

Pentagon admits US “surge” in Iraq has yielded only more carnage

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In a report covering the first four months of the Bush administration’s security “surge” in Iraq, the Pentagon acknowledged Wednesday that the result has been only a higher level of civilian deaths as well as substantially more attacks on US forces.

When the escalation of the Iraqi intervention was announced five months ago, President Bush justified the action as a “campaign to put down sectarian violence and bring security to the people of Baghdad.”

In reality, the operation represented a desperate attempt to suppress the mounting opposition to the US occupation and to rescue Washington from the deepening debacle created by its attempt to subjugate the oil-rich nation to US interests.

That ordering an additional 28,000 armed American troops deployed in Baghdad’s urban neighborhoods and the restive Anbar province has led to an increase in the deaths of both Iraqi civilians and American soldiers and marines was entirely predictable. Nonetheless, the Pentagon’s quarterly report, which by law it must issue to Congress, stands in stark contrast to the rosy assessments delivered recently by Bush, Defense Secretary Robert Gates and the top US commander in Iraq, Gen. David Petraeus, who on Wednesday boasted of “astonishing signs of normalcy” in Baghdad and last week described the progress made by the surge as “breathtaking.”

The 46-page report, released on the same day as the bombing of a major Shiite shrine in Samarra raised the prospect of a fresh resurgence of sectarian violence, admitted to a “breathtaking” level of carnage, with an average of 100 civilians having been killed every day during the February to May period covered by the document, while also acknowledging that the number of attacks on both US forces and Iraqis has risen to an average of over 1,000 a week.

The Pentagon claimed that the number of sectarian killings had declined in Baghdad, but had “increased in most provinces, particularly in the outlying areas of Baghdad province and Diyala and Ninewa provinces.” It particularly singled out Diyala’s capital of Baqubah, where it acknowledged that US and Iraqi puppet forces “have been unable to diminish rising sectarian violence contributing to the volatile security situation.”

The civilian death toll given by the Pentagon, which according to press reports concentrates largely on mass-casualty incidents, undoubtedly grossly underestimates the real number of Iraqis that are dying daily as a result of the occupation.

The claims about the reduced number of sectarian killings in Baghdad, moreover, have already been called into question. While there apparently was a significant drop in the number of bound and tortured bodies turning up in the streets of Baghdad between February and April, data gathered by the *Washington Post* and others from the Baghdad morgue in May indicated that the level of killing had climbed back up to levels seen before the surge.

Moreover, violence being unleashed by the US occupation force itself has escalated significantly with the additional deployment, meaning an inevitable rise in the number of Iraqis killed. The study done last year by the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, which estimated more than half a million excess deaths resulting from the US war and occupation, found that approximately a third of all violent deaths in the country were caused by US military operations.

The Associated Press last week reported that alongside the deployment of nearly 30,000 more troops, the US Air Force escalated its bombardment of Iraq, dropping twice the number of bombs on cities and towns that it did a year ago.

Citing Air Force figures, the news agency reported, “In the first 4½ months of 2007, American aircraft dropped 237 bombs and missiles in support of ground forces in Iraq, already surpassing the 229 expended in all of 2006.” These bombardments inevitably claim civilian lives, though US military officials routinely label all of those killed as “terrorists.”

The report was sharply critical of the Iraqi government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, which has proven powerless to comply with the “benchmarks” for political progress imposed by Washington.

“To date, operations in Baghdad indicate that Iraqi government delivery on these commitments has been uneven,” the report said. “For example, there have been reports of political involvement by some leaders in tactical and operational decisions that bypass the standard (military) chain of command.” These types of interventions have been carried out both to order death-squad killings by security forces and to block raids on militias aligned with government parties.

The Pentagon further lamented, “The Shia-dominated government is vulnerable to pressure from large numbers of economically disadvantaged, marginalized Shia.”

The report went on to note that the legislation that has been demanded most strongly by Democrats and Republicans alike in Washington—a law that would open up Iraq’s oilfields to

exploitation by US-based energy conglomerates—has not been presented for a parliamentary debate and key provisions for implementing the law have yet to be even drafted.

It also voiced pessimism about enacting laws allowing Sunni former members of the Baathist party of the deposed Saddam Hussein regime to regain government jobs, because of “strong resistance” from Shia parties, and warned that proposed constitutional reforms and decisions on setting dates for provincial and local elections “could be delayed for months.”

Citing the Pentagon’s conclusions, the *Washington Post* summarized Thursday, “Iraqi leaders have made ‘little progress’ on the overarching political goals that the stepped-up security operations are intended to help advance, the report said, calling reconciliation between Shiite, Kurdish and Sunni factions ‘a serious unfulfilled objective.’”

Meanwhile, the United Nations, whose Security Council voted with little discussion this week to renew its mandate for the US-led occupation forces, issued its own report acknowledging the catastrophic situation in the country and explaining that the UN cannot expand its mission in Iraq because of the worsening security conditions.

“Insurgent attacks persist and civilian casualties continue to mount,” UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in a quarterly report to the UN Security Council issued early this week. “While there was a brief lull in the level of sectarian violence early in the reporting period, it now appears that militia forces are resuming their activities.”

Ban cited as a “major development” in the deteriorating situation the steady rise in mortar and rocket attacks on the Green Zone, rising from 17 in March to 30 in April and 39 in the first 22 days of May. Indeed, on Thursday afternoon between four and six mortar rounds struck the enclave in central Baghdad, sending billows of smoke rising over the building housing the Iraqi parliament. This was despite the fact that a curfew has been imposed on the capital, enforced by US troops and Iraqi security forces.

“These attacks have become increasingly concentrated and accurate and often consist of multiple mortars and rockets landing within minutes of each other,” Ban said. “Armed groups operating within Baghdad have demonstrated their ability to strike at well-protected, strategic targets, such as the suicide bombing inside the Parliament building on 12 April.”

The UN headquarters inside the zone is not secure, he said, and given the “unacceptable security risks” the existing staff will be moved into “more hardened facilities” and cannot be expanded, he explained.

On the conditions facing the Iraqis, Ban explained, “The situation deteriorated steadily” over the past three months. “For every death reported in the news, six family members on average are left without a breadwinner.”

The UN report added: “The rising number of displaced persons is also a cause for concern. UNHCR estimates that displacement has continued at an undiminished pace and over 800,000 Iraqis have been internally displaced since the Samarra mosque bombing in February 2006, while 30,000 to 50,000 flee to neighboring countries each month.”

According to UN estimates, the total number of internally displaced Iraqis has now risen to 1.9 million, while over 2.2 million have become refugees abroad.

A coalition of non-governmental groups issued its own report, denouncing the UN Security Council for its “shocking silence” on the flagrant violations of international law by the US occupation forces in Iraq.

The Global Policy Forum in particular condemned Washington for continuing to hold “a large number of Iraqi citizens in ‘security detention’ without charge or trial, in direct violation of international law.” The group added that detainees are being tortured in “large numbers” in Iraqi prisons, “apparently with US awareness and complicity.”

It also condemned the US occupation forces for establishing “permissive rules of engagement” allowing the use of deadly force in response to the slightest perception of a potential threat.

“As a consequence, the US and its allies regularly kill Iraqi civilians at checkpoints and during military operations, on the basis of the merest suspicion.”

In response to the evident failure of the military surge to produce its promised results—and in response to the plummeting of its own standing in recent opinion polls—the Democratic leadership in Congress issued an open letter to Bush on Wednesday declaring: “The increase in US forces has had little impact in curbing the violence or fostering political reconciliation,” and adding that “the last two months of the war were the deadliest to date for US troops.”

The letter, signed by Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi, vowed to send the White House legislation to “limit the US mission in Iraq, begin the phased redeployment of US forces, and bring the war to a responsible end.”

This hollow pledge comes barely two weeks after the Democratic-led Congress approved a bill providing nearly \$100 billion to continue the war in Iraq. While the Democratic leadership is promising to go through the motions once again of attempting to attach language urging withdrawal timetables and other limits on US deployments to Pentagon funding legislation and other bills, they continue to make it clear that they have no intention of voting to cut off funding for the war.

In direct opposition to the mass popular sentiment for ending the war, the Democrats, like the Bush administration, continue to support the original predatory aims of the US invasion and back the deployment of US forces in Iraq—albeit in smaller numbers—for many years to come.



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