

As “post-war” casualties top invasion’s

Bush Iraq policy in disarray

Bill Vann
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On Tuesday, the death toll suffered by US occupation troops in Iraq in the wake of President Bush’s May 1 claim that major fighting was over topped the number killed in the invasion and its immediate aftermath. A bomb claimed the life of a soldier riding in a column of army vehicles about 16 miles northwest of Baghdad.

The death marked more than just a numerical milestone—139 having lost their lives in the occupation as opposed to 138 in the fighting that preceded it. Behind the rising death toll is growing popular resistance in Iraq.

Washington confronts a far more dangerous enemy today than when it waged its one-sided war against the weakened military apparatus of Saddam Hussein’s corrupt regime. It now faces an increasingly hostile and radicalized population that is determined to free the country of foreign occupation. It has further antagonized masses of people throughout the Arab world, with thousands reportedly pouring into Iraq from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan and elsewhere to fight the occupiers.

As for the suffering of the American soldiers, there is no end in sight. Another soldier was struck and killed by a car in Baghdad Tuesday, while a third was taken to a hospital after apparently trying to kill himself. It was only the latest in what the Pentagon refers to as “non-hostile gunshot wounds.”

It has become more evident every day that the entire war strategy of the Bush administration—an illegal war of aggression waged for predatory motives and based on a web of lies told to the American people—is irrevocably unraveling.

Appearing before a convention of the American Legion in St. Louis Tuesday, Bush delivered an address that can only be described as Orwellian in its grotesque distortion of reality. He labeled Iraqis who resist US military occupation of their country as “terrorists” whose aim is to “undermine the advance of freedom.”

He repeated the lies about the supposed imminent threat posted to the American public by Iraqi “weapons of mass destruction,” despite the failure of hordes of US military teams scouring the country to find the slightest evidence that any such weapons existed.

Bush hailed the war in Afghanistan as a success story, even as the US military has been forced to launch aerial bombardments and a new ground offensive because the Taliban and other forces opposed to the US-installed regime have turned much of the country ungovernable. Anti-government militias have reportedly begun operating in forces as large as 600.

The escalating spiral of violence in Israel and Palestine, which has been marked by repeated Israeli missile attacks on the occupied territories, was dismissed by the US president as a sign of that Palestinian “terrorists” have become desperate as “the parties move closer together.”

“Our only option is total victory in the war on terror,” declared Bush, as he suggested that the US occupation of Iraq would drag on for years, comparing it to the post-World War II military presence in Germany and Japan, which lasted decades.

Meanwhile, Bush boasted of the wave of retaliation that the US military has launched in response to attacks on its own forces and the devastating truck bombing of the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad last week. He declared exultantly that the American forces had in the previous days conducted “almost 200 raids, netting more than 1,100 detainees.” That such operations, involving the ransacking of Iraqi homes and terrorizing of the civilian population, serve to create only more hostility and unrest is apparently lost on the US president.

Bush’s dull-witted bravado stood in stark contrast to the growing manifestations of desperation and demoralization over the events in Iraq, particularly from within the camp of his administration’s closest supporters and the most avid advocates of the war.

“...[T]here is more at stake in Iraq than even this vision of a better, safer Middle East,” declared the *Weekly Standard*, among the most influential voices on the Republican right. “The future course of American foreign policy, American world leadership, and American security is at stake. Failure in Iraq would be a devastating blow to everything the United States hopes to accomplish, and must accomplish, in the decades ahead... That is why it is so baffling that, up until now, the Bush administration has failed to commit resources to the rebuilding of Iraq commensurate with these very high stakes...the danger is that the resources the administration is devoting to Iraq right now are insufficient, and the speed with which they are being deployed is insufficiently urgent. These failings, if not corrected soon, could over time lead to disaster.”

The editorial demanded more troops sent to Iraq and greater resources invested there. This as military planners acknowledge that US forces are stretched to the limit and the Congressional Budget Office predicts a staggering \$480 billion federal deficit in the coming year.

Similarly, columnist George Will, also an enthusiastic proponent of the war, wrote last week: “Perhaps the administration should recognize that something other than its intelligence reports concerning weapons of mass destruction was wrong. Paul Wolfowitz, deputy secretary of defense, was wrong in congressional testimony before the war...[when] he insisted that Gen. Eric Shinseki, a veteran of peacekeeping in the Balkans, was ‘wildly off the mark’ in estimating that several hundred thousand troops would be needed in occupied Iraq.” While Will agreed that more troops are needed, he was compelled to note the growing dissension among the troops themselves: “Today’s tempo of operations threatens the services’

retention and recruitment.”

New York Times foreign affairs columnist Thomas Friedman, who acted as a mouthpiece for the administration’s war party in the run up to the Iraqi invasion, similarly voiced extreme pessimism in a column titled “Why US may lose the big one.”

Repeating his signature claptrap about the US war having been waged not for oil but for democratic “ideas and values,” Friedman wrote that while the administration compares Iraq to 1945 Germany “it has approached post war Iraq as if it’s Grenada in 1982.” He warned that the US “may fail because of the utter incompetence with which the Pentagon leadership has handled the post-war challenge.”

Finally, there was a particularly telling indication of the military’s morale. *Washington Post* columnist David Ignatius reported Tuesday that the US Army’s special operations command has organized a special Pentagon screening of “The Battle of Algiers,” the passionate 1965 film that chronicles the victory of the Algerian revolution against French colonial occupation.

The Pentagon flier announcing the film drew a direct parallel between the defeat of the French—despite their overwhelming military superiority—and the looming catastrophe for the US military in Iraq: “How to win a battle against terrorism and lose the war of ideas. . . . Children shoot soldiers at point blank range. Women plant bombs in cafes. Soon the entire Arab population builds to a mad fervor. Sound familiar? The French have a plan. It succeeds tactically, but fails strategically. To understand why, come to a rare showing of this film.”

While an indication of the growing demoralization in the army command over the course of events in Iraq, the showing of this film to the Pentagon’s military brass also constitutes a warning of what is to come. French society is still torn by the crimes carried out by its military in Algeria—systematic torture, the wholesale execution of prisoners and the killing of over half a million Algerians. Faced with mass opposition, the US military will inevitably embark on a similar bloody campaign.

The impact of the deteriorating situation in Iraq has clearly found expression in growing popular opposition to the Bush administration’s policies, expressed even in the media polls.

A survey released Saturday by *Newsweek* magazine showed that a majority of US voters oppose Bush’s re-election to a second term. It also found that nearly 70 percent of the public is concerned that the US occupation will drag on for years without any resolution of the conflict in Iraq. And, while the president’s worried Republican supporters are urging a huge increase in the resources committed to the US neo-colonial project, more than half of those polled said that the current \$1-billion-per-week cost of the occupation was already too high and should be scaled back.

Bush, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice all urged “patience” in their speeches delivered on Iraq this week. But it is evident that patience is running out, both in Iraq and in the US itself.

The US occupation has failed to organize any coherent reconstruction of an Iraqi infrastructure devastated by US attacks that came on top of a decade of economic sanctions. While an estimated \$15 billion is needed to rebuild the country’s electricity system, for example, the occupation has allocated only \$200 million, the lion’s share going to fatten the profit margins of Bechtel. Meanwhile, the Iraqis enduring a sweltering summer without power.

While Washington claims that the “Coalition Provisional Authority” is a temporary administration designed to organize a transition to Iraqi

self-rule, there is no indication of any move in that direction. The misnamed Iraqi Governing Council, consisting of Pentagon-trained exiles and Quisling politicians recruited by the US, has served as nothing more than an “Iraqi face” for foreign occupation.

One indication of the growing popular anger was Monday’s demonstration by tens of thousands of Shi’ites in Baghdad—the largest such action seen since the US invasion. While the protest had been organized against the attempted assassination of a Shi’ite cleric in Najaf, it quickly turned into a manifestation of anger against the occupation, with marchers chanting “Down with America,” and “Down with the ruling council,” this in reference to the Iraqis serving as a front for the US colonial regime. It is widely reported that US officials fear that an eruption of the Shi’ite population would plunge the country into a full-scale civil war.

In the US, increasing numbers of American working people are seeing through the fog of media propaganda and recognizing that the administration has systematically lied to them to carry out a war that was waged on false pretenses and to achieve hidden motives.

Events have borne out none of the claims made by the Bush White House and the Pentagon in the buildup to the war. Not a trace of Saddam Hussein’s supposedly lethal arsenal of chemical and biological weapons has been discovered. The Iraqi people, far from welcoming US troops as liberators, are waging a guerrilla war against the occupation. And, rather than weakening the radical Islamist forces that are said to be responsible for the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York and Washington, the occupation has swelled the ranks of these groups while creating an ideal battlefield for them on the soil of Iraq.

Behind the implacable drive to war on Iraq, lay the determination of a section of the American ruling elite to utilize American military might to overcome a precipitous economic decline. Envisioned by these layers was the looting of Iraq’s wealth, the expropriation of its vast oil fields and the securing of lucrative contracts for politically connected corporations for reconstruction.

While this criminal scheme was intended to enrich a thin layer at the top, it is American working people who are being forced to pay the price, both in terms of the steady stream of young American soldiers losing their lives in Iraq and in the growing deficits and economic dislocation at home. The demands now being made for a massive buildup of military forces and increased economic expenditures to rescue the US neo-colonial projects in both Iraq and Afghanistan can only be realized through a drastic intensification of the attacks on social conditions in the US itself.

The claim that such buildups would aid the people of these countries is a lie. Their purpose would be solely to suppress the legitimate resistance of both Iraqis and Afghans to foreign occupation and to secure the profit interests of the US-based corporations.

Against the drive to escalate the repression in Iraq, the demand must be raised for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US, British and other occupation forces. At the same time, an independent investigation into the methods used to promote this criminal war must be held to assure that those responsible are held accountable.



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