

US raid on Baghdad's Sadr City leaves many dead and wounded

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A violent US assault on Baghdad's Sadr City Sunday left many people dead—49 according to the military's own count—and scores more wounded. The foray into the crowded and impoverished Shia neighborhood, home to an estimated 3 million people, was launched before dawn and quickly escalated as American forces called in air strikes that left houses, stores and cars destroyed and in flames.

US military spokesmen described the dead as “criminals.” Major Winfield Danielson told the media: “I can say that we don't have any evidence of any civilians killed or wounded. Coalition forces only engage hostile threats and make every effort to protect innocent civilians.”

The evidence, however, was impossible to ignore. Television footage from the scene showed the bloodied bodies of two slain toddlers, one in diapers, at the local morgue. The Reuters news agency reported: “In a house where one of the children lived, a man pointed to bloodstained mattresses and blood-splattered pillows, choking back tears as he held up a photo of one of the dead.”

The local Imam Ali hospital was overwhelmed with casualties, including children, women and the elderly. The bodies of those slain were placed in coffins covered with the Iraqi flag. Angry crowds marched through the streets of Sadr City carrying the coffins.

Iraqi government spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh charged that all those killed in the raid were civilians and said that Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki had met with US commander General David Petraeus to protest the killings.

No American casualties were reported in the action.

According to spokesmen for the US occupation forces, the raid had been launched in a bid to capture a so-called high-value target. The military issued a statement saying that “The operation's objective was an individual

reported to be a long-time Special Groups member specializing in kidnapping operations.”

“Special Groups” is a category invented by the US military authorities, meant to describe those in the Shia areas who are perceived as opposing the American occupation. The Pentagon has used this jargon to portray the resistance as the work of “rogue” elements directed, trained and armed by Iran.

An Iraqi police source, however, was quoted by the Al Jazeera news agency as saying that the raid was launched, apparently in retaliation, after a US vehicle was struck by a roadside bomb.

The accounts that have emerged thus far suggest that the attempts by US troops to move into the neighborhood in the pre-dawn hours provoked unanticipated resistance, including small arms fire and rocket-propelled grenades. The ground forces responded by calling in air strikes by US jet fighters and helicopter gunships.

It appears that many of those killed died in their sleep, either killed on their roofs where Baghdad residents frequently go to escape the heat, or from shells and missiles that smashed into their homes.

According to the Associated Press: “A local resident who goes by the name Abu Fatmah said his neighbor's 14-year-old son, Saif Alwan, was killed while sleeping on the roof.

“‘Saif was killed by an air strike and what is his guilt? Is he from the Mahdi Army? He is a poor student,’ Abu Fatmah said.

“An uncle of 2-year-old Ali Hamid said the boy was killed and his parents seriously wounded when helicopter gunfire pierced the wall and windows of their house as they slept indoors.”

The carnage in Sadr City erupted in the context of intensified US attacks throughout Iraq. Just a day earlier, US troops raided neighborhoods in the southern city of Diwaniyah, supposedly in search of leaders of the Mahdi

Army, the militia loyal to Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr. US attack helicopters were called in and fired on the area, destroying at least five homes. The US military reported detaining 30 people in the raid, while again claiming that the bombardment caused no civilian casualties.

On October 11, US air strikes against a home in Samarra killed 34 people, including nine children, one of the deadliest such attacks to be acknowledged by the US military since the 2003 invasion.

There is growing evidence that the use of air strikes against the Iraqi people has grown considerably since the military “surge” ordered by the Bush administration at the beginning of the year, even as it goes largely unreported by the US media.

The US Air Force posts daily accounts of its operations, listing between 50 and 70 “close-air-support missions” each day. According to a survey by the Associated Press, the number of bombs dropped by US war planes on Iraq increased fivefold during the first six months of 2007, compared to the same period a year earlier. The Air Force has for the first time this year deployed powerful B1-B bombers in Iraq, capable of carrying up to 24 tons of bombs.

This increasing use of air power inevitably entails a growing toll in terms of civilian dead and wounded, referred to by military officials a “collateral damage.” The study of excess Iraqi deaths published in the authoritative British medical journal *Lancet* a year ago estimated that 13 percent of all violent deaths in Iraq were caused by US air strikes. The report’s authors estimated that these strikes were responsible for fully 50 percent of the violent deaths of children under the age of 15.

The increasing use of such air power—and the indiscriminate bloodshed that it entails—is a measure of the growing crisis of the American occupation and the Pentagon’s fears about the demoralization and disintegration of US ground forces in Iraq. The deliberate aerial bombardment of crowded civilian neighborhoods—a war crime—is designed both to further terrorize the Iraqi population and cut the number of US casualties.

On Saturday, US troops also raided and ransacked the headquarters of the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) in Baghdad, leaving it in a shambles. The IIP, which is the largest Sunni party in Iraq, is led by Iraq’s Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi.

Al-Hashemi has provoked the ire of both Iraqi Prime Minister al-Maliki, and the US occupation authorities in recent weeks with his highly publicized visits to crowded detention camps, where predominantly Sunni prisoners

have told him that they are innocent, have been arrested without charges and have been subjected to torture.

The United Nations humanitarian mission in Iraq recently released a report estimating that there were some 44,000 detainees in Iraqi or US custody as of last June—a total that had increased by at least 10 percent just over the previous two months as a result of increased US raids. No doubt this prison population has grown sharply since then.

The UN report cited “widespread and routine torture and ill-treatment of detainees.”

“In addition to routine beatings with hosepipes, cables and other implements,” the report states, “the methods cited included prolonged suspension from the limbs in contorted and painful positions for extended periods, sometimes resulting in dislocation of the joints, electric shocks to sensitive parts of the body; the breaking of limbs; forcing detainees to sit on sharp objects, causing serious injury and heightening the risk of infection; and severe burns to parts of the body through the application of heated implements.”

Meanwhile, one of Washington’s principal Iraqi collaborators and an architect of the US-imposed regime declared in a television interview that the American intervention has brought only “chaos and instability.”

Feisal Amin Istrabadi, who resigned in August as Iraq’s deputy ambassador to the United Nations, told NBC News Friday that “there is no Iraqi government,” only an “appearance of institutions.”

Istrabadi, a US-born lawyer who was a leading figure among the exile circles promoting a US invasion and later played the key role in drafting Iraq’s interim constitution, blamed the catastrophe confronting Iraq on Washington’s drive to hold early elections in which the population was pushed to support competing ethno-religious-based parties.

“What did we accomplish, exactly [with] this push towards an appearance of institutions ... merely an appearance?” he asked. “Except that an American politician can stand up and say, ‘Look what we accomplished in Iraq.’ When in fact, what we accomplished in Iraq over the last three years has been chaos and instability.”



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