

Study documents US-inflicted carnage on Iraqi people

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The *Dossier of Civilian Casualties 2003-2005*, published this month by the organisation Iraq Body Count (IBC), is the most detailed assessment to date of how the illegal US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq have caused the death and injury of tens of thousands of civilians.

The dossier examines 24,865 civilian fatalities and 42,500 injuries in Iraq between March 19, 2003 and March 19, 2005. The study's methodology was meticulous but conservative, meaning the figures underestimate the extent of the carnage inflicted on the Iraqi people. Only deaths that were reported by at least two out of 152 English-language news sources have been counted. Associated Press, Agence France Presse and Reuters provided over one third of the casualty reports. Other sources were journalists working for Knight Ridder, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, CNN, the *Guardian*, the *Independent*, the BBC, UPI and other major international news outlets.

The dossier notes that the reliance on English-only sources means "it is possible that our count has excluded some victims as a result". As well, the report does not include the deaths and injuries suffered by the Iraqi military during the invasion, or the casualties that have been sustained by the anti-occupation resistance movement. Nor does it include the casualties inflicted by the resistance on the pro-occupation Iraqi military fighting alongside the US forces.

The fact that the report does not include thousands of deaths makes its statistics even more horrifying. In Tikrit, for example, the hometown of Saddam Hussein and the target of heavy bombing in March 2003, IBC has documented that at least one out of every 90 civilians has been killed. In Baghdad, at least one out of every 500 people has been killed since the US invasion.

Across the country, IBC has recorded that a minimum

of one out of every 1,000 Iraqi civilians suffered a violent death between March 19, 2003 and March 19, 2005. If a similar death toll was suffered in the United States, more than 295,000 people would have lost their lives—100 times the number killed in the September 11, 2001 terror attacks on New York and Washington.

The population of Fallujah, the target of two US military offensives during 2004, has most likely suffered the greatest proportional loss of life. IBC has data showing that at least one out of every 137 civilians has been killed—1,874 people. Large numbers of deaths in the city, however, were never reported. The US military claimed to have killed over 1,200 Iraqi fighters during the bloody assault that took place in November 2004, many of whom may well have been noncombatants.

IBC had age and gender information for 13,811 of the reported civilian deaths. Males made up 81.7 percent, women 8.7 percent, 9.3 percent were children under 18 and 0.4 percent were babies up to two years old. The dossier notes: "Given the high number of male adult deaths, we can know that many Iraqis have been left fatherless and widowed."

The image presented in the US media's daily propaganda is that "terrorists" or Iraqi insurgents are responsible for the bulk of civilian casualties in Iraq. IBC proves that the opposite is the case. The US-led occupation forces have caused the largest number of the reported civilian deaths—9,270 or 37.3 percent of the total.

IBC attributes 2,353 civilian deaths to the actions of anti-occupation forces—9.5 percent of the total. In another 1,258 cases, where civilians were killed during clashes between US-led forces and the resistance, it is unclear which party caused the deaths.

Of the civilian fatalities directly attributed by IBC to

the US-led forces, 6,882 occurred during the invasion of Iraq from March 20 to May 1, 2003. Air strikes have consistently been responsible for the greatest number of casualties. Between July and October 2004, for example, 55 US air strikes on cities such as Fallujah, Kut, Tal Afar and Samarra killed 547 civilians. These attacks received only the most cursory coverage in the American media.

IBC classified 2,731 fatalities, or 11 percent of the deaths, as being caused by “unknown agents”. Included in this number are the victims of bombings and suicide bombings that targeted only civilians, and deaths where no clear information exists as to who was responsible.

The study’s decision not to blame these deaths on the Iraqi resistance is correct. While the indiscriminate bombings that have slaughtered scores of innocents are almost ritualistically blamed on Al Qaeda and Jordanian extremist Abu Musaab al-Zarqawi, in Iraq itself, many have been blamed on pro-occupation factions. There is also credible evidence that extra-judicial murders are being carried out by Iraqi government special police units. IBC notes that some of the people killed by “unknown agents” were “clearly opposed to the military occupation”.

One of the most important findings of the IBC dossier is that the second largest cause of civilian deaths over the first two years of the occupation was crime. In the two-year period, there were 8,935 more reported fatalities attributed to criminal violence than the rate registered in Iraq before the invasion. Far from bringing “liberation” to the Iraqi people, the US invasion has produced the disintegration of civil society and the collapse of a credible legal framework. For over two years there has not been a functioning police force or judiciary in large parts of the country, while unemployment stands at over 50 percent. An epidemic of criminal activities, murders, revenge killings and gang turf battles has resulted.

The report’s findings on Iraqi wounded are just as sobering as the statistics on the number of deaths. The figure of 42,500 injuries implies that a minimum of one out of every 560 people in Iraq has been injured by bombs, explosions or small arms fire since the US invasion.

The US-led forces were directly responsible for at least 21,000 of the wounded. Anti-occupation forces caused 4,992, while “unknown agents” caused 4,831.

Another 10,257 civilians were wounded by what the Iraqi Ministry of Health classifies as “military operations” or “terrorist attacks”—with two thirds of the casualties resulting from clashes between US forces and insurgents, and one third from terrorism. In all, the US-led forces were involved in 68.6 percent of all civilian injuries.

Taken as a whole, the IBC dossier is a valuable contribution. It lends weight to the study published last October by *Lancet* magazine, which estimated that 98,000 Iraqis had lost their lives as a direct byproduct of the US-led invasion—whether they died from violence or as a result of the social breakdown in the country. Both reports combat the attempt by the US-led occupation to conceal the real cost of the war by simply refusing to count the victims. Neither the US or British governments, or the pro-American Iraqi government, have undertaken any count of civilian casualties.

The IBC dossier constitutes a record of the atrocities that have been committed in Iraq, providing weighty evidence for future war crime trials of those responsible—the Bush administration, its international allies, and its local Iraqi government stooges.



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