

Washington's Iraq Occupation Kills 655,000

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On October 11, a team of Iraqi physicians, whose work was overseen by U.S. epidemiologists at the Johns Hopkins University's Bloomberg School of Public Health, published a study in *The Lancet*, a prestigious British medical journal, estimating that the U.S.-led occupation of Iraq has cost the lives of 655,000 Iraqis.

"We're very confident with the results," Gilbert Burnham, a Johns Hopkins physician and epidemiologist, told the *New York Times*. The team found that Iraq's mortality rate in the year before the U.S.-led invasion in March 2003 was 5.5 deaths per 1000 people. Since the invasion, it has averaged 13.3 deaths per 1000 people per year.

Wounds from gunfire caused 56% of the violent deaths, with car and roadside bombs causing 14%, according to the survey results. Coalition artillery and air strikes caused 30% of the violent deaths.

By October 11, the death toll for the invading U.S.-led coalition had almost reached 3,000, with 2,754 U.S. and 232 allied foreign troops having been killed since the occupation began.

Over the past seven months the number of U.S. troops wounded in combat in Iraq has soared — from 300 in February to 776 in September, the October 8 *Washington Post* reported. The September figure was the highest monthly level since the U.S. military's assault on the rebel city of Fallujah two years ago, when 1,437 U.S. troops were wounded.

"More than 20,000 U.S. troops have been wounded in combat in the Iraq war, and about half have returned to duty," the *Post* noted. "While much media reporting has focused on the more than 2,700 killed, military experts say the number of wounded is a more accurate gauge of the fierceness of fighting because advances in armor and medical care today allow many service members to survive who would have perished in past wars. The ratio of wounded to killed among U.S. forces in Iraq is about 8 to 1, compared with 3 to 1 in Vietnam ...

"The rising toll of wounded reflects ongoing heavy combat in [Iraq's western province of] Anbar as well as in Baghdad, where U.S. troops face an escalation of small-arms and other attacks as they push into the city's most violent neighborhoods to rein in sectarian death squads, militias and insurgents, officers say."

Since July, the number of U.S. troops in Baghdad has been doubled to 15,400. By the end of September there were 141,000 U.S. troops deployed in Iraq. Associated Press reported on October 11 that the U.S. Army is "gearing up to keep current troop levels in Iraq for another four years."

In September, 74 U.S. troops were killed in Iraq, one-third of them in Baghdad. Most of the rest were killed in Anbar province, where fighting between U.S. troops forces and Iraqi guerrillas is most intense.

U.S. Loses Control

The September 11 *Washington Post* reported that Colonel Peter Devlin, chief of intelligence for the U.S. Marine Corps in Iraq, sent a secret report to the Pentagon on August 16 saying that the 30,000 U.S. marines, soldiers and sailors in Anbar had been fought to a stalemate and lost political control of the province to anti-U.S. “insurgents.” Devlin’s assessment was later publicly acknowledged as being “right on target” by U.S. Army General Peter Chiarelli, the commander of the U.S.-led coalition forces in Iraq.

As the war between Iraqi resistance fighters and the U.S. occupation forces has intensified over the last seven months, U.S. officials have sought to hide this fact by claiming that their troops are combatting a nascent “civil war” between “Shiite militias” and “Sunni insurgents.”

The Western corporate media has parroted this claim. Thus the *Post* claimed that the 35% jump in the number of U.S. troops wounded in Iraq since July’s figure of 574 was a result of U.S. soldiers fighting “block-by-block in Baghdad to try to check a spiral of sectarian violence that U.S. commanders warn could lead to civil war.”

Only a week earlier, on September 27, the *Post* had reported that, according to a U.S. State Department survey, in Baghdad “nearly three-quarters of residents polled said they would feel safer if U.S. and other foreign forces left Iraq, with 65% of those asked favoring an immediate pullout.”

The *Post*’s report added that interviews with “Baghdad residents in recent weeks suggest one central cause for Iraqi distrust of the Americans: They believe the U.S. government has deliberately thrown the country into chaos ... to create an excuse to keep its forces here.”

This was confirmed by a poll conducted on September 1-4 by the University of Maryland’s Program on International Policy Attitudes. The PIPA poll found that an “overwhelming majority” of Iraqis “believe that the U.S. military presence in Iraq is provoking more conflict than it is preventing.” This view was held by 78% of Iraqis — by 82% of Shiites and a near-unanimous 97% of Sunnis.

Resistance Widely Supported

The PIPA poll also found that 61% of Iraqis approved of attacks on U.S. forces — up from 47% in January. Support for attacks on U.S. forces among Shiites had risen from 41% in January to 62% in September. Support for such attacks among Sunnis was 92%, up from 88% in January.

For more than a year now Sunni community leaders have repeatedly blamed death squads operated by Iraqi National Police — recruited and trained by the U.S. and led by U.S. “advisers” — for the growing number of abductions and execution-style killings of Sunni Iraqis.

Despite the exposure in November and December of two secret jails run by Iraqi interior ministry police commandos — jails in which nearly 200 prisoners had been starved, beaten

and tortured — U.S. officials have dismissed such allegations.

On September 20, for example, U.S. Army General Joseph Peterson, who is in charge of training the Iraqi police, told a Baghdad media conference that there were 6,000 U.S. and allied foreign “advisers” embedded with the Iraqi police units. He stated that “none of the death squad members detained in the past month during a security operation in Baghdad had ties to the Ministry of Interior or other government agencies.”

However, at a media conference on October 4, U.S. military spokesperson General William Caldwell announced that an entire Iraqi police brigade — comprising around 800 officers — was being pulled out of service for “retraining” because of suspected involvement in death-squad activities.

Caldwell said Iraqi officials ordered the police brigade withdrawn from Baghdad after 26 workers, most of them Sunnis, were kidnapped on October 2 from a meat-packing plant in a neighbourhood the brigade was supposed to be protecting. Seven of the workers had been killed. The next day, men wearing police uniforms and driving police trucks kidnapped 14 people from a shopping district.

The October 4 *New York Times* reported that an “American military official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said that some of the members of the unit had been directly implicated in death-squad killings.”

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