

# The Iraq Quagmire Deepens

By Erik Leaver | November 8, 2004

The Bush administration has begun to strike Fallujah with 10,000-15,000 U.S. soldiers, starting with gunships indiscriminately raking the city with cannon fire. By the end of the first day, warplanes had carried out some two dozen sorties against the city, and four 500-pound bombs were dropped over Fallujah.

The pageantry of the U.S. elections over the past few weeks hid from the eyes of many Americans the massing of U.S. troops on the outskirts of Fallujah. Nearly 6,500 new U.S. soldiers have been brought into Iraq, raising the troop level to the highest level since the war began. The Brits also repositioned over 800 British troops from the South to Baghdad to allow for greater numbers of U.S. soldiers to head to Fallujah.

The dangers of this escalation are clear as the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, wrote to President George W. Bush last week, “The threat or actual use of force not only risks deepening the sense of alienation of certain communities, but would also reinforce perceptions among the Iraqi population of a continued military occupation.”

These perceptions that Kofi Annan refers to have been reinforced by the high toll ordinary Iraqis have paid in bloodshed. The British medical journal *The Lancet* recently reported a Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health study that found there have been 100,000 “excess deaths” of civilians in Iraq since the U.S. invasion began. The Johns Hopkins researchers cited U.S. air strikes on towns and cities as responsible for many of the deaths. Les Roberts, one of the report’s authors, told Reuters that, “the use of air power in areas with lots of civilians appears to be killing a lot of women and children. ... What we have evidence of is the use of air power in populated urban areas and the bad consequences of it.” The aerial bombings in Fallujah will surely add to the rising death toll of civilians as well as insurgents.

Worse, the attacks will not make Fallujah—nor any other part of Iraq—“safe for democracy.” Imagine if Cincinnati, Ohio, a city of Fallujah’s size, were

destroyed ten weeks before the election was to take place. Elections would make little sense in the aftermath of such destruction.

Furthermore, the attacks in Fallujah will spur more violence in surrounding towns, such as Samarra, where more than 30 people were killed this past weekend, making the country less safe and unlikely to be able to hold honest elections in January. But there are three other reasons why the assault on Fallujah is posed to further sink the U.S. in a quagmire with no exit:

- 1) U.S. attacks are fueling the insurgency. The monthly average of insurgent attacks on U.S. and Iraqi forces more than doubled from 1,005 in the eight months prior to the “transition” to Iraqi rule began, to 2,150 in the months since the June 28 “handover.” Just as the attacks have increased, the Pentagon has also acknowledged that the number of insurgents is on the rise. In November of 2003, the Pentagon estimated that there were 5,000 Iraqi resistance fighters. In September of this year, the number had risen to 20,000. The British Deputy Commander of the forces in Iraq estimates the resistance may be double that number. The rise is even starker when we factor in the additional 24,000 Iraqi resistance fighters who have been detained or killed. The implications are enormous—for every insurgent killed, the U.S. is creating at least one more.
- 2) International support for the war and occupation is eroding further. During the first presidential debates, Bush repeatedly referred to Poland as a valuable member of the “coalition of the willing.” Ironically, soon after, the Polish government announced a reduction in their troops, shrinking



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the coalition even further. And in recent days Hungary announced that it is pulling out. The Czechs plan to pull out by the end of February, the Dutch by the end of March, and Japan is feeling pressure to withdraw.

At the war's start, coalition countries represented 19% of the world's population. Today, the remaining countries with troops on the ground represent only 13.6% of the world's population.

3) The U.S. plan to train more Iraqi security forces will be at increased risk. The root of the administration's plan for Iraq is to train Iraqi security forces to lessen the pressure on U.S. forces. However, this war puts anyone who is physically near or associated with a U.S. soldier at risk. Members of Iraq's security forces are being killed at a higher rate than before the "transition." At least 127 were killed in June and July 2004, raising the total body count since January 2004 to more than 700. Furthermore, putting many of these poorly trained and equipped soldiers in battle will repeat the same mistakes seen in Fallujah last April. Already, National Public Radio has reported that similar defection rates are occurring

with one Iraqi battalion of 500 losing 255 soldiers to defection over the weekend.

The consequences of the attack on Fallujah will be enormous. The much more limited siege of Fallujah in April 2004 led to the deaths of over 600 Iraqi civilians. The attack and the likely casualties that U.S. soldiers and Iraqi civilians will sustain will only reinforce the notion that the U.S. occupation of Iraq is the cause of, not the solution to, the violence and the mounting deaths that followed the invasion.

Authorities in Washington have not only misread the "mandate" that the U.S. electorate supposedly gave them on November 2, they have misread the military and political situation in Fallujah and the rest of Iraq. The administration should learn from past mistakes. The mantra of destroying the village to save it didn't work in Vietnam. Its prospects for success in Iraq won't be any better.

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