

Will The Slaughter Of Iraqis By The US Military Ever Be Reported?

Will The US Government And Media Finally Report The Slaughter Of Iraqis By The US Military?

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Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#), [Media Disinformation](#)

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I recently received a set of questions from Le Monde Diplomatique reporter Kim Bredesen about the 2007 Project Censored story about 1,000,000 Iraqi deaths due to the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq. The questions and answers are, I think, useful in framing both the untold story of the slaughter in Iraq and the failure of the U.S. media to report on its extent or on U.S. culpability for the deaths of 4% of the Iraqi population.

Bredeson : I observed recently that your story on Iraqi deaths caused by US occupation became story no. 1 in this year's listing by Project Censored. I wondered if I could ask you a few questions on e-mail regarding this issue?

Regards, Kim Bredesen, Le Monde diplomatique (Norway)

These are my questions.

1. Do you expect that the new administration under Barack Obama will acknowledge the validity of the statistics concerning Iraqi deaths caused by the US occupation force?

It is always difficult to predict the political future, but even if the Obama administration pursues a very different policy in Iraq and the Middle East, I doubt it will acknowledge the amount of violence caused by the war during its first six years. Historically, the U.S. government has a poor record of acknowledging its responsibility for death and/or destruction of other peoples, beginning with the genocide against Native Americans (never officially acknowledged), continuing through two hundred years of the slave trade and slavery (there has actually been a limp official apology), and culminating in the ongoing refusal to acknowledge one to three million deaths in Vietnam caused by the U.S. attempt to conquer that country. 2. You mention in your update to Censored 2009 that there is a media blackout about the dramatic statistics in US mass media. Do you think this will change?

I think that the U.S. mainstream media has a poor record of acknowledging the many instances in which it has (collectively) failed to maintain its constitutionally mandated independence from government policy, and instead has ignored or written false reports supporting government malfeasance and tyranny. It was refreshing that the New York Times and Washington Post acknowledged their failure to report the contrary evidence to the US government claims about WMDs in Iraq, but this is a rare moment that has not led to more independent reporting on other U.S. government action in the Middle East.

I think that we can expect the U.S. mainstream media to continue to compromise its journalistic integrity in reporting on Iraq, and this will mean failing to report its own suppression of the Lancet studies and continuing to misreport the U.S. role in the Iraq war. This expectation is, of course, speculation, but the best evidence for this speculation is the fact that the major media have been withdrawing their personnel from Iraq, instead of taking advantage of more favorable security conditions to send reporters to locations that were previously inaccessible and therefore more thoroughly report the impact of the war on Iraqi life.

3. How have you experienced the coverage about the issue in other Western or international media, have they taken the situation in Iraq more seriously?

I find the reporting in Al Jazeera, the British national press, other international media, and independent U.S. media far more comprehensive in their coverage of the Iraq war. I would not say that they take the situation more “seriously,” — there has never been a problem with the U.S. media taking the war seriously. The differences are in very specific parts of the coverage: reporting on U.S. involvement in deaths and destruction, reporting on Iraqi resistance to the U.S. presence; reporting on the economic and social chaos caused by U.S. military, political, and economic policies in Iraq; reporting on who is fighting against the U.S.; reporting on the actual reality of life under U.S. occupation; and reporting on the day-to-day antagonism of Iraqis to the U.S. presence.

I should add, however, that these failures are not so much failures of U.S. mainstream reporters, but of the editors and publishers who assign reporters to particular stories and not to others. There are many reporters who fit information about all these issues into assignments that are aimed at other subjects. One small example will illustrate what I mean. In reporting about the U.S. offensive in Haifa Street in January 2007, mainstream reporters (for McClatchy and the Washington Post, if memory serves me) whose assignment was to report on the successful capture by U.S. troops of an insurgent stronghold also described the destructiveness of the U.S. attack and mentioned that U.S. soldiers stood idly by while Shia death squads cleansed the neighborhood of Sunnis. This information appeared toward the end of published reports, but it was published nevertheless. In contrast, a CBS report on the overarching destructiveness of the offensive and of the anger of residents at U.S. military actions was not broadcast and was only made public because of the protests of the censored reporter.

4. The journalist Joshua Holland compared the mass killings in Iraq with Pol Pot’s genocide in Cambodia. Is this an accurate comparison in your opinion?

Holland’s purpose in this comparison is the same as my purpose in comparing the deaths in Iraq to those in Darfur: we are trying to give people a sense of the scale of the violence wrought in Iraq by the U.S. military. The mass murders in Cambodia under Pol Pot and the displacements and genocide in Darfur — as well as so many other recent and more distant instances of such violence — all have different sources, intentions, and outcomes from the Iraq violence and from each other. The point of making these comparisons is to point out the magnitude of the slaughter in Iraq, not to make analytic comments about the dynamics of the war. 5. Do you believe it is appropriate that the Bush administration should face trial for their actions?

In *The Fog of War*, former U.S. Secretary of Defense McNamara said to the camera that if

the U.S. had lost World War II, then he and other American leaders would have stood trial as war criminals for the terrorist fire bombings of Japanese and German cities by the U.S. air force. Certainly the actions of U.S. political leaders and military commanders in ordering their troops to attack civilian targets in Iraq (for example the destruction of the city of Falluja — well publicized everywhere in the world except in the United States) fall under the same definition of war crimes that McNamara was considering in making this statement, and so it would be perfectly appropriate for Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Powell, and the various commanding generals to stand trial for these actions.

But take note that McNamara said that trials would have taken place if the U.S. had “lost.” This statement has actually turned out to be a kind of half truth. In World War II, the Japanese and Germans certainly lost, but only a relative handful of those responsible for their war crimes stood trial (the Japanese Emperor, for example, was actually restored to his throne). In the Vietnam War, most observers say that the U.S. “lost” the war, but no U.S. leaders stood trial for the many war crimes they committed during that long conflict. There is no predicting the future, but I expect that, no matter how the Iraq war ends—with either McCain’s “victory” or with the “defeat” that President Bush has repeatedly warned the U.S. citizens about—there will be no war crimes trials of U.S. political and military leadership.

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