

A deafening silence on report of one million Iraqis killed under US occupation

By Patrick Martin
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When those responsible for the American war in Iraq face a public reckoning for their colossal crimes, the weekend of September 15-16, 2007 will be an important piece of evidence against them. On Friday, September 14 there were brief press reports of a scientific survey by the British polling organization ORB, which resulted in an estimate of 1.2 million violent deaths in Iraq since the US invasion.

This staggering figure demonstrates two political facts: 1) the American war in Iraq has produced a humanitarian catastrophe of historic proportions, with a death total already higher than that in Rwanda in 1994; 2) those arguing against a US withdrawal on the grounds that this would lead to civil war, even genocide, are deliberately concealing the fact that such a bloodbath is already taking place, with the US military in control.

The reaction to the ORB report in the US political and media establishment was virtual silence. After scattered newspaper reports Friday, there was no coverage on the Friday evening television newscasts or on the cable television news stations. There was no comment from the Bush White House, the Pentagon, or the State Department, and not a single Republican or Democratic presidential candidate or congressional leader made an issue of it. On the Sunday morning talk shows on all four broadcast networks the subject was not raised.

This was not because those involved were unaware of the study, which received wide circulation on the Internet and was prominently reported in the British daily press. Nor was there any serious challenge to the validity of the study's findings.

[Opinion Research Business \(ORB\)](#), founded by the former head of British operations for the Gallup polling organization, is a well-established commercial polling firm. It gave a detailed technical description of the methods used to make a scientific random sample.

Six months ago, by contrast, an ORB survey in Iraq was hailed by the White House because some of its findings could be given a positive spin in administration propaganda. That survey, conducted in February and made public March 18 in the *Sunday Times* of London, found that only 27 percent of Iraqis believed their country was in a state of civil war and that a majority supported the Maliki government and the US military "surge," and believed life was getting better in their country.

That survey also reported figures on violence that largely dovetail with those of the survey conducted in August and reported last Friday, including 79 percent of Baghdad residents experiencing either a violent death or kidnapping in their immediate family or workplace. But its findings of Iraqi political opinions—not the figures on deaths—were given headline treatment in the US press, with articles in the *Washington Post*, the *Christian Science Monitor* and other national media outlets.

White House press spokesman Tony Snow cited the ORB poll at a March 23 news briefing, when he used its findings to rebut the results of a poll of Iraqis by ABC News, the British Broadcasting Corporation, the German ARD network and *USA Today* newspaper. Asked about the ABC poll's finding that Iraqis were more pessimistic about the future, Snow declared, "there was also a British poll at the same time that had almost diametrically opposed results." He added that the British poll had "twice the sample" of the ABC poll, and should therefore be considered more authoritative.

The March ORB poll was widely hailed in the far-right media, including Fox News Network. The right-wing magazine *National Review* declared, "Supporters of Operation Iraqi Freedom will be buoyed by a new poll of Iraqis showing high levels of support for the Baghdad security plan and the elected government implementing it."

The latest ORB poll, focusing on the enormous death toll produced by the US invasion, has received no such positive reception at the White House. There is, of course, ample reason for such hostility. The figures reported by ORB undermine Bush administration claims that its goal in Iraq is to “liberate” the Iraqi people from tyranny and terrorism, or to defend “freedom and democracy.”

The real motivation for the war was spelled out by former Federal Reserve Board chairman Alan Greenspan in a newly published book of memoirs, in which he wrote, “Whatever their publicized angst over Saddam Hussein’s ‘weapons of mass destruction,’ American and British authorities were also concerned about violence in an area that harbors a resource indispensable for the functioning of the world economy. I’m saddened that it is politically inconvenient to acknowledge what everyone knows: The Iraq war is largely about oil.”

Equally significant is the silence from congressional Democrats and the Democratic presidential candidates, all of whom claim to be opposed to the Iraq war. This antiwar posturing, however, has nothing in common with genuine compassion for the plight of the Iraqi people or principled opposition to the predatory interests of American imperialism in the oil-rich country.

The Democrats oppose the Bush administration’s conduct of the war, not because it has been a bloody and criminal operation, but because it has been mismanaged and unsuccessful in accomplishing the goal of plundering Iraq’s oil resources and strengthening the strategic position of US imperialism in the Middle East.

The Democrats do not want to highlight the massive scale of the bloodbath in Iraq, as suggested by the ORB survey, because they share political responsibility for the war, from the vote to authorize the use of force in October 2002, to the repeated congressional passage of bills to fund the war, at a total cost of more than \$600 billion. In any war crimes trial over the near-genocide in Iraq, leading Democrats would take their place in the dock, second only to the Bush-Cheney-Rumsfeld war cabal.

Appearing on NBC’s “Meet the Press” program Sunday, the 2004 Democratic presidential candidate, Senator John Kerry, denounced suggestions that congressional Democrats would allow the United States to be defeated in Iraq. He criticized the Bush administration’s conduct of the war on the ground that it had weakened US national security interests, particularly in relation to Iran.

“We’re not talking about abandoning Iraq,” Kerry said. “We’re talking about changing the mission and adjusting the mission so that the bulkier combat troops are withdrawn, ultimately, within a year, but that you are continuing to provide the basic backstop support necessary to finish the training, so they stand up on their own, and you are continuing to chase Al Qaeda.”

Kerry made it clear that he advocated a more aggressive, not less aggressive, policy in the Middle East. “We need to get out of Iraq in order to be stronger to deal with Iran,” he said, “in order to deal with Hezbollah and Hamas, to regain our credibility in the region. And I believe, very deeply, they understand power.”

When “Meet the Press” host Tim Russert pressed Kerry on the refusal of the Democrats to force the White House to stop the war by cutting off funding, Kerry evaded the question, claiming—falsely—that such action would require 67 votes in the Senate to override a presidential veto. The supposed 67-vote hurdle is an obstacle deliberately conjured up by the congressional Democrats, in order to play their double game of publicly posturing as opponents of the war while allowing the Bush administration to continue waging it.

Kerry continued: “I will fund the troops to protect the national security interests of America, to accomplish a mission that increases our national security and protects the troops themselves. We are not proposing failure...”

What does the pursuit of “success” mean in the context of the reports of 1.2 million violent deaths in Iraq since the US invasion and occupation? It means the devastation of that country will continue until the American and international working class intervenes to put an end to it.