

US troops kill 15-year-old girl in Iraq

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A teenage girl was shot dead by American soldiers as they conducted live-fire drills at the Victoria military base near Baghdad International Airport on September 20.

Fifteen year-old Zainab Essam Majed al-Khazali, a student, was working with her father on their family farm when a bullet struck her in the head. Her funeral procession was held the next day.

The Iraqi Security Media Cell promised an investigation into the murder, which it initially described as a “random shooting.” However a statement given by Iraq’s security forces, quoted by *The Cradle*, confirmed the culpability of the US military: “The killing of Zainab Essam Majed coincided with the presence of training operations for the American forces ... the bullet that was taken out of the girl’s head confirms that it is from one of the weapons used by the American forces in the embassy and airport.”

The shooting has provoked widespread outrage, with locals demanding to know why American soldiers were holding live-fire exercises near residential areas. On September 22, Iraqi legislator Ahmed Taha al-Rubaie, from the Basra province, called upon the Baghdad government to summon the American ambassador and present her with a formal note of protest, along with taking legal measures to hold those responsible for the murder accountable.

In a post on Twitter, Rubaie wrote, “Even though two days have passed since the teenage girl was killed by a bullet fired during US military exercises near the Victoria base northwest of Baghdad, the US Embassy has not bothered to issue any official apology for the unjust incident.”

He went on, “The death, which occurred as a result of the use of live rounds during military drills near residential neighborhoods, exhibits an outrageous disregard for the Iraqi blood and a blatant disrespect for

the country's sovereignty.”

Qais al-Khazali, leader of *Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq*, a Shi’ite militia group that is part of the Popular Mobilization Forces, demanded on Twitter that the government “present a detailed report to the Iraqi people, explaining ... this cowardly incident, and how a military base can exist on Iraqi soil in clear violation of the Iraqi constitution ... and sovereignty.”

It remains unclear whether the shooting was intentional, or the result of US troops recklessly firing off live ammunition near populated urban areas. In either case, it demonstrates the criminal indifference of the US occupiers towards the lives of the people whom they “liberated.” It also exposes the cynicism and hypocrisy of the leaders of the US and the other imperialist powers as they invoke concern for “human rights” to justify the use of militarism.

US officials have not acknowledged the crime, and in fact not a single Western news outlet has reported on the murder. At the same time, they have used the occasion of the death in police custody of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini in Iran—and the popular protests in Iran that have ensued—to call for regime change in Iran.

The *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, in sync, have both published articles by foreign policy analyst Karim Sadjadpour, who writes in the *Post* that the United States should “champion the aspirations of the Iranian people to live in a free society at peace with the world ... Iran’s transition from theocracy to democracy may not come easily, peacefully or soon. But it is the single most important key to transforming the Middle East.”

On Thursday, the Biden administration imposed sanctions on Iranian police and intelligence officials in response to what Secretary of State Antony Blinken called the “tragic and brutal” death of Amini. The stark contrast in media coverage of the two deaths, which happened days apart, reflects the fact that—from the

standpoint of the interests of US imperialism—one of them is politically useful, while the other is an inconvenience that is best ignored.

Nearly two decades ago, the George W. Bush administration applied an equally cynical campaign of falsehood, on a much greater scale, to justify the unprovoked invasion of Iraq. On the one hand, Iraq was manufacturing “weapons of mass destruction” and posed an imminent danger to the world. On the other, the Iraqi people needed to be liberated from the brutal Saddam Hussein regime. These were the official justifications for what in reality was a war of imperialist aggression, launched against an oppressed nation in order to secure US domination over the oil resources of the Middle East.

Begun with an infamous lie, the 2003 US invasion and occupation of Iraq was conducted with a level of brutality and criminality not seen since Hitler’s bloody invasions in the early stages of the Second World War. During the initial “shock and awe” blitzkrieg, the practically defenseless and already impoverished country was ruthlessly pulverized with the most advanced weaponry, with the capital Baghdad turned into a raging inferno by a storm of bombs and missiles. The ground invasion that followed encountered virtually no organized opposition from the dilapidated Iraqi Army, making it more accurate to call this phase a massacre rather than a war. The number of Iraqi soldiers and civilians killed during the invasion has never been accurately assessed, but it likely numbers in the tens of thousands at the least.

Less than an hour’s drive from the site of Zainab al-Khazali’s killing is the town of Fallujah, which in 2004 became a center of an uprising of the Iraqi people against their oppressors. Determined to make an example, US forces responded by virtually obliterating the town during a months-long siege, making no distinction between civilians and combatants in what can only be described as a mass reprisal, reminiscent of the brutal collective punishment meted out by the Nazi conquerors in Poland, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and elsewhere.

Just a few miles from where the teenager met her untimely end lies Abu Ghraib, the site of the infamous prison camp operated by the US military which saw the torture and murder of detainees, the majority of whom were never even suspected of belonging to any

resistance group. Photographs from Abu Ghraib profoundly shocked and angered the consciences of the world, and exposed the sheer gangsterism of the US war against Iraq.

The senseless killing of an innocent girl is therefore the latest in a long list of outrages. But despite all the crimes, the mass killings, the torture, the systematic looting of the country and the destruction of priceless cultural artifacts, US imperialism failed in its military aim of installing a viable puppet state in Iraq, as demonstrated by the lingering presence of US troops. The country seethes with discontent. A similar operation in Afghanistan, which saw a 20-year effort by US imperialism to maintain an installed pro-US regime, likewise ended in a debacle.

Now, US imperialism, confronted with an intractable social, economic and political crisis at home, is planning even greater and more catastrophic wars. The rhetoric of “human rights” and “defending democracy” is being used by the ruling class and its media apparatus to provide a justification for the planned wars against Russia and China, which threaten humanity with the specter of nuclear annihilation.



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