

# WikiLeaks cable confirms reports of US massacre of Iraqi civilians

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An unclassified US State Department cable recently published on the WikiLeaks web site supports reports of a 2006 US massacre of civilians, including women and small children, in Iraq's Ishaqi district.

The massacre was first reported in Western media in 2006 by Matthew Schofield of Knight Ridder newspapers (subsequently acquired by McClatchy News). Knight Ridder cited reports by Iraqi doctors and investigators at the Joint Coordination Center in Tikrit—an Iraqi security office set up with US military assistance and staffed by US-trained Iraqi police officers.

Staff Colonel Fadhil Muhammed Khalaf, the assistant chief of the Joint Coordination Center, wrote: "At [2:30 AM] of 15/3/2006, according to the telegram report of the Ishaqi police directorate, American forces used helicopters to drop troops on the house of Faiz Harat Khalaf situated in the Abu Sifa village of the Ishaqi district. The American forces gathered the family members in one room and executed 11 people, including 5 children, 4 women, and 2 men, then they bombed the house, burned three vehicles and killed their animals."

At the time, the US military dismissed the reports of McClatchy and US-trained police, claiming that five Iraqis had been killed in a successful raid against Sunni insurgent forces. A Pentagon spokesman, US Major Tim Keefe, said: "We're concerned to hear accusations like that, but it's also highly unlikely that they're true.... [US forces] take every precaution to keep civilians out of harm's way."

Such claims lacked all credibility, however, as reports

and pictures emerged from Ishaqi showing execution-style killings of an elderly woman and a baby less than one year old. US officials later admitted that more than five Iraqis had been killed in Ishaqi.

The newly released WikiLeaks cable from the US embassy in Geneva cites findings of a March 2006 investigation by Philip Alston, the UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions. Alston's conclusions matched those of Iraqi police and Knight Ridder.

After coming under fire near the house, according to Alston, US "troops entered the house, handcuffed all residents and executed all of them. After the initial MNF [Multi-National Force, i.e., US coalition] intervention, a US air raid ensued that destroyed the house.... Iraqi TV stations broadcast from the scene and showed bodies of the victims (i.e., five children and four women) in the morgue in Tikrit. Autopsies carried out at the Tikrit Hospital's morgue revealed that all the corpses were shot in the head and handcuffed."

The cable notes that "at least 10 persons, namely Mr. Faiz Hratt Khalaf (aged 28), his wife Sumay'ya Abdul Kazzaq Khuthur (aged 24), their three children Hawra'a (aged 5), Aisha (aged 3) and Husam (5 months old), Faiz's mother Ms. Turkiya Majeed Ali (aged 74), Faiz's sister (name unknown), Faiz's nieces Asma'a Yousif Ma'arouf (aged 5 years old), and Usama Yousif Ma'arouf (aged 3 years), and a visiting relative Ms. Iqtisad Hameed Mehdi (aged 23) were killed during the raid."

Contacted by McClatchy last week, Alston—now a professor at New York University—said that US

officials ignored his report on the Ishaqi massacre: “The tragedy is that this elaborate system of communications is in place but the UN Human Rights Council does nothing to follow up when states ignore issues raised with them.”

Nor was this reaction unusual. According to Alston, a lack of response from US officials “was the case with most of the letters to the US in the 2006-2007 period.”

This period, which saw the US “surge” of troops into Iraq and US toleration of killings by sectarian death squads, was one of the most violent in the nine-year US occupation of Iraq. US officials were particularly anxious to end investigations of US group executions of Iraqi civilians due to mass outrage in Iraq at the November 2005 US killing of 24 civilians in Haditha.

The US military has refused to conduct any further investigation of the Ishaqi massacre, and Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki has declared that he cannot fully investigate the killings without more information from the US government.

Pentagon spokesman Lt. Colonel James Gregory told the *Guardian*: “The incident was properly investigated at the time, and no new information has surfaced.”

The only possible conclusion from Gregory’s statement is that the Pentagon attaches no importance to the killing of Iraqi civilians, and intends to continue issuing bogus denials of US responsibility for the massacre.

If the initial US investigation in 2006 indeed had access to the information in Alston’s report, the investigation was clearly a cover-up. It did not publicize Alston’s findings but concluded that US troops had used “appropriate force.” By declaring this to be a “proper” investigation, the Pentagon is making clear that it wants to continue covering up the event to avoid provoking more popular opposition to the war, both in the United States and in Iraq itself.

The new reports on the Ishaqi massacre have already provoked controversy in the Iraqi regime, which is negotiating an accord for US imperialism to maintain

permanent military bases in Iraq after the nominal December 31 deadline for US troops to leave the country. The Pentagon is demanding that US troops have legal immunity from prosecution for their conduct in Iraq after December 31.

Such immunity would allow US troops to kill Iraqi civilians without any accountability. These demands are stoking popular anger and opposition in Iraq.

Amman Yousif, the council chairman for Salahuddin province (which contains Ishaqi), said that local officials “reject the extension or the existence of American troops in Salahuddin.... [US troops] have never expressed their apologies. We want them to apologize, to compensate the victims’ families, and withdraw from Iraq.”



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