

Iraqi Dead Under US Occupation

2009. Acrylic on canvas, 30 x 48"

by
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"We have a better way... Kill them. We are going to wipe them out."
President George W. Bush¹

In October 2006, doctors from Johns Hopkins School of Health along with Iraqi doctors from al-Mustanceriya University in Baghdad published a study in *The Lancet*, a British medical journal, which estimated the number of excess deaths from the occupation of Iraq at about 655,000.²

However, the United States government and media try to play down the number of Iraqi dead, perhaps that's part of the dehumanization of the enemy (the entire Iraqi society). Or maybe the truth would just be too much to handle, especially for the media, who tagged along as side-kicks to the military, cheer-leading the war. Today, the American press likes to say things such as "The number of Iraqis killed...is much harder to pin down." Or, "Iraqi civilian deaths are estimated at *more than* 54,000 and *could be* much higher, *some unofficial* estimates range into the hundreds of thousands." Does that make the 54,000 an official estimate?³

A Duke University political scientist, Christopher Gelpi, continues the myth and media excuses about the Iraqi dead. He publicly states, "[p]eople in democracies generally don't shy away from inflicting civilian casualties...and they may be even more tolerant of them in situations such as Iraq, where many of the civilian deaths are caused by other Iraqis."⁴

Were the Iraqis carrying out air strikes with bombers, fighter jets, and helicopter gunships on themselves? Were the Iraqis using tanks and artillery on themselves? Did the Iraqis conduct "shock and awe" on themselves?

Anyway, Gelpi claims, "the Iraqi death toll probably wouldn't change already negative public attitudes toward the war much."⁵

Sure, it might have been a mistake, an illegal war and occupation, but what are a few hundred thousand dead Iraqis here, a few hundred thousand dead Iraqis there? It's just not a popular issue.

Though, to many Iraqis the *Lancet* study was a low number that didn't take into consideration bodies dumped in rivers, bodies buried by militants, and deaths in areas controlled by militias, outside of the Green Zone. There are often new burial grounds located and the dead are not recorded.⁶ Furthermore, "Across Iraq, deaths and injuries from violent causes were concentrated in adolescent to middle age men. It was reported that coalition forces were "targeting all men of military age."⁷

The *Lancet's* 2006 survey estimated "that as of July 2006, there have been 654,965 excess Iraqi deaths as a consequence of the war." 601,000 of the "post-invasion deaths were due to violence, the most common cause being gunfire." An "[a]nalysis for trend showed that [the] rate for violent deaths increased significantly in every period after the invasion." The majority of "violent deaths were due to gunshots (56%); air strikes, car bombs, and other explosions/ordnance each accounted for 13-14% of violent deaths."⁸

The London based Opinion Research Business (ORB) reported on September 14, 2007 an estimate of 1,220,580 deaths resulting from the invasion of Iraq.⁹

The estimate of Iraqi dead is reached through a scientifically accepted method to measure demographics which include death rates. The same kind of survey has been used in the aftermath of natural disasters, wars and famines, including data on deaths in Darfur, which the United States government says is genocide. The method is called a cluster survey¹⁰

The website Iraq Body Count records Iraqi violent civilian deaths that were reported in at least two press reports, which calculate to about the same percentage of deaths over time. The IBC report gives a maximum and a minimum estimate. The IBC does not include combatant deaths.¹¹

The website Just Foreign Policy continues to update the estimate by multiplying the Lancet number “of July 2006 by the ratio of current IBC deaths divided by IBC deaths as of July 1, 2006.”¹²

Over two and half years ago, 2006, The Lancet estimated “that almost 655,000 people – 2.5% of the population in the study area have died in Iraq.” The Iraq war has become “the deadliest international conflict of the 21st century.”¹³

The war and occupation continues.

Notes

1. Richard Sanchez , *Wiser in Battle: A Soldier's Story*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), pp. 349-350.
2. *Iraq Death Toll 'Above Highest Estimates'* by Ahmed Ali and Dahr Jamail, Inter Press Service, Comondreams.org.
3. *Americans Underestimate Iraqi Death Toll*, by Nancy Benac, The Associated Press, February 24, 2007.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. *Iraq Death Toll 'Above Highest Estimates'*.
7. *Mortality after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: a cross-sectional cluster sample survey*, by Prof. Gilbert Burnham M.D., Prof. Riyadh Lafta, M.D., Shannon Doocy, Ph.D., and Les Roberts, Ph.D., The Lancet, 2006.
8. Ibid.
9. *Iraq Death Toll 'Above Highest Estimates'*; Just Foreign Policy: *Iraqi Death Estimate*, June 2, 2008, justforeignpolicy.org.
10. *Just Foreign Policy: Iraqi Death Estimate*, counter explanation, June 2, 2008, justforeignpolicy.org.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. *Mortality after the 2003 invasion of Iraq*.