

Taking Stock of 100,000 Iraqi Deaths

By Amy Quinn | October 29, 2004

Anne Arbor, MI; Bellevue, WA; Cape Coral, FL; Stamford, CT; Green Bay, WI; Manchester, NH; Allentown, PA; Portsmouth, VA; Cambridge, MA.

These are just a few U.S. cities whose populations hover around 100,000 people. In late October, public health experts calculated that an equal number of Iraqi civilians have died as a result of the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq.

The Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health study is the most reliable estimate to date of Iraqis killed in the 18 months after the March 2003 invasion. The house-to-house study fills a void left by George W. Bush's administration, which has refused to track and publicize Iraqi civilian deaths. The researchers concluded that the risk of death from violence since the invasion has been 58 times higher than the period before the war. Air strikes from coalition forces accounted for most of the deaths. The majority of those killed were women and children.

The U.S. public deserves a realistic assessment of the mounting human costs of the Iraq War. The economic costs are becoming clearer and are just as staggering. Congress is set to expand the nation's price tag of war by \$70 billion after the U.S. election and the long-term cost to each American household will approach, if it doesn't exceed, \$3,500 over three years.

A recent study by the Iraqi Health Ministry, conducted over the last six months when the Iraq resistance has been strongest, concluded that U.S.-led coalition forces have been responsible for killing twice as many Iraqi civilians as insurgents in this period. Similar to the Johns Hopkins study, the Health Ministry study concluded that U.S. air strikes, intended for insurgents, were killing large numbers of innocent civilians.

As the bloodshed surges on the ground, so does Iraqi frustration with the U.S. military occupation. An October poll by the National Republican Institute revealed that 45 % of Iraqis said the country is headed in the wrong direction compared with 39% when the United States transferred political power to a caretaker Iraqi government in June. One third of Iraqis blame problems on U.S. forces.

Not only has the growing death toll undermined U.S. efforts to win the hearts and minds of Iraqis, but it has also helped the resistance quadruple its ranks from 5,000 in 2003 to 20,000 today.

The growing strength of the resistance has led to a surge in attacks on U.S. soldiers, which now average 87 a day—up 100% since the spring. And the lethal impact of attacks on coalition forces may grow. The world has just learned that nearly 380 tons of powerful conventional explosives vanished from one of Iraq's most sensitive military installations after Saddam Hussein's fall. While the news is frightening, it represents only a small fraction of the vast quantities of looted munitions.

Bush's failure to prepare a post-war plan left Iraq vulnerable to the looting that emptied Iraq weapons depots into the hands of the nascent resistance and ravaged Iraq's ancient cultural wealth. In an attempt to downplay the looting and violence right after the war, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld held that "freedom is messy."

That comment was both a wild underestimation of the long-term implications of mistakes the Bush team has made and an outright disrespect for the 100,000 Iraqi and more than 1,100 U.S. lives since lost.

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Critics of the new study say the sample used was small. What's undisputed is that tens of thousands of innocent civilian lives have been squandered in the Iraq War.

If the U.S. government can stick to the claim that it's capable of registering all Iraqi citizens for the January elections, then surely it's also capable of determining how many Iraqis have been killed in this war.

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