

## DEATH TOLL RISES IN SADR CITY SIEGE

by SIMON ASSAF

OVER 800 people are feared dead in the poor slums of Baghdad following a brutal month-long siege by US forces and their Iraqi allies.

The figure from the Iraqi government, updated from 400 announced last week, marks a new bloody turn following months of a ceasefire.

In the latest incident US warplanes levelled a five story apartment block and a hospital, killing an untold number of civilians.

The Sadr City neighbourhoods, home to over 2.5 million people, have been swelled recently by waves of refugees driven out of their homes by sectarian cleansing.

The US is attempting to destroy the Mehdi Army, a Shia Muslim resistance organisation headed by rebel cleric Moqtada al-Sadr.

The organisation enjoys popular support among the majority of poor Shias. Sadr has called on his supporters to fight the occupation after his plea for a ceasefire was ignored.

### Allegations

The US claims that Sadr is being armed by Iran. But even the US-backed Iraqi government, when questioned about the source of rockets hitting the Green Zone, the area in Baghdad where the occupation is based, admitted "there is no conclusive evidence" they were supplied by Iran.

Resistance fighters have stalled US forces at the edge of the Shia areas of the capital, prompting the occupation forces to launch a wave of attacks by warplanes, helicopter gunships and predator drones.

As occupation troops lay siege to Sadr City, the US unveiled a new "grand plan" for the Green Zone, now rebranded the "international zone".

### AFGHANISTAN

#### Reality of the unwinnable war

**THE US has announced it will deploy an additional 7,000 soldiers to Afghanistan to plug the gap left by its European allies. This brings the number of US troops in the country to 40,000—the highest since the invasion in 2001.**

US defence secretary Robert Gates had been touring European capitals in an attempt to get Nato—the military alliance that runs the occupation—to increase the number of soldiers.

Fearful of growing anti-war sentiment, most European governments have deployed

Over the next five years the US plans to transform it into a "zone of influence" packed with luxury hotels, restaurants and up market homes.

Takers so far include the Marriot hotel chain, MBI International—a conglomerate headed by Saudi billionaire sheikh Mohammed Bin Issa al-Jaber—and a Californian company that wants to build an "amusement centre" worth £250 million.

According to the US, property values inside the Green Zone have risen from £25 a square meter to over £250.

This playground of seven-star hotels will be defended by 15 foot concrete blast barriers, razor wire and heavily armed troops.

### Rockets

The main problem with this plan is the steady stream of rockets raining down on the Green Zone.

Over the past month resistance fighters in the Iraqi capital have fired over 700 rockets and mortars into the zone killing scores of US troops and contractors.

Part of the US offensive on Baghdad neighbourhoods is to "pacify" areas of the city where the rockets are being launched.

Meanwhile the majority of Iraqis live in extreme poverty. They are forced to flee from one area to another to escape bombardments, military swoops and sectarian death squads.

Over two million have fled to neighbouring countries, while the relatively safer areas in the northern Kurdish regions are now in danger from ongoing Turkish military incursions.

According to independent journalist Dahr Jamail, Iraqis face a cut in their monthly food rations from ten items to five. They are the only means of survival for over four million Iraqis.

minimal ground forces.

Now Gates has threatened to take control of military operations ahead of a much feared "spring offensive" by the resistance.

According to reports from Pakistan, the new government is keen to reach a truce with rebels along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. The US fears this truce will free up resistance fighters who regularly cross into Pakistan to escape occupation troops.

The "mini surge" is scheduled for this area, which raises the possibility of US troops pouring over the border and spreading the fighting into Pakistan as part of a strategy of "hot pursuit".

### US dockers strike against war

**Tens of thousands of dock workers across the west coast of the US struck on 1 May in protest at the wars and occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan.**

The workers, members of the International Longshore

and Warehouse Union (ILWU), organised action in almost 30 ports across the coast from Washington to San Diego and paralysed billions of dollars worth of cargo.

ILWU members have

joined anti-war protests before but this was the first large-scale work stoppage in opposition to the war.

It coincided with demonstrations of tens of thousands of people in cities across the US to mark

May Day.

The action also had solidarity from across the world—including from Iraq where dock workers closed down the port of Basra for several hours in support of the US strike.

### SOMALIA

## US air raids fuel the flames of resistance

SOMALIA EXPLODED in a wave of riots on Monday in protest at rocketing food price rises.

According to news agencies a demonstration, including many women and children, broke out in the capital Mogadishu after food traders refused to accept the old 1,000 shilling note.

The protests grew to tens of thousands, with protesters attacking merchants, buses and cars. According to witnesses, troops and shopkeepers opened fire, killing at least two people.

The country has been hit by the global rise in food prices. Staples such as corn meal have doubled in price, while a sack of rice has jumped from £13 to £23—beyond the pocket of most ordinary people.

One protester told Irin, the United Nations (UN) news agency, that "the only thing we have left is the old 1,000 shilling note and the traders have refused it. They only take US dollars. This means we

don't get to eat. For us it is a matter of life and death, for them it is just business."

The latest protests comes as Somalis face a barrage of attacks by Ethiopian troops and US warplanes which have killed scores of people.

On Sunday mass demonstrations broke out after Aden Hashi Ayro, a leader of the Somali resistance was killed in an air raid. Eleven civilians were killed in the

same blast.

Somalia, labelled by the US as the "third front in the war on terror", was invaded by Ethiopian troops in January 2007 following a mass uprising that ousted warlords who had fought for control over different parts of the country since the government collapsed in 1991.

For a brief time the country was ruled by the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), a grassroots organisation that

grew out of the rebellion. The US labelled the UIC as the "Somali Taliban" and said it had ties to Al Qaida. Neither allegation is true, but Somalia sits on the strategic Horn of Africa making it a key target for US imperialism.

The Ethiopian invasion has created one of the biggest humanitarian crises in Africa. According to the UN some 2.6 million people are in urgent need of food aid. This is an increase of 40 percent since the beginning of the year.

A UN monitoring team that recently returned from the country has warned of the danger of famine.

"The urban poor are struggling to cover their basic needs as the cost of a minimum food basket is now more than double what it was last year," UN monitors said.

"The number of people in need of assistance could reach up to 3.5 million or half the total population of the country by the end of the year."



Poor people are facing huge food shortages in Somalia