

US massacres civilians in Fallujah

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The world may never know exactly how many Iraqis are being murdered or maimed in Fallujah. The Pentagon does not bother to count its victims and has imposed a regime of strict censorship, abetted by the self-enforcement of the corporate media. However, from the few reports coming out of the besieged city, it is absolutely clear that the basic purpose of the US campaign is to reduce it to rubble, killing and terrorizing as many inhabitants as possible.

Residential buildings, hospitals and mosques have all been bombed, and American troops are engaging in a house-to-house search of whatever remains. Tens of thousands of civilians remain in Fallujah, a medium-sized city near Baghdad that is normally home to 300,000 people.

A New York Times reporter “embedded” with US troops described the onslaught: “Just before the marines began to push south into Falluja, the American bombardment intensified, and heavy artillery could be heard pounding positions in or near the city every few minutes. An entire apartment complex was ground to rubble. A train station was obliterated in a hail of 2,000-pound bombs. All electrical power in the city was cut off about 5 p.m.”

The account passes over without comment the destruction of an apartment complex and train station—both civilian structures.

For the thousands of civilians who remain in Fallujah, there is nowhere to hide from the American blitzkrieg. They risk being buried alive by staying in their homes during the unending bombing raids, and if they venture outside they face almost certain death at the hands of American troops and snipers, who have fought their way into the city center.

According to Quil Lawrence, a BBC correspondent embedded with troops in Fallujah, “There must be many [Iraqi] casualties considering the amount of gunfire I’ve seen. The Americans launch about 500 rounds to the insurgents’ one, pelleting the insurgent area.”

Aside from the American and British journalists accompanying the invading troops, there are only a handful of Iraqi journalists reporting on the fighting from inside the city. According to Al Jazeera, one of these journalists reported that shortly after the invasion began, US planes bombed a government health clinic that had been treating wounded insurgents and civilians in the center of Fallujah, killing both patients and staff.

Bakr al-Dulaimi told Al Jazeera that the bombings targeted everything in the city including the hospital, houses and cars. “Al Dulaimi said the hospital’s staff, doctors and patients have all fallen victim to the assault.”

According to Al Jazeera, "Residents said smoke was rising from the whole city as it shook to constant explosions. Civilians were huddled in their homes and there was no word on casualties...An AFP [Agence France-Presse] reporter in Jolan [a district of Fallujah] said one building in every 10 had been flattened. As US-led troops closed in on the neighborhood overnight, at least four 2,000 pound (900-kilogram) bombs were dropped on the city's northwest."

The network quoted Muhammad Abbud, who said he was forced to watch his nine-year-old son Ghaith bleed to death because the family could not take him to the hospital while bombs continued to fall on the city and gunfire poured into their neighborhood from US tanks and planes.

"My son got shrapnel in his stomach when our house was hit at dawn, but we couldn't take him for treatment," said Abbud, a schoolteacher. "We buried him in the garden because it was too dangerous to go out."

On Monday, the US took control of Fallujah's main hospital outside the city center in order to prevent doctors there from reporting on the level of civilian casualties. Sami al-Jumaili, a doctor at the hospital who managed to escape arrest by American troops, told Reuters that there were very few medical supplies and clinics open to treat the injured.

"There is not a single surgeon in Fallujah," Al Jumaili said. "We had one ambulance hit by US fire and a doctor wounded. There are scores of injured civilians in their homes whom we can't reach. A 13-year-old child just died in my hands."

Patients in the hospital were handcuffed and dragged out of their rooms for examination by troops. The US puppet, Prime Minister Allawi, has reportedly said that forces entering the hospital had "captured four foreigners and killed 38 persons."

The International Committee for the Red Cross issued a statement saying that it was "deeply concerned about reports that the injured cannot receive adequate medical care" in Fallujah.

No one is being permitted to leave the city as the US military carries out the slaughter. A ring of US and British soldiers has been set up around the city. US Colonel Michael Formica told the Associated Press that this was necessary to prevent any insurgents from escaping dressed in civilian clothing.

"My concern now is only one: not to allow the enemy to escape," he said. "I do not want these guys to get out of here. I want them killed or captured as they flee."

The US actions in Fallujah are not only a moral outrage, they are a direct violation of international law, which prohibits indiscriminate attacks on civilian centers. According to Additional Protocol 1 of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, "Parties to the conflict shall at all times distinguish between the civilian population and combatants and between civilian objects and military objectives and accordingly shall direct their operations only against military objectives."

The Geneva Conventions were adopted in the aftermath of the atrocities committed by the Nazis in occupied Europe, wholesale attacks on civilian populations like the razing of the Warsaw Ghetto and the wiping out of the Czech village of Lidice. Now Washington is reviving

the very methods that the world formally repudiated 55 years ago.

The assault on Fallujah is the first shot in what will be a series of attacks on Iraqi cities resisting occupation by insurgents, including Ramadi, Samarra and sections of Baghdad. The extraordinary level of violence employed in Fallujah is meant not only to physically destroy whatever opposition exists in the city, but also to terrorize the entire Iraqi population.

The Christian Science Monitor quotes a retired general with connections to the Pentagon as noting, "This is being done for not only its effect on Fallujah, but for its demonstration effects...on other places resembling Fallujah." The use of violence for the purpose of intimidation and spreading terror is also a violation of international law.

Fallujah has been targeted first because it has been a center of Iraqi resistance to American occupation since the invasion last March. The killing of four American contract mercenaries in the city last April was used as a pretext for a US invasion, an operation that was aborted in the face of stiff resistance and an international outcry.

When it comes to retribution, however, the American military and political elite never forget. Operation Phantom Fury—the grotesque name given to the invasion—is revenge against the city for daring to oppose the will of the American occupation.

Washington's pretense—dutifully parroted by the US media—that these actions are being taken to ensure democracy and allow for peaceful elections in January is an absurdity. If any further confirmation of this was necessary, it was provided by Allawi, who declared a 60-day period of emergency rule preceding the planned vote, as well as round-the-clock curfews in Fallujah and Ramadi, and a nighttime curfew in Baghdad.

The declaration of martial law was intended not only to provide the illusion of Iraqi "authorization" for the massive violence unleashed by the Pentagon against Fallujah, but also to give US occupation authorities and their Iraqi stooges a free hand in rounding up and purging political dissidents.

These actions are being carried out in the face of enormous opposition from the vast majority of the Iraqi population, an opposition that the attack on Fallujah will only intensify.

In spite of attempts by the Pentagon and the US political establishment to pretend that Iraqis are in control of the operation, the Iraqi forces that have been cobbled together are quickly dwindling in the face of mass desertions. According to media reports, upwards of 500 of the Iraqi troops—out of a total of 2,000 mobilized for the operation—disappeared before it began. A senior officer in the Iraqi police abandoned his post after learning of the plans for the invasion of Fallujah, presumably in order to inform the resistance.

The Association of Muslim Scholars, a group of leading Sunni clerics, denounced the invasion, appealing to "all those who live with a conscience around the world" to oppose the "massacres and elimination war" in Fallujah. The group called for a boycott of the January elections, saying that any such elections would be held "over the corpses of those killed in Fallujah and the blood of the wounded."

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