

Further evidence of huge Iraqi death toll

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On April 23, the Associated Press (AP) published a secret tally compiled by the Iraqi Health Ministry that recorded 87,215 violent deaths in the country between early 2005 and February 28, 2009. Violent deaths were defined by the AP's source in the Iraqi government as those caused by "shootings, bombings, mortar attacks and beheadings" and which had been officially registered.

The tally excluded "missing persons" who were presumed to be dead. It did not include the deaths during the three-week US invasion of 2003, during which as many as 30,000 Iraqi troops were killed. It also excludes deaths during the first 20 months of occupation. Thus, it does not count the thousands of fighters and civilians killed in the US military operations, particularly in 2004, to suppress Iraqi resistance in cities such as Baghdad, Fallujah, Ramadi, Mosul, Najaf, Karbala and Basra.

Most importantly, the tally leaves out "indirect factors such as damage to infrastructure, health care and stress that caused thousands more to die". In other words, it does not count the victims of US occupation who died because they could not get food, clean water, sanitation, electricity or medical treatment.

The death toll of 87,215 in the report is therefore only a small proportion of the true number of fatalities since March 2003. How many deaths occurred between March 2003 and early 2005? How many resistance fighters and civilians were buried without notifying the official death registrar? How many bodies were so mutilated that they were never documented or still lie beneath tonnes of rubble? How many of the estimated four million refugees and internally displaced have died? How many have lost their lives from the so-called

"indirect", "non-violent" causes?

The Iraq Body Count project, which meticulously documents the civilian deaths that are reported in the media, also fails to answer these questions. It does not count combatants' deaths, those who die from "non-violent" causes or the many unpublicised fatalities. Its current estimate of reported civilian deaths stands at between 91,580 and 99,985. (See: <http://www.iraqbodycount.org/>)

The most authoritative method of judging the impact of the US occupation on the Iraqi people is through a comprehensive household "cluster sample" survey—interviewing a statistically significant sample of households throughout Iraq in order to make an overall estimate.

The most recent surveys in 2006 were undertaken under extremely difficult conditions. Researchers were prevented from entering the most war-ravaged areas due to the scale of the ongoing violence.

The first survey, by the Johns Hopkins University's Bloomberg School of Public Health, extrapolated from interviews with 2,000 households, estimated that between 393,000 and 943,000 "excess deaths" had occurred from March 2003 to June 2006, with the median figure being 655,000.

Excess deaths referred to the number that would not have occurred if the mortality rate had remained at the pre-2003 levels. Peered-reviewed and published by the *Lancet* medical journal, the study concluded that American military operations and other violence had caused the bulk of the extra fatalities.

Shortly after the Johns Hopkins study, the Iraqi

Health Ministry and the World Health Organisation (WHO) conducted their own cluster sample survey, this time of 9,345 households. It produced an estimate of 151,000 violent deaths up to September 2006.

There was a clear discrepancy between the two surveys as to the number of excess deaths that could be attributed to violent causes. Both surveys, however, found a staggering increase in the overall mortality rate in Iraq. The Health Ministry/WHO study recorded a 60 percent rise in non-violent deaths compared to prior to the war.

Dr Les Roberts, one of the Johns Hopkins researchers, pointed out that the overall mortality rates were comparable, but there was a difference in the estimates of violent deaths. Possible reasons for the discrepancy were explained in a WSWs article. (See: “New study estimates more than 150,000 violent deaths in Iraq over three years”)

More than 30 months has elapsed since the period assessed by the two studies. Even by the official casualty figures, some of the worst killings took place in late 2006 through to the end of 2007. This period witnessed ongoing Shiite-Sunni sectarian violence and escalated US operations in residential areas associated with the “surge” policy. The violence disrupted emergency food distributions, prevented basic infrastructure repair and triggered a flood of desperate refugees out of affected cities and towns, particularly Baghdad.

Based on the results of previous studies, a new, well-resourced cluster sample survey—including interviews in previously inaccessible areas and among the refugee population—would in all likelihood arrive at the conclusion that the illegal US invasion and occupation of Iraq has cost well over one million Iraqi lives during the past six years.

On May 24, 2007, the WSWs editorial board published a statement entitled “US officials guilty of ‘sociocide’ in Iraq must be held accountable”. It indicted the senior personnel of the Bush White House and American corporate establishment as “guilty of preparing, encouraging or carrying out war crimes” and

called for them to be held to account.

The statement concluded: “As we have explained before, this is not a matter of vengeance, but the political education of the population as a whole. The process by which these bloody crimes against foreign peoples are set in motion, as well as their true geopolitical driving forces, needs to be exposed in full view of masses of people. Only when the population understands the character of such wars, sees through the lies of the establishment and takes political matters into its own hands will the mad war drive of American imperialism be halted.”

With the Obama administration continuing the war in Iraq and escalating US military violence in Afghanistan, this assessment is just as applicable to the new occupant of the White House and the administration members and corporate backers who surround him.



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