

US death toll hits 2,000—grim milestone in a criminal war

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The number of US military personnel killed in the Iraq war passed 2,000 Tuesday with the Pentagon's announcement of three more combat fatalities. This grim milestone is all the more tragic because the lives of these soldiers have been sacrificed in a war based upon lies.

They have been killed 7,000 miles from their homes fighting in a war launched for reasons that have never been publicly stated. The soldiers have died not to put an end to "terrorism" or secure "weapons of mass destruction", but to seize control of Iraq's strategic oil reserves and ensure the global dominance of the financial and corporate interests that determine the foreign policy of the United States.

In addition to the 2,000 killed, more than 15,000 have been wounded, many of them seriously. Thousands have lost limbs and many have suffered severe brain injuries. And many thousands more have returned mentally and emotionally traumatized from the carnage that they have both witnessed and inflicted.

The 2,000th fatality came with the death of 34-year-old Staff Sgt. George T. Alexander Jr., who had been sent to the Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas with severe wounds suffered after a roadside bomb detonated near his Bradley Fighting Vehicle in Samarra on October 17.

Also on Tuesday, the Pentagon announced that two unidentified military personnel—a sailor and a Marine—were killed in fighting last week in a village 25 miles west of Baghdad. They were among the 67 US troops killed so far this month.

The response of the Bush administration and the military brass to the US death toll reaching 2,000 was predictably callous. Knowing that the milestone would be marked Tuesday—and fearing its impact on his already crisis-ridden presidency—Bush chose the day to

address a safe audience of officers' wives at Washington's Bolling Air Force Base.

Making no mention of the death toll, Bush only warned that even more will have to die. "This war will require more sacrifice, more time and more resolve," he said. "The best way to honor the sacrifice of our fallen heroes is to complete the mission."

This is truly the last refuge of the militarist scoundrel: the war must continue and thousands more must die to validate the sacrifices that have already been made.

The Pentagon's spokesman Lt. Col. Steven A. Boylan sent an email to reporters in Baghdad warning them not to make too much of the death toll. He called reaching the 2,000th US military fatality in Iraq "an artificial mark on the wall set by individuals or groups with specific agendas and ulterior motives. In some cases, this could be the creating [of] news where none really exists."

Within this odious statement there is an unintended kernel of truth. The human toll exacted by the war has not really been news. The White House and the Pentagon have worked diligently to prevent it from becoming so—barring cameras from Dover Air Force Base, where the coffins come home from the war, and sending the president to no funerals or memorial services for the slain soldiers.

The images of the dead—both American and Iraqi—are largely self-censored by the American media.

But this "mark on the wall" is an indicator of the price that the American people have paid because of a war that they were dragged into on false pretenses. Of those in uniform who have died, 357 of them had yet to reach their 21st birthday.

Among the latest fatalities announced by the Pentagon were Kenneth J. Butler, a 19-year-old Marine from North Carolina; Sgt. Jacob D. Dones, 21, from

Texas; and Cpl. Seamus Davey, 25, from New York.

The carnage inflicted on the Iraqis is not even counted—outside of the half-hearted efforts of the Pentagon to offer “body counts” for its recent counterinsurgency operations. The civilian death toll since the March 2003 invasion is estimated at over 100,000. Hundreds more die every week. In a country where six out of ten people are under the age of 18, a shocking percentage of those left dead and maimed by the US occupation are children.

The announcement of the new milestone in the US death toll came amidst mounting recriminations within the US ruling establishment over the deepening debacle in Iraq.

“The case that I saw for four-plus years was a case I have never seen in my studies of aberrations, bastardizations, perturbations, changes to the national security decision-making process,” Lawrence B. Wilkerson, who was chief of staff to then secretary of state Colin Powell during the war’s buildup and launching, said in a recent speech. “What I saw was a cabal between the vice president of the United States, Richard Cheney, and the secretary of defense, Donald Rumsfeld, on critical issues that made decisions that the bureaucracy did not know were being made.”

Even more damning were the statements of former ambassador Robin Raphel, a veteran US diplomat who played a prominent role in the Coalition Provisional Authority, the US colonial apparatus that ruled Iraq in the wake of the invasion. The Bush administration, she said in an oral history interview posted on the web site of the US Institute of Peace, was “not prepared” when it invaded Iraq, but launched the war anyway because of “clear political pressure, election driven and calendar driven.”

Then there is the interview given to the *New Yorker* magazine by Brent Scowcroft, the national security advisor to Bush senior, attacking the premises given for the invasion and occupation of Iraq and referring to Cheney, with whom he worked for years, as a man “I don’t know anymore.”

These critiques—arising from the failure of the administration’s war plans—expose that the invasion was from the outset a “war of choice,” a criminal venture aimed at imposing Washington’s neo-colonialist domination over Iraq and the region as a whole. It is for this crime that 2,000 soldiers’ lives

have been needlessly sacrificed.

The 2,000 milestone will quickly fade into history as the war grinds on, producing more and more deaths, both Iraqi and American. In just over one year, 1,000 US soldiers have been killed. The death toll will continue to grow apace, reaching 5,000, 10,000 and more, unless Washington is forced to withdraw all US troops from Iraq.

Despite the divisions and crisis within the American ruling elite over the Iraqi quagmire, there is no indication that the administration has any intention of withdrawing, and, indeed, there is no demand from the leadership of its ostensible political opposition, the Democratic Party, for it to do so. The two major parties remain convinced that securing US hegemony over Iraq and its oil reserves is in the vital interests of the corporations, banks and wealthy individuals that they both represent.

A halt to the mounting toll of deaths in Iraq will come only through the development of an independent mass movement of political opposition from below, from the masses of American working people who oppose the war and want to see no more American youth in uniform sacrificed for the interests of a tiny, predatory elite.



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