More than 100 US soldiers in Iraq killed in April

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The death toll for US soldiers in Iraq climbed to at least 104 in April—up from 81 in March—making it one of the deadliest months for US troops since the March 2003 invasion of Iraq. US military fatalities have topped 100 a month only five times since the war's beginning, according to the Associated Press. A total of 3,351 members of the US military have died since the war started, with another 24,314 wounded.

The spike in American deaths comes as the US surge completes its third month and the escalation of US military operations in Baghdad and the western Anbar province continues. US troops have been increasingly vulnerable to attack as they have left fortified bases, set up neighborhood outposts and been deployed to the streets of the capital and other cities to suppress resistance to the US occupation.

April was also the deadliest month for British forces in Iraq since the first month of the war. The 11 British troops deaths reported last month is surpassed only by the 27 who died in March 2003, reflecting increasing violence in southern Iraq where they are based, particularly among Shiite groups vying for influence as Britain prepares to reduce its forces.

While the Bush administration and the Democrats trip over each other to pledge their "support for the troops," the continuation of the war—which the Democrats are committed to continue funding—will condemn hundreds, if not thousands, more young people to their deaths, bringing incalculable tragedy to communities across America.

In the last few days of April, at least 14 US soldiers died in combat. The nine killed last Friday included five who died in fighting in Anbar province, three who were killed when a roadside bomb struck their patrol southeast of Baghdad and one who died in a separate roadside bombing south of the capital. Another US soldier was fatally wounded Saturday by small arms fire in the same part of the city—a predominantly Shiite area. Three American soldiers and an Iraqi interpreter were killed by a roadside bomb Sunday while on a combat patrol in eastern Baghdad, and another Marine was killed in Anbar province, the military said.

A profile of the US soldiers killed in April is typical of the thousands of working class youth, many from small rural towns and lacking decent prospects for a future, who have fallen victim, along with hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, to this criminal war.

US Army Pfc. David Austin Kirkpatrick, 20, was killed last Friday when his Humvee was hit by an IED. According to local news reports, Kirkpatrick was a 2006 graduate of Eastbrook High School in Matthews, Indiana—a rural town of 595 people about 55 miles northeast of Indianapolis. Growing up with a father who fought in Vietnam, his sister said, "We pretty much always knew he'd end up in the Army or the military at some point." Kirkpatrick was the second soldier from Grant County to die in Iraq within the last month, and the fifth with ties to the county since the war began. In all, 80 people from Indiana have died after being sent to the Middle East since the buildup for the invasion of Iraq began in 2003.

Earlier in the month, Garrett Knoll, a 23-year-old medic who had been in Iraq just two months, was among nine US soldiers killed April 24 when a truck bomb exploded next to their patrol base in Diyala province. Knoll was a 2001 high school graduate, who lived with his grandparents in Bad Axe, Michigan, a town 3,462 people. According to Bad Axe High School Principal Wayne Brady, Knoll attended Verona Mills, a one-room country school, from kindergarten through eighth grade. When he transferred to Bad Axe High School as a freshman, he "fit right in" and joined the

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cross-country, track and wrestling teams, Brady said.

"The news of a fallen soldier was like a punch in the gut for residents of his hometown in Michigan's Thumb," the *Bay City Times* noted. "James Stahl was working in his field when the radio delivered the news about Knoll," the article continued. "I was saddened,' " said the president of Bad Axe Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 116. "You hear it all the time, but it's not kids from around here. Eventually, though, it catches up. It made me think about the Vietnam War and the kids from Huron County who were killed over there. There were four kids from little Filion alone."

The top military commander in Iraq, General David Petraeus, said last week that more casualties are to be expected because the US military was "operating in new areas and challenging elements in those areas." The "effort may get harder before it gets easier," he said. The success of the US military operation in Iraq would take years, he said, as he denounced any plan to pull back troops by the fall, claiming this would lead to an escalation of sectarian violence.

Far from the US surge ending sectarian violence, the death toll among Iraqi civilians continues to climb despite efforts by the US and Iraqi government to conceal statistics that would undermine efforts to paint the military escalation as a success.

Asked by reporters how long the US effort would take, Petraeus said, "I wouldn't try to truly anticipate what level might be some years down the road." However, he noted historical precedents to long US peacekeeping missions. "It is an endeavor that clearly is going to require enormous commitment and commitment over time, but beyond that time I don't want to get into trying to postulate how many brigades or when we would start to do something," he said.

Petraeus also blamed growing US casualties on "exceedingly unhelpful activities by Iran and Syria, especially those by Iran."

The general is the architect of a counter-insurgency plan that borrows heavily from the methods of colonial repression used by the French in Algeria, the British in Malaysia and the US in Vietnam and Central America. This includes building 12-foot concrete walls in Baghdad and controlling "gated communities" in an attempt to divide the population and crush opponents of the occupation. "In the near future," the *New York Times* noted Sunday, "identity cards or internal passports may be issued in an effort to isolate the enemy in Baghdad, as has been done with some success in the embattled city of Fallujah," a city that was laid to waste in one of the worst crimes of the war.

US military forces shelled a Sunni neighborhood in southern Baghdad Sunday morning the day after nine US soldiers were killed. *Agence France-Presse* reported that as the sun rose over Baghdad, a series of massive detonations could be heard from southwestern districts, where Iraqi security officials said a US operation was under way in support of the capital's joint security plan. The artillery bombardment began after 9 a.m. and lasted for more than 15 minutes.

There are increasing calls from the Democratic Party in particular to "redeploy" US troops throughout Iraq and rely on air power and special forces to secure US control over the oil rich nation. By pulling US troops out of the most dangerous urban areas the Democrats hope to reduce US casualties and thus make a long drawn out occupation of the country more politically palatable in the US.

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