

## Mixing Incompatible Atrocity Stories

The logic of the farce that we commented on recently under the heading **Mixing Incompatible Scare Stories** has now repeated itself in the form of tragedy.

US Representative John Murtha has made a series of **allegations** about a reported atrocity by US Marines that is currently being investigated by the Marine Corps:

"There was no firefight. There was no IED that killed these innocent people. Our troops overreacted because of the pressure on them, and they killed innocent civilians in cold blood," Murtha said.

[...]

"They actually went into the houses and killed women and children,"

A Marines spokesman said: "Any comment at this time would be inappropriate and could undermine the investigatory and possible legal process." Yes indeed, and Murtha's decision to prejudge the outcome in public is reprehensible for that reason alone. It is an abuse of his position for him to purport to know, at this stage, not only that a crime was committed and who was guilty, but the underlying causes of the crime too – especially as they happen to fit his agenda that the war is an unwinnable quagmire. But our point here is different.

Did the troops "overreact because of the pressure on them", or did they "kill innocent civilians in cold blood"? It cannot be both. Murtha did not say (in the CNN video clip linked by that article) what the nature of the pressure was that he says turned these men into mass murderers. But whatever he meant, if that was the explanation it would reflect badly, perhaps criminally, on everyone in the chain of command that ordered them into the situation. It would also mean that the murders were not in cold blood. That Murtha should make both allegations in the same breath shows that, like the environmental journalist we quoted before, he is not interested in what the facts are. But unlike the journalist, he has done this over an issue of life and death.

If by "cold-blooded" he meant intentionally cruel, then you're right. But "cold-blooded" can also mean without feeling or emotion. If one accepts that mental pressure brought on by war can desensitize your emotions, then there is no inherent contradiction in his statement.

I have no idea how he thinks the pressure in this war differs from any other war. If his point is that if this war wasn't unjustified and such an unwinnable quagmire, then these soldiers would never have felt the pressure that caused them to kill innocent civilians in cold blood... well, that would be a tough allegation to back up.

by a reader on Thu, 05/25/2006 - 16:15 | [reply](#)