

US death toll reaches 3,000 in Iraq, with no let-up in sight

Joe Kay
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The number of US soldiers killed in Iraq since the invasion topped 3,000 just before the New Year. This new milestone comes as the Bush administration is planning to increase the number of soldiers in Iraq, in preparation for a major military offensive that will lead to a sharp increase in Iraqi and US casualties.

With 111 soldiers killed, December 2006 was the deadliest month for US forces since the brutal invasion and destruction of Fallujah in November 2004.

The number of US soldiers killed would be much higher were it not for the introduction of more advanced medical techniques and body armor, which leave more soldiers alive, but seriously injured. The number of soldiers sustaining serious injuries, in combat and non-combat operations, is estimated at 46,800—an extremely high proportion of the total number of soldiers in Iraq.

By all accounts, the frequency and impact of attacks on US soldiers have increased over the past period. Nearly half of American casualties are now caused by roadside bombs, which Iraqi insurgents have developed to more effectively puncture the armored vehicles that carry US soldiers on patrol.

A considerable proportion of the recent deaths has occurred in the western Iraqi province of Anbar, where US soldiers have been engaged in a lengthy offensive against the largely Sunni population in the region. This conflict has gone virtually unreported in the US media, which confines itself to reporting from the “green zone” of Baghdad.

The US soldiers killed in Iraq are generally youth from rural and working class backgrounds. A *New York Times* article from January 1 noted, “The service members who died during this latest period fit an unchanging profile. They were mostly white men from rural areas, soldiers so young they still held fresh

memories of high school football heroics and teenage escapades. Many men and women were in Iraq for the second or third time. Some were going on their fourth, fifth or sixth deployment.”

The number of US soldiers killed is of course dwarfed by the number of Iraqis who have died in the carnage created by the American occupation. An estimate for Iraqi deaths in excess of the pre-invasion mortality rate, published by the medical journal *Lancet*, put the figure at 655,000 through June 2006. This would mean that the death figure is now well above 700,000.

To this must be added 250 killed from other countries besides the US, along with 750 serious injuries.

The Bush administration and military brass reacted with predictable indifference to the consequences of their war policy. White House spokesman Scott Stanzel said that Bush “grieves” for every soldier who dies, while insisting that he “will ensure their sacrifice was not made in vain. The war on terror will be a long struggle.” In other words, the response of the “grieving” Bush will be to continue, and escalate, the military campaign of the United States—the blood of these 3,000 will presumably be made worthwhile by adding thousands more to the list of those killed.

Neither the Pentagon nor the White House issued official statements on the milestone, while various generals gave background comments to the press downplaying the significance. The *Los Angeles Times* reported in its January 1 article, “US Marine Corps Commandant Gen. James T. Conway said in an interview that, given the significance of Iraq and Afghanistan to US national security, the death toll in those two countries was not excessive.”

These comments are made for a specific purpose: to prepare the US public for a sharp growth in the number

of Americans and Iraqis killed. The Bush administration has made clear that it has decided on a “surge” option, the details of which will be announced later this month. It is expected that somewhere between 15,000 and 40,000 additional troops will be sent to Iraq, primarily to “secure” Baghdad by carrying out a massive offensive against opponents of the American occupation.

Frederick Kagan of the American Enterprise Institute, who has been one of the leading advocates of the “surge” option, has been blunt in his assessment of the consequences of this policy for US casualties. In a report published last month (“Choosing Victory: A Plan for Success in Iraq”), Kagan asked rhetorically whether more US casualties could be expected. “Yes,” he responded, adding that a “short-term increase in casualties is not a sign of failure.”

Elsewhere, Kagan has made clear that what he envisions is not a temporary increase in US troop levels, but one that will last at least 18 months. In preparation for the consequences of such an escalation in Iraq, the military is planning to permanently increase the size of its forces, while also calling for the loosening of restrictions on the deployment of individuals in reserve units. Most members of the military reserves have already completed their required tours of duty, but there is now a major push to force them to return again to Iraq for at least another year. Thousands more are being prepared to serve as cannon fodder for American militarism.

These preparations come as opposition to the war steadily increases, including within the military itself. According to a poll conducted by the *Military Times* and released December 29, only 35 percent of US soldiers approve of Bush’s handling of the war, down from 54 percent in 2005 and 63 percent in 2004. Only 41 percent said they thought that the US should have invaded Iraq in the first place, down from 65 percent in 2003.

Among the general population, only 11 percent support an increase of US troops in Iraq, while the majority favors a withdrawal.

This opposition, however, finds no expression within the framework of American politics. The Democrats, who won control of Congress in November largely due to popular opposition to the Iraq occupation, have made clear that they will take no serious steps to oppose the

Bush administration’s policy. Even though 69 percent of Americans, according to a recent Gallup Poll, say that addressing the war in Iraq should be the top priority, the Democrats have not included any measures on Iraq in their plan for the first 100 days of the new Congress.

Democratic Party leaders have already foreshadowed any suggestion that they will cut off funding for the Iraq occupation, and the supposed opposition party will certainly help pass a \$100 billion Iraq war request from the Pentagon due early this year. Several top Democrats have also indicated that they are willing to go along with an increase in troops in Iraq.

Thus the number of US soldiers killed will certainly increase in the coming period. And for what purpose? It is often said among some opponents of the war that the deaths of US soldiers have been “senseless,” that they have died for “no reason.” The truth, in fact, is worse. They have died for a purpose, but a purpose that is unjust and criminal, a purpose for which every effort has been made to keep them ignorant.

These 3,000 US soldiers, mainly working class youth, have been killed while carrying out a brutal policy of colonial domination, justified and perpetuated on the basis of lies, in pursuit of the geopolitical interests of the American ruling elite. They have died while carrying out a policy that has decimated an entire country and destroyed the lives of hundreds of thousands of innocent people, in order to seize control of the natural resources of Iraq.

Responsibility for these deaths does not lie with the Iraqi resistance. Indeed, this resistance is entirely justified, targeting soldiers who are part of a foreign occupation. This basic truth cannot even be hinted at within the political, media and corporate establishment because its counterpart is the fact that the responsibility for these deaths, along with the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, lies with those who have launched the war and helped justify it—that is, with this same political, media and corporate establishment.



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