

Fallujah: A Turning-Point In the Iraq War?

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Just prior to the U.S. elections, a bombshell report was released, showing that 100,000 Iraqi civilians had died in the U.S.-led war and continuing occupation. The study, conducted by Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, was released in the British journal *Lancet*. It was based on interviews with over 1,000 families in 33 districts across Iraq, which compared deaths before and after the invasion, and the causes of the deaths.

The devastating conclusions show that 100,000 more deaths since the official end of the war, were almost all due to violence by the occupation forces, mostly from aerial bombing, with most of the deaths women and children. The study excluded the figures from Fallujah, one of the main centers of Sunni anti-occupation resistance; in this city, another 200,000 violent deaths were recorded in the post-war period. These figures were excluded from the totals.

In an op-ed published in the German newspaper *Junge Welt* on Nov. 11, former UN arms inspector Scott Ritter compared the tally with the figure usually given for the victims of Saddam Hussein's regime over decades: 300,000. Ritter remarked that the United States and Great Britain appear to have killed one-third as many Iraqis, in only 18 months.

Just how such a catastrophe could occur, can be readily grasped by an examination of what has been happening around the assault against Fallujah, by U.S. and Iraqi government forces. Because it is happening again.

During the last siege of Fallujah, in April of this year, by official counts, 700 civilians died, mostly women and children. Due to massive public exposure of the atrocities, the United States had to back off. This time around, on Nov. 8, the assault on the city began with brutal aerial bombardments, lasting through many nights, followed by American ground forces, numbering up to 15,000. Moving with tanks and armored vehicles, they blasted their way into the city, from

different positions, with artillery fire. Houses and other civilian buildings were targeted; walls were blasted open to allow troops to enter and search the homes. Often the storming troops found unarmed families, dressed in nightclothes.

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld proclaimed on Nov. 8, that "there aren't going to be large numbers" of civilians killed in the operation against Fallujah. "Innocent civilians in that city have all the guidance they need as to how they can avoid getting into trouble," he told a Pentagon press conference. The remark was curious, considering that the U.S. military had sealed off all roads in and out of the city, so civilians who may have wanted to flee, could not do so, once the assault had begun. Furthermore, of the estimated 50-100,000 civilians remaining in the city, many are old, and incapable of travelling.

As for those who managed to flee before the bombs began to fall, they are estimated to be up to 90% of the population of 300,000. This means that as many as 275,000 people have been on the move, in autos, carts, and on foot. Many with relatives in Baghdad, have made it to the capital. Others have sought refuge in nearby towns, like Aanah, where extended families of up to 30 persons have camped out in the homes of host families, who, due to the war and rationing, are without the means to provide them with adequate food. The least fortunate refugees have set up tents outside Fallujah, or have gone into small outlying towns, and camped out in schools, mosques, libraries, other public buildings or construction sites.

Both the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Committee of the Red Cross have sounded the alarm, that a humanitarian catastrophe is looming for these refugees. "We are extremely concerned at the fate of tens of thousands of people who have fled the city of Fallujah to escape the heavy fighting there," said Jennifer

Clark, UNHCR spokeswoman. “The most immediate need of the displaced,” she said, “are food, shelter, water, sanitation and health care.” Neither of the two agencies can do anything about it directly, given that the war has hindered their presence in Iraq. They can only “monitor” the crisis from Jordan.

Allawi’s Political Suicide

Another casualty in the ongoing Fallujah offensive will be interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, who, as a dutiful puppet, “authorized” the U.S. military to launch the assault, right after George Bush was reportedly re-elected. Speaking to press, Allawi announced, “I gave my authority to the multinational forces, Iraqi forces. We are determined to clean Fallujah from the terrorists.”

Just prior to this, on Nov. 7, he had declared a state of emergency in the country (with the exception of the Kurdish region in the north), which accorded him and his government broad new powers. A curfew was imposed in Fallujah; the Baghdad international airport was closed; and the borders with Syria and Jordan were closed.

According to Al-Jazeera, the emergency powers will allow Allawi to do the following: “Restrict the freedom of movement, assembly, and use of weapons by Iraqis or foreigners suspected of crimes. Suspects can be detained and searched. Their homes and workplaces are also subject to searches.” Furthermore he can: “Impose a curfew for a short and defined period in areas facing serious security threats such as explosions, unrest, and large-scale armed attacks. Cordon off and search an area if its inhabitants are suspected of possessing medium or heavy arms or explosives or harboring outlaws. Freeze the assets of those accused of conspiracy, fighting foreign forces, armed unrest, killings and bombings, and anyone who cooperates with them, commissions or incites their actions or offers them places to stay or gather. Intercept, monitor and seize mail, packages, telegrams and wired and wireless communications if there is evidence they could uncover or prevent crimes. Restrict transport by land, air and sea in specific areas and for defined periods. Limit the activities, monitor, suspend or disband any clubs, associations, unions, companies and offices, connected to crimes. This requires a court order. Take security and military measures in areas where a state of emergency is declared. Seek the help of U.S.-led troops in Iraq during large-scale operations. In the northern Kurdish region, these measures must be implemented in coordination with the Kurdish government.”

The last provision, regarding seeking the “help” of U.S. military, is what he invoked in “ordering” the assault on Fallujah. Allawi, who has a pedigree as a turncoat—having worked for Saddam Hussein’s intelligence services abroad, before joining British and then U.S. intelligence—has gone to great pains to present the attack against Fallujah as an “Iraqi” operation, merely “supported” by the United States. His envoy, State Minister Abdullatif, had the nerve to tell Syrian government officials, that the Fallujah operation had come only in



U.S. soldiers move into Fallujah on Nov. 9. As a result of the attack against the city, many political forces in Iraq, particularly Sunni organizations, say they will boycott elections, rendering them meaningless.

response to the request of 200,000 Fallujans!

But the facts on the ground tell a different story. There are anywhere from 6,000 to 15,000 U.S. troops, and a reported 2,000 Iraqi troops and security units deployed in the Fallujah operation. Of the 2,000, at least 200 have deserted, that is, 10%! Among them, according to U.S. and Iraqi sources cited by CNN, is a senior officer who had been fully briefed on the battle plan for Fallujah. He had been in command of 160 Iraqi soldiers. In addition, 20 Iraqi security forces either capitulated or were taken hostage by resistance forces in the city.

One reason for such desertions is that political pressures have been brought to bear on the Iraqi “collaborators” by a vast array of Iraqi political forces, who denounce any Iraqis fighting alongside the U.S. occupying powers. The Association of Muslim Scholars, the most powerful and prestigious Sunni organization in the country, issued a statement demanding that Iraqi forces “beware of making the grave mistake of invading Iraqi cities under the banner of forces who respect no religion of human rights.” The group associated with radical Shi’ite leader Moqtadar al-Sadr also condemned the invasion, and called on “our sons in the national guard and police force not to become instruments of the occupation forces.”

Parallel to such political interventions, forces associated with the resistance have moved to outflank the U.S.-led aggression on Fallujah, withdrawing from the city, and regroup-

ing in other cities, where they can target precisely those Iraqi police and security forces considered collaborators. Thus, in Baquba reportedly 45 were killed when three police stations were attacked, and resistance forces retook total control of Ramadi, another Sunni stronghold near Fallujah. On Nov. 11, the northern city of Mosul became the scene of fierce attacks by resistance forces against the 8,500 U.S. soldiers deployed there. The governor immediately imposed a curfew, and closed all bridges. It is feared, especially by the Kurdish political parties in the north, that Mosul could become "another Fallujah." In addition, car bomb attacks occurred in Baghdad, including against churches, and U.S. convoys.

The most spectacular flanking maneuver was organized on Nov. 10, when assailants kidnapped three relatives of Allawi from their home in Baghdad, and threatened them with death, unless the attack on Fallujah be ended.

Allawi is damned if he does and damned if he doesn't: the more he cooperates with the occupying forces, the more he alienates whatever following he has left. His government coalition is on the line: On Nov. 10, the Iraqi Islamic Party, a Sunni party, announced that it would withdraw its representative, Industry Minister Hajim al-Hassani, from the Cabinet, because "We cannot be part of this attack." On the other hand, were Allawi to buck U.S. orders, he would be quickly replaced.

The cruel irony of the Fallujah operation lies in the fact that both the Bush-Cheney Administration and their puppet Allawi, have insisted that such a bloody massacre were required in order to make the country safe for elections, scheduled for Jan. 31, 2005. Yet, as a result of the onslaught, many political forces in Iraq, particularly the Sunni organizations and parties, now say they will boycott any such elections, rendering them meaningless.

It is likely that such elections will never be held. Even European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana voiced his doubts that the security situation could make elections possible. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan had warned the U.S. against such a Fallujah campaign, also on the grounds that it would jeopardize any hopes of elections.

Political Solution Nixed

The point is, the United States and its Iraqi puppets do not want a political solution to the crisis. This became crystal clear from a report appearing in the *Washington Post* on Nov. 6, about a serious and viable proposal that had been made to the U.S., by a group of Sunni leaders, whereby elections could be organized, and those threatening to boycott them, would be brought on board. The Nov. 3 proposal, presented by the Iraqi National Founding Conference, which includes all religious and ethnic groups, including the Association of Muslim Scholars, called for the following: that a panel of Iraqi judges be established to preside over elections, to be supervised by monitors from Arab and Islamic countries; that members of the former Ba'ath Party be allowed to run for office, if not

guilty of crimes; and, that U.S. and other foreign military units withdraw to outside the cities and remain in their barracks through January. Once these conditions were met, the groups would withdraw their support for armed resistance.

Met with approval by a number of former U.S. officials in Iraq, as a potential "breakthrough," which could lead to a transformation of the armed resistance into a political phenomenon, the proposal was ignored by the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad.

This clearly indicates that the option in Washington has been and remains military. Cheerfully ignoring the lessons of military history, especially those from Vietnam, the Bush-Cheney Administration is committed to trying to eliminate a national, popular armed resistance through military means. Anyone who knows the Iraqi mentality and history knows that, for every resistance fighter killed, another ten become voluntary recruits, beginning with members of the victim's immediate family.

One former U.S. official who worked in Iraq, and who supported the Sunni political proposal, summed it up this way: "Most of what we've learned about insurgencies is that you don't defeat one through purely military means. When you try to do that, you may win the battle but lose the war. The insurgency in the Sunni heartland is now quite broad-based, and I don't think we're going to defeat the insurgency in this part of the country through purely military means. I think we're looking at a protracted insurgency which will get worse if we go through with the elections" which are boycotted by many Sunnis. "These groups," he added, "have to be given evidence that it's in their interests to participate in the electoral process."

Instead, the Rambo policy deployed in Fallujah, and targeting Ramadi, Samarra, and other cities, will only spread the resistance and lend it strength, nationally and internationally. Fallujah is becoming a symbol for the anti-occupation struggle, throughout the Arab world.

On Nov. 6, a group of Saudi religious leaders and scholars issued a *fatwa*, or religious decree, in support of the Iraqi resistance. The open letter, posted on the Internet, and signed by 26 Saudi scholars, said the armed attacks on the U.S. forces were legitimate. The *fatwa* prohibited Iraqis from supporting U.S. military operations against other Iraqis. "Fighting the occupiers is a duty for all those who are able. It is a *jihad* to push back the assailants," it said. "Resistance is a legitimate right. A Muslim must not inflict harm on any resistance man or inform about them. Instead, they should be supported and protected."

Arab sources have confirmed to *EIR*, that massive numbers of fighters are going to Iraq from the Emirates, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, well equipped with arms and money.

If the United States persists in seeking a military solution, ultimately it will be defeated, as it was in Vietnam. Elections will then be able to take place, only under the direction of a reconstituted sovereign, independent Iraq.