

Guerrilla war intensifies in Iraq despite Hussein's capture

By James Conachy
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Contrary to the predictions of the Bush administration, the Pentagon and much of the US media, the capture of Saddam Hussein last December has not brought about any significant reduction in the intensity of Iraqi opposition to the US occupation. Nearly one year after the invasion, American troops are compelled to conduct over 1,500 patrols every day to try and disrupt resistance activities and to maintain control over the country. According to the most recent briefing by the Provisional Authority in Iraq, the number of attacks on US forces has increased over recent weeks, from 18 to 24 per day.

Summing up the impact of Hussein's capture on the scale of fighting in the northern city of Mosul, a 101st Airborne colonel told the *Los Angeles Times* on February 4: "I would say there has been no noticeable difference in any way, shape or form since the time he was captured."

During January, 45 American soldiers died in Iraq—five more than were killed in December—and another 209 were wounded. The total US casualties since the war began has reached 534 dead, 2,617 wounded-in-action, 408 injured in non-hostile incidents and at least 8,500 evacuated for other medical reasons.

The Americans who have died came from every state in the Union, as well as from the US colonies of Puerto Rico and American Samoa. The class composition of those being killed was pointed out in a comment by Cynthia Tucker in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*: "The all-volunteer military is disproportionately drawn from blue-collar homes." The family median income of recruits into the US military is between \$32,000 and \$34,000. Military sociologist Charles Moskos told Tucker: "People are forgetting, we're not losing the sons and daughters of America's leaders, but basically minorities and working class whites."

In February so far, seven US troops have been killed and 28 confirmed wounded. Hundreds of Iraqi's working for the US have also been killed or injured. No part of Iraq can be considered secure.

At the beginning of the month, 109 Iraqi Kurds died and hundreds more were wounded in simultaneous suicide bomb attacks on gatherings of the two pro-occupation Kurdish political parties in the northern city of Irbil.

Yesterday, an explosion outside the police station killed at

least 53 people and injured over 60 in the Shiite town of Iskandariyah, south of Baghdad. US authorities have not yet confirmed whether they believe the bomb was remotely detonated or the work of a suicide bomber. It is believed many of those killed were men queuing to submit applications to join the Iraqi police. An American soldier was killed by a roadside bomb near the town on February 3.

In a sign of the bitterness against the occupation forces, local people blamed the US for the attack, accusing the American military of either carrying out or organising the bombing in order to divide Iraqi Sunnis and Shiites. According to Associated Press, dozens of townspeople demonstrated outside the ruins of the station chanting: "No, no America! The police are traitors: not Sunnis, not Shiites! This crime was by the Americans!" Police were forced to fire shots over the peoples' heads to disperse the crowd.

In another attack yesterday, four Iraqi police were killed in ambushes in Baghdad. According to the head of the police force, General Ahmed Kazem, the deaths brought the number of Iraqi police killed since the US established the force last April to 604. The number of police wounded is unknown but is likely to be in the thousands.

Roadside bombs or improvised explosive devices (IEDs) are inflicting a heavy toll on American troops. IEDs killed 23 American troops in January. On Monday, two US soldiers were killed and six wounded when they accidentally detonated explosives they were trying to clear from an area near the town of Sinjar, north of Baghdad. Four other soldiers were wounded near Baquba in what appears to be a carefully planned ambush. As a soldier approached what he thought was an inactive roadside bomb, it exploded. As others rushed to his aid, a second bomb went off. Both explosions were likely detonated by remote control.

On Sunday, three separate US vehicle convoys were hit by roadside bombs or rockets in Mosul, Fallujah and Mahmudiyah—a town south of Baghdad. One soldier was killed and at least three wounded in the attacks.

On Sunday night, guerrillas mortared the Baghdad airport, killing a former Fijian soldier working for the British company Global Risk Strategies International. Another Fijian employee of the company was wounded. Global Risk Strategies

International, which was awarded a multi-million dollar contract by the US to provide security at various Iraqi facilities and government offices, has a private army of 500 former British Army Nepalese Gurkha's and 500 former Fijian soldiers in Iraq—making it one of the largest providers of troops for the occupation.

Mortar attacks are now regular events and this month they have been particularly lethal. On February 5, guerrillas also mortared the Baghdad airport, killing one American soldier and wounding another. On February 1, guerrillas launched a barrage of at least seven rockets into an American base near Balad, a city 75 kilometres north of Baghdad. One US soldier died and 12 were wounded.

There are growing indications that the resistance has free rein in some Iraqi cities and that insurgents have infiltrated the US-created Iraqi police, military and civilian authorities.

On Saturday, a bus carrying members of the new American-created Iraqi Army was hit by a RPG in broad daylight outside the mayor's office in downtown Fallujah. The attack wounded at least five of the Iraqi soldiers. The assailants escaped.

The same day, a bomb exploded inside a police station in Suwayrah, south of Baghdad, killing four Iraqi police and wounding 11. The station commander told the *Los Angeles Times* the bombing must have been carried out by one of his own officers, as no-one else had access to the room where the explosive had been rigged up. Later on Saturday, the occupants of a house in Tikrit suspected of resistance activity allegedly opened fire on American troops monitoring the building. One Iraqi was killed and two others wounded in a subsequent gun battle. The man killed turned out to be an officer in the local Iraqi police.

The reality of an ongoing guerrilla war and the toll of casualties continually pose the question before both American soldiers and the broader American population: why is the US in Iraq? The lies of the Bush administration are now being thoroughly exposed. Iraq possessed no weapons of mass destruction and the Iraqi people—whatever their feelings toward Saddam Hussein—have not welcomed the American forces as “liberators”. They are viewed by the majority of Iraqis as an invasion force that has come into the country to plunder its oil and turn it into a puppet state for American interests in the Middle East.

A captain of the Fourth Infantry Division about to leave Iraq posted on the website companycommand.com the following blunt advice to the soldiers replacing his unit in Tikrit: “What they have to understand is that most of the people here want us dead, they hate us and everything we stand for, and will take any opportunity to cause us harm.”

In order to reduce US casualties, the Pentagon intends to pull American troops back into heavily defended bases located on the outskirts of Iraq's major cities and intends to rely on local Iraqi forces to do the day-to-day fighting. By May 1, the US

intends to reduce the number of forward bases it has in Baghdad from 26 to just 8. Many of the American troops will be based as far as 35 kilometres from the city.

The US claims to have 9,000 Iraqi police already employed in Baghdad, 4,000 civil defence troops and over 5,700 security guards. During his visit to the city earlier this month, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz declared: “It's clearly better for us if they are on the front lines, and it's better for them and it's better for their country.”

The Iraqi forces, however, are unlikely to be particularly effective against the insurgents. Firstly, their morale and motivation is questionable—under conditions of mass unemployment, the majority enlisted for a pay packet not out of any support for the US. Secondly, they are woefully ill-equipped. The *Chicago Tribune* documented this month that a 160-strong company of civil defence troops already on operations in Baghdad did not have vehicles, radios, bullet-proof vests or even furniture in their barracks.

The most likely impact of the US pullback from Baghdad is that the insurgent groups will be able to improve their ability to supply and recruit fighters and to coordinate attacks on US and other occupation targets.

In Fallujah—where troops have already been largely pulled out of the city—a resistance group calling itself “Muhammad's Army” issued a leaflet last week informing the police and locals that they will be assuming control when the US completely withdraws. The leaflet declares: “America is getting ready to withdraw its forces from our country with its tail between its legs.”

The *Washington Post's* Daniel Williams described the state of affairs in Fallujah in a column on Sunday: “US forces are seen less often than before in the muddy streets. The US-sanctioned local government operates behind barricades, and police hunker down in fortress-like compounds. Iraqi resistance groups move in and out of the city with ease, and foreign infiltrators opposed to the US presence have taken up residence, people here say.”

Much of Baghdad could be in same state in a matter of months. Until the day every last American and foreign soldier is withdrawn from Iraq and the illegal occupation of the country is ended, the fighting will go on and the casualties will grow, for both the occupiers and the occupied.

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