

U.S., Iraqi troops seal off Haditha - residents

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U.S. and Iraqi troops have sealed off the city of Haditha in Anbar province, in the heartland of the Sunni insurgency, and have warned residents to keep off the streets and stay indoors, officials and residents said on Friday.

The U.S. military said troops were manning checkpoints and building a sand berm to crack down on insurgents in Haditha and in neighbouring Barwana. It said U.S. troops were protecting "the population and good citizens of Haditha".

But residents in Haditha, which is at the centre of a U.S. military investigation into the deaths of two dozen civilians in November 2005 by U.S. Marines, said electricity has been cut off and that no food is being allowed into the city.

Schools have been forced to close, they said.

While the U.S. military has acknowledged it shut down electrical power in the area during recovery efforts following the death of four U.S. troops last week when a Marine helicopter came down, it has blamed current power losses on "maintenance requirements" at a nearby dam.

"This is the sixth day Haditha is without electricity," one resident said on Friday.

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