

American military deaths soar as US extends its “surge” in Iraq

“Second Fallujah” plan for Baghdad’s Sadr City

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22 May 2007

Twenty one US soldiers were killed in Iraq between Thursday and Sunday of last week. Their deaths brought the total number of US military deaths since the war began in March of 2003 to 3,422, according to iCasualties.org, an independent web site that tracks military deaths. Other estimates place the death count at near 4,000.

On Saturday alone, seven US soldiers died. Six American troops and an interpreter were killed when a roadside bomb exploded in a western section of Baghdad, and a seventh American soldier was killed by a blast in the southern city of Diwaniyah, the military announced Sunday.

As of this writing, the US military had not revealed the names of the latest war dead.

The deaths of the six troops in Baghdad marked the second time this month that six US soldiers were killed in a single blast. On May 6, a Russian photographer and six Americans were killed by a roadside bomb as they traveled between Baghdad and Baqubah.

The surge in US military deaths brought the total so far this month to 71. The *Washington Post* noted Monday, “Military deaths have been rising since last fall, and the first half of this year has already been deadlier than any six-month period since the war began more than four years ago. According to iCasualties.org, 531 US service members have been killed since Dec. 1, an average of more than three deaths a day ...”

The escalating pace of US lives cut short and others devastated by serious injury, and the uncounted, far higher toll of Iraqis killed or wounded, is the result of the Bush administration’s “surge” of some 30,000 additional combat forces. The escalation was launched last February in the teeth of mass opposition to the war

expressed in the Republican rout in the November mid-term elections

In a number of recent speeches, Bush has warned that the ongoing military escalation will mean a rise in US casualties. In addition to the nearly 4,000 American soldiers already killed, 25,378 have been wounded, according to official figures.

The latest spike in military deaths comes as the Democratic congressional leadership enters into closed-door talks with their Republican counterparts and the White House to work out a war-funding bill by Memorial Day (May 28) that will give President Bush everything he has requested to intensify the killing and repression—and guarantee a further rise in US casualties. Typical of the cynicism and lying by both parties that has characterized every aspect of the war, this blank check for more bloodshed is being portrayed as a measure to “support the troops.”

The Pentagon said the six soldiers killed in Baghdad had been searching over the past week for weapons caches. Their mission was typical of the operations being conducted to pacify the capital. They have already involved the isolation and barricading of neighborhoods where insurgents enjoy popular support, joint raids by US, Iraqi and Kurdish forces, mass detentions and artillery and aerial bombardments of civilian areas.

According to figures cited by the *Washington Post*, Iraqi government detention centers are now holding close to 20,000 people, while US-run prisons have 19,500 inmates—an increase of 3,000 since February.

The stepped-up US violence is only a prelude to what is coming. The American military has not yet made a serious attempt to occupy Sadr City, the 2 million-

strong Shiite slum where the anti-American cleric Moqtada al Sadr has mass support. Sadr's Mahdi Army militia has long controlled the area, and a key element of the "surge" plan is to destroy or otherwise neutralize his forces.

The Pentagon is waiting until after June 1, when the fifth and final brigade mobilized as part of the escalation is in place. To this point, US and Iraqi troops have refrained from moving beyond a small sector in the southern part of Sadr City. US Special Forces troops have engaged in targeted commando raids to arrest or kill alleged militia leaders, while American commanders seek to negotiate an agreement with Sadrist leaders to allow them to occupy the area.

However, the talks have stalled, due fundamentally to the intensified opposition and resistance of Iraqis, both Sunnis and Shia, to the US occupation. One way or another, the US military is determined to "clean out" Sadr City, and has prepared alternative means.

"If political avenues are exhausted," the *Washington Post* reported Monday, "the US military has formulated other options, including plans for a wholesale clearing operation in Sadr City that would require a much larger force, but commanders stress that this is a last resort.

"A second Fallujah plan exists, but we don't want to execute it," a military officer in Baghdad said, referring to the US military offensive in November 2004 to retake the insurgent stronghold of Fallujah in Iraq's western Anbar Province..."

The assault on Fallujah was a brutal operation that leveled much of the city and killed hundreds if not thousands of its residents. After the mass destruction, the city was for a time evacuated and ringed with US troops. Any such operation in Sadr City would produce a bloodbath of incalculable proportions and inevitably result in a sharp rise in US combat deaths and injuries.

There is no serious evidence that the US surge has to date reduced either the sectarian violence or the insurgent resistance to the American occupation. According to reports in the US press, Iraqi national police reported finding 34 bodies on Sunday: 24 in Baghdad, six in Mahmudiyah, about 15 miles south of the capital, and four in the northern city of Mosul. Another press report noted that several bullet-ridden bodies were found near Samarra, north of Baghdad. The number of dead bodies dumped in Baghdad this month stands at 438.

Over the weekend there were car bomb explosions in different parts of the country, and roadside bombings and other attacks on US personnel continue on a daily basis. Mortar and rocket attacks on the US embassy, ensconced in the heavily fortified Green Zone, are increasing.

Meanwhile, there is no new information on the fate of three soldiers missing since they were captured May 12 in an ambush near Mahmudiyah, south of Baghdad, despite a massive search being carried out by the US military. This operation, involving the ransacking of homes and mass detention of suspected insurgents, is only intensifying the hatred and resistance of the Iraqis.

Moreover, the dangers facing captured US soldiers have been immeasurably heightened by the US government's repudiation of the Geneva Conventions, its establishment of concentration camps such as Guantánamo, and its use of torture against Iraqis and others detained in the so-called "war on terror." War crimes and atrocities such as Abu Ghraib, Fallujah, Haditha and Mahmudiyah (where American soldiers raped and murdered a 14-year-old girl and killed her sister and parents) have encouraged similar reprisals against US soldiers.



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