

Mass killings, looting in Tikrit by US-backed Shiite militia

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6 April 2015

According to media reports and public denunciations by Sunni Arab officials in Iraq, Shiite militias have engaged in mass executions and widespread looting and destruction of property in the city of Tikrit since it was recaptured last week from Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) forces.

As many as 76 people were summarily executed by militia forces, who dragged the bodies through the streets of the conquered city, a former stronghold of longtime Iraqi ruler Saddam Hussein, who was born nearby. Militiamen plundered stores and set fire to homes and businesses, in some cases claiming to be taking preventive action against the possibility of bombs having been left behind by ISIS.

Following a month-long battle, Shiite militias completed the conquest of Tikrit on March 31 after American warplanes joined the fight and obliterated the last ISIS holdouts in the center of the city.

Ahmed Al Krayam, head of the provincial council of Salahuddin province, told reporters, “Tikrit is under chaos and things are out of control. The police force and officials there are helpless to stop the militias.” Both Al Krayam and the governor of Salahuddin left Tikrit, the provincial capital, on Friday night, protesting the failure of the Iraqi government to curb looting and murder.

“Houses and shops were burnt after they stole everything,” Krayam told Reuters. Saying that hundreds of buildings had been burned, he added, “Our city was burnt in front of our eyes. We can’t control what is going on.”

The *Wall Street Journal* interviewed a Tikrit resident, Waleed Omar, who had fled the city during the fighting earlier this month. “This looting issue is 100 percent true and it means new suffering for the people of Tikrit,” he said. “Islamic State displaced people in

Tikrit after committing horrible abuses against them, and now the militias are looting and burning their homes.”

A factor in the savagery of the Shiite forces was the fact that Tikrit had been the longtime political base of Saddam Hussein, who brutally repressed a Shiite uprising in 1991. Moreover, at nearby Camp Speicher, an abandoned US military base, Sunni ISIS fighters had allegedly murdered some 1,700 captured Iraqi Army soldiers after separating the Sunnis, who were released, from the Shiites, who were slaughtered.

The revenge killings raised the specter of a general sectarian bloodbath as the Shiite militias and the army of the Shiite-dominated Baghdad regime enter largely Sunni-populated areas, including Anbar province in the west and Nineveh province in the northwest. The latter includes Mosul, Iraq’s second-largest city.

The speaker of the Iraqi parliament, Salim al-Jabouri, a Sunni, warned the government on Friday that it had to take action against those who “conspire against the security and stability of Iraq.” Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, a Shiite, said the military would start arresting and prosecuting looters in Tikrit. But the balance of forces in the city is lopsided in favor of the militias, which outnumber regular army troops by at least four to one.

Amnesty International announced Thursday that it was investigating reports of “widespread human rights abuses” by Shiite militiamen during and after the conquest of Tikrit and neighboring towns and villages.

Amnesty senior crisis response adviser Donatella Rovera said: “We are investigating reports that scores of residents have been seized early last month and not heard of since, and that residents’ homes and businesses have been blown up or burned down after having been looted by militias... There have also been

reports of summary executions of men who may or may not have been involved in combat but who were killed after having been captured.”

The *New York Times*, in an April 2 report, quoted Muen al-Khadimy, a senior official of the Badr Brigade, the most powerful Shiite militia, saying that his group took no ISIS prisoners in Tikrit. “To be honest, everywhere we captured them we killed them because they were the enemy,” he said. Khadimy claimed that all ISIS fighters were assumed to be suicide bombers and killed as a precaution.

By Friday, American officials were admitting to reporters that summary executions and looting were taking place in Tikrit and warning that such actions could undermine the US-backed coalition against ISIS, which includes the Sunni-ruled monarchies of the Persian Gulf.

“It’s bad,” one US military official told the *Wall Street Journal*. “This is not what we want. This is not what al-Abadi wants.”

Earlier US press reports, however, stressed the growing collaboration between US military forces and the Shiite gunmen responsible for the latest wave of atrocities in Iraq. The *New York Times* described “a template for fighting the Sunni militancy in other parts of Iraq: American airstrikes and Iranian-backed ground assaults, with the Iraqi military serving as the go-between for two global adversaries that do not want to publicly acknowledge that they are working together.”

The *Times* continued: “The template, American officials said privately this week, could apply in particular to the looming battle to retake Mosul, Iraq’s second-largest city.”

The same article noted last week’s congressional testimony by Gen. Lloyd J. Austin, head of the US Central Command, who declared flatly, “I will not—and I hope we will never—coordinate or cooperate with Shiite militias.” The *Times* cited the rebuttal by “a senior Obama administration official,” who said Austin “may have gone a little far.”

The *Washington Post* reported the situation in Iraq under the headline “After Tikrit victory, Iraq’s new challenge: Win over Sunnis.” The newspaper did not elucidate how this could be accomplished in the midst of the sectarian slaughter of Sunnis.

These press commentaries merely repeated, parrot-like, the claims of the Obama White House, which

described the Iraqi force that conquered Tikrit as “a multi-sectarian force that’s being led by the Iraqi military,” although Shiite militias comprised at least 20,000 fighters compared to 4,000 regular troops.

The reports of mass killings in Tikrit confirm that American imperialism has not returned to Iraq to fight atrocities and mass murder by ISIS, but rather to prop up the puppet regime established by the invasion of 2003 and the subsequent eight-year occupation of the oil-rich country.

Even before the fall of Tikrit, there were widespread reports of ISIS-style atrocities, including beheadings, by Iraqi military units and Shiite militias trained and armed by the United States. ABC News reported last month that investigations had begun into possible war crimes, including torture, executions, decapitations and desecration of corpses, some of them documented by online videos.



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