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Cornered US Military Takes to Desperate Tactics in Iraq

by **Dahr Jamail**

with Ali Al-Fadhily

FALLUJAH (IPS) – People living in areas where resistance to U.S.-led occupation is mounting are facing increased levels of collective punishment from the occupation forces, residents say.

Siniyah town 200 km north of Baghdad with a population of 25,000 has been under siege by the U.S. military for two weeks.

IPS had earlier reported unrest in Siniyah Jan. 20 when the US military constructed a six-mile sand wall in a failed attempt to check resistance attacks.

Located near Beji in the volatile but oil-rich Salahedin province, Siniyah has become a vivid example of harsh tactics used by occupation forces, who have lost control over most of the country.

"Thirteen children died during the two-week siege due to US troops' disallowance for doctors to open their private clinics as well as closure of the general medical center there," a doctor from the city reported to IPS via satellite phone.

The doctor spoke on condition of anonymity, fearing reprisals from the US military. IPS had to reach him by phone since the military blockade has cut the city off from the outside world.

"This is not the first time US troops have conducted such a siege here, but this time it represents murder," the doctor said.

A US military public relations officer in Baghdad told IPS on phone that the military was doing "what it had to do to fight the terrorists in and around Siniyah" and that "no medical aid is being interfered with."

When IPS told him it had received contradictory information from a doctor in that city, he replied, "that is just not true."

The siege has generated resentment against the Shia-dominated Iraqi government led by Prime Minister Noori al-Maliki, who has failed to comment on the deaths. Sunnis have not missed the sharp contrast to his order to US troops to lift their checkpoints around the Shia area of Sadr City in Baghdad.

Sectarian conflict has been rising between Shias and Sunnis, two differing followings within Islam. Sunnis are the majority worldwide, but Shias are said to be the majority within Iraq.

Abdul Kareem al-Samarrai'i, a leading member of the Islamic Party that participates in the Maliki government, stated on Baghdad Space Channel that the 13 children died in Siniyah "because of the siege and the US army orders to deprive the town of any medical care."

Duluiyah, another small town roughly 60 km north of Baghdad has been under siege by the US military for the last three weeks.

"They (US military) applied the siege upon Duluiyah (close to Samarra) many times, the last of which partially ended last week," Samir Muhammad of the Samarra municipality council told IPS.

The Geneva Conventions forbid use of collective punishment. International law says the occupying power in a country is responsible for safeguarding the civilian population.

Fallujah in al-Anbar province to the west of Baghdad continues to face attacks and harassment by the US military, according to local residents.

"Why don't those people admit their failure and leave," 55-year-old Khalaf Dawood from Fallujah told IPS. "They are being hit and their soldiers are getting killed all over the city. All they are doing is killing civilians and suffocating the city economically as revenge."

Electricity supply in Fallujah was recently cut off for three days after resistance snipers launched attacks on US soldiers. US military vehicles are attacked regularly around the city.

Several local people told IPS that on average one civilian a day is killed by US gunfire in Fallujah, while raids on houses have been stepped up heavily.

The US military commander in Fallujah admitted to local media last month that at least five attacks on average were being conducted everyday against his troops and Iraqi army units. The vast majority of the population of Fallujah continues to demand unconditional withdrawal of US troops from their city.

Meanwhile, the situation in Ramadi, the capital city of al-Anbar province where Fallujah is also located, has deteriorated further. Residents told IPS that bombardment from US warplanes and helicopters has killed many civilians.

IPS reported Nov. 17 that US military had shelled several houses in Ramadi, killing 35 civilians.

A partial siege of the city continues, and residents are complaining that a new militia formed by Maliki's government in the name of "fighting terror" has been rounding up young men from the city.

The militia recently took control of the University of Anbar in Ramadi and started harassing students. US soldiers blocked the main road to the university before the militia entered the campus.

"They even harassed the president (principal) of the university and accused him of being an al-Qaeda leader," a university professor speaking on condition of anonymity told IPS. "The principal is a professor in chemistry and a very peaceful man who has dedicated his life to science and supervising PHD and MSC graduates."

(Inter Press Service)

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