

US deaths in Iraq underscore need to revive the antiwar movement

The WSWWS editorial board
5 August 2005

The killing of 25 US troops in Iraq in just two days this week must galvanise the efforts to revive a mass antiwar movement demanding the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all American and foreign occupation troops. The meaningless death and injury being inflicted upon hundreds of young American soldiers and thousands of Iraqis must be brought to an end.

On Tuesday, six marines were killed in an ambush outside the town of Haditha in western Iraq. On Wednesday, 14 marines and an Iraqi translator were killed when their lightly armoured troop carrier was destroyed by a massive explosion on the outskirts of the town. The blast turned the 31-tonne vehicle over and left it a blazing wreck. Just one occupant survived. Five other soldiers died over the same two days in roadside and suicide bombings in the nearby towns of Hit and Rawah, and the Iraqi capital Baghdad.

It is time for the American people to face facts. From the time of the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the White House and the media have thrown dust in their eyes. US officials lied about the real motives of the war and they have continually misrepresented both the scale of the resistance to the occupation and the depth of popular support for it. The truth is that millions of Iraqis legitimately oppose the conquest of their country. The propagandists of the Bush administration slander the insurgents as “terrorists” and “anti-Iraqi forces”. To their own people, they are liberation fighters.

The two attacks near Haditha demonstrate the longer the illegal occupation of Iraq continues, the greater the determination, intelligence capabilities and combat experience of the resistance. Many of the fighters to the west of Baghdad would have taken part in the defence of Fallujah last year. They have seen thousands of civilians killed and an entire city reduced to rubble by the US military. Despite horrific losses, they have not ceased fighting to free Iraq from American domination.

The six marines—a sniper team dispatched on foot into the town to assassinate insurgents—were instead stalked by the Iraqi fighters, possibly filmed and then ambushed. Locals told Associated Press that the insurgents triumphantly paraded American weapons and equipment through the town streets shortly after.

The attack on the armoured vehicle demonstrated that the resistance has become increasingly expert at inflicting casualties on US forces with improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Richard Bridges, a spokesman for the Joint IED Defeat Task Force, told Knight Ridder last month that insurgents were “now using larger, more powerful IEDs, and they are attacking the undercarriages of our vehicles now, where the armour is not as thick as on the sides. They are also, in some instances, using home-engineered shaped charges that are more effective at penetrating armour”. Guerillas are rigging bombs that are so powerful they can destroy the US Army’s main Abram battle tanks.

Since the invasion in March 2003, the Bush administration has sought to conceal its effects from the American people. Any images of returning coffins have been proscribed, while Iraqi casualties have not even been counted, in order to insulate public opinion from the real cost of the war.

The reality, however, is being registered in the devastating impact of the growing casualties on communities across the United States. American fatalities in Iraq have now reached 1,825, with 50 killed in just the 10 days from July 24 to August 3. At least 13,700 personnel have been wounded-in-action and thousands more stricken by illness since the invasion. In July—a relatively typical month for the occupation forces—54 American troops, three British soldiers, four western contractors and at least 304 Iraqi government military and police personnel were killed. Well over 500 US troops were wounded.

Who are these soldiers being killed, maimed and damaged? They are overwhelmingly economic conscripts: young men and women who are only in the military due to the lack of opportunity and deprivation that faces millions of working class families across the United States. They have been flung into a nightmare of death and destruction for which there is no political or moral justification.

The lives lost this week near Haditha are a particular catastrophe for dozens of working class families in the state of Ohio. All 20 marines who were killed were part of the 3rd battalion, 25th Marines, a reserve unit based in the Cleveland suburb of Brook Park. The community has suffered blows from which it will never recover. The 3/25 had already suffered significant losses over the past three months. Out of some 900

marines, 45 have been killed and scores more wounded.

Eleanor Matelski, a 69-year-old woman in Brook Park, emotionally told Associated Press: “Tell Bush to get our soldiers out of there now before any more of our soldiers die. This is getting ridiculous.”

As well as the deaths and physical injuries, thousands of US soldiers are suffering immense psychological harm. Many are being rendered dysfunctional or indifferent to human life by the ever more murderous campaign of repression they are being ordered to carry out against the Iraqi civilian population. American society will pay a heavy price in coming years for this process of brutalisation.

Bush’s answer to the increasingly terrible cost of the Iraq war has been more lies. The young soldiers, he stated on Wednesday, “have died in a noble cause and a selfless cause”. US troops would not leave Iraq, he declared, “before the mission is complete”.

But what is the mission? In March 2003, Americans were told the mission was to disarm the regime of Saddam Hussein of “weapons of mass destruction”, stop its support for international terrorism and “liberate” the Iraqi people from tyranny. All these claims have proven false. There were no WMDs and Iraq had no links with Al Qaeda. As for “liberation”, so far as many as 100,000 Iraqis have lost their lives due to the US-led invasion and occupation and the country has been devastated. For millions of ordinary people, the war has brought rampant shortages, disease, malnutrition, poverty, crime and the constant risk of death or injury.

After the discrediting of the original propaganda, Washington has justified the war on the grounds it is bringing democracy to the Iraqi people. This is just as false. The US exerts direct control over the Iraqi government’s armed forces and behind-the-scenes control over the economy, including the plans to sell off the country’s oil industry to American corporate interests. The Shiite fundamentalist-led government installed by the occupation is accused of operating death squads against its political opponents and suppressing the civil liberties of minorities and women.

American soldiers are not dying for a noble cause. They are the cannon fodder in a criminal, imperialist mission that involves an indefinite colonial war of repression in Iraq. The longer the war has ground on, the more the Bush administration and the Pentagon have deployed part-time National Guardsmen and reservists to fill the ranks of the occupation force, flinging them into harm’s way, often without adequate training and with substandard equipment. The contempt of the US elite for the lives of the Iraqi people is matched by their contempt for the lives of American working class youth.

Further wars are clearly being prepared. This is the meaning of the constant threats being made by the White House against Syria and Iran. The real aim of the invasion of Iraq is an attempt by the US ruling elite to dominate the oil resources and territory of the entire Middle East. The Democrats fully endorse

this perspective. In response to this week’s casualties, they have reiterated their support for the Iraq occupation.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party call for a renewal of mass antiwar protests in the United States and internationally. It is not worth losing one more life for the reckless militarist agenda of the Bush White House. The economy of militarism must be answered with the demand that the vast resources being squandered on war be redirected to addressing the social crisis afflicting millions of working people in the US. Billions should be spent providing urgently needed infrastructure, social services, health care and training. The very areas where the military signs up its recruits are among the most deprived, blighted by decades of factory closures and job losses.

The antiwar movement must demand the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US and foreign troops from Iraq and the Middle East, the payment of reparations to the Iraqi people, and the prosecution for war crimes of all those responsible for the planning and conduct of the war.

Just as crucially, there must be a turn by opponents of US imperialism to using every means possible to clarify and educate the broadest layers of the population about the real motives of the war. A recent opinion poll, for example, found that as many as one in three Americans still believe the lie that the Saddam Hussein was implicated in the September 11, 2001 terror attacks on the US. To the extent that the Bush administration is able to harness support, it stems in large part from the tremendous disorientation and confusion that constant government and media propaganda has caused.

Such a struggle cannot be developed within the two-party system or the official political framework. It requires, above all, the establishment of the political independence of the working class through the building of a mass socialist movement in the US and internationally.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact