

Survey claims 37,000 Iraqi civilians killed in first seven months of war

James Conachy
5 August 2004

An Iraqi political organization, the People's Kifah or Struggle Against Hegemony, told the Arab network Al Jazeera on the weekend that it had documented more than 37,000 civilian deaths in Iraq in the seven months from the start of the US war on March 20, 2003, through October 2003.

A spokesman for the People's Kifah, Muhammad al-Ubaidi, told Al Jazeera they were "100 percent sure" the estimate was correct. The data was gathered during September and October 2003, when the organization undertook a nationwide survey "involving hundreds of Iraqi activists and academics." Ubaidi stated: "For the collation of our statistics we visited the most remote villages, spoke and coordinated with grave-diggers across Iraq, obtained information from hospitals and spoke to thousands of witnesses who saw incidents in which Iraqi civilians were killed by US fire."

The People's Kifah claims it halted the survey under duress, after one of the group's workers, Ramzi Musa Ahmad, was seized by Kurdish militiamen last October and handed over to US troops. He has been missing ever since.

According to the statements of the organization, the figure of 37,000 does not include the casualties suffered by Iraqi military and paramilitary forces. The estimates of Iraqi military deaths during the invasion range from approximately 10,000 to as many as 45,000. As the study concluded last October, it also does not include the large numbers of civilian casualties inflicted by the US military in April and May, during its operations to crush the Iraqi uprising in Fallujah and Baghdad and across southern Iraq.

Thus far, only limited details of the survey have been released, and its methodology does not appear to have been subjected to independent scrutiny. It warrants attention, however, because no official survey into the

number of civilian casualties has been carried out in Iraq since the occupation began. The US military refuses to make public its own estimate of how many Iraqi civilians it killed during the invasion. Last December, the head of the statistics department of the Iraqi health ministry alleged a study it was conducting was shut down on the orders of the US-controlled Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). At the time, both the CPA and the US-installed Iraqi Governing Council denied any survey was being conducted.

Though there are no official figures on casualties, what is known is that the US military unleashed massive firepower during the invasion of Iraq. The ongoing occupation has been marked by the systematic repression of the Iraqi people in an effort to force them to bow down to the neo-colonial US control of the country and its resources.

According to figures released last year by the US military, some 800 cruise missiles, more than 18,000 precision-guided bombs and missiles, and some 9,000 "dumb" bombs were unleashed on Iraq during the invasion. At least 1,200 cluster bombs were dropped, each releasing dozens of small grenade-like bomblets. A-10 "Warthog" ground-support aircraft fired an estimated 300,000 rounds from their 30mm cannons—many of which are believed to have been manufactured from depleted uranium (DU). Tens of thousands of tank and ground artillery rounds, including DU rounds, and vast numbers of machine-gun and small-arms munitions were also expended.

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld approved 50 air strikes that US military planners had estimated in advance would kill 30 or more civilians. Fifty strikes were also launched to kill "high-value" Iraqi military and political leaders, mostly in Baghdad, before which no estimate was even made of likely civilian deaths.

None of them hit their intended targets, and the few that have been investigated all resulted in civilian losses.

The People's Kifah survey claims to have documented 6,103 civilian deaths in Baghdad province from the beginning of the war through October. Iraq's capital suffered the heaviest aerial bombardment by American and allied aircraft, and large numbers of civilians were killed during the US tank assaults into the city from April 3 to April 9.

Between May and October 2003, Human Rights Watch collected what it called credible reports of 94 civilian deaths in Baghdad at the hands of American troops. These included people gunned down in their cars as they approached checkpoints, shot during raids, or hit by indiscriminate US fire in the street.

In the province of Basra, which has been under British control since the end of the war, the survey claims to have documented 6,734 civilian deaths. The city of Basra, Iraq's second largest, was subjected to a fierce bombardment and siege by US and British troops in the first week of the war. Three hospitals in the city recorded 413 deaths during the invasion, but this figure did not include those who did not die in hospital or who were not taken to hospital morgues.

In Babil province, of which Hilla is the capital, the survey claims 3,552 civilians were killed. During the invasion, an International Red Cross representative, Roland Hugenin, told journalists from Hilla hospital that "there has been an incredible number of casualties with very, very serious wounds in the region of Hilla. We saw that a truck was delivering dozens of totally dismembered dead bodies of women and children."

The survey claims 3,581 civilians died in the province of Nasiriya—another scene of intense fighting during the invasion. It claims more than 2,000 civilian deaths in other southern provinces such as Misan, Karbala and Wasit; the northern province of Mosul; and the western province of al-Anbar, which includes the cities of Fallujah and Ramadi. No figures were reportedly gathered in the three predominantly Kurdish northern provinces of the country.

The figure of 37,000 deaths is far higher than the estimate of civilian casualties arrived at by relying upon media accounts. As of August 4, the Iraq Body Count web site (www.iraqbodycount.net) had data-base reports that show a minimum of 11,429, and a maximum of 13,398 Iraqi civilians have been killed in

Iraq since March 20, 2003.

A disclaimer on the site reads, however: "We are not a news organization ourselves and like everyone else can only base our information on what has been reported so far. What we are attempting to provide is a *credible compilation* of civilian deaths that have been reported by recognized sources. Our maximum therefore refers to *reported deaths*—which can only be a sample of true deaths unless one assumes that every civilian death has been reported. It is likely that many if not most civilian casualties will go unreported by the media. That is the sad nature of war" (emphasis in the original).

The true figure of Iraqi civilian casualties is therefore likely to be closer to that arrived at by the People's Kifah survey. The scale of the death and destruction resulting from the US invasion of Iraq underscores the criminality of those responsible for planning and organizing the war, and those advocating the continuation of the occupation.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact