

US soldier asks: “How many more must die” in Iraq?

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A letter from a US soldier in Iraq appeared last month in the *Peoria* (Illinois) *Journal Star*, and was reprinted September 17 in the *Los Angeles Times*. Tim Predmore has been on active duty with the 101st Airborne near Mosul, Iraq, since March, and has served in the military for almost five years.

Predmore’s denunciation of the Bush administration’s war on Iraq and the continued occupation of the country is a sign of growing opposition to American war policy within the ranks of the US military. His words also express the sentiments of broader layers of the US population as the assault on Iraq enters its sixth month—and the lies upon which it has been based continue to unravel.

“As a soldier preparing for the invasion of Iraq,” Predmore writes, “the words ‘shock and awe’ rang deeper within my psyche. These two great superpowers were about to break the very rules they demand of others. Without the consent of the United Nations, and ignoring the pleas of their own citizens, the United States and Britain invaded Iraq.”

“‘Shock and Awe’?” he continues, referring to the Pentagon’s plan for the pulverization of Iraq at the war’s onset. “Yes, the words correctly described the emotional impact I felt as we prepared to participate in what I believed not to be an act of justice but of hypocrisy.”

Predmore’s description of his thoughts as he entered into war are at odds with the depiction promoted by America’s mainstream media of the state of mind of US troops as the invasion began—one of blind patriotism and bullying superiority. While such moods no doubt existed and persist, as troop casualties have steadily built—and US soldiers have witnessed both the horrors imposed on civilians and the resultant resistance of the Iraqi people—more of the men and

women sent to fight have undoubtedly begun to question their mission.

Predmore takes particular aim at America’s open cynicism in its prosecution of Operation Iraqi Freedom. “Following the broadcasting of recorded images of captured and dead US soldiers over Arab television,” he writes, “American and British leaders vowed revenge while verbally assaulting the networks for displaying such vivid images. Yet within hours of the deaths of Saddam’s two sons, the American government released horrific photos of the two dead brothers for the entire world to view.”

He also exposes the brutality and inhumanity of the colonial occupation: “As soldiers serving in Iraq, we have been told that our purpose here is to help the people of Iraq by providing them the necessary assistance, militarily as well as in humanitarian efforts. Then tell me where the humanity was in the recent *Stars and Stripes* account of two young children brought to a US military camp by their mother, in search of medical care? The two children had been, unbeknown to them, playing with explosive ordnance they had found and as a result were severely burned. The account tells how the two children, following an hour-long wait, were denied care by two US military doctors. The soldier described the incident as one of many ‘atrocities’ he has witnessed on the part of the US military.”

“So then, what is our purpose here?” Predmore asks, posing the questions on the minds of millions of Americans: “Was this invasion due to weapons of mass destruction as we so often hear? If so, where is the proof? Or is it that our incursion is a result of our own economic advantage? Iraq’s oil can be refined at the lowest cost of any in the world. Coincidence?”—he and many of his fellow soldiers apparently think not.

He reasons: “This looks like a modern-day crusade not to free an oppressed people or to rid the world of a demonic dictator relentless in his pursuit of conquest and domination but a crusade to control another nation’s natural resource. At least for us here, oil seems to be the reason for our presence.”

The human toll to date of this predatory war for oil? According to US military sources, since the invasion, 305 servicemen and women have died; 166 since George W. Bush declared the end of “major combat” on May 1. Of the 305 dead, 106 are classified as “non-combat” deaths—including accidents, “friendly fire” incidents and suicides. The US military has a policy of not keeping records on civilian casualties. But according to the Iraq Body Count web site <http://www.iraqbodycount.net/>, to date between 6,131 and 7,849 civilian men, woman and children have died, and at least 20,000 have been injured. As this count only includes deaths that can be verified by two news sources, it undoubtedly greatly underestimates the number. It also fails to include the casualties among Iraqi soldiers, mostly teenage conscripts, which include many thousands, if not tens of thousands, more.

These horrors of war—justified by lies emanating from the White House and the Pentagon—prompt Predmore to write: “I once believed that I served for a cause: ‘to uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States.’ Now I no longer believe; I have lost my conviction, my determination. I can no longer justify my service for what I believe to be half-truths and bold lies. My time is done as well as that of many others with whom I serve. We have all faced death here without reason or justification.”

Such sharp condemnation coming from within the ranks of the military for the Bush administration’s criminal war policy can only indicate a deeper distrust within the wider population of US working people, students and others, who not only see the death and destruction wrought by this war, but are being asked to sacrifice their loved ones to fight it and their jobs and social conditions to finance it.

Tim Predmore echoes these feelings in the concluding paragraph of his letter: “How many more must die? How many more tears must be shed before America awakens and demands the return of the men and women whose job it is to protect them rather than their leader’s interest?”

The full text of Tim Predmore’s letter can be accessed at the web site of the Peoria Journal Star: “A U.S. soldier in Iraq wonders: “How many more must die?”

<http://www.pjstar.com/news/opedcolumns/b0gtbbgr059.html>



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