

# In wake of helicopter attack—Washington prepares for mass killing in Iraq

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The Bush administration is preparing a major escalation of repressive violence in Iraq following the November 2 guerrilla attack that downed a Chinook helicopter near Fallujah, claiming the lives of 15 US soldiers.

The missile attack, which caused the worst loss of life for US forces in any single incident since the Bush administration launched its unprovoked war against the country last March, is part of a continuing pattern of resistance that underscores the tenuous hold of the US military occupation.

In Baghdad, mortar fire and massive explosions shook the Iraqi capital for the second night in a row Tuesday. Shells fell on the heavily guarded “Green Zone” that houses the headquarters of the Coalition Provisional Authority and other key occupation facilities, wounding at least three US personnel. The previous night, mortar shells struck the headquarters of the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment and other areas in the center of the city.

In another attack Tuesday, a roadside explosive killed a US soldier and wounded two others in Baghdad. A soldier was killed and another injured in a similar attack in Tikrit on Monday. These deaths brought to 141 the number of combat fatalities since May 1, when Bush strutted across the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln to declare the war over and “mission accomplished.”

In the northern city of Mosul, meanwhile, the headquarters of the 82nd Airborne Division came under rocket-propelled grenade attacks Tuesday. Three convoys moving through the city, once described as relatively safe for US troops, came under attack with rocket-propelled grenades and roadside bombs Wednesday, leaving five American soldiers wounded.

The inability of the US military to halt these attacks or even identify its enemy, as well as the capacity of the Iraqi resistance fighters to operate undetected, are measures of popular opposition to the occupation and support for those fighting to eject US forces from the country.

*Newsweek* magazine provided a particularly telling indication of these broad popular sentiments. “In Iraq, when

guerrillas place an IED (improvised explosive device) by the side of the road, they sometimes write a warning on the street in Arabic,” the magazine reported in its November 10 issue. “The locals understand to steer clear; the Americans drive right into the trap. ‘Everybody knows about it except us,’ grouses Lt. Julio Tirado of the 124th Infantry Regiment, Florida National Guard.”

The claim that the resistance to the US occupation is nothing more than a few “dead-enders,” criminals and terrorists, while the majority of Iraqis support the US occupation, is just one more in the litany of lies the US administration has employed to carry out its illegal war.

The mounting casualties are having an undeniable impact on public opinion within the US itself, with an ABC-*Washington Post* poll showing that, for the first time, more than half—51 percent of those surveyed—disapprove of the way Bush is handling Iraq. Late last month, a CBS News poll found half of those surveyed said events in Iraq are out of control.

After two days of avoiding any direct comment on the stunning losses suffered in the downing of the helicopter, Bush responded to reporters’ questions in California Tuesday by claiming that the sacrifice of US soldiers’ lives was necessary to “defeat terrorism.”

“We are at war, and it’s essential that the people of America not forget the lessons of September 11, 2001,” Bush declared.

What precisely these lessons are is by no means clear as the event remains shrouded in official secrecy. The Bush administration has stonewalled the commission set up to investigate the terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington, leading the panel’s Republican chairman, former New Jersey governor Thomas Kean, late last month to threaten issuing subpoenas to extract withheld information.

The administration is determined to push ahead with the military occupation despite the growing resistance. It invokes the unrelated death toll of September 11 in an attempt to intimidate growing opposition among the

American people. It is also counting on the spinelessness of its ostensible political opposition within the Democratic Party and the complicity of the media in covering up the severity of the crisis in Iraq.

A fresh indication of the Democrats' subservience to the Bush administration came earlier this week with the Senate's passage of the \$87.5 billion appropriation for continuing military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The measure was approved with only six Senators present. No roll call vote was taken and when Senator Robert Byrd (Democrat, West Virginia) asked for a voice vote, he was the only one saying "nay." The Democratic leadership, which supported the measure, wanted no record of the vote.

Before casting his lone vote against the measure, Byrd pointed out that the conference committee that hammered out difference between the House and Senate bills had systematically removed all amendments that imposed any serious accountability on the spending of nearly \$20 billion on Iraqi reconstruction contracts, leaving the administration a free hand to dole out vast sums to its corporate backers. There is no doubt that Democratic lawmakers' collaboration was determined by sizeable contributions that they also receive from these same corporations.

For its part, the US media has worked to conceal from the public the implications of the growth of popular resistance in Iraq. Several influential dailies published editorials Tuesday indicating support for the occupation and for increased military repression against the Iraqi people. The scope of criticism of the administration's policies has been limited largely to tactical issues, with the necessity of continuing the war in Iraq rarely placed in question.

The *Los Angeles Times*, indicating its support for the administration's proposal to speed up the training of a local Iraqi Quisling militia, declared: "The increasing number and severity of attacks on U.S. forces, foreign aid workers and Iraqi civilians show the need for better intelligence and a more forceful response."

The *New York Times* in an editorial spelled out its opposition to any demand for an end to the US military occupation: "Mounting American casualties and the approach of next year's presidential election could create pressure for a hasty military withdrawal, a course the administration rightly vows to resist." Echoing the administration's harsh warning to the US public to get used to the kind of losses suffered by US forces in the downing of the helicopter, the newspaper concluded, "It seems that more terrible days like Sunday lie ahead."

Among the more chilling pieces to appear in the press—and one that most accurately reflects the mindset of the administration and its supporters—was by David Brooks, the *New York Times* columnist and editor of the right-wing

*Weekly Standard*.

In a column published Tuesday, Brooks wrote: "It's not that we can't accept casualties. History shows that Americans are willing to make sacrifices. The real doubts come when we see ourselves inflicting them. What will happen to the national mood when the news programs start broadcasting images of the brutal measures our own troops will have to adopt? Inevitably, there will be atrocities that will cause many good-hearted people to defect from the cause.... The president will have to remind us that we live in a fallen world, that we have to take morally hazardous action if we are to defeat the killers who confront us."

The administration is counting on the media to exercise self-censorship and curtail reports of US atrocities that are seen as inevitable. Given the behavior of the major broadcast outlets during the course of the war, it has ample grounds for confidence on this score.

The column by Brooks follows a statement last week by Senator Trent Lott (Republican, Mississippi), the former Republican majority leader, proposing a massive escalation of violence. "Honestly it's a little tougher than I thought it was going to be," he said of the Iraqi occupation. "If we have to, we just mow the whole place down, see what happens. You're dealing with insane suicide bombers who are killing our people and we need to be very aggressive in taking them out."

Lott's barbaric proposal is an indication of where the administration is heading. Massive retaliation, collective punishment and wholesale killings are being prepared in an attempt to crush popular support for the Iraqi resistance. The infamous methods employed in Vietnam of assassination squads, strategic hamlets, carpet bombing and "destroying the village in order to save it" are to be inflicted upon the people of Iraq.

These methods will only produce greater hostility and opposition to the occupation, embroiling US forces in a bloody and escalating conflict that will claim the lives of countless Iraqis while killing and maiming more and more American youth.

They will also engender intense revulsion and opposition within the American people to the Iraqi occupation and growing demands for the immediate withdrawal of all US troops.



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