

motivation for the attacks on US forces. (See Chapter XXII *Regime Unchanged* and JNV Briefing 47 **After Falluja**.)

DRESS REHEARSAL: BALAD

On 13 June, US forces claimed to have killed 27 Iraqi rebels in an ambush that went wrong outside the city of Balad. A few days later, it was quietly reported, 'It now seems that only seven men died, five of them apparently innocent farmers.' (*Guardian*, 16 June 2003, p. 10)

IMPUNITY

'The US military has paid out \$1.5m (£907,000) to Iraqi civilians in response to a wave of negligence and wrongful death claims filed against American soldiers, the *Guardian* has learned. Families have come forward with accounts of how American soldiers shot dead or seriously wounded unarmed Iraqi civilians with **no apparent cause**. In many cases their stories are **confirmed** by Iraqi police investigations. **No American soldier has been prosecuted for illegally killing an Iraqi civilian and commanders refuse even to count the number of civilians killed or injured by their soldiers.**' (*Guardian*, 26 Nov. 2003)

'Iraqi courts, because of an order issued by the US-led authority in Baghdad in June, are **forbidden** from hearing cases against American soldiers or any other foreign troops or foreign officials in Iraq. Human Rights Watch said, "The lack of timely and thorough investigations into many questionable incidents has created **an atmosphere of impunity**, in which many soldiers feel they can pull the trigger without coming under review." ... **In some cases relatives have spoken of their plans to join the growing guerrilla resistance movement to avenge the deaths of their relatives.**' (*Guardian*, 26 Nov. 2003)

RAMADI, SAMARRA, FALLUJA

'Dramatic video footage from the city of Ramadi 75 miles west of Baghdad showed unarmed supporters of Saddam Hussein being gunned down in semi-darkness as they fled from American troops... An American commander in Samarra later said 11 "insurgents" had been killed... Fallujah [was] the scene of the other mass killing, of five Iraqi men, pro-Saddam demonstrators.' (Robert Fisk, *Independent*, 17 Dec., p. 1)

For more background, please see Milan Rai, *Regime Unchanged* (reviews at www.j-n-v.org)

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AFTER SAMARRA

Another US Massacre In The 'Sunni Triangle' JNV Anti-War Briefing 52 (17 December 2003)

'54 AMBUSHERS KILLED' CLAIMS US

First reports were unequivocal: 'US forces killed 46 Iraqis after a military convoy was ambushed in the town of Samarra last night in the most deadly firefight in the seven months since President Bush declared an end to major combat operations in Iraq.' (*Times*, 1 Dec., p. 1)

'Many of the dead Iraqis wore uniforms of the Fedayeen, a militia loyal to Saddam Hussein, Lieutenant Colonel William MacDonald of the 4th Infantry Division said.' (*Guardian*, 1 Dec., p. 1) 'US officers involved in the battle described the ambushes as well coordinated by up to 80 guerrillas.' (*Guardian*, 2 Dec., p. 2)

'The convoys were carrying new Iraqi banknotes into the town to exchange for Saddam-era cash. American military spokesmen said they knew of no Iraqi civilian casualties, even though they destroyed three buildings with tank rounds.' (*Telegraph*, 1 Dec., p. 1)

US officials later said they had killed 54 'enemy personnel' – 22 were said to have been wounded, one captured. (*FT*, 2 Dec., p. 11) 'Major Gordon Tate, a spokesman at the headquarters of the 4th Infantry Division in Tikrit, insisted the US military was "confident" about its assessment of the "battle damage". "Soldiers and commanders on the site counted [the dead]," he told *The Independent*.' (*Independent*, 2 Dec., p. 2)

IRAQIS DISAGREE: EIGHT CIVILIANS DEAD

'US and Iraqi reports differed sharply. Mr Mohammed, the police chief, said [on the first day] that only six Iraqis had been killed in the clashes, along with one Iranian pilgrim. He accused US troops of "firing randomly" on Iraqi civilians after they had been ambushed "by one or two people". He said 54 Iraqis had been **injured**.' (*FT*, 2 Dec., p. 11)

'"We think that at most eight or nine people died," said Khaled Mohammed, an admissions clerk in the hospital's emergency ward. Ahmed al-Samarai, a local police officer, said the day after the shooting, "Not more than 10 people were killed and some of those were not involved in the fighting."' (*Guardian*, 2 Dec., p. 2)

British journalist Phil Reeves reports that ‘Repeated visits to the scene, interviews with Iraqi civilians and US soldiers, and close inspection of the battle damage by scores of correspondents have failed to eliminate several troubling and crucial questions. Where are the bodies? Did they exist? **Or was this death toll – as some suspect – a fabrication which was intended to generate positive headlines for the US**, after a disastrous weekend in which guerrilla attacks killed 14 foreigners?’ “This is a very tribal society, in which everyone in the area knows everyone else. It [54 deaths] just did not happen,” said Samarra resident Yahir Mahmoud al-Abassi. (*Independent*, 6 Dec., p. 1)

‘Scepticism about the US’s version of the death toll has been expressed within upper echelons of the occupation authorities. A US combat leader who was involved in the battle has also denounced the military’s account of the battle.’ (*Independent*, 4 Dec., p. 2)

‘The US military believes the bodies of the 54 dead were swiftly collected and buried. But [it] is questionable whether the guerrillas’ families or surviving combatants would have risked recovering known members of the resistance in a town which is under constant US surveillance: the Americans have a base’ there. (*Independent*, 4 Dec., p. 2)

30 NOVEMBER: THE REEVES CHRONOLOGY

Two US convoys entered Samarra at 11am. There were 100 troops from 4th Infantry Division in six tanks, four Bradley fighting vehicles and four Humvees, carrying new Iraqi dinars for the al-Rashid bank in Babel Kabla St, and another branch opposite the al-Risala mosque in Bank St. With them were two squads of military police, and four squads of infantry.

As the two convoys entered from east and west, roadside bombs detonated on both roads, injuring three soldiers. As the troops prepared to retreat from their respective banks, about 1.30pm, ambushes were sprung on both convoys, using small arms, rocket-propelled grenades and mortars.

According to Phil Reeves’ account, a mortar shell fired by the guerrillas landed near the front gate of the Samarra Drugs factory, killing Amira Mahdi Saleh, a worker in her mid-thirties. Later, another mortar round wounded Hossam Shakir al-Douri, 25, who later died. A clerk working in the front office of the factory witnessed bullets from passing US armoured vehicles smashing into the reception area: Phil Reeves reported, ‘It [the reception area] bears the marks of at least five machine-gun bullets.’

Outside a small mosque in front of the local hospital, Abdullah Amin al-Kurdi was ‘mown down’, and another man, Raid Ali Fadhel, was also killed. A few yards from the Shia mosque, a firefight took the life of Fatah Allah Hijazi, a 71-year-old Iranian pilgrim.

As ‘running battles’ spread through the town, some of the shooting was ‘random’, according to Phil Reeves. (*Independent*, 6 Dec., p. 1)

According to Saadun Isawi, a police official at Samarra hospital, the dead included ‘a 10-year-old boy’. (*FT*, 4 Dec., p. 15)

RANDOM FIRE

Captain Andy Deponai, one of the US commanders on the ground, ‘said that his men had targeted assailants shooting at them, and denied they had fired at random.’ (*Times*, 2 Dec., p. 17) ‘Jihad Hussein, a student, said he had seen passersby running for cover. “They were spraying the whole street,” he said. “I don’t know who fired the first shot, the Americans or the Fedayeen, but I saw at least one young woman hit by a bullet as she lay on the ground.” ’ (*Guardian*, 2 Dec., p. 2)

‘On the main street outside the Rasheed Bank, where the main attack was launched, a five-storey apartment block was riddled with bullet holes from American guns, while several cars lay crushed by the retreating tanks... Some [young men] accused the US forces of firing on vehicles ferrying the wounded to receive treatment.’ ‘Imam Jumaa Mozher, 25, showed large-calibre shells he said had been fired at the building from an Apache helicopter while the [Ali al-Hadi] mosque was crowded for evening prayers, wounding several worshippers.’ (*Times*, 2 Dec., p. 17)

‘The attacks had left an ugly mood in the town, where **locals were unanimous in condemning indiscriminate firing** by the Americans.’ (*Telegraph*, 2 Dec., p. 14) ‘Iraqi residents said that when the shooting started outside the banks, **the Americans fired randomly at houses, mosques and even a kindergarten, prompting local people to reach for their guns and join the running street battle.**’ (*Times*, 2 Dec., p. 17)

FEDAYEEN?

Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt, deputy director of US-UK operations, ‘said several of the dead had been wearing uniforms “consistent with” those of Fedayeen Saddam commandos, which included a black face scarf and a shoulder patch.’ (*FT*, 2 Dec., p. 11) Phil Reeves reported that the clothing of the dead ‘sounded like the apparel of many young Arabs.’ (*Independent*, 2 Dec., p. 2)

REVENGE: ‘THA’AR’

Dr Mohamed Badie, vice-president of Tikrit University, said, ‘All the people here are fed up and angry... There is something here that is hidden from the American public. They call it “Tha’ar” – **revenge**. That means that if anyone kills your friend, or your brother, you have to avenge it by killing an American soldier.’ (*Independent*, 2 Dec., p. 2) This may be **the major**