

Report Shows US Invasion, Occupation of Iraq Left One Million Dead

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The “Body Count” report notes that its numbers are a conservative estimate, and that the total number of people killed in the three countries “could also be in excess of 2 million, whereas a figure below 1 million is extremely unlikely.” (Photo: [Gun Barrel](#) via Shutterstock)

A recently published report has revealed that the US invasion and occupation of Iraq was responsible for the deaths of approximately 1 million Iraqis, which is 5 percent of the total population of the country. The report also tallies hundreds of thousands of casualties in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Authors of the report, titled [“Body Count: Casualty Figures After 10 Years of the ‘War on Terror,’”](#) have told Truthout that other casualty reports, like the often-quoted Iraq Body Count (IBC), which has a high-end estimate at the time of this writing of 154,563, are far too low in their estimates, and that the real numbers reach “genocidal dimensions.”

Joachim Guilliard, the author of the Iraq portion of the study, told Truthout that the new study relied heavily on extrapolations from a previous study published in the prestigious [Lancet](#) medical journal, which put Iraq’s numbers at 655,000, but the study was published in 2006 and is now dramatically out of date.

“The numbers of Lancet, reaching genocidal dimensions, represent a massive indictment of the US administration,” Guilliard said. “Most Western media are not interested in it. The IBC numbers, however, are [seen as] acceptable. They are in line with the general picture of the war in Iraq according to which the Iraqis themselves are primarily responsible for most violence.”

The report, produced as a collaborative effort between Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR), Physicians for Global Survival and the Nobel Prize-winning International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, shows that at least 1.3 million lives were lost in the three countries it surveyed, from the onset of wars following September 11, 2001.

The report notes, however, that its numbers are a conservative estimate, and that the total number of people killed in the three countries “could also be in excess of 2 million, whereas a figure below 1 million is extremely unlikely.”

Iraq Figure Is 10 Times Greater Than Previous Estimates

Truthout has [previously reported](#) on the so-called debate about the true number of dead in Iraq as a result of the US-led invasion and occupation.

It is clear that, as Guilliard said, the mainstream media are loath to report on the true numbers of the dead, as these facts would in themselves be a stunning indictment of US foreign policy.

This is why IBC became the go-to source for casualty counts: Its lowball figures fit the mainstream narrative of the war's impacts, and the organization accordingly garnered an extraordinary amount of media coverage.

This long-time reliance on IBC makes the recent report's figures all the more important.

The figure from the recent "Body Count" report, stunningly high as it is, still only counts deaths in Iraq up until the end of 2011. Some of the worst violence that has engulfed the country has happened since that time.

The report also does not account for deaths among the approximately 3 million Iraqi refugees who have been subjected to conflict zones, disease and health problems.

Nevertheless, the report states that its figure for Iraq is "approximately 10 times greater than that of which the public, experts and decision makers are aware of and propagated by the media and major NGOs."

Guilliard, a former statistician who has conducted work in developing countries in the past, explained how "Body Count" got its figures.

"To get a realistic estimate, I reviewed the major studies and data published on the numbers of war-related deaths in Iraq," he said. "For their evaluation I took into account both the scientific discussion about their different methods and additional information such as reports and statistics on military operations, eyewitness accounts and the number of registered medical doctors who have been killed."

After also checking IBC's figures, Guilliard said that his evaluation showed that the other surveys, primarily that of the Lancet, which was the most scientific study carried out on the topic to date, "provide the far more reliable estimates. At the time of compiling the IPPNW "Body Count," the 2006 Lancet study was considered the most meticulous of all, so we based our own estimation widely on an extrapolation of its result."

Dr. Tim Takaro, another author of "Body Count" and a professor of health sciences at Simon Fraser University, wrote off the mainstream media's choice to stick with the IBC figures as indicative of their being "wary of scientific methods they might not fully understand."

Guilliard said that IBC's numbers are so low because they do not count mortality rates both before and after the start of the war.

"Initiatives such as the IBC ... only count deaths which are considered civilians directly killed through war-related violence," he said. "So not only are combatants not included in the statistics but also everyone who died from indirect fallouts of the war, such as lack of basic health care, hunger or contaminated drinking water. In most wars, that kind of victim exceeds the number of those directly killed. Without detailed on-site surveys, it is hard to reliably determine either whether a dead person had been a civilian or combatant, or the exact cause of death."

In contrast, Takaro explained how "Body Count" got its figures.

“‘Body Count’ is a compilation of data from many different sources,” he said. “Because the best studies on Iraq are the [two Lancet studies](#) and the [PLOS Med. study](#) [PLOS Medical Journal], these figure prominently in our analysis.”

All of those studies included baseline casualty comparisons from before the 2003 war began, which of course IBC lacked.

Takaro, who was also an author of the PLOS study (published in 2013), said that study, which estimated 500,000 deaths in Iraq, “was designed to answer criticisms of the first two Lancet studies, primarily addressing the issue of sampling bias where we deployed new peer-reviewed methods and sample size.”

Critics of the Lancet studies, as well as the PLOS Med. study, accused the studies of lacking adequate sample sizes. However, the scientific methodology utilized in the Lancet studies, as well as the PLOS study, are the same methodologies that have been used in crisis situations around the world for years. In these instances, the methodologies had not received criticism before, which highlighted the political nature of reporting accurately on the true scope of the devastation in Iraq.

Hence, low-end casualty figures like those produced by IBC were never criticized in the mainstream media, whereas more scientific and accurate studies, like the Lancet reports and PLOS Med. study, were attacked regularly.

Nevertheless, the results speak for themselves in the reliable scientific methodology used in the studies, which resulted in reporting extremely high casualty figures.

The lead author of the PLOS study, Amy Hagopian, also said that the study was a low-end estimate, and the real figure was most certainly higher.

Demanding Transparency and Accountability

The report states that, in addition to the deaths in Iraq, an estimated 220,000 people have been killed in Afghanistan and 80,000 in Pakistan as a result of US foreign policy. These findings come on the heels of a UN report that finds that civilian deaths in Afghanistan in 2014 were at their highest levels since the UN began producing reports on the topic in 2009.

Takaro believes it is important that Americans be made aware of all of the figures in the report.

“The chicken hawks, e.g. Cheney, Wolfowitz and Rumsfeld, are never held to account for the death and destruction they bring to a country like Iraq,” he told Truthout. “We want there to be an accounting and for the possibility that if our leaders were held to account for the consequences of starting a war that kills hundreds of thousands of innocents, perhaps we could prevent the next war.”

Takaro pointed out that accurate data is an important step toward avoiding future repetition of the atrocities wrought in Iraq.

“Public health is all about prevention. But there’s very little money in prevention,” he said. “There is lots of money in preparing for and making war. We try to use ‘facts-on-the-ground’ to counter this terrible imbalance.”

The report concludes with a demand for accountability and transparency from the US government.

“The main instrument for denying and ignoring the facts remains the non-disclosure of the consequences of the attacks,” the report states. “Which is inadequately justified by ‘national security.’”

In a press release about the report, Physicians for Social Responsibility emphasized that hundreds of thousands of deaths have, thus far, been essentially hidden from public view, making it difficult to evaluate the ethics of intervention. “Unfortunately, these deaths have been effectively hidden from our collective consciousness and consciences by political leaders seeking to pursue military solutions to complex global issues with little, if any, accountability,” the group stated. PSR went on to note that the report “underscores the scope of human destruction that helps fuel the widespread anger at the Coalition Forces. It similarly provides the context to understand the rise of brutal forces such as ISIS thriving in the wake of our leaders’ failures.”

The report’s foreword, which Takaro also co-authored, states that the public has been purposely kept in the dark about the figures the report makes known.

“A politically useful option for US political elites has been to attribute the ongoing violence to internecine conflicts of various types, including historical religious animosities, as if the resurgence and brutality of such conflicts is unrelated to the destabilization caused by decades of outside military intervention,” the foreword states. “As such, underreporting of the human toll attributed to ongoing Western interventions, whether deliberate, or through self-censorship, has been key to removing the ‘fingerprints’ of responsibility.”

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Dahr Jamail, a Truthout staff reporter, is the author of [The Will to Resist: Soldiers Who Refuse to Fight in Iraq and Afghanistan](#), (Haymarket Books, 2009), and [Beyond the Green Zone: Dispatches From an Unembedded Journalist in Occupied Iraq](#), (Haymarket Books, 2007). Jamail reported from Iraq for more than a year, as well as from Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Turkey over the last ten years, and has won the Martha Gellhorn Award for Investigative Journalism, among other awards.

His third book, [The Mass Destruction of Iraq: Why It Is Happening, and Who Is Responsible](#), co-written with [William Rivers Pitt](#), is available now on Amazon. He lives and works in Washington State.

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