

The Line of Atrocity: From the White House to Haditha

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Global Research, June 03, 2006

uruknet.net 3 June 2006

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June 1, 2006

Many observers have compared the methodical murder of 24 innocent civilians by U.S. Marines in [the Iraqi town of Haditha](#) - now confirmed by Pentagon and Congressional sources - to the infamous My Lai massacre in Vietnam, when American troops slaughtered hundreds of civilians in a bloody rampage. But this is a false equation, one that gravely distorts the overall reality of the Coalition effort in Iraq.

For it is not the small-scale Haditha atrocity that should be compared to My Lai: it is the entire Iraq War itself. The whole operation - from its inception in high-level mendacity to its execution in blood-soaked arrogance, folly, greed and incompetence - is a war crime of almost unfathomable proportions: a My Lai writ large, a My Lai every single day, [year after year after year](#).

[Details of the Haditha killings](#) are finally emerging after months of official cover-up and heated denunciations of anyone who questioned the shifting, conflicting stories issued by the Pentagon following the November 2005 incident. The horror speaks for itself: a unit of Marines from Kilo Company, thirsting for revenge after a roadside bomb killed a comrade, broke into homes near the blast area and systematically executed the civilians they found there, along with five men who happened to be passing by in a taxi, Time Magazine reports.

Photos taken afterwards by U.S. military intelligence document the carnage. "One portrays an Iraqi mother and young child, kneeling on the floor, as if in prayer," the [Sund](#)



[ay Times reports](#). "They have been shot dead at close range. The pictures show other victims, shot execution-style in the head and chest in their homes." The victims "included a 76-year-old amputee and a four-year-old boy," [the Observer reports](#). "In one house an entire family, including seven children, were attacked with guns and grenades. Only a 13-year-old girl survived." A U.S. government official told the Sunday Times that the attackers had "suffered a total breakdown in morality and leadership."

Take special note of that last statement: it may be the first time that a Bush Administration spokesman has ever told the truth about the war. There has indeed been a “total breakdown in morality and leadership” in Iraq; but it’s not confined to the Haditha killers. They are just the inevitable end product of the culture of lawlessness, brutality, and aggression deliberately manufactured by the White House to serve [its predatory geopolitical ambitions](#) and its dirty war-profiteering schemes.

This fish has rotted from the head, and the corruption has eaten through the entire body politic. It was bound to find its most extreme manifestations in those whom Bush has armed with lies – a majority of U.S. soldiers believe that Iraq was involved in 9/11, polls show – and sent off to kill and be killed in an illegal war of aggression based on knowingly false and tricked-up evidence. If atrocity is the foundation of your enterprise, if atrocity is the atmosphere you breathe, why then, you are bound to produce atrocities, over and over, despite the many individual soldiers and honorable officers who struggle against the infected tide.

These massacres aren’t just momentary outbursts of revenging anger; they’re learned behavior. The Marines who killed at Haditha were



veterans of [the much larger atrocity at Fallujah](#) the year before. There they took part in one of [the most savage demolitions of a city](#) since World War II. Eight weeks of relentless bombing was followed by a cut-off of the city’s water, electricity and food supplies. a clear war crime under the Geneva Conventions. More than two-thirds of the city’s residents, some 200,000 people, fled the coming inferno, refugees in their own land. Those who remained were considered fair game in the house-by-house ravaging that followed. Among the Americans’ first targets were the city’s hospitals and clinics, as U.S. officers freely admitted to the New York Times: another blatant war crime. They were destroyed or shut down, with medical staff killed or imprisoned, to prevent bad publicity about civilian casualties from reaching the outside world, the officers said. Later, an investigation by the U.S.-backed Iraqi government found credible evidence of the use of chemical weapons against the city; yet another war crime. Up to 6,000 people were killed in the attack, most of them civilians.

The few hundred Fallujah-based insurgents who had been the ostensible target of the assault had escaped long before the onslaught began. Thus there was no real military purpose to the city’s destruction, which had been ordered by the White House; it was instead an act of reprisal, a collective punishment against the Iraqi people as a whole, non-combatants included, for the armed resistance to the Coalition conquest. The Marines of Kilo

Company simply took what they were taught by their eminently respectable superiors in Fallujah and applied it in Haditha.

No doubt these lessons are being applied throughout Iraq. In March, we reported here on [an eerily similar incident in the Isahagi region](#), when 11 civilians, including five children under



the age of five, were killed during a house raid by U.S. troops. [[See the flash film, Children of Abraham.](#)] Local police said the victims had been shot execution-style, although none of them were connected to the insurgency. Photographs of the scene - by Agence-France Presse - confirmed the attack and the children's deaths, with indications that they had indeed been shot in the head. Pentagon officials, despite the photographic evidence, would confirm only four civilian deaths: unfortunate collateral damage of a firefight with an al-Qaeda operative, they said. The idea that U.S. troops could execute civilians in cold blood was preposterous, they said.

Like Abu Ghraib, Haditha is not an aberration by a few "bad apples" but the emblem of a wider, systemic crime, the natural fruit of an outlaw regime that has made aggressive war, torture, indefinite detention, "extrajudicial killing," rendition and concentration camps official national policy. This moral rot is Bush's true historical legacy.

Chris Floyd/This is an expanded version of a column appearing in the June 2 edition of The Moscow Times.

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