

Fourteen US troops killed in two days of Iraq fighting

Barry Grey
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The US military reported Thursday that 14 US soldiers and Marines were killed in Iraq the space of 48 hours. The surge in American deaths coincided with an enormous intensification of US military violence that has claimed an unknown number of Iraqi lives in Baquba, the provincial capital of Diyala Province, in other cities and towns around Baghdad, in the capital itself, and in Mayan Province in the country's Shia south.

The surge in US deaths brought the total number of American soldiers and Marines killed since the 2003 invasion to at least 3,545, according to the Associated Press count. It follows a US death toll of 230 in April and May, the deadliest two-month period since the US launched the war.

The response of the Pentagon was to tell the American people that they should expect more of the same. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said dryly, "They are in the middle of a battle." Military spokesman Lt. Col. Christopher Garver said, "We have said it's going to be a long, tough fight over the summer. This is part of that long, tough fight."

While the current US offensive is centered in Baquba, northeast of Baghdad, where some 10,000 troops have cordoned off the city and begun a house-to-house search to "kill or capture" Sunni insurgents, none of the 14 fatalities over the past two days occurred there. Twelve occurred in or near Baghdad—which US officials had said would be "secured" by the influx of 30,000 additional troops in the escalation announced by President Bush five months ago.

The deadliest incident took place on Thursday in northeastern Baghdad, when a roadside bomb exploded near a military vehicle, killing five US soldiers and four Iraqis. The US troops were working with the Iraqi Security Force to "clear and control" the neighborhood, as part of the US operation to pacify the capital. Also on Thursday a rocket-propelled grenade struck a vehicle in northern Baghdad, killing one soldier and wounding three others.

On Wednesday a roadside bomb killed four US soldiers and wounded another in western Baghdad. The same day, two Marines died in fighting in the western province of Anbar—a stronghold of Sunni resistance to the US occupation which US officials had boasted was largely pacified.

Two more Marines were killed and four wounded when explosions struck their vehicle southwest of Baghdad, although

there are conflicting reports as to whether the deaths occurred on Wednesday or Tuesday.

Counting a previously announced US fatality that occurred Tuesday in Baquba, the latest military statements add up to 15 troops were killed over a three-day period.

The tragic and rapidly mounting toll of US deaths is a further indictment of the Bush administration and its accomplices in the Democratic Party. This is what the Democratic Congress sanctioned when it voted last month to give Bush his \$100 billion in additional war spending.

But for all the pain and suffering inflicted on American families, who will never overcome the loss of loved-ones, the toll on the Iraqi people is far more devastating. According to the Pentagon's own figures, Iraqis are continuing to die at the rate of over 100 a day—and that must be viewed as a gross underestimation.

The US siege of Baquba is a prime example of Washington's supposed crusade for democracy and security for the Iraqi people. Like the previous mass assaults on heavily populated cities, such as Fallujah and Ramadi, the US operation in the city of 300,000 people is an exercise in mass killing, terror and repression. The claim by US officials, echoed uncritically by the American media, that the assault on the city is directed only against Al Qaeda in Iraq and other Sunni "extremists" is a lie.

The attack is a brutal effort to crush popular resistance to the American occupation in a largely Sunni region, Diyala Province, which has been a stronghold of opposition to the US and its puppet government in Baghdad. And unlike Fallujah, where most residents were able to flee in advance of the November 2004 US assault, most of Baquba's civilian population remains trapped in the besieged city.

The US media, with its "embedded" reporters and vetted and sanitized reporting—to the extent that anything is reported at all—is doing its best to prevent the American people from knowing what is being carried out in their name.

However, a report in the June 20 issue of the *New York Times* by the newspaper's military correspondent, Michael R. Gordon, himself an avid supporter of the troop "surge," provides a chilling glimpse. His piece is entitled "Blocking the Exits," and carries a second headline: "This Time, US Troops Seek to Capture or Kill Insurgents Rather Than Just Dislodging

Them.”

Gordon describes how the US assault forces began their attack late Monday by blocking off all pathways in and out of the city. He notes with evident satisfaction that “the Americans plan to take fingerprints and other biometric data from every resident who seems to be a potential fighter,” adding, “The Americans will also test for the presence of explosive material on suspects’ hands.”

He writes, “American forces have already fired more than 20 satellite-guided rockets into western Baquba. Apache helicopters have attacked enemy fighters.” He goes on to describe M1 tanks maneuvering “through the narrow city lanes,” warplanes dropping satellite-guided bombs on “suspected roadside bombs” and the use of mortar fire against suspected insurgents.

He concludes by detailing how US forces fired a line charge, “a cable festooned with explosions.” When the weapon went off, he marvels, “There was a resounding thud and the skies over Baquba were smeared by a spiraling mushroom cloud.”

The *Washington Post* on Thursday quoted Capt. Jon Korneliussen, a US military spokesman, saying that US troops, having cordoned off the city, “are very deliberately doing house-to-house cleaning.” The choice of words speaks for itself.

The *Los Angeles Times* on Thursday quoted Rami Abdullah, a Baqubah schoolteacher, describing the activities of a Sunni militia that has been recruited by the US to help purge the city of alleged Al Qaeda sympathizers. Masked members of the 1920s Revolution Brigades have been given vehicles by the Iraqi police to patrol the city.

Abdullah said he saw masked men raid a house near his home and arrest two alleged Al Qaeda loyalists. “They whisked them away to unknown destinations,” he said.

He added that masked men had also taken over several homes and were using them as interrogation centers for people suspected of supporting Al Qaeda. “They are executing anyone who is proved affiliated with these groups,” he said.

Such piecemeal reports provide hints of the wanton destruction, mass killing, rounding up of any and all potential anti-US insurgents, and systematic torture that is underway in Baquba. The city is being transformed into a giant concentration camp—a model for other centers of Iraqi resistance.

American officials claim that 41 insurgents have been killed since the beginning of the offensive in Diyala Province. Aside from the fact that the military routinely counts those it kills as “insurgents,” no credibility can be given to the official tally of Iraqi fatalities. Hospital officials reported after the first two days of the offensive that ambulances were bringing dozens of bodies from the western half of Baqouba, the central focus of the US attack.

There is, however, no indication that these methods have improved the military or political situation for the US in Iraq.

On Thursday, between seven and nine mortar rounds were fired in quick succession into the Green Zone, the heavily fortified compound in central Baghdad that houses the US and British embassies and the major Iraqi government offices. The blasts sent a huge plume of smoke rising above the compound, and at least one mortar struck a parking lot used by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and his security detail.

After five months of the US surge, whose central mission was to secure the capital, and with all 30,000 additional US troops now in place, strikes on the Green Zone are becoming more accurate and more common.

As for the purported goal of reducing sectarian and other forms of violence, 18 Iraqis were killed and 67 wounded on Thursday when a suicide bomber rammed his truck into the municipal headquarters of the town of Sulaiman Bek, near the northern city of Kirkuk.

This followed a truck bomb on Tuesday that partly destroyed a Shia mosque in Baghdad, killing 87 people and wounding more than 200.

In fact, the new US tactic of enlisting and arming former Sunni insurgents can only intensify the sectarian warfare.

As the US commander in Iraq, Gen. David Petraeus, made clear in a television interview last Sunday, the perspective of the US military is to continue counterinsurgency warfare in Iraq for a decade or more. This can only mean hundreds of thousands more Iraqi deaths and tens of thousands more Americans killed or maimed.

Their anti-war posturing notwithstanding, the Democrats are in full agreement. They, no less than the Republicans, support the imperialist aims that motivated the war: the establishment of US control over Iraq’s vast oil resources and the utilization of the country as a base for military operations throughout the region.



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