

British-Iraqi survey confirms one million deaths as a result of US invasion

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1 February 2008

Even as the Bush administration, virtually unchallenged by the Democrats or any significant voices in the media, claims ‘success’ in Iraq and makes clear its intention to establish permanent bases there, further polling data has emerged that underscores the dimension of the US war crimes in that country.

The British polling agency ORB (Opinion Research Business) issued survey results January 28 that confirm its earlier estimate that more than one million Iraqi civilians have died as a result of the American-led invasion and occupation. The British agency carried out the work in association with its Iraqi research partner, the Independent Institute for Administration and Civil Society Studies (IIACSS).

In September 2007 ORB made public its finding that an estimated 1.2 million violent deaths had taken place in Iraq since March 2003. The agency commented at the time that US-occupied Iraq had “a murder rate that now exceeds the Rwanda genocide from 1994 (800,000 murdered),” with another one million wounded and millions more driven from their homes into exile, either internal or foreign.

The American media, true to form, essentially took no notice of the report, despite ORB’s indisputable pedigree—the firm has conducted polls for Britain’s Conservative Party and the BBC. The Democratic Party presidential candidates also ignored it. Neither the White House nor the Pentagon felt obliged to comment on the research.

The ORB findings vindicated the study published in the *Lancet*, the British medical journal, in October 2006, which put the Iraqi death toll then at approximately 655,000.

As a co-author of the *Lancet* study, Les Roberts, wrote in an email to *MediaLens* in response to the ORB survey’s publication in September, “The poll is 14

months later with deaths escalating over time. That alone accounts for most of the difference [between the October 2006 *Lancet* paper and the ORB poll].” Roberts noted that the *Lancet* and ORB studies “seem very much to align.”

In its January 28 press release, ORB commented that “further survey work” had confirmed its earlier estimate of more than 1 million Iraqi deaths “as a result of the conflict which started in 2003.”

The agency referred to presumably critical or skeptical “responses” to its earlier work, which was based on surveys undertaken primarily in urban settings, and explained, “We have conducted almost 600 additional interviews in rural communities. By and large the results are in line with the ‘urban results’ and we now estimate that the death toll between March 2003 and August 2007 is likely to have been of the order of 1,033,000. If one takes into account the margin of error associated with survey data of this nature then the estimated range is between 946,000 and 1,120,000.”

The results were culled from face-to-face interviews with a representative sample of 2,414 Iraqi adults aged 18 and over (with a margin of error of plus or minus 1.7 percent). Those surveyed were asked: “How many members of your household, if any, have died as a result of the conflict in Iraq since 2003 (i.e., as a result of violence rather than a natural death such as old age)? Please note that I mean those who were actually living under your roof?”

Among those answering the question, some 20.2 percent reported at least one death in their household as a result of the US invasion and occupation. Within those households, the average number of deaths was 1.26 people. The last complete Iraq census in 1997 reported a total of 4,050,597 households. The polling

firm thus came up with the figure of approximately one million deaths since March 2003.

The ORB-IIACSS team found that more than 40 percent of Baghdad households had lost a family member, higher than in any other area of Iraq. Among those willing to declare their doctrine (about 50 percent of the respondents preferred to describe themselves simply as Muslims), Sunni households were more likely to have known a victim or victims of the conflict (33 percent); the corresponding figure among Shias was 16 percent.

The polling firm conducted 1,824 interviews in urban areas and some 590 “around rural sampling points. The survey methodology utilized multi-stage random probability sampling and covers fifteen of Iraq’s eighteen governorates. Overall 112 unique sampling points were covered—92 in urban areas and 20 in rural locations.”

For security reasons interviews were not conducted in Karbala and Al Anbar provinces, and in Irbil the local Kurdish authorities prevented the research team from conducting its work. The head of IIACSS, Munqith Dagher, told *Research* magazine that Kurdish security forces asked “to accompany our interviewers to the houses, just to be confident that we were not harming or harassing people. Of course, this was just an excuse. I knew they wanted to know what we were doing and they wanted to watch people, to discover how they talked to us.”

The updated survey found that 40 percent of the violent deaths were attributable to gunshot wounds, 21 percent to car bombs, 8 percent to aerial bombardment, 4 percent to sectarian violence and 4 percent to accidents.

The figure for deaths from aerial bombardment, some 80,000 or more, must refer to fatalities resulting from US or British operations, since only their forces are equipped with airplanes and helicopters.

As was the case in September, the American media has chosen to ignore the ORB findings. The web sites of the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Boston Globe* and *ABC News* ran a brief *Reuters* news story about the ORB findings. The *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Detroit Free Press*, *Wall Street Journal*, *CNN* and *CBS News* have had no reference to the survey. Neither Barack Obama nor Hillary Clinton has commented on the death toll. On his web site, Obama

makes mention of displaced Iraqis, but has no reference whatsoever to civilian deaths.

In a speech Thursday in Las Vegas, George W. Bush unequivocally defended the invasion of Iraq and brushed aside public opposition to his policies. Bush asserted, “The decision to remove Saddam Hussein was the right decision. The world is better off without Saddam Hussein in power. And so are the Iraqi people. There has been some interesting progress in Iraq. They wrote a constitution. They voted. Imagine a society going from a brutal tyrant to being able to vote in a short period of time.”

The president boasted that his decision to launch last year’s ‘surge’ in Iraq was “based on the considered judgment of military people” and not “upon any Gallup poll or focus group. It was based upon what was right for the future of the United States, and that is, as opposed to pulling troops out, send more in.”

Bush explained that he intended to go on flouting the popular will: “You know, a lot of folks say, well, what’s next, Mr. President? And my answer is, we have come too far in this important theater in this war on terror not to make sure that we succeed. And therefore any further troop reductions will be based upon commanders and conditions. Iraq is important for our security. I will be making decisions based upon success in Iraq. The temptation, of course, is for people to say, well, make sure you do the politically right thing. That’s not my nature. That’s not exactly what we’re going to do.”

The Iraqi people, and thousands of Americans, will continue to suffer death and devastation until the international working class intervenes and puts an end to the neo-colonial occupation of Iraq.



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