Friday, “We do not target civilians.... But

when our forces are fired upon, as they are routinely, then they have no option but to return fire.” He added, “The enemy has a vote here, and when he chooses to surround himself with civilians and then fire upon US forces, our forces have no choice but to return a commensurate amount of fire.”

That indiscriminate air attacks can be defended as “commensurate” force reveals much about the thinking of US military planners and the brutality of the occupation. “Where can anybody be safe from Bush’s democracy?” one surviving relative, whose pregnant cousin was killed, told the *Washington Post*. “Whenever we want to open a new chapter with the Americans, to forget the past and try all over again, they drag us into violence, weapons and fighting again. And to sympathize with al-Qaida against them. All because of their inconsideration for our blood.”

A United Nations Assistance Mission to Iraq report (see UN Assistance Mission for Iraq full pdf report) released the same day described the situation in Iraq as an “ever-deepening humanitarian crisis.” The report, which spanned the three-month period ending June 30, documented more than 100 civilian deaths from US air strikes and raids.

In a May 8 incident, seven children were killed when helicopters attacked an elementary school. A military spokesman at the time denied media reports that the incident had occurred, and claimed the helicopter had fired on insurgents planting roadside bombs. Although the military subsequently announced an investigation, according to the UN, “the findings of such investigations are not systematically publicized.”

Stonewalling and whitewashing of this sort, which epitomizes the whole criminal venture in Iraq, is typical of the US military and administration leaders.

The draft of the UN report had been slated for release in August, but according to a confidential admission by a senior UN official to the *Washington Post*, the UN

delayed its publication for more than a month following a request by Ryan Crocker, the US ambassador to Iraq. Crocker did not want the reality portrayed in the document to overshadow his own testimony, along with that of General David Petraeus, before Congress in early September, presenting the situation in Iraq as one of measurable progress resulting from increased troop levels.

The reality is quite the opposite. The US occupation has thrown Iraq into chaos and led to the mass dislocation of Iraqis both within the country and to neighboring states. The most recent estimate of the violent death toll in Iraq since the 2003 invasion stands at well over 1.2 million. The UN report estimated that 2.2 million Iraqis had fled the country as of June, most into Syria and Jordan. Another 1 million were estimated to be internally displaced, in addition to the 1.2 million who were displaced before 2006.

The UN notes that these figures are underestimates because they include only those refugees who have registered with government and aid agencies. "Having been forced to abandon their homes," the report states, "many are living in dire conditions without access to adequate food supplies and basic services, with children being particularly vulnerable to disease."

More than 42,000 detainees are held in overcrowded, squalid, and inhumane conditions. The UN noted ongoing "torture and ill-treatment of detainees" at pre-trial facilities run by the Interior Ministry in Baghdad, where prisoners are subjected to electric shocks, breaking of limbs, rape, severe burns, and other "routine" abuse. Detainees are denied legal counsel or family contact for several months at a time, and denied representation, access to evidence and due process during judicial reviews, the UN reported. The US has continually denied human rights monitors entrance to detention facilities run by the occupying forces, where more than half of all detainees are held.

According to the UN, raids and arrest sweeps such as those that US forces have undertaken in the past week, "are often less targeted than is typically portrayed by the authorities, and that a significant number of suspects are apprehended because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time following a security incident." The UN found that detainees rounded up in raids were typically "forced to sign or fingerprint statements before the investigating officer while

blindfolded (and sometimes while handcuffed), and on which they were subsequently questioned by the investigative judge."

US forces encounter an increasingly hostile insurgency in Iraq. In the week ending October 12, 15 US troops were killed in Iraq. Since 2003, 3,827 US troops have died, and the number of wounded stands at more than 27,750. On October 13, 2 US soldiers were killed and 40 others were wounded in a series of rocket attacks on Camp Victory, a heavily fortified headquarters outside of Baghdad.

According to military statements, rockets were fired at the base from a nearby abandoned school. While US bases regularly face "indirect fire" in the form of mortars or rockets, the high number of casualties is quite extraordinary. The military has yet to release details of the attack, but the number injured suggests a more direct hit.

Violence throughout the country continues to inflict large numbers of civilian casualties, contrary to positive reports from the US military. On Thursday, 35 Iraqis were killed or found dead. In Kirkuk, 9 died in a truck bomb attack that wounded 50 others at a market. Another car bomb struck an Internet café in Baghdad, killing 5 civilians and injuring 25. Five bodies were found separately in Baghdad.

On Friday, 2 children were killed and 17 others were wounded by a bomb hidden in a cart of toys at a northern Iraq playground. Four civilians died and 15 others were injured in another bombing in Baghdad, and 4 other bodies were discovered around the city.

Over the weekend, more bomb attacks in Baghdad and Samarra killed at least 31 people and wounded at least 40 more.



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