

Fallujah US assault will not spell victory

By [Global Research](#)

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Reports from Al-Fallujah last night painted a confused picture of the progress of the American assault on the city. It seemed that US forces had penetrated to the city centre, though one report challenged that, but insurgents were said to be engaging in hit-and-run attacks. It was unclear how long it would take the military to quell the insurgency and take effective control of the entire town. There is, however, no doubt that they will achieve that, though probably at a very heavy price in terms of lost lives and destroyed property.

But as the battles raged in Al-Fallujah, insurgents succeeded in wresting control of the centre of Ramadi from US and Iraqi government forces last night. That will undoubtedly be temporary, but it highlights two huge problems for the coalition and its allies. First, that capturing a city does not solve anything if a significant number of insurgents remain hidden among its population. Second, that the number of pro-government troops -whether US marines or Iraqi soldiers -is too small to maintain control throughout the country.

The lack of forces on the ground, due to US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's "war like" policy, has been a contentious issue since the invasion and is likely to enter military textbooks as one of the most significant mistakes in the Iraq war. Events in Al-Fallujah have been driven by a series of mistakes, beginning with the shooting of demonstrators by nervous soldiers immediately after Saddam's fall. That was followed by over-aggressive policing and then a massive over-reaction to the murder of four US mercenaries earlier this year. At that time, the White House ordered its forces to invade and recapture the city and then (when the rising tide of death caused a blip in President Bush's popularity ratings at home) reversed the order. This time, there can be no going back.

US forces were defeated by politics in the first assault on Al-Fallujah and in the siege of Al-Najaf, which ended with the political rehabilitation of Muqtada al-Sadr. The US and its Iraqi government cannot afford any additional loss of face.

So, Al-Fallujah will fall, hopefully quickly without much more loss of life. And what will happen then? The situation will revert to what it was a year ago, with US troops vulnerable to occasional ambushes in the city while the insurgents continue to challenge government and coalition forces elsewhere.

Perhaps the destruction of Al-Fallujah is meant to be a lesson to the Sunnis, just as the gassing of Halabjah and the draining of the marshes were Saddam's lesson to the Kurds and

Marsh Arabs, respectively. But tanks cannot win political battles. Washington's only hope was to conquer the insurgents through peaceful persuasion, all attempts at which seem now to have been abandoned.

Over the coming days, America's overwhelming military might will silence the insurgents' guns in Al-Fallujah. But nothing will have changed. The anger that is driving the insurgency will still be in place and may well be stronger than ever.

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