Iraq war "surge" claims lives of 12 more US soldiers

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The Pentagon has confirmed the deaths of another dozen US soldiers in Iraq, including six who were killed Sunday in Diyala province, northeast of Baghdad, when their Stryker armored vehicle was hit by a massive roadside bomb. On the same day a US commander warned that American casualties would increase over the next several months, cautioning that it could take years to subdue Iraqi resistance to the US occupation.

Roadside bombs killed two other soldiers Sunday—one in southern Baghdad, the other in north of the capital. A soldier was killed in a "non-combat incident" in Tikrit the same day, while two Marines were killed in combat operations Saturday and another in a bomb attack Friday in western Baghdad.

The death toll of US soldiers in Iraq has now reached 3,377, with nearly 25,000 wounded. Another 388 US troops have been killed in Afghanistan, including two on Sunday who were shot by a soldier in the US-backed Afghan government army outside of a top security prison being expanded to house detainees presently being held in Guantánamo Bay.

The Bush administration's "surge," which is sending nearly 30,000 more US troops into Iraq, is now entering its fourth month. The escalation has placed US soldiers in a far more vulnerable position. Soldiers have left heavily fortified areas, set up neighborhood outposts and engaged in street battles and door-to-door raids. Casualties in May are growing at a faster pace than last month, when 104 US soldiers were killed, one of the deadliest months since the war began in March 2003.

Speaking to reporters Sunday, Maj. Gen. Rick Lynch, commander of the 3rd Infantry Division, said, "All of us believe that in the next 90 days, you'll probably see an increase in American casualties because we are taking the fight to the enemy. This is the only way we can win the fight."

Lynch presented a grim picture of the military and political situation, saying Iraqi fighters had adjusted to US military tactics, were winning support and protection from civilians and intensifying their attacks on US forces.

"The enemy dominates the terrain," he said. "He has the opportunities to set ambushes. He has the opportunity to set traps." Lynch noted that more sophisticated roadside bombs were being used by both Shiite and Sunni insurgents, and added, "You got a thinking enemy out there. As soon as we do something to prove our capability, he does something to defeat our capability."

Although the US commander claimed that the surge would have a "decisive effect on enemy formations" by August or September, he suggested that it could take years to suppress Iraqi popular opposition.

Describing himself as a student of history—and clearly basing himself on the bloody experiences in Algeria, Malaysia, Vietnam and Central America—Lynch said, "Counter-insurgency operations that have been successful in the past took a minimum of nine years. Others took a lot longer but never were that successful. There is not an instantaneous solution to this problem."

The Pentagon and the news media have been silent on what are undoubtedly thousands of Iraqi casualties resulting from the surge, which has included the isolation and barricading of neighborhoods where insurgents enjoy popular support, joint raids by US, Iraqi and Kurdish forces, mass detentions and the use artillery bombardment in civilian areas.

Following an assault Sunday by US forces in the sprawling slums of the Sadr City neighborhood of Baghdad, a local hospital reported that it received at least 20 casualties. According to the Pentagon at least

eight "militants" were killed in the pre-dawn raid and five-hour gun battle.

While the names of the latest US fatalities have yet to be released by the Defense Department, the last dead soldier identified by the Pentagon was typical of thousands of working class youth—along with hundreds of thousands of innocent Iraqis—who have died.

Twenty-four-year-old Pfc. Jerome Potter from Tacoma, Washington, was killed May 3 while on patrol in Baghdad. Potter left high school to join the Jobs Corps and then joined the military, which sent him to Iraq last October. According to the *Seattle Times*, Potter hoped to use money he earned in the military to become a park ranger.

The growing number of US casualties has become a major factor in the mass opposition to the war within the US and the deep hatred of President Bush whose approval ratings have fallen to an all-time low of 28 percent. Nevertheless, the Democratic Party, while attempting to corral antiwar sentiment with its impotent proposals for non-binding troop withdrawal resolutions, is committed to the continued occupation of the oil-rich Middle Eastern country and is about to vote to continue funding this criminal war.

Each of the leading Democratic presidential contenders—Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama and John Edwards—is seeking to craft their own position that will allow them to posture as opponents of the war, while committing themselves to defending US geo-political interests in the region.

Clinton is calling for a vote to end Congressional authority for the war as of October 11, the fifth anniversary of the original vote, which sanctioned the US invasion and occupation—a vote that she and Edwards both supported. According to the *New York Times*, "Clinton said her push for a new vote on the war authority did not mean she would oppose whatever spending measure might emerge from negotiations between Congress and the White House."

While Clinton claims that rescinding the original vote would mean troops would be out by October, the *Times* noted that her aides later said, "Mrs. Clinton was not seeking a total withdrawal of troops from Iraq, or a quick pullout that could put troops at risk. They said she had called for a phased pullout that would leave a reduced American force to pursue terrorist cells in Iraq, support the Kurds and conduct other missions—a

position she continued to support, her aides said."