

Iraq: U.S. Resorting to 'Collective Punishment'

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RAMADI, Sep 18 (IPS) - U.S. forces are taking to collective punishment of civilians in several cities across the al-Anbar province west of Baghdad, residents and officials say.

"Ramadi, the capital of al-Anbar province, is still living with the daily terror of its people getting killed by snipers and its infrastructure being destroyed," Ahmad, a local doctor who withheld his last name for security purposes told IPS. "This city has been facing the worst of the American terror and destruction for more than two years now, and the world is silent."

Destroying infrastructure and cutting water and electricity "for days and even weeks is routine reaction to the resistance," he said. "Guys of the resistance do not need water and electricity, it's the families that are being harmed, and their lives which are at stake."

Students and professors at the University of al-Anbar told IPS that their campus is under frequent attack.

"Nearly every week we face raids by the Americans or their Iraqi colleagues," a professor speaking on condition of anonymity told IPS. Students said that U.S. troops occupied their school last week..

"We've been under great pressure from the Americans since the very first days of their occupation of Iraq," a student told IPS.

Such raids are being reported all over Ramadi. "The infrastructure destruction is huge around the governorate building in downtown Ramadi," said a 24-year-old student who gave his name as Ali al-Ani. "And they are destroying the market too."

IPS reported Sep. 5 that the U.S. military was bulldozing entire blocks of buildings near the governorate to dampen resistance attacks on government offices.

Such U.S. action seems most severe in al-Anbar province, where resistance is strongest, and which has seen the highest U.S. casualties.

The city of Hit 80km west of Ramadi was surrounded by U.S. troops for several days earlier this week. Several civilians were killed and at least five were detained by U.S. forces. Checkpoints are in place at each entrance to the city after the U.S. military lifted the cordon around it. This has stifled movement and damaged local businesses.

"There was an attack on a U.S. convoy, and three vehicles were destroyed," a local tribal chief who gave his name as Nawaf told IPS. "It wasn't the civilians who did it, but they are the ones punished. These Americans have the bad habit of cutting all of the essential

services after every attack. They said they came to liberate us, but look at the slow death they are giving us every day.”

In Haditha, a city of 75,000 on the banks of the Euphrates River in western al-Anbar, collective punishment is ongoing, residents say. This was the site of the massacre of 24 civilians by U.S. marines in November 2005.

“The Americans continue to raid our houses and threaten us with more violence,” a local tribal leader who gave his name as Abu Juma’a told IPS. “But if they think they will make us kneel by these criminal acts, they are wrong. If they increase the pressure, the resistance will increase the reaction. We see this pattern repeated so often now.”

Abu Juma’a added: “I pray that the Americans return to their senses before they lose everything in the Iraqi fire.”

In Fallujah, local police say residents have turned against them due to the collective punishment tactics used by U.S. forces.

“The Americans started pushing us to fight the resistance despite our contracts that clearly assigned us the duties of civil protection against normal crimes such as theft and tribal quarrels,” a police lieutenant told IPS. “Now 90 percent of the force has decided to quit rather than kill our brothers or get killed by them for the wishes of the Americans.”

At least one U.S. vehicle is reported destroyed every day on average in the face of mounting U.S. raids and a daily curfew. The scene is one of destruction of the city, not rebuilding.

“Infrastructure rebuilding is just a joke that nobody laughs at,” Fayiq al-Dilaimy, an engineer in Fallujah told IPS. He was on the rebuilding committee set up after the November 2004 U.S.-led operation which destroyed approximately 75 percent of the city..

“People of this city could rebuild their city in six months if given a real chance. Now look at it and how sorrowful it looks under the boots of the ‘liberators’.”

Many of the smaller towns have been badly hit. “Khaladiyah (near Fallujah) and the area around it have faced the worst collective punishments for over two years now,” said a government official in Ramadi. “But of course most cities in al-Anbar are being constantly punished by the Americans.”

Samarra and Dhululiyah towns, both north of Baghdad, have also been facing collective punishment from the U.S. military, according to residents.

“Curfews and concrete walls are permanent in both cities, which makes life impossible,” Ali al-Bazi, a lawyer who lives in Dhululiyah and works in Samarra told IPS. “There are so many killings by American snipers. So many families have lost loved ones trying to visit relatives or even just stepping outside of their house.”

While Baghdad is not in al-Anbar province, occupation forces have used similar tactics there. In January 2005 IPS reported that the military used bulldozers to level palm groves, cut electricity, destroy a fuel station and block access roads in response to attacks from resistance fighters.

A U.S. military spokesman in Baghdad did not comment on specific cases, but told IPS that

the U.S. military “does its best to protect civilians from the terrorists.”

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