

The human costs of four years of war

The US invasion has caused nearly three-quarter million Iraqi deaths

By the Editorial Board
20 March 2007

On the fourth anniversary of Washington's unprovoked invasion of Iraq, President Bush delivered a five-minute midday televised speech pleading with the American people to give his latest escalation of the war more time to suppress Iraq resistance to the US occupation.

In a subdued and defensive tone, Bush recycled the same lies used to promote and justify the war since well before the launching of the "shock and awe" bombing of Baghdad in March of 2003. He claimed once again that the US had intervened because of the "threat" Iraq posed to the world, without mentioning the supposed substance of that threat, weapons of mass destruction and ties to terrorist groups, both of which were fabricated by the White House.

He made the absurd claim that the US-backed Iraqi regime is "working to build a free society that upholds the rule of law, that respects the rights of its people, that provides them security . . ." This is under conditions in which death squads and terrorist attacks claim scores if not hundreds of lives daily, and disappearances and torture are rampant.

Finally, he once again invoked September 11, echoing the innumerable attempts of his administration to perform the political sleight of hand of blaming Iraq for the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington and selling the war of aggression as vengeance for those killed in the Twin Towers and at the Pentagon.

The "consequences for American security would be devastating," if US troops were withdrawn from Iraq, Bush declared. He continued, "The terrorists could emerge from the chaos with a safe haven in Iraq to replace the one they had in Afghanistan, which they used to plan the attacks of September 11, 2001. For the safety of the American people, we cannot allow this to happen."

The reality is that Iraq had nothing to do with September 11, which was utilized as a pretext for launching a long-planned war to conquer Iraq and its oil wealth. And the US invasion is the cause of, not the solution to, the chaos in Iraq. The claim that the US troops must remain in the country because otherwise terrorists could set up training camps there could be used to justify the invasion and occupation of any country in the world that Washington perceives as insufficiently stable or repressive.

Bush's speech provoked predictable rebuttals from his ostensible political opposition, the Democratic leadership in Congress. Senate majority leader Harry Reid of Nevada charged that the last four years have amounted to "a series of failures by the Bush administration: failure to plan for the occupation, failure to anticipate an insurgency, failure to provide for our troops, and a failure to level with the American people."

Others condemned Bush for allowing Iraq to divert military resources from the "real" war on terror.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi criticized Bush's handling of the war, referring, like many others, to the more than 3,200 soldiers killed in Iraq and the tens of thousands wounded, while adding that the invasion and

occupation had brought "our military's readiness to the lowest levels since the Vietnam war."

Meanwhile, the House Democrats are moving ahead with plans to approve over \$100 billion in "emergency" funding to pay for the war and its escalation, while attaching non-enforceable language suggesting a timeline for the withdrawal of some—though by no means all—US troops from Iraq.

What is ignored entirely in this phony debate and largely obscured by the mass media is the staggering level of death and destruction that the four-year-old US war has inflicted upon the Iraqi people.

Press reports marking the fourth anniversary of the war largely glossed over this question, or presented figures that wildly underestimated the death toll.

Thus, for example, the *Los Angeles Times* reported Monday, "an estimated 60,000 Iraqis have been killed since the US-led invasion on March 20, 2003."

CNN similarly stated, "Iraqi civilian deaths are estimated at more than 54,000, possibly much higher."

The figure of 60,000 Iraqi deaths was given by both NBC and ABC in their early morning newscasts.

For its part, the cable news network MSNBC declared simply that the number of Iraqis killed was "almost impossible to estimate."

The source of these estimates—or why any estimate is next to impossible—is not explained by these media organizations. It is as if the fate of the Iraqi people—whose "freedom" is constantly invoked as the supposed purpose of the war—is a minor question, of no real interest to anyone.

Even if the unattributed estimates of 60,000 dead were true, it would represent a horrifying slaughter, representing 20 dead Iraqis for every US soldier killed. The reality, however, is that the ratio is at least 200 to 1.

In October of last year, the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health published the results of a meticulous epidemiological study finding that an estimated 655,000 Iraqis had lost their lives as a result of the US war and occupation between March of 2003 and June of 2006. The public health experts who directed the study—the only scientific investigation of Iraqi casualties—cautioned that the real death toll could be significantly higher and attributed nearly one third of it directly to US military operations.

Given the marked escalation of the violence in the past several months, it is entirely likely that three-quarters of a million Iraqis have died as a result of the US invasion and occupation of their country.

In addition to those who have lost their lives, one must assume that more than a million Iraqis have suffered some form of physical injury as a consequence of the bloodshed unleashed by the US invasion.

This still does not encompass the full scale of the human tragedy for

which the United States is responsible. An estimated two million refugees have fled Iraq, creating one of the most severe refugee crises anywhere on the planet. At least another 1.7 million are internal refugees, driven from their homes by the war and the uncontrolled and savage ethnic cleansing operations taking place throughout the country.

Given these figures, it is likely that a quarter of the Iraqi population has been killed, wounded or turned into refugees.

This is the real context in which the working class in the US and around the world must view Bush's calls for "more time" to implement his "new strategy" of escalation, Condoleezza Rice's statement Monday that the Iraq war is "worth the sacrifice," or the Democrats claims that the only way to end the war is to give the White House another \$100 billion to wage it.

What has taken place in Iraq and what is continuing and escalating is a crime of blood-curdling proportions. The so-called "surge" of some 30,000 additional troops into Baghdad and Anbar province will only mean an escalation of this mass killing, maiming and uprooting of Iraqis.

In the end, the US intervention in Iraq has amounted to an exercise in *sociocide*, the unleashing of violence, death and destruction on such a scale as to traumatize, deform and even destroy Iraqi society.

This finds its expression in every area of life in occupied Iraq. The country's economy remains devastated, with between 50 and 75 percent of the population unemployed. Poverty has soared, and with it child malnutrition and infant mortality. According to the Catholic relief agency Caritas, nearly one third of Iraqi children are going hungry. Press reports from Iraq indicate that legions of war orphans and impoverished children have taken to the streets of Baghdad and other cities to beg for food.

Essential services such as clean water and electricity are less available to the average Iraqi now than they were before the US invaded the country four years ago, when conditions were already vastly deteriorated as a result of a decade of international sanctions and the widespread destruction inflicted during the first Persian Gulf War and subsequent US missile attacks.

Meanwhile, the national health care system, once considered one of the best in the region, has largely collapsed, leading to countless more unnecessary deaths. In an open letter published earlier this year, Iraqi doctors and foreign aid professionals wrote: ". . . children are dying in Iraq for want of medical treatment . . . Sick or injured children, who could otherwise be treated by simple means, are left to die in their hundreds because they do not have access to basic medicines or other resources. Children who have lost hands, feet, and limbs are left without prostheses. Children with grave psychological distress are left untreated."

The desperate conditions created by the US intervention in Iraq found fresh expression in a poll released Monday by a group of major US and European news organizations, showing that fully 53 percent of Iraqis report having had family member or close friends killed or wounded. Close to 90 percent say that they live in fear of someone in their own family becoming a victim.

Moreover, in virtually every area of life, the poll pointed to a dramatic deterioration in the past two years. Thus, while in a poll taken in 2005, 54 percent said that their electricity supply was inadequate or non-existent, now the figure is 88 percent. Similar changes were recorded in relation to jobs, water supply and hopes for the future. Not surprisingly, the attitude towards US occupation forces also registered a sharp shift, with 51 percent expressing the view that it was "acceptable" to attack them, triple the rate recorded three years ago. Nearly 80 percent opposed their presence on Iraqi soil.

The desperate social and economic conditions prevailing in Iraq, as well as the killing and maiming of Iraqi civilians, constitute war crimes committed by Washington. They are a blatant violation of the Geneva Accords, which imposes upon an occupying power the "duty of ensuring the food and medical supplies of the population," and a special

responsibility to ensure the maintenance, care and education of its children.

Far from reconstructing Iraq, the US occupation has unleashed upon the ravaged country all that is corrupt, sick and criminal within American society itself. This has included the sadism and perversity of Abu Ghraib, the psychotic massacres and rapes for which some lower-ranking enlisted personnel are now being tried and, on a far more massive scale, the outright theft and embezzlement carried out by a host of politically connected contractors, foremost among them Halliburton, whose former bagman is now vice president of the United States.

These are the crimes not just of an administration in the White House, but of the entire political establishment and the social order as a whole.

Every significant institution in American society bears responsibility for this criminal enterprise, from the right-wing leadership that conspired to launch the war, to the Democratic Party, which voted the administration unlimited war powers and hundreds of billions of dollars in war funding, to the mass media, which transformed itself into a conduit for lies and war propaganda, both before the invasion and after.

Behind these political institutions stand the major economic forces within US society—the banks, corporations and, most immediately, the giant energy conglomerates—all of which saw in the Iraq war a means of reversing the relative decline of US capitalism on the world market by means of military aggression and plunder.

As both the Bush administration and leading Democratic politicians like Senator Hillary Clinton of New York issue demands and threats to compel the Iraqi regime to speedily enact a new petroleum law opening up the country's vast reserves to exploitation by ExxonMobil, ChevronTexaco and ConocoPhillips, etc, the already transparent motives underlying the US invasion four years ago are becoming ever more explicit.

These companies are just as guilty in relation to the pillaging and mass slaughter in Iraq as the German firms IG Farben, Krupp and Flick were in the atrocities of Hitler's Third Reich, crimes for which their directors were convicted—if less than adequately punished—at Nuremberg.

These are the real issues confronting American society on this fourth anniversary of a war characterized by unspeakable criminality and filth.

The so-called debate between the Bush White House and the Democratic leadership in Congress over how best to salvage US interests from the debacle in Iraq does not begin to confront these questions. Both Bush's escalation and Democratic proposals for reducing US forces, while continuing the occupation, are based on a continued strategy of conquest and on the conception that, eventually, the mass killing and repression will force the Iraqi people to submit. Both parties express the interests and methods of an American capitalist class that has enriched itself through parasitism and methods of violence and criminality, employed both at home and abroad to effect the transfer of vast amounts of wealth from the working population of the world to a tiny financial aristocracy.

An end to the immense and tragic crisis that now exists in Iraq is unthinkable outside of the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US troops. Moreover, no real settlement can be contemplated outside of those who conspired to carry out this illegal war being held politically and legally responsible, including through prosecution for war crimes.

Such a solution cannot be achieved through the existing political institutions and the two major parties in the US, all of which have Iraq blood on their hands. It requires the independent political mobilization of working people, both in the US and internationally, in a class-conscious socialist movement.

On this, the fourth anniversary of the war in Iraq, the Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site* pledges to intensify the struggle to build such a movement to put an end to war and the profit system that creates it.

We call on all those who agree with this perspective to make

preparations to attend the Emergency Conference Against War sponsored
by the *World Socialist Web Site*, the Socialist Equality Party and the
International Students for Social Equality on the weekend of March
31-April 1, 2007.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>