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Murder made respectable

Linda S. Heard

Iraq is under martial law, complete with curfews and press restrictions. A report in the prestigious Lancet says 100,000 Iraqi civilians have been killed since the start of the invasion. Unemployment is running at 70 percent, kidnappings and beheadings are rife, while the breakdown in security has driven every international aid agency out of the country. But never mind, Fallujah - a town of 300,000 souls of which many have already met their Maker - has finally been pacified. That'll teach them to lay off foreign mercenaries in future. Oops! I mean contractors, of course. Congratulations USA!

Now that all is right with the world, some 200,000 exiled civilians can return home, provided they still have one that is. A report in the Los Angeles Times describes the city as "a tableau of destroyed buildings, burned-out cars, battered mosques and piles of rubble". No building was sacrosanct including hospitals and clinics.

The fate of those who stayed behind because they have nowhere else to go or did not want to abandon their belongings and valuables is uncertain.

Reports of families burying their dead in gardens, eking out an existence on flour or dates, bleeding to death without medical assistance or becoming ill after drinking contaminated water paint an ugly picture.

We have yet to discover how many newly minted orphans there are, courtesy of the Marines, such as five-year-old Aysha Saleem who lost her parents and grandparents in one of the US military's "precision strikes". Indeed, we may never know as the mouths of reporters embedded with the troops open and close according to military diktats.

We would never know how US soldiers are breaching the Geneva Conventions but for a renegade video aired by Australian ABC television. In it, a Marine shouts: "I've just injured one. He's between two buildings". One of his colleagues walks over to a tiny alleyway separating two houses, climbs up onto a metal drum, and fires his weapon in cold blood. "He's done," he announces flippantly.

We may never learn whether his victim, exterminated like a rat, was a hardcore foreign fighter, a local insurgent or

merely a male resident of Fallujah prevented from leaving. Men aged between 15 and 55 were either rounded up or forced to fight to stay alive. Members of the Scottish Black Watch regiment, whose job they say is to patrol the "rat run", confirmed the status of fleeing Iraqis as rodents.

In a further breach of the Geneva Conventions, US troops prevented a Red Crescent convoy of emergency aid from reaching the main Fallujah hospital, where wounded residents have been forbidden from entering.

Yet even though the stench of human flesh pervades their nostrils, one Marine held to the view: "We will win the hearts and minds of Fallujah by ridding the city of insurgents. We are doing this by patrolling the streets and killing the enemy." Those who have lost mothers, daughters, sons and brothers to his bountiful nature will, no doubt, be grateful.

Another such enlightened soldier Lt. Col. Gareth Brandt told the BBC: "The enemy has got a face. He's called Satan. He lives in Fallujah". Others of

his ilk were holding evangelical ceremonies or dressing up as gladiators for chariot races, using horses confiscated from Iraqis, in the mold of the movie Ben Hur. A third, a music lover, was quoted as saying: "Only two songs send a shiver up my spine. The Marine hymn, and that song by Toby Keith after 9-11 which says 'we're gonna kick you up the ass - that's the American way.'" The majority of US soldiers in Iraq still believe the lie that Saddam Hussein had links to Osama Bin Laden and the attacks on America.

For the 48 percent of Americans who voted against the Bush doctrine, this is not the American way. They include a former Marine Staff Sergeant James Massey from Waynesville, North Carolina, who told the WSW website: "We're committing genocide in Iraq". He describes his disillusionment thus: "We were like a bunch of cowboys who rode into town shooting up the place. I saw charred bodies in vehicles that were clearly not military vehicles. I saw people dead on the side of the road in

civilian clothes." He recalls how his trigger-happy compatriots mowed down 30 civilians at a checkpoint on a single day.

Iraq's Girl Blogger who pens Baghdad Burning is similarly angry over Fallujah. She writes: "Iraqis will never forgive this. Never! It's outrageous. It's genocide and America - with the help and support of (Iyad) Allawi - is responsible."

The land of deprivation, death and degradation, which Iraq has become due to US intervention, is there for all to see but where is the outrage? Why aren't decent people of every faith up in arms?

Author and philosopher George Orwell may have the answer. "The nationalist not only does not disapprove of atrocities committed by his own side, but he has a remarkable capacity for not even hearing about them."

"Political language... is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable" goes another of Orwell's remarkable insights.

But the politicians aren't the only ones to blame for the horror masquerading as the spread of democracy. Extremist reli-

gious leaders are just as culpable as is a supine media, which despite its various mea culpas over its failure to say it like it is, has once again stifled truth.

Think about it. How can individuals, fighting for their own freedom against a foreign power in the towns and cities of their birth and protecting their wives and children, possibly be "terrorists"?

And by the same token why should those rampaging foreign armies whose members believe freedom extends to being able to play video games be labelled honourable? Such is the big lie, and one that is the duty of all those who are able to cut through the propaganda, to quash.

There is but one truth for the vast majority of Iraqis. They want no more pretty promises, corrupt plutocrats, superpower pawns or deviant torturers. Amid a growing insurgency, most of all, they want the invaders and their military hardware gone. Who of sound mind and compassionate heart can possibly blame them?

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