

## **Insurgents Bought Homes of Fleeing Fallujans**

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Arab and foreign fighters in Fallujah have been paying many times the market rate to rent and buy property.

Ahmed al-Dulaimi, who owns a grocery store in Fallujah, left shortly before the US-led assault began, because he was concerned his home might be targeted.

“We’d been really afraid the Americans would attack our house because our neighbours had rented theirs out to a group of Arab fighters.

“They used the house mainly as a weapons dump. Since the city is full of informants we were really afraid they would tell the Americans to attack it.”

There have been a number of reports of insurgents battling US-led forces renting or buying property from people who’ve left the city. Evidently, some of the latter aren’t aware that they’re doing business with militants while others are.

Tens of thousands of Fallujans have fled their homes in recent months to escape US bombing. “I lived in the city’s al-Joolan district. In September, jetfighters bombed a house where the Mujahedin used to gather,” said taxi driver Waleed Khalid. “The attack destroyed two other homes as well and killed seven civilians.”

Some have also said the radicals created a climate of fear and imposed a number of restrictions on what they regarded as un-Islamic practices.

“The insurgents made things really difficult for everyone here, but no one dared to say anything because we were afraid of them. The city was full of Baathists, Islamists and gangs of thugs,” said al-Dulaimi.

“We couldn’t even buy movies or CDs anymore. The only things on sale were CDs of the fighters with songs glorifying them. Now we just hope the campaign against Falluja ends without too many civilian casualties.”

Pensioner Salman Majhool said the deteriorating security situation in the city forced him to sell up and move to Baghdad, but, at the time, he had no idea his house was passing into the hands of foreign fighters.

“I sold my house in al-Shuhadaa district to an Iraqi, but when I spoke to one of my old neighbours, he said Syrians were living there not Iraqis. He told me the other neighbours had complained they might be targeted by the Americans, but the men in the house replied, ‘Don’t worry. We are Mujahedin. God will protect us all,’” said Majhool.

“Now I know why they paid more than the house was worth. I asked for 80,000 US dollars but they gave me 100,000. I wasn’t going to argue.”

As well as offering high rental and purchase prices for properties in the city, Arab and foreign fighters have

also been guaranteeing owners compensation, should the buildings be damaged.

One native Fallujan, who moved to Baghdad five months ago, and would only speak to IWPR on condition of anonymity, said, "We got fed up living in Fallujah. It was completely lawless so we came to Baghdad. I rented my house to foreigners for 700 dollars a month. They gave me 7,000 upfront for a 10 month lease.

"They also said they would compensate me if there was any damage to the house. I really want to go back to Fallujah - my relatives are there and my life is there - but I'm staying here until the situation has stabilised. Then we can rebuild our city and live like normal people again."

Hussein Ali and Ali Marzook are IWPR trainees.

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