

# As Senate approves new war funding, US massacres Iraqi civilians

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US helicopters massacred at least eight civilians, including several children, in an operation in northern Iraq on Wednesday.

The civilians were killed when strafed or bombed by US helicopters, though there are conflicting accounts about the details of their deaths. The incident was near Baiji, located between Baghdad and the northern city of Mosul.

*Agence France Presse* (AFP) reported on Thursday that the eight included two children, and that they were traveling by car. According to the news agency, a police official added that six of the bodies were mutilated beyond recognition. The Associated Press reported that three of the dead were children, and displayed a photograph of the three bodies at a local hospital.

Both the *International Herald Tribune* and Reuters reported, however, that at least some civilians were killed while fleeing on foot. The IHT cited an Iraqi police official in Salahaddin province as saying that local police reported that the civilians were shot from behind while running away.

Reuters quoted a local resident, Ghafil Rashed, as saying that his brother and son had been killed. “The Americans raided our houses.... People started fleeing with their children, then the aircraft started bombing people in a street along the farm.”

Colonel Mudhir al-Qaysi, of the Baiji police, added, “Baiji policemen went to the scene and found the killed family unarmed, and the bodies were burned and torn apart.”

Whatever the exact details, it is clear that the killing of the family is yet another in a long series of war crimes committed by the US occupying forces.

The US military, meanwhile, responded with predictable cynicism and indifference. Relying on

reports that the eight had been killed while in an automobile, a military spokesman claimed that those traveling in the car had “exhibited hostile intent.” The American action “was an operation targeted against known Al Qaeda in Iraq operating a weapons storage facility,” Colonel Gerald O’Hara claimed, without providing any evidence.

The standard response of the military to any atrocity it commits is to blame “terrorists” of one form or another. O’Hara said the military “sincerely regrets when any innocent civilians are injured, resulting from terrorists locating themselves in and around them.”

In a separate incident on Wednesday, the US military killed at least 11 residents of Obaidi, a predominantly Shia area of Baghdad near Sadr City. The military claimed that they were all members of “Special Groups,” a term the US has begun using to refer to sections of the Mahdi Army—the militia loyal to Shia cleric Moqtada Al-Sadr—who allegedly are not under Sadra’s control, but working with Iran.

Thousands of Iraqi soldiers have moved into Sadr City as part of a cease-fire arrangement with Sadr brokered earlier this month.

According to the local police and residents, those killed included three elderly men and two street cleaners. Reuters reported, “In the courtyard of one house ... black-robed women wailed over the bloody corpse of a man half-covered by the blanket, while men beat their chests in a sign of grief.” The news agency quoted one of the men: “He was shot by an American sniper. He was loitering outside the house. He was not even holding a piece of wood.”

Among those killed in Obaidi was an Iraqi television cameraman, Wissam Ali Auda, of Afaq TV, which is affiliated with the Dawa Party of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. Auda was apparently killed in crossfire,

though it cannot be excluded that he was deliberately targeted.

The ceasefire has allowed the US and Iraqi forces to concentrate on operations in northern Iraq around Mosul, which has resulted in the mass arrest of at least 1,200 people over the past several weeks.

Against the backdrop of these atrocities, the US Senate agreed Thursday to fund the Iraq war with an additional \$165 billion, intended to last into the summer of 2009—that is, well into the next presidential term. The Democrats want to ensure that another war funding vote does not take place in the run-up to the November elections.

The vote on the bill was 70-26. With enough support from Democratic senators to ensure the bill's passage, Democratic Presidential candidates Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton were free to vote against the bill in an empty gesture of opposition to the war. Both senators support the continued occupation of Iraq.

The Senate also voted 63-34 to reject a toothless measure that would urge the redeployment of combat troops by the end of 2009.

The Senate attached to its bill funding for an expanded veterans education benefit and other domestic programs, including the extension of unemployment benefits by 13 weeks.

The funding for veterans benefits allowed the senators to make noises about “supporting the troops,” even as they approved billions in funding to keep them in Iraq. The domestic spending won the support of part of the Republican caucus, passing 75-22. President Bush has pledged to veto any bill that includes additional spending beyond funding for the war, but if this tally held, the veto could be overridden.

War-funding legislation must still pass the House before it goes to the president's desk. Last week, the House rejected its own funding bill after Republican representatives elected to vote “present,” calling the Democrats' bluff. The Democratic leadership had arranged an elaborate voting process on three different measures that was intended to pass the funding bill while allowing some Democrats to vote against war funding, for veterans benefits, and for a toothless withdrawal measure.

There is no doubt that the House and Senate will quickly agree on a bill that is acceptable to Bush and that will ensure the continuation of the bloody

occupation.

Also on Thursday, the Senate Armed Services Committee began hearings for the nomination of General David Petraeus, the architect of the “surge,” to be commander of US Central Command, which oversees the Middle East and Central Asia. The committee heard testimony from Petraeus and from Lieutenant General Raymond Odierno, who would replace Petraeus as commander of US forces in Iraq.

In his opening statement, the Democratic chairman of the committee, Senator Carl Levin (Michigan), indicated his support for the nomination—another expression of the general agreement that both parties have with the Iraq occupation.

Levin gushed over Petraeus and Odierno for their “sacrifice” in overseeing the Iraq war. The senator went on to say that the surge policy had created “stability” in Iraq. Regardless of any differences over tactics, Levin said, “We owe General Petraeus and General Odierno a debt of gratitude for the commitment, determination and strength that they brought to their areas of responsibility.”

Petraeus, for his part, went on to repeat his threats against Iran, which he said “persists in its non-transparent pursuit of nuclear technology and continues to fund, train and arm dangerous militia organizations.” He denounced Iran for fueling “proxy wars” to pursue its “regional ambitions,” while Petraeus himself outlined US strategy for domination over the Middle East and Central Asia. As the head of Centcom, Petraeus would oversee any military operation against Iran.



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