

The Siege of Tal-Afar

90% of the residents have left their homes

By [Dahr Jamail](#)

Global Research, September 16, 2005

[Iraq Dispatches](#) 16 September 2005

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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September 15, 2005

For the last several days at least 6,000 US soldiers along with approximately 4,000 Iraqi soldiers (Read-members of the Kurdish Peshmerga and Shia Badr Army) were laying siege to the city of Tal-Afar, near Mosul in northern Iraq. It is estimated that 90% of the residents have left their homes because of the violence and destruction of the siege, as well as to avoid home raids and snipers.

The Fallujah model is being applied yet again, albeit on a smaller scale. I haven't received any reports yet of biometrics being used (retina scans, finger printing, bar coding of human beings) like in Fallujah, but there are other striking similarities to the tactics used in November.

While the US military claims to have killed roughly 200 ³terrorists² in the operation, reports from the ground state that most of the fighters inside the city had long since left to avoid direct confrontation with the overwhelming military force (a basic tenet of guerrilla warfare).

Again like Fallujah, most of the families who fled are staying in refugee camps outside the city in tents amidst horrible conditions in the inferno-like heat of the Iraqi summer.

The LA Times reported that Ezzedin Dowla, a Turkmen leader in the area said, ³Families are homeless and the government has not provided any shelter, food or drink for them.² Nor has the US military.

The targets of this military operation are the Sunni Turkmen who are politically on the side of the Sunni Arabs. Most Sunnis will be voting against the constitution during the coming vote of October, 15th.

The Cheney Administration is desperate for something it can spin as ³good news² from Iraq; thus, it most certainly behooves them to have the referendum on the constitution to boast about. But in order to do so, the voting ability and power of the Sunni (and Sunni Turkmen) must be severely compromised, as well as punishment meted out for rightfully assuming what will be a Sunni no-vote on the constitution.

Both the Cheney Administration and its current puppet-government in Iraq benefit from destroying the voting (and living) ability of the majority of people in the ³Sunni triangle,² so we have the operation in Tal-Afar, most likely to be followed by similar operations in Al-Qa'im, Haditha, Samarra, and possibly more.

In Tal-Afar, the propaganda spewed by the US military (and Iraqi ³government²) was that the operation was to fight terrorists coming into Iraq via Syria. If that were true, why did the US military remove troops from the border with Syria who were supposed to be preventing infiltration by foreign fighters? Instead of guarding the border, as they should, they engaged in the operation against Iraqi Sunni Turkmen. Working in unison, the US military launched the heavy-handed attack with the ³authorization² of Prime Minister Ibrahim Jaafari, the leader of the Shia Dawa Party. Jaafari even went so far as to venture to Tal-Afar on Tuesday to visit troops and have his photograph taken.

³Authorization² was given by the Iraqi government for the attack on Tal-Afar, just as ³authorization² was given by then interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi for the November, 2004 massacre in Fallujah. ³Authorization,² when the US military would never, ever allow any foreign power jurisdiction over American forces, least of all a puppet government.

Correspondents with Azzaman media in Tal-Afar miraculously made it into the city and reported that residents are disputing reports that US and Iraqi soldiers have killed scores of ³insurgents.² Like Fallujah, these residents of Tal-Afar are reporting that most of the people killed were civilians who had no place to go so they chose to stay in their homes. People also stayed because they feared persecution at the hands of the Peshmerga and Badr Army.

I recently interviewed an Iraqi man from that area at the Peoples¹ UN conference in Perugia, Italy. He told me, ³Most people in Mosul and Tal-Afar would rather be detained by the Americans now, because they know if Iraqi soldiers or Iraqi police detain them they will be tortured severely, and possibly killed. This gives you an idea of how bad it is with these Iraqi soldiers, even in the shadow of what the Americans are still doing in Abu Ghraib.²

As for ³foreign fighters,² one of the Azzaman correspondents quoted a resident of Tal-Afar as saying, ³We used to hear (from news reports) of the presence of some Arab (foreign) fighters in the city, but we have seen none of them.²

Life in Iraq remains a living hell. Blood flowed in the streets of Khadamiya yesterday as a horrendous car bomb killed 112 people in the predominantly Shia neighborhood. And once again, calls of solidarity were made from the nearby Sunni neighborhood of Adhamiya and residents emerged from their homes to help their brothers and sisters across the river, just as they did after the panic and chaos which recently took the lives of nearly 1,000 Shia.

The horrendous totals from yesterday were 160 dead, 570 wounded Iraqis as the result of the string of attacks and at least a dozen car bombs. The blowback from the Jafaari ³authorized² state-sponsored terrorism in Tal-Afar took little time to materialize in the capital city.

If Jafaari was more honest with his press appearances, along with his photo-op in Tal-Afar he should have had his photo taken amidst the charred, smoking body parts strewn about the streets of Khadamiya, which was a result (albeit just as horrific) of his Tal-Afar ³authorization.²

On that note, Jalal Talabani, Iraq's puppet president, was in a press conference in Washington D.C. with Mr. Bush just hours before the blowback began.

Meanwhile, one of my friends in Baghdad writes me, ³Dear Dahr, how are you dear pal? I am very sorry for what happened after Hurricane Katrina. It is a real tragedy. I hope none of

your friends or family was affected. It is a tragedy which makes one speechless.²

This when he goes to work each day hoping to make it home alive to see his wife and newborn daughter.

And another of my friends in Baghdad wrote me recently, ³I'm so sorry that I didn't email you the previous days—the situation in Tal-Afar has become so much worse for the people. It is terrible what is going on there and nobody can say anything because as usual the military operation is still going on and they are trying to keep all the media out. They have also started another operation in another area of Al-Anbar province and they will soon start one in Samarra.²

My interpreter when I'm in Iraq, Abu Talat, has been willing to take the risk of working with me there. To give you an idea of the lengths he's willing to go to, he gave me the green light to come to Iraq last November, just before the massacre in Fallujah began. It is safe to say times were quite tense then, with kidnappings and beheadings having long since become the norm.

³The Minister of Defense is threatening not only Fallujah but all of the Ramadi Governorate, I can tell you very surely about that,² he wrote in a recent email to me and a colleague who was hoping to enter Iraq to work as a reporter. (Today, US warplanes began dropping bombs inside the city of Ramadi.)

³No one can support you working here. We are having a very critical situation. For this reason, I think that coming to Iraq in this critical time is not accepted. I was very, very welcoming to any of your friends, Dahr, but not in this time. Sorry, but for your own safety. Take good care of yourself.²

Today at least 30 more Iraqis have died in violence across their occupied country and it will only continue to worsen.

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Articles by: **[Dahr Jamail](#)**

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