

As the 1,000th US soldier dies in Iraq

The fight to end the war means opposing both Bush and Kerry

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9 September 2004

The passing of the grim milestone of 1,000 American soldiers killed in Iraq must be the occasion for redoubling the fight for an immediate end to the US occupation of that war-ravaged country.

This means a struggle not only against the Bush administration, but also against the Democratic Party and its presidential candidate John Kerry, who voted to authorize the war and has vowed to continue it.

After the Iraqi people themselves, who have seen tens of thousands of their countrymen killed, wounded and tortured by the US occupation army, the American troops are the principal victims of this war.

Every reason given for sending them to fight and die has proven a lie. There were neither any weapons of mass destruction nor any Al Qaeda-Baghdad connection. The Bush administration's promise to turn Iraq into a beacon of democracy has produced a puppet regime headed by a homicidal thug and long-time CIA agent who is despised by the majority of the population.

Stripped bare of all these false pretexts, the war stands as a criminal colonialist enterprise aimed at militarily subjugating Iraq in order to control its vast oil reserves.

More than half of the soldiers killed in Iraq were under 30, drawn overwhelmingly from the working class. Many of those whose lives have been needlessly sacrificed in what Washington insiders describe as a "war of choice" joined the military straight out of high school to get a job or money for college. These young men and women are now dying at the rate of three a day.

While the identity of the 1,000th soldier killed in Iraq is not yet known, names released by the Pentagon Wednesday included those of Tomas Garces, a 19-year-old army specialist from Weslaco, Texas, a Rio Grande Valley town where the unemployment rate is close to 15 percent, and Devin Grella, 21, a private first class in the reserves from Medina, Ohio, who was the 35th soldier from that state to die.

In addition to the dead, there are some 7,000 wounded, among them many who are permanently disabled. Some 1,100 soldiers and Marines were wounded in the month of August alone, as US forces faced determined resistance in heavily populated Iraqi cities.

There is every reason to believe that casualty rates will rise substantially after the November election. The Bush administration has deliberately postponed launching far more intense

counterinsurgency operations to suppress the Iraqi resistance and retake cities that it now controls for fear of the impact the carnage would have on the November vote.

The preparations for a brutal offensive are already under way. General Richard Myers, chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, told a Pentagon press briefing Tuesday that the US military in Iraq is now working "to set the conditions for the successful use of force later" against cities and areas where the Iraqi resistance has gained control. Military commanders in Iraq have indicated that any such action will be delayed for two to four months.

The administration dismissed any significance to the 1,000th US military fatality in Iraq. Defense Secretary Rumsfeld described the number of casualties as "relatively small" and obscenely lumped them together with the lives lost in the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on September 11, 2001, as all part of the global "war on terrorism."

Kerry took note of the figure, calling it "tragic" and incorporating it into a new tack that the Democratic campaign has taken on the Iraq war.

It should be recalled that during the Democratic primaries Kerry cast himself as an antiwar candidate, opposed to Bush's policies in Iraq. Once he had the votes needed for the nomination, Iraq became a non-issue. Kerry deliberately disassociated himself from the broad popular opposition to the war. He adopted the slogan that "failure is not an option," and vowed to continue the occupation and even increase the number of US troops there.

Then, last month, Kerry announced that—even if he had then known that Iraq had neither the weapons nor terrorist ties alleged by the administration—he still would have cast his vote of two years ago giving Bush the authority to launch a "preemptive" invasion. With this statement the Democratic campaign essentially ceded the issue of Iraq to Bush.

Now, following relentless attacks against him by the Republicans, and a drop in the polls—particularly among those describing themselves as strongly committed to the Democratic candidate—Kerry has resurrected Iraq as a campaign theme.

Beginning on Labor Day, Kerry described Iraq as "the wrong war in the wrong place at the wrong time." The candidate traveled Wednesday to Cincinnati, Ohio, to deliver a speech in the same hall where Bush made his fraudulent case for war nearly two years earlier. Kerry censured the Bush administration for a series of

“miscalculations.”

“His miscalculation was going to war without planning carefully and without the allies we should have had,” said Kerry. “As a result, America has paid nearly 90 percent of the bill in Iraq. Contrast that with the Gulf War, where our allies paid 95 percent of the costs.”

What precisely is it that Kerry finds “wrong”—aside from Washington footing the bill—about the war in Iraq, a war that he and his running mate John Edwards both voted to authorize?

That the war was based upon lies and waged in blatant violation of international law merits no mention by Kerry. Nor did the Democratic candidate say a word about the continuing bombardment of crowded urban neighborhoods in Baghdad, Fallujah, Najaf and elsewhere in Iraq, which constitutes a war crime. The sadistic torture of Iraqi civilians at Abu Ghraib and other US detention camps in Iraq also failed to feature among the things Kerry found wrong about the war.

What has been done to the Iraqi population is, to put it bluntly, not an issue for Kerry. As we mark the 1,000th US fatality, it should be noted that no one in the Washington establishment has even bothered to estimate the casualties inflicted upon Iraqi civilians in the year and a half since the US invasion.

Estimates range as high as 37,000 killed and many more wounded. In a country where 60 percent of the population is under the age of 18, a large proportion of those who have been slain or maimed by US bombs, missiles, shells and bullets are children. Their deaths and agony go unrecorded, continuously censored from the major media’s coverage of the war.

So what’s wrong about the war for Kerry? His differences are a matter of tactics and style. He is committed to a successful consummation of the criminal and reckless aggression launched by the Bush administration, but insists that his election could win Washington greater international backing, while lulling the growing antiwar sentiment within the US itself.

Kerry has suggested that US troops could be withdrawn from Iraq after his first term, meaning four more years of war and thousands more US soldiers and tens of thousands more Iraqis killed. Kerry qualified even this halfhearted promise with a warning that withdrawing from Iraq too soon could leave a political “vacuum.” In other words, he is determined to continue the occupation until a pro-US regime is consolidated, a goal that means unending colonial war.

While the Republicans have undoubtedly smeared Kerry and grossly distorted his political record, their derisive singsong chant of “flip-flop, flip-flop” has some political basis.

Bush and his handlers portray Kerry’s twists and turns on the Iraq war as merely a matter of political opportunism, driven by the polls or some personal indecisiveness that disqualifies him from assuming the exalted title of “commander-in-chief.”

In reality, Kerry’s problem is that from the outset of his campaign he has been compelled to speak to two audiences. The first is the majority of the population which is opposed to the occupation of Iraq and wants US troops withdrawn.

The second—and for him the most important—are the predominant sections of the US corporate and financial oligarchy, which in no way want the election turned into a referendum on the Iraq war

and global US militarism.

To the extent that Kerry is forced to criticize Bush on Iraq once again in order to boost his flagging campaign, it amounts to empty demagoguery. When it comes to the fundamental aims of US imperialism in Iraq, there are no differences between the two candidates.

Kerry’s statement that he would still have voted for the war, like the vote itself, was no accident. The war on Iraq—whatever tactical differences existed over timing and diplomatic preparation—was a consensus policy of the ruling elite. It is the culmination of a strategy developed by both Republicans and Democrats since the dissolution of the Soviet Union 13 years ago—the use of overwhelming US military superiority to achieve global hegemony by securing a stranglehold over markets and sources of strategic raw materials, foremost among them oil.

Kerry’s election would not spell an end to either the US occupation of Iraq or the continuing campaign of global militarism under the pretext of a war on terrorism. Whatever sympathy he feigns for the working class youth in uniform who are being killed and maimed in this war, he is committed to continuing the slaughter for years to come.

Bringing a halt to the war and to the entire bipartisan program of world domination is possible only by means of a break with the two-party system and the emergence of a new mass political movement of working people, based on a socialist program. Only this kind of a movement, representing the needs and desires of the vast majority of the population, can end the domination of US foreign policy and every other vital social question by the predatory interests of a tiny financial elite.

The vital role played by the Socialist Equality Party campaign in the 2004 election is that of laying the political groundwork for the emergence of such a movement. Ours are the only candidates who unequivocally advance the demand for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US troops from Iraq and Afghanistan. We call for those who conspired to drag the American people into war based upon lies to be placed on trial for war crimes.

Above all, our campaign is directed to preparing the struggles to come, no matter whether Kerry or Bush wins the November election.



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