

Iraqi Deaths, Uncensored Reports

“Iraq: Not our country to Return to” for Inter Press Service, by Makial-Nazzal and Dahr Jamail, voted #1 most censored story of 2008 by Project Censored.

More information about the story:

#1. Over One Million Iraqi Deaths Caused by US Occupation in Top 25 Censored Stories for 2009

Sources:

After Downing Street, July 6, 2007

Title: “Is the United States Killing 10,000 Iraqis Every Month? Or Is It More?”

Author: Michael Schwartz

AlterNet, September 17, 2007

Title: “Iraq death toll rivals Rwanda genocide, Cambodian killing fields”

Author: Joshua Holland

AlterNet, January 7, 2008

Title: “Iraq conflict has killed a million, says survey”

Author: Luke Baker

Inter Press Service, March 3, 2008

Title: “Iraq: Not our country to Return to”

Authors: Maki al-Nazzal and Dahr Jamail

Student Researchers: Danielle Stanton, Tim LeDonne, and Kat Pat Crespán

Faculty Evaluator: Heidi LaMoreaux, PhD

Over one million Iraqis have met violent deaths as a result of the 2003 invasion, according to a study conducted by the prestigious British polling group, Opinion Research Business (ORB). These numbers suggest that the invasion and occupation of Iraq rivals the mass killings of the last century—the human toll exceeds the 800,000 to 900,000 believed killed in the Rwandan genocide in 1994, and is approaching the number (1.7 million) who died in Cambodia’s infamous “Killing Fields” during the Khmer Rouge era of the 1970s.

ORB’s research covered fifteen of Iraq’s eighteen provinces. Those not covered include two of Iraq’s more volatile regions—Kerbala and Anbar—and the northern province of Arbil, where local authorities refused them a permit to work. In face-to-face interviews with 2,414 adults, the poll found that more than one in five respondents had had at least one death in their household as a result of the conflict, as opposed to natural cause.

Authors Joshua Holland and Michael Schwartz point out that the dominant narrative on Iraq—that most of the violence against Iraqis is being perpetrated by Iraqis themselves and is not our responsibility—is ill conceived. Interviewers from the Lancet report of October 2006 (Censored 2006, #2) asked Iraqi respondents how their loved ones died. Of deaths for which families were certain of the perpetrator, 56 percent were attributable to US forces or their allies. Schwartz suggests that if a low pro rata share of half the unattributed deaths were caused by US forces, a total of approximately 80 percent of Iraqi deaths are directly US perpetrated.

Even with the lower confirmed figures, by the end of 2006, an average of 5,000 Iraqis had been killed every month by US forces since the beginning of the occupation. However, the rate of fatalities in 2006 was twice as high as the overall average, meaning that the American average in 2006 was well over 10,000 per month, or over 300 Iraqis every day. With the surge that began in 2007, the current figure is likely even higher.

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Schwartz points out that the logic to this carnage lies in a statistic released by the US military and reported by the Brookings Institute: for the first four years of the occupation the American military sent over 1,000 patrols each day into hostile neighborhoods, looking to capture or kill “insurgents” and “terrorists.” (Since February 2007, the number has increased to nearly 5,000 patrols a day, if we include the Iraqi troops participating in the American surge.) Each patrol invades an average of thirty Iraqi homes a day, with the mission to interrogate, arrest, or kill suspects. In this context, any fighting age man is not just a suspect, but a potentially lethal adversary. Our soldiers are told not to take any chances (see Story #9).

According to US military statistics, again reported by the Brookings Institute, these patrols currently result in just under 3,000 firefights every month, or just under an average of one hundred per day (not counting the additional twenty-five or so involving our Iraqi allies). Thousands of patrols result in thousands of innocent Iraqi deaths and unconscionably brutal detentions.

Iraqis’ attempts to escape the violence have resulted in a refugee crisis of mammoth proportion. According to the United Nations Refugee Agency and the International Organization for Migration, in 2007 almost 5 million Iraqis had been displaced by violence in their country, the vast majority of which had fled since 2003. Over 2.4 million vacated their homes for safer areas within Iraq, up to 1.5 million were living in Syria, and over 1 million refugees were inhabiting Jordan, Iran, Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey, and Gulf States. Iraq’s refugees, increasing by an average of almost 100,000 every month, have no legal work options in most host states and provinces and are increasingly desperate.¹

Yet more Iraqis continue to flee their homes than the numbers returning, despite official claims to the contrary. Thousands fleeing say security is as bad as ever, and that to return would be to accept death. Most of those who return are subsequently displaced again.

Maki al-Nazzal and Dahr Jamail quote an Iraqi engineer now working at a restaurant in Damascus, “Return to Iraq? There is no Iraq to return to, my friend. Iraq only exists in our dreams and memories.”

Another interviewee told the authors, “The US military say Fallujah is safe now while over 800 men are detained there under the worst conditions. . . . At least 750 out of the 800 detainees are not resistance fighters, but people who refused to collaborate with occupation forces and their tails.” (Iraqis who collaborate with occupation forces are commonly referred to as “tails of the Americans.”)

Another refugee from Baghdad said, “I took my family back home in January. The first night we arrived, Americans raided our house and kept us all in one room while their snipers used our rooftop to shoot at people. I decided to come back here [Damascus] the next morning after a horrifying night that we will never forget.”

Citation

1. “The Iraqi Displacement Crisis,” Refugees International, March 3, 2008.

UPDATE BY MICHAEL SCHWARTZ

The mortality statistics cited in “Is the United States Killing 10,000 Iraqis Every Month?” were based on another article suitable for Project Censored recognition, a scientific investigation of deaths caused by the war in Iraq. The original article, published in *Lancet* in 2006, received some dismissive coverage when it was released, and then disappeared from view as the mainstream media returned to reporting biased estimates that placed Iraqi casualties at about one-tenth the *Lancet* estimates. The corporate media blackout of the original study extended to my article as well, and has continued unabated, though the *Lancet* article has withstood several

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waves of criticism, while being confirmed and updated by other studies (Censored 2006, #2).

By early 2008, the best estimate, based on extrapolations and replications of the Lancet study, was that 1.2 million Iraqis had died as a consequence of the war. This figure has not, to my knowledge, been reported in any mass media outlet in the United States.

The blackout of the casualty figures was matched by a similar blackout of other main evidence in my article: that the Bush administration military strategy in Iraq assures vast property destruction and lethality on a daily basis. Rules of engagement that require the approximately one thousand US patrols each day to respond to any hostile act with overwhelming firepower—small arms, artillery, and air power—guarantee that large numbers of civilians will suffer and die. But the mainstream media refuses to cover this mayhem, even after the Winter Soldier meetings in March 2008 featured over one hundred Iraq veterans who testified to their own participation in what they call “atrocious producing situations.” (see Story #9)

The effectiveness of the media blackout is vividly illustrated by an Associated Press poll conducted in February 2007, which asked a representative sample of US residents how many Iraqis had died as a result of the war. The average respondent thought the number was under 10,000, about 2 percent of the actual total at that time. This remarkable mass ignorance, like so many other elements of the Iraq War story, received no coverage in the mass media, not even by the Associated Press, which commissioned the study.

The Iraq Veterans Against the War has made the brutality of the occupation their special activist province. The slaughter of the Iraqi people is the foundation of their demand for immediate and full withdrawal of US troops, and the subject of their historic Winter Soldier meetings in Baltimore. Though there was no mainstream US media coverage of this event, the live streaming on Pacifica Radio and on the IVAW website reached a huge audience—including a vast number of active duty soldiers—with vivid descriptions of atrocities committed by the US war machine. A growing number of independent news sites now feature regular coverage of this aspect of the war, including Democracy Now!, Tom Dispatch, Dahr Jamail's MidEast Dispatches, Informed Comment, Antiwar.com, and ZNet.

UPDATE BY MAKI AL-NAZZAL AND DAHR JAMAIL

The promotion of US general David Petraeus to head CENTCOM, and General Raymond Odierno to replace Petraeus as commanding general of the Multi-National Force in Iraq, provoked a lot of anger amongst Iraqis in both Syria and Jordan. The two generals who convinced US and international society of improvement in Iraq do not seem to have succeeded in convincing Iraqi refugees of their success.

“Just like the Bush Administration decorated Paul Bremer (former head of the Coalition Provisional Authority), they are rewarding others who participated in the destruction to Iraq,” stated Muhammad Shamil, an Iraqi journalist who fled Iraq to Syria in 2006. “What they call violence was concentrated in some parts of Iraq, but now spread to be all over the country, thanks to US war heroes. People are getting killed, evicted or detained by the thousands, from Basra (South) to Mosul (North).”

Other Iraqi refugees seem to have changed attitudes regarding their hopes to return. Compared to when this story was published in March 2008, the refugee crisis continues to deepen. This is exacerbated by the fact that most Iraqis have no intention of returning home. Instead, they are looking for permanent residence in other countries.

“I decided to stop dreaming of going back home and find myself a new home anywhere in the world if I could,” said thirty-two-year-old Maha Numan in Syria, “I have been a refugee for three years now living on the dream of return, but I decided to stop dreaming. I have lost faith in all leaders of the world after the surges of Basra, Sadr City and now Mosul. This seems to be

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endless and one has to work harder on finding a safe haven for one's family.”

Iraqis in Syria know a lot more of the news about their country than most journalists. At an Internet café in Damascus, each of them calls his hometown and reports the happenings of the day to other Iraqi refugees. News of ongoing violence across much of Iraq convinces them to remain abroad.

“There were four various explosions in Fallujah today,” said Salam Adel, who worked as a translator for US forces in Fallujah in 2005. “And they say it is safe to go back! Damn them, go back for what? For roadside bombs or car bombs?”

It has been important, politically, for the Bush administration to claim that the situation in Iraq is improving. This claim has been assisted by a complicit corporate media. However, the 1.5 million Iraqis in Syria, and over 750,000 in Jordan, will tell you differently. Otherwise, they would not remain outside of Iraq.

To obtain updated information on the refugee crisis, see <http://www.irinnews.org/IRIN-ME.aspx>, <http://www.iraqredcrescent.org/>, <http://www.refugeesinternational.org/section/waystohelp>, <http://www.unhcr.org/iraq.html>, and <http://www.dahrjamailiraq.com/>.

About Project Censored:

Founded by Carl Jensen in 1976, Project Censored is a media research program working in cooperation with numerous independent media groups in the US. Project Censored's principle objective is training of SSU students in media research and First Amendment issues and the advocacy for, and protection of, free press rights in the United States. Project Censored has trained over 1,500 students in investigative research in the past three decades. Through a partnership of faculty, students, and the community, Project Censored conducts research on important national news stories that are underreported, ignored, misrepresented, or censored by the US corporate media. Each year, Project Censored publishes a ranking of the top 25 most censored nationally important news stories in the yearbook, *Censored: Media Democracy in Action*, which is released in September. Recent Censored books have been published in Spanish, Italian and Arabic.

The Project works in cooperation with SSU academic classes Sociology of Media and Sociology of Censorship, where students earn credit for their research and participate in writing the annual yearbook. Additionally, Project Censored sponsors and supervises over 60 student interns a year who do in depth investigative research, sponsor campus events and speakers, and organize an annual national Media Accountability Conference. Students also participate in writing the Project Censored quarterly newsletter (circulation 9,000) and assist with maintaining the Project Censored website www.projectcensored.org, which receives over a million views a month from all over the world.

Between 700 and 1000 stories are submitted to Project Censored each year from journalists, scholars, librarians, and concerned citizens around the world. With the help of more than 200 Sonoma State University faculty, students, and community members, Project Censored reviews the story submissions for coverage, content, reliability of sources and national significance. The university community selects 25 stories to submit to the Project Censored panel of judges who then rank them in order of importance. Current or previous national judges include: Noam Chomsky, Susan Faludi, George Gerbner, Sut Jhally, Frances Moore Lappe, Michael Parenti, Herbert I. Schiller, Barbara Seaman, Erna Smith, Mike Wallace and Howard Zinn. All 25 stories are featured in the yearbook, *Censored: The News That Didn't Make the News*.

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