

Find the job you really want 

## JOB SEARCH

## NEWS

NZ News

World News

- Headlines
- Iraq War
- Dialogue
- News Cartoon

Business

Money

Technology

Sports

Entertainment

Travel

Features

Weather

Marine

Employment

Property

Motoring

## News Toolbox

- News via email
- News via PDA
- XML Newsfeeds
- Photo Sales
- Feedback
- Search Help

## AD LISTINGS

## SCHOOLS &amp; STUDENTS

## READER SERVICES

## SPONSORSHIPS

## APN SITES

## CAREERS AT APN

## Search

[Advanced Search / Help](#)

## World News

>> [Home](#) >> [World News](#)

## Odds heavily against US counter-attack succeeding

11.11.2004

By JUSTIN HUGGLER

There was something familiar in the muddy reports from Fallujah.

Just as during the invasion of Iraq last year, television pictures provided drama, but little hard information. Nobody was really sure how the American assault was going.

A city still packed with civilians has been subjected to a withering assault of United States air strikes and artillery. But outside the Arab world, international criticism of the US attack on the city was unexpectedly muted. There was a sense among many observers that this latest ratcheting of Iraq's agony had become inevitable.

The Americans painted themselves into a corner. The mistakes that led to yesterday's fighting were made long ago, in the invasion of Iraq and the woeful failure to administer the country that followed. The US could not stand by and do nothing as the country descended ever further into anarchy.

The insurgents are able to operate at will, striking where and when they please. The wave of beheadings of Westerners and Iraqis who work for the West has wrecked any vestigial hope of rebuilding the country. The last aid agencies are fleeing.

Unless the Americans were to admit defeat and leave - which they won't, yet - they had to try to strike back at the insurgents.

Fallujah's defiance has come to symbolise the insurgency, and it appears to have become a major base for foreign militants such as Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the Jordanian al Qaeda ally who is accused of being behind many of the

## World News

[Is Arafat's death a threat or an opportunity?](#)[Iraq rebels hit back amid Falluja battles](#)[Blair urges Bush to ensure Middle East peace progress](#)[Second wave of foreigners flee Ivory Coast unrest](#)[Over 100 injured US soldiers flown to Germany](#)[Arafat's body arrives in Cairo for funeral](#)[Israel arrests nuke whistleblower Vanunu for 'leak'](#)[US troops raid Baghdad mosque, Sunni group's homes](#)[Egypt to host military funeral for Arafat](#)[Arafat's death: Snapshot](#)[Israelis shed no tears over Arafat's death](#)[Arafat's death: Potential successors](#)[Arafat's funeral: List of world leaders and dignitaries to attend](#)[US sees chance of peace hinging on Arafat successor](#)

## Latest World News

Updated 4.40 pm NZT

[Strong quake hits Indonesian island, kills six](#)['Cartwheel cops' suspend 11-year-old](#)[CBS sorry for pre-empting hit drama with Arafat report](#)[CIA critic of US war on terror resigns](#)[NZ special envoy to attend Yasser Arafat's funeral](#)[Britain's Princess Anne in 'air proximity incident'](#)[Russian hostel fire death toll rises to 25](#)

beheadings.

But every indication is that the odds are heavily against this US counter-attack succeeding. There is no doubt the Americans have the military strength to take Fallujah, or raze it. But that is not their aim. They need to stem the insurgency, and the omens are not good.

Insurgents can simply slip away to another city, or lie low and live to fight another day. That is what happened when the Americans tried to pacify Samarra last month. At the weekend the militants were back in Samarra. At least 34 people died in a wave of car bombings.

Even as US troops were advancing into Fallujah, there were reports of insurgents arriving in the neighbouring city of Ramadi and taking up positions to secure the centre there. Fallujah may have become a symbol of the insurgency, but it has never been the only rebel stronghold.

But the Americans have more fundamental problems. The truth is they don't know how many insurgents there are, who they are or where they are. If they did they could launch more pinpoint attacks. They are mounting a full-scale assault that risks massive civilian casualties which would only turn Iraq against them more completely than ever.

The Americans have made much of Zarqawi, but all the signs are that he is really only one among many insurgent leaders. The Americans have not even named another.

The assumption that Fallujah is a city of Iraqis under the control of foreign militants is wrong. There may be foreign militants there, but they are allied with Iraqi insurgents.

Fallujah is a microcosm of the problem the US has created in Iraq. The invasion has blurred the lines between the Islamic extremist movement - the likes of Zarqawi - and Iraqi nationalists protecting their land from foreign occupation. The "war on terror" has become hopelessly blurred with nationalist resistance against occupation.

The chances are that most foreign militants will slip out of Fallujah and the Americans will find themselves fighting local Iraqis trying to defend their city. If the Americans were to strike it spectacularly lucky, they might kill or capture Zarqawi and other foreign militants, and manage to avoid inflicting heavy casualties. But the odds are against it. The likes of Zarqawi are probably long gone.

Or the Americans may have another aim in mind: To respond to the nightmare videos of Westerners being

[Open letter attacks French envoy for inaction in Tahiti crisis](#)

[Australian army denounces Klan-style photo](#)

[French nationals under attack in Ivory Coast](#)

[Tokelau's rising tide](#)

[Arctic meltdown opens alternative sea routes](#)

[Life sometimes better when it's pear-shaped](#)

[Study questions benefits of vitamin E](#)

[France launches drug plan for rapists](#)

[Diana fund lawsuit settled out of court](#)

[Arafat dead](#)

[History will judge Arafat harshly, says Howard](#)

[Bush picks controversial Gonzales for Attorney General](#)

[Palestinian officials prepare for Arafat's funeral](#)

[US seizes most of Falluja, militants take PM's cousin hostage](#)

[France to offer rapists chemical treatment to inhibit sex drive](#)

[French citizens flee Ivory Coast violence](#)

[More Headlines...](#)

beheaded in kind. They may feel "putting Fallujah to the torch", as it has been described in the American press, will put the insurgents on notice that they can expect horror in exchange for horror.

It is a familiar tactic from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and all it ever led to there was an endless cycle of killing.

- INDEPENDENT

[Herald Feature: Iraq](#)

[Related information and links](#)

\* [Get the latest nzherald headlines delivered to your inbox every morning, afternoon, or both. It's free!](#) [\[Register Here\]](#)

- ADVERTISEMENT -

[Email story link to a friend](#)

[Print story](#)

[Top](#)

© Copyright 2004, New Zealand Herald

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Use](#)