

Washington escalates slaughter in Iraq

By Bill Van Auken
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The killing of two American soldiers captured by insurgents at a roadblock south of Baghdad will be seized upon by Washington as justification for an intensified bloodbath against the Iraqi people.

Well before the discovery of the bodies of the young soldiers, reportedly bearing the marks of torture and mutilation, there were already mounting indications that the Bush White House and the Pentagon were implementing a shift in military tactics that spells a dramatic escalation of US violence in the occupied country.

The mass media, which has shown little inclination to highlight the daily death toll of American troops, now totaling over 2,500—much less the far greater toll of Iraqi dead, estimated in the hundreds of thousands—has exhibited keen interest in the fate of the two executed enlisted men, including gruesome details of their deaths. Their aim is to whip up an atmosphere of hatred and revenge against the Iraqi population.

Brutal killings of occupation troops are the inevitable product of every colonial war fought in the history of mankind. Yet virtually every US television announcer and every newspaper headline writer has felt a duty to proclaim the “barbaric” and “savage” character of these particular deaths, words that are never applied to the torture deaths of Iraqis in the confines of Abu Ghraib and other US detention centers, the slaughter of men, women and children in their own homes by 500-pound bombs, or the indiscriminate killing of civilians on Iraqi roads in the name of “force protection.”

The media has granted instant credibility to an Internet posting which claims that the purported new leader of Al Qaeda in Iraq—Abu Hamza al-Muhajir—personally beheaded the American soldiers. This dubious claim is promoted to provide a personification of evil for mass consumption, with the aim of conditioning the American people for the mass killing that is about to be carried out in their name.

Government and media propaganda aside, these killings are a telling indication that more than three years after invading and occupying Iraq, US forces have failed to secure the very ground upon which they stand. The ability of masked gunmen to seize the soldiers, hold them for three

days, kill them and dump their bodies, and then mine both the location of the corpses and the road leading to it, without being captured or detected by the thousands of troops searching for them, is evidence that those fighting the US occupation enjoy widespread support and sympathy from within the Iraqi population.

It should be recalled that the bloodbath unleashed upon Fallujah in November 2004 followed the killing and mutilation of four military contractors—hired mercenaries—who were ambushed while driving through the Iraqi city. The city was turned into a free-fire zone and much of it was reduced to rubble by means of high explosive bombs, complimented by napalm and chemical weapons.

Similar atrocities are being prepared against the capital of Anbar Province, Ramadi, which has been placed under US military siege. Warplanes and attack helicopters fly continuously over the city, dropping bombs, while battle tanks patrol the streets. A series of roadblocks have sealed off all roads in and out of Ramadi, and residents have been subjected to the cutoff of basic services such as electricity, water and emergency medical care.

An entire US Marine brigade—some 2,500 troops—has been deployed in and around the city, while an additional 1,500 US soldiers have been brought to Iraq specifically for the operation in Ramadi, long considered a center of resistance to the American occupation. Another two battalions of US-trained Iraqi government troops have been mobilized.

While many families have fled Ramadi, it is estimated that as many as 150,000 Iraqis—among them the poor, the elderly and the disabled—remain within the city, unable to leave. Once the all-out US offensive begins, these men, women and children will be classified as “terrorists” and many will be included in the reported toll of enemy forces killed in combat.

Another war crime is being prepared, even as evidence mounts that the US war and occupation of Iraq consists of countless acts of brutality and murder.

The search launched in the wake of the capture of the two US soldiers has itself been accompanied by massive violence. According to the Pentagon, the US deployed some 8,000 troops in the operation and “cleared” at least 12

villages, forcibly detaining large numbers of Iraqis.

In Baghdad itself, a security crackdown has been launched following George Bush's grandstanding visit to the Green Zone last week. Security sweeps are being conducted by combined units of US and Iraqi puppet troops, while a dusk-to-dawn curfew has been put in place. Last month, according to official Iraqi sources, some 2,155 people suffered violent deaths in the capital, many of them victims of US-trained death squads.

Another atrocity was carried out by the US military this week in a village near the city of Baquba, 30 miles northeast of Baghdad. According to published reports, between 13 and 15 Iraqis were killed in an air raid and subsequent assault by US airborne troops. The dead consisted primarily of poultry farm workers, gunned down by American forces, but also included one child.

Even before the investigation into the massacre of 24 civilians in the town of Haditha has concluded, the US Army has charged three American soldiers—all members of the 101st Airborne, the unit of the two soldiers captured and executed this week—with murder in the summary execution of three Iraqis last month.

Those killed were among some 200 detained by American troops in a May 9 raid at a chemical plant near the Thar Thar canal in northern Salahuddin province. According to the Pentagon's account, not only did three soldiers participate in the executions, they threatened to kill a fourth member of their unit if he said anything about the murders.

The growing number of criminal charges against US troops are symptomatic of an occupation and war that are themselves crimes, involving unimaginable violence and deprivation inflicted on the Iraqi people.

The great bulk of atrocities are carried out with official sanction and go unreported by the American media and unopposed by the ostensible political opposition, the Democratic Party. The US public is kept almost entirely in the dark about the horrors that are being carried out in its name under the phony mantle of the "global war on terrorism."

While there is increasing evidence that the US attempt to conquer Iraq and install a puppet regime to ensure US control over the country's oil reserves has produced a debacle, there is no indication that either the Bush administration or its nominal political opponents in the Democratic Party have any intention of calling the bloodbath to a halt.

On the contrary, the preparations for an assault on Ramadi and the crackdown in Baghdad suggest that the Bush administration is planning to employ naked force and mass terror to produce at least the appearance of a changed situation on the ground in Iraq before the November

mid-term elections.

While such political calculations play a major role in this military strategy, on a more fundamental level, the US ruling elite remains committed to a policy of subjugating Iraq to semi-colonial domination. The phony debate on the war in Congress and within the Democratic Party is not over whether to end the occupation, but how to make it succeed.

The so-called "antiwar" faction of the Democrats, including the party's former presidential candidate, Massachusetts Senator John Kerry, is proposing not an end to the colonialist adventure in Iraq, but merely a "redeployment" to carry it out more effectively and with fewer American casualties. The predominant faction in the party, personified by New York Senator Hillary Clinton, maintains a policy of continuing the present deployment, differing little with the Bush administration.

Virtually every major newspaper, from the supposedly liberal *New York Times* to the hard-line Republican *Wall Street Journal*, has published editorials in the past week warning that demands to withdraw US troops or even to set a timetable for reducing force levels are unacceptable.

What accounts for this remarkable unanimity among those entrusted with manufacturing public opinion behind a position that is manifestly at odds with the popular antiwar sentiment reflected in every opinion poll? It reflects a broad consensus within America's financial elite that the project of conquering Iraq—whatever differences might exist over its execution by the Bush administration—must continue, no matter what the cost in human life and financial resources. The profit interests of America's multi-millionaires and billionaires are bound up with Washington's attempt to use military force to achieve global hegemony, and no amount of killing is too great to secure them.

An end to this filthy war can be achieved only through the independent political mobilization of American working people against these interests and the two-party system that exists to defend them. The Socialist Equality Party has placed at the center of its intervention in the US midterm elections the demand for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all American military forces from Iraq, and that all those responsible for the illegal and unprovoked invasion be compelled to face trial before a war crimes tribunal.

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