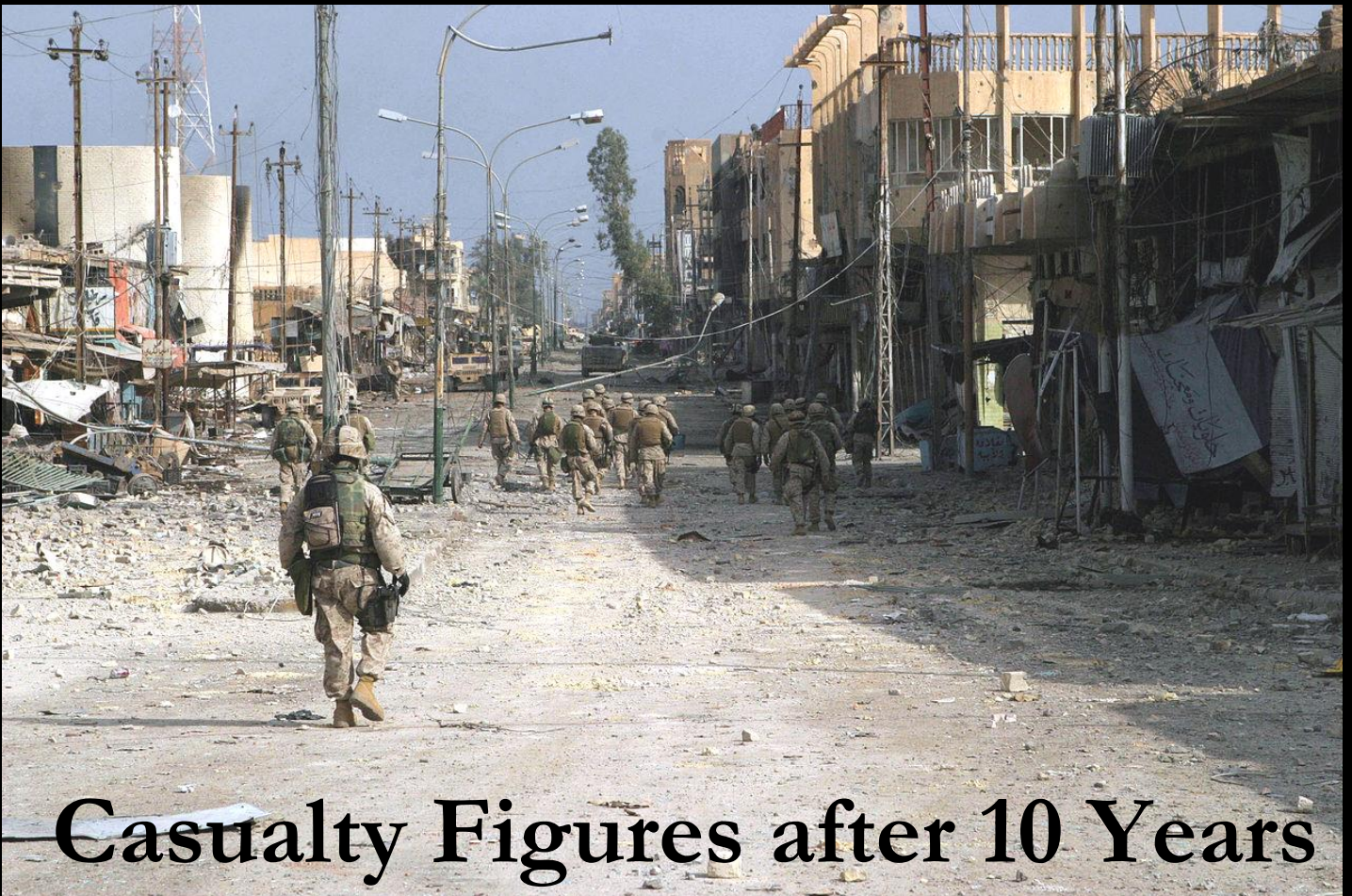


Body Count



Casualty Figures after 10 Years

of the “War on Terror”

Iraq

Afghanistan

Pakistan

Body Count

Casualty Figures after 10 Years of the “War on Terror”
Iraq Afghanistan Pakistan

First international edition - Washington DC, Berlin, Ottawa - March 2015
translated from German by Ali Fathollah-Nejad

available from the editors:

Internationale Ärzte für die Verhütung des Atomkrieges / Ärzte in sozialer Verantwortung (German affiliate), Berlin
PSR: Physicians for Social Responsibility (US American affiliate), Washington DC
PGS: Physicians for Global Survival (Canadian affiliate), Ottawa
of **IPPNW** (International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War)

www.ippnw.de
www.psr.org
www.pgs.ca

hardcopies:
kontakt@ippnw.de (print on demand)

ISBN-13: 978-3-9817315-0-7

Table of Contents

Preface by Dr. h.c. Hans-C. von Sponeck	6
Foreword by Physicians for Social Responsibility (USA)	8
Foreword for the international edition - by IPPNW Germany	10
Introduction	11
Executive Summary	15

Iraq

“Body Count” in Iraq	19
Different Methods of Counting	21
Fragmentary Observations	23
Realistic Estimates through Representative Polls	25
The Lancet Study of 2006	26
The WHO Study	28
Possible Distortions in Mortality Studies	28
The Question of Who Are the Perpetrators	28
Summary 30	
Ostrich Policy	33
 Incomplete Databases	34
IBC Criticism of the <i>Lancet</i> Studies	34
Evidence of a Gross Underestimation by IBC	36
<i>Lancet</i> Study Figures Appear More Plausible	38
Deficient and One-Sided Reporting	39
Examples of Large Gaps	40
 “The Numbers War”:	
On the Dispute Surrounding the Credibility of the <i>Lancet</i> Studies	43
The <i>Lancet</i> study	43
Spontaneous Rejection	44
Barely Disputed Among Experts	45
Criticism from Scientists	46
“Main Street Bias”	47
“40 Households per Day Not Feasible”	47
“No Response to Critical Questions”	48
“Decrease in Child Mortality”	48
“Low Pre-War Mortality”	48
Danger of Underestimation Greater than Danger of Overestimation	49
General Doubts in Representative Methods	50
The IFHS Study	50
Flaws of the IFHS Study	51
Politically Motivated Restriction	52
Who Did the Killing?	53
Political Attacks against the Authors of the <i>Lancet</i> Studies	53
Justified Criticism	55
Summary	56
 Meticulous, But Late: A New Mortality Study on the Iraq War	56
Core Details of the Study	57
Comparing the <i>PLOS</i> and <i>Lancet</i> Studies	58

Reasons for the Difference Between the <i>PLOS</i> Study and Earlier Studies	58
Adjustments for Migration in the <i>PLOS</i> Study	59
Consensus	61
“Response Rate”	62
Problems with the Cluster Selection.....	62
Responses to the <i>PLOS</i> Study	63

Afghanistan

Estimates of the Number of War Deaths in Afghanistan from October 7, 2001 to December 31, 2011	65
Civilians	66
Directly Killed Civilians.....	66
Indirectly Killed Civilians	69
Killed Combatants	69
Killed Afghan Security Forces.....	70
Killed ISAF and OEF Soldiers.....	70
Killed Staff of Private Security Contractors	71
Killed “Taliban”	71
Afghanistan	74
Security Forces Killed in Afghanistan	74
Insurgents Killed in Afghanistan.....	75
Civilian Employees of the US Government Killed	76
Journalists Killed in Afghanistan.....	76
Civilians Killed in Afghanistan	76
Abbreviations	79

Pakistan

Overview: Pakistan.....	81
Journalists Killed in Pakistan.....	82
Victims of the “War on Terror” in Pakistan	84
The Most Important Areas of Conflict aside from the “War on Terror”.....	85
1,842 “terrorist attacks” in which 1,395 persons were killed.	86
An Assessment of the General Data Situation:.....	87
Summary	89
“Crowd Killings”	90
Expansion of the Man Hunt.....	90
Transparency Demanded.....	92
“Tough Guy” Obama	92
A Deceived Public.....	93
Festive Parties as Target.....	93
Disregard for International Law.....	94

Authors / Contributors.....	96
Picture Credits	97
List of Acronyms.....	97



"I believe the perception caused by civilian casualties is one of the most dangerous enemies we face."
U.S. General Stanley A. McCrystal in his inaugural speech as ISAF Commander in June 2009.¹

¹ Spencer Ackerman, "[NATO-Caused Civilian Casualties Increasing in Afghanistan](#)," *The Washington Independent*, April 16, 2010.

Preface

Dr. h.c. Hans-C. von Sponeck

The U.S.-led Multinational Force (MNA) in Iraq, the NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan and the U.S. Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF-A), also in Afghanistan, have carefully kept a running total of fatalities they have suffered. However, the military's only interest has been in counting "their" bodies: 4,804 MNA soldiers have died in Iraq between March 2003 and February 2012, the date when the U.S. body counting stopped. As of early end 2014, 3,485 ISAF and OEF soldiers have lost their lives in Afghanistan since 2001.²

Since U.S. and other foreign military boots are only intermittently and secretly on the ground in Pakistan, mainly in the northern tribal areas, there are no body count statistics for coalition force casualties available for Pakistan.

The picture of physically wounded military personnel for both war theatres is incomplete. Only the U.S. military is identified: (a) 32,223 were wounded during the 2003 Iraq invasion and its aftermath, and (b) until November 2014 20,040 were wounded in Afghanistan.³

No figures are known for mental disorders involving military personnel who have been deployed in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Officially ignored are casualties, injured or killed, involving enemy combatants and civilians.⁴ This, of course, comes as no surprise. It is not an oversight but a deliberate omission. The U.S. authorities have kept no known records of such deaths.⁵ This would have destroyed the arguments that freeing Iraq by military force from a dictatorship, removing Al-Qaeda from Afghanistan and eliminating safe-havens for terrorists in Pakistan's tribal areas has prevented terrorism from reaching the U.S. homeland, improved global security and advanced human rights, all at "defendable" costs.⁶

However, facts are indeed stubborn. Governments and civil society know now that on all counts these assertions have proved to be preposterously false. Military battles have been won in Iraq and Afghanistan but at enormous costs to human security and trust among nations. One must not forget the financial costs.⁷ The 21st century has seen a loss of innocent civilian life at an unprecedented scale, especially in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Nobody should even dare to ask the

² See iCasualties.org: Iraq Coalition Casualty Count, available at <http://icasualties.org/>.

³ See Breitbart Newsletter <http://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2014/11/11/over-20k-soldiers-wounded-in-afghan-war-theater/>

⁴ In 2011, the Brussels Tribunal (BT) convened an international conference in Ghent (Belgium) on Iraqi academia. It revealed that 449 academics had been murdered since the U.S./UK invasion in 2003. Neither the occupation authorities nor the government of Iraq carried out an investigation of these crimes.

⁵ Former U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld in his memoirs *Known and Unknown* (Penguin Books, 2011) refers to Iraqi death squads and sectarianism as causes of civilian casualties. This is not wrong. He omits, however, any reference to U.S. or coalition contributions to the death of Iraqi civilians.

⁶ Former U.S. President George W. Bush concluded in his memoirs *Decision Points* (Virginia Books, 2010): "I did not see how anyone could deny that liberating Iraq advanced the cause of human rights."

⁷ Joseph E. Stiglitz, winner of the 2011 Nobel Prize in Economics, and Linda J. Bilmes pointed out in 2008 out that before the Iraq invasion, U.S. authorities assumed a cost of \$50 billion. Their own estimate came to \$3 trillion, a figure which today is considered too low and likely to be exceeded when final accounts are available. See Joseph E. Stiglitz & Linda J. Bilmes, *The Three Trillion Dollar War: The True Cost of the Iraq Conflict*, Norton, 2008.

question whether it was worth it! As independent U.S. journalist Nir Rosen noted, “the hundreds of thousands of dead Iraqis are not better off, [...] the children who lost their fathers aren’t better off, [...] the hundreds and thousands of refugees are not better off.”⁸

The IPPNW Body Count publication must be seen as a significant contribution to narrowing the gap between reliable estimates of victims of war, especially civilians in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan and tendentious, manipulated or even fraudulent accounts. These have in the past blurred the picture of the magnitude of death and destitution in these three countries. Subjective and pre-conceived reporting certainly is a serious matter. This includes the dissemination of deliberately falsified information. In the context of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, there are many examples of manipulated “facts.” The U.S. Department of Defense’s short-lived (2001/02) Office of Strategic Influence (OSI) is one stark example of government-generated mis- and dis-information meant to influence public opinion in supporting its Iraq policies.⁹

With this publication the public becomes aware of how difficult it has been to grasp the real dimensions of these wars and how rare independent and non-partisan casualty assessments have been. For governments and inter-governmental organizations, the IPPNW review represents a powerful *aide mémoire* of their legal and moral responsibility to hold perpetrators accountable. What is reflected in the IPPNW study is not for the history books alone, but much more significant it is a plea for justice to prevail.

Without the credible information contained in the IPPNW Body Count publication it would be even more difficult to seek redress and justice. As the picture becomes clearer thanks to organizations such as IPPNW about dead, wounded, traumatized, tortured, poisoned (due to depleted uranium and white phosphorus), dislocated and impoverished civilians, accountability for the crimes committed is more and more within reach. Winning the battle over the integrity of information, it must be stressed, unequivocally constitutes a prerequisite for a dangerously overdue debate. Global leaders in governments and in the United Nations can no longer escape from an open and intensive reflection, together with civil society, on the origins of recent conflicts. The public conscience is not willing to accept further procrastination. People on every continent, especially the young who are the involuntary inheritors of conflict, insist on actions for peace. Nothing less!

IPPNW’s timely Body Count publication is evidence of its unrelenting commitment to “ending war and to addressing the causes of armed conflict” and, as such, an important contribution to actions for peace.

Dr. h.c. Hans-C. von Sponeck, UN Assistant Secretary General & UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq (1998-2000); UN Resident Coordinator for Pakistan (1988-94) covering also Afghanistan.

⁸ Nir Rosen, *Following the Bloodshed of America’s Wars in the Muslim World*, Nation Books, 2010.

⁹ Joachim Guilliard reminds us that many opponents of war are not interested in the exactness of reported casualty data. Any fatality, they argue, due to war is one too many. Guilliard, however, makes the important point that reported numbers of deaths carry with it the political weight of how serious a conflict is perceived to be. Knut Mellenthin provides information that drone casualties in Pakistan’s tribal areas had much to do with aimless attacks often facilitated by hired local CIA informants. And Lühr Henkens puts the word Taliban in quotation marks. Rightly so, since both Afghan and Pakistani villagers protesting against corruption and the lack of development in their communities are frequently conveniently labeled as “terrorists” or “Taliban” to justify failed operations.

Foreword by Physicians for Social Responsibility (USA)

By Robert M. Gould, MD, Physicians for Social Responsibility (USA)

Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) and Physicians for Global Survival (PGS) are pleased to make this latest edition of the IPPNW *Body Count* publication available to our membership in the United States and Canada. We greatly appreciate the extraordinary work of members of the German affiliate of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW), and their colleagues, in documenting the true human costs of the various U.S.-led military interventions and operations rationalized since September 11, 2001 in the name of the "War on Terror."

The desire of governments to hide the complete picture and costs of military interventions and wars is nothing new. For the United States, the history of the Vietnam war is emblematic. The immense toll on Southeast Asia, including the estimated death of at least two million Vietnamese non-combatant civilians, and the long-term health and environmental impacts of herbicides such as Agent Orange, are still not fully recognized by the majority of the American people.

Such historical amnesia, as documented by Nick Turse in his disturbing 2013 "Kill Anything That Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam," can be traced to widespread cover-up by US authorities and their media minions of the crimes against humanity committed in "our" name. Similarly, the Vietnam war's consequent political destabilization of the region, associated with the rise of the horrific Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia, is reminiscent of the recent "post-war" destabilization in Iraq and neighbors that has been conducive to the rise of brutal Caliphate "wannabes" such as ISIS that is now terrorizing the region, with often brutal aerial and ground responses by U.S., Canadian and local forces.

However, as invisible as the majority of the victims of our conflicts have been, the over 58,000 American dead, and countless veterans physically and mentally scarred from the war in Southeast Asia created a major political dilemma for American political elites desiring to use US military power to maintain the American imperium throughout the Cold War and beyond.

The Reagan Administration sought to resolve this problem by utilizing obedient client states or surrogate forces, epitomized by the "Contra" armies and death squads deployed in Central America and Southern Africa. With the end of the Cold War, U.S. policymakers triumphantly pronounced the end of the "Vietnam Syndrome," and ushered in a new era of American "boots on the ground" that led ultimately to the debacle in Iraq, Afghanistan and the surrounding region that provides the context for this publication.

As the authors of *Body Count* point out, at a time when U.S. and NATO casualties in the "wars on terror" have been, from an historical standpoint, relatively low, it has been politically important to downplay Allied forces' responsibility for the massive carnage and destruction in the region. It has been similarly essential for U.S. policymakers to hide from view the trillions of dollars expended since 2001, lest recognition of these costs contribute to war-weariness among the Western domestic populations.

A politically useful option for U.S. political elites has been to attribute the on-going violence to internecine conflicts of various types, including historical religious animosities, as if the resurgence and brutality of such conflicts is unrelated to the destabilization caused by decades of outside military intervention.

As such, underreporting of the human toll attributable to ongoing Western interventions, whether deliberate, or through self-censorship, has been key to

removing the "fingerprints" of responsibility. With the political liabilities and costs of occupying forces being increasingly countered by anonymous drone-operators insulated by thousands of miles of separation from the "battlefields" of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, etc., attacks on a "terrorist" conclave or wedding party have become indistinguishable to Western populations more distracted by the devastating impacts of the continuing global economic crisis.

The enthusiastic U.S. Congressional response to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's recent bellicose speech seeking to undermine the incipient deal to resolve tensions over the Iranian nuclear program underscores the continued dangers of unquestioned U.S. policies. By demanding that the rest of the world "do what we say, not what we do," especially regarding the ultimate reliance on nuclear weapons to guarantee the "credibility" of our global military projection, we bring a new option for terror in the Middle East and surrounding region, already one of the world's hottest, nuclear armed "tinderboxes".

With the US and Canadian governments now poised to escalate its military involvement in Iraq and Syria to counter the real and exaggerated threat posed by ISIS, the lessons of *Body Count* can contribute to a necessary conversation regarding the extreme downsides of continued U.S./NATO militarism. Hopefully it can help the North American public better understand the links between the devastation caused abroad and the escalating military budgets that lead to increasing detriment of our communities and social fabric at home. For those of us in IPPNW, this would be an important step towards creating a true climate of peace essential to our ultimate goal of eliminating the potential world-ending scourge of nuclear weapons, and freeing our collective resources to address the looming threats of climate change that requires at least as much creativity from us as a species and is equally challenging to our survival.

Foreword for the international edition - by IPPNW Germany

Jens Wagner, co-editor, IPPNW Germany, February 2015

The international edition of the IPPNW *Body Count* is based on the third German edition published in October 2014. The intention of the publication is to assess as objectively as possible the consequences of recent military interventions, especially those conducted under the label “War on Terror”. To do so, we focused on casualties in the context of these wars.

The international edition of the IPPNW *Body Count* was necessitated by a number of factors. To begin with, the quality of public information and public knowledge about the tragic consequences of Western military interventions has been and is still at a poor level. It seems, however, that the interest in obtaining information on the war zones in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan has increased among the peace and anti-war movement as well as independent journalists. Above all, this has been the case in the context of new political developments, including the war in Syria and the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) in the wake of the U.S.-led military interventions. Also, requests from around the world prompted us to make the entire study available in English, and when doing so basing it on a possibly up-to-date account. More recently, new studies and data that authors deemed important have been published, the reason why they discuss them in the present edition of this study. Here, we can foremost point to a study on mortality in Iraq, published in the open-access medical journal *PLOS Medicine* in October 2013, to new data and studies in the context of the Iraq War logs published by WikiLeaks, as well as to various new sets of data regarding Afghanistan and to some extent Pakistan.

The second German edition examined the cases of Iraq for the period till July 2012, of Afghanistan for the period October 2001 till December 2011, and of Pakistan for the period 2004 till June 2012. The third German edition and now international edition – that subjected the statements made so far on the number of deaths in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan to another round of reviewing and updating – contains a preface by Dr. h.c. Hans-C. von Sponeck, former UN Assistant Secretary General & UN Humanitarian Co-ordinator for Iraq (1998-2000), forewords by IPPNW Germany and PSR, a slightly updated introduction, an extended part on Iraq by Joachim Guilliard who discusses additional sources as well as the above-mentioned *PLOS* study, an additional text on Afghanistan with updated figures covering the period till the end of 2013, and an updated overview on the war situation in Pakistan by Lühr Henken. Knut Mellenthin’s text on Pakistan remained unaltered from the second German edition, while the summary of the entire study has been slightly extended and updated.

The term “Body Count” was taken from the Vietnam War, in which the U.S. army used body counts in the effort to show that the U.S. was winning the war.

As the IPPNW *Body Count* has been prepared by different authors and is partly composed of newspaper and magazine articles, we apologize to our readers for any redundancy and the study’s heterogeneous organization and style. This project, like many others in the NGO sector, has only been made possible by the great personal commitment of all those involved, particularly the authors Guilliard, Henken and Mellenthin, as well as Tim Takaro and Bob Gould, Catherine Thomasson, Ali Fathollah-Nejad, Christoph Krämer, Helmut Lohrer, Carla Wiselmann and Jens-Peter Steffen, to all of whom we express our deepest gratitude.

Introduction

Jens Wagner

Even within the peace and anti-war movement, knowledge about the enormous destruction brought about by high-tech warfare and the actual humanitarian and social consequences of political decisions in favor of military intervention is often quite limited. Uncertainty with regard to the scale of destruction mainly arises from the fact that a comprehensive assessment of the damage is prevented by the Western participants in the war, and that it is very hard to get access to reliable information within the countries in which the war is being fought. Even where there is such information, the partisanship of the mainstream media makes it very difficult to make it accessible to a broader international audience.

In the Western countries, which today are all parliamentary democracies, the majority of the population overwhelmingly rejects war. Today, national political or economic interests would barely be accepted as reasons for going to war. Only when wars can be justified as legally legitimate and morally necessary, do we find more substantial popular acceptance for military intervention abroad. The argument of self-defense, which had proven so crucial throughout history, often collapses quite swiftly – we only need to think of the alleged weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

Today, permanent acceptance of war and occupation is most easily accomplished by using humanitarian, human rights pretexts for war, such as “reconstruction,” “stabilization,” “securing human rights” or “democratization.” After the so-called “global war on terror” was at first justified as a (pre-emptive) self-defense, even later on the continued occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq were likewise explained by those alleged goals. While at the beginning such military interventions were called “humanitarian interventions,” today their proponents try to classify them as part of the so-called “Responsibility to Protect” which Western states try to enshrine as a new norm in international law.

Yet, the more often humanitarian goals are invoked for military intervention, the more we should try to monitor its humanitarian consequences, especially by determining as accurately as possible the number of war casualties.

Casualty figures during ongoing war operations are generally arrived at by using “passive methods.” By this, we mean the evaluation of all sorts of accessible information about war casualties retrieved from news agencies, hospital registers, police records, etc. Active methods, on the other hand, try to determine all victims in a certain area by investigations on the spot, e.g. by asking families after relatives who have been killed (see Chapter 1, section on “Realistic Estimates through Representative Polls”).

As later examinations of conflicts have always shown, passive surveys in theaters of war can only capture a fraction of the entire picture. And the gap between the actual casualty numbers and those derived from passive surveys will be much larger, the less societal and state infrastructure we have on the ground: hence, the “dark numbers” grow. When in September 2009 in the Kunduz province in northern Afghanistan, German Colonel Georg Klein ordered an airstrike of stationary oil tankers, he reported the killing of 56 “Taliban,” in other words all of the people located around the tankers were seen as labeled combatants. However, a detailed investigation into this aerial attack conducted by a commission of inquiry of the German parliament concluded that actually more than 100 civilians

had been killed, among them many children.¹⁰ Had this case not generated such strong public attention, there would have been no exact investigation of the casualty figures, and the incident would not have been included in the counting of “civilian deaths.”

Restricting oneself to certain groups of casualties poses a problem anyway if, for instance, the only persons counted are those who satisfy certain criteria of being a “civilian.” Since such a characterization is a matter of definition, certain victims would then easily fall through the cracks engendered by the chosen definition.

Unfortunately, the media often portray passively collected figures as the most realistic aggregate number of war casualties. Valuable as they may be for gaining a preliminary impression on the extent of violence, they can only serve as minimum numbers. And unsurprisingly, the numbers supplied by the involved Western governments and the organizations close to them also do not produce a complete picture, since they mainly publish what is absolutely undeniable. Whoever wants to trace the actual number of war casualties will have to look for them actively, as was done, for instance, in the 2006 study in Iraq published by the renowned medical journal *Lancet*.¹¹

Contrary to widespread opinion according to which a sufficiently precise estimate of the aggregate number of the casualties of a war is impossible, there exist scientific methods to estimate such numbers in war zones. It is indeed possible to determine with sufficient precision the rise in mortality of the general population during and after military intervention. From a change in the mortality rate, i.e. the percentage of the population that died within one year, one can determine the aggregate number of persons who would be still alive in absence of war, and who thus directly or indirectly fell victim to that war. The mortality rate is an epidemiological figure that can be established by active, standardized statistical methods with definable precision, even in war zones. A maximally precise determination of this epidemiologically determined estimate can thus constitute a decisive contribution to an important political debate, namely on the question to what extent military intervention has contributed to an improvement or to the worsening of the humanitarian situation.

Thus, the intense debate revolving around casualty figures is an important element in the discussion of whether the population supports such interventions or not. It is therefore not surprising that the media, and even parts of academia, be it ideologically motivated or guided by other interests, use starkly sanitized figures (see Chapter 3: “The Numbers War”) And this has been quite successful: In a 2007 poll, Americans estimated the number of killed Iraqis at less than 10,000.¹²

However, should the number of Iraqis killed from the 2003 U.S. invasion until 2012 actually be around one million, as the analysis of the existing scientific studies presented in the present study suggests, this would represent 5% of the total population of Iraq – a number which additionally indicates the extent of the corresponding damage inflicted upon society and the infrastructure. Such numbers

¹⁰ See e.g. Judy Dempsey, “[Berlin to Pay Afghan Families for Fatal Attack](#),” *New York Times*, August 10, 2010; Matthias Gebauer & Holger Stark, “[One Year After the Kunduz Air Strike: NO sign of a Full Investigation](#),” transl. from Germany by Ch. Sultan, *Spiegel Online International*, August 30, 2014.

¹¹ MIT Center for International Studies, *The Human Cost of the War in Iraq: A Mortality Study 2002-2006*, 2006, <http://mit.edu/humancostiraq/reports/human-cost-war-101106.pdf>.

¹² Nancy Benac, “[Americans Underestimate Iraqi Death Toll](#),” *The Huffington Post*, February 24, 2007.

become imaginable only by relating them to known facts: In fact, during World War II Germany lost around 10% of its population.

The estimate of the casualty figures conducted in this study also shows that the much-praised precision weapons do not alter the high percentage of civilians killed in war or dying as an indirect consequence. Since their own casualties are

“Our military forces have prevented a massacre and have saved countless human lives.”

NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen on the 2011 war against Libya, at a press conference on October 21, 2011.



much more important to them than victims among the distant local population, the U.S. and its allies minimize the risk for their own troops by the use of modern weapons discharged from safe distance. Before even sending ground troops, potential centers of resistance are taken out by aerial force. The very high risk for non-participants resulting from the military operations' huge distance from the target and the enormous destructiveness of the arms is accepted as a consequence. The same is true of the battle-guiding maxim “Shoot first, ask questions

later” that was so drastically on display by the video of the operation of a U.S. battle helicopter later published by *WikiLeaks*.

And finally, the executions of presumed enemies through the use of battle drones outside of the war zone itself, which the U.S. President now orders with increasing frequency, do not only violate existing international law but also lead to a high number of civilian casualties. Well-known examples are the bombardment of weddings and funerals or assemblies of elders.

The murder of civilians in Iraq documented in the *WikiLeaks* video “Collateral Murder” and the case of Kunduz are among the rare exceptions bringing the daily terror of war to light, but they are only the tip of the iceberg.

The more the consequences of Western military interventions as well as the resulting casualty figures can be hidden and played down by politicians and the media, the more easily new interventions can be ordered.

This is where IPPNW as a medical-political peace organization has joined the debate, asking three authors to provide their estimates on the number of deaths caused by the three big theaters of war launched under the heading of the “war on terror.” Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan were chosen because it needs to be made clear what kind of damage the wars being launched in the context of an alleged fight against terror have actually caused. Thematically, Somalia and Yemen would also have to be included in such an investigation, but since in those countries available data is even scarcer than in the cases examined in the present study, these two countries are excluded here.

According to first estimates, the war in Libya in 2011, where NATO intervened in support of insurrectionary forces, has cost at least 50,000 Libyan lives. Even

though the intervention was justified by the claim of “protecting the civilian population” and was legitimized by the U.N. Security Council, a comprehensive study on the actual number of casualties is still missing. With the present study, we stress the urgency of the demand towards the U.N. to live up to its responsibility and to initiate in the wake of military interventions, particularly those with a U.N. mandate, a comprehensive scientific investigation conducted by independent experts into the humanitarian consequences.

Unfortunately, the justification of military interventions in order to “fight terror” is still part and parcel of the political debate, even though there is enough evidence that a substantial part of terrorism is engendered by military, intelligence, and economic interventions of the very same countries that consequently make use of the pretext of terror to politically legitimize their military and geo-strategic expeditions.

In what follows, Joachim Guilliard analyzes the “Body Count,” the “Fragmentary Data Bases,” and the “Numbers War” in Iraq. Lühr Henken takes stock of NATO’s war in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and provides an estimate of the number of casualties in Afghanistan. Finally, Knut Mellenthin gives an overview of the war casualties of the “War on Terror” and of the drone war in Pakistan.

Executive Summary

The purpose of this investigation is to provide as realistic an estimate as possible of the total body count in the three main war zones Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan during 12 years of 'war on terrorism'. An extensive review has been made of the major studies and data published on the numbers of victims in these countries. This paper draws on additional information such as reports and statistics on military offensives and examines their completeness and plausibility. It applies interpolation to calculate the figures for those periods for which no information is available. Even now, 13 years after this war began, there has still been no equivalent study.

This investigation comes to the conclusion that the war has, directly or indirectly, killed around 1 million people in Iraq, 220,000 in Afghanistan and 80,000 in Pakistan, i.e. a total of around 1.3 million. Not included in this figure are further war zones such as Yemen. The figure is approximately 10 times greater than that of which the public, experts and decision makers are aware of and propagated by the media and major NGOs. And this is only a conservative estimate. The total number of deaths in the three countries named above could also be in excess of 2 million, whereas a figure below 1 million is extremely unlikely.

Investigations were based on the results of individual studies and data published by UN organizations, government bodies and NGOs. Figures for Afghanistan and Pakistan are only estimates based on the numbers of observed or reported deaths (passive determination). In Iraq, however, several representative surveys were also conducted in the context of studies seeking to determine the increase in the mortality rate since the onset of war, and therefore the total death toll among Iraqis arising from war or occupation. Although extrapolation of the results of such 'active' determination techniques inevitably causes significant breadth of range, this investigation shows that the data it provides is still far more reliable.

Decisive for the publishers of this paper is not the exact number of victims, but their order of magnitude. They believe it crucial from the humanitarian aspect, as well as in the interests of peace, that the public will become aware of this magnitude and that those responsible in governments and parliaments are held accountable.

Iraq

In contrast to Afghanistan and Pakistan, in the case of the internationally much more controversial Iraq War there have been a series of initiatives seeking to calculate the number of its victims (see the chapter "Body Count in Iraq"). Comparing the different methods also helps better assess the number of victims in other conflicts. Therefore, the Iraq part is the largest one in the IPPNW Body Count. Most initiatives were based on detecting the number of reported deaths, i.e. on a so-called passive surveillance method. Their results vacillate between 110,000 and 165,000 civilian victims of violence, which translates to between 42 and 76 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants and year (in comparison, in Detroit in 2006 the number stood at 48). Moreover, there have been various studies estimating the total number of Iraqi war dead based on on-the-spot representative surveys. Four of them cover a time period until mid-2006 and beyond. Their estimates lie between 151,000 and 1 million, i.e. between 172 and 851 war dead per 100,000 inhabitants and year.

The Iraq Body Count (IBC)

The best known initiative based on passive surveillance is the British Iraq Body Count (IBC). This project tries to capture the casualties of the Iraq War by using a database that counts all killed civilians as reported in renowned Western media

outlets or registered by hospitals and morgues. From March 2003 to September 2011, the time period that the present IPPNW Body Count investigates, IBC activists have identified approximately 108,000 killed Iraqi civilians.

Representative Studies Provide an Estimate of Up To 1 Million

Conversely, results from statistical surveys conducted by the Johns Hopkins University, published in 2004 and 2006 in the medical journal *The Lancet*, as well as by the British polling institute Opinion Research Business (ORB) in 2007 suggest that already by 2008 over one million Iraqis had died as a result of war, occupation and their indirect consequences.

The 2006 *Lancet* Study

At the time of compiling the IPPNW Body Count, the 2006 *Lancet* study was considered the most meticulous of all. The controversies over the number of war dead in Iraq centered on that study. For the study, 1850 households with almost 13,000 people at 50 randomly chosen locations had been interviewed on those who had died during the first 15 months before and during the first 40 months after the start of the war (i.e. till June 2006). The resulting rise in mortality detected from that *Lancet* study allows us to determine the number of dead that occurred beyond those conventionally expected. For no other serious causes come into question, they became direct or indirect victims of war. Extrapolated onto the total population, around 655,000 people had died up until June 2006.

Although renowned specialists of the field, including the leading scientific advisor to the British Ministry of Defense, attested that the study had followed established academic standards, most media had immediately rejected its findings as highly excessive. While projections are commonly used in politics and academia and are widely accepted, in the case of the Iraq studies they were dismissed as pure speculation. Further criticism was sparked off on the authors' alleged bias, the process of selecting the households that would privilege those more at risk (the so-called "main street bias") and the rapidity of the conducted surveys. The bulk of those criticisms, however, as the chapter on the "Numbers War" illustrates, turns out to be either unfounded or lacking decisive relevance.

Comparing the *Lancet* and IBC Studies

Yet, the numbers cannot be directly compared with each other, because they take a different scope of victims into account. By counting mortality before and after the start of the war, mortality studies try to capture the totality of those who died as a result of war. Initiatives such as the IBC, however, only consider victims of war to be civilians who were directly killed through war-related violence. The same is true with the representative IFHS study of Iraq's Ministry of Health that had merely counted 151,000 victims until June 2005. Through such limitations, not only are combatants not included in the statistics but also everyone who died from indirect fallouts of the war, such as lack of basic health care, hunger or contaminated drinking water. In most wars, that kind of victims exceeds the number of those directly killed. Without detailed on-site surveys, it is hard to reliably determine either whether a dead person had been a civilian or combatant, or the exact cause of death. Regarding all cases of death, the estimate provided by the IFHS study was only 17% below that of the *Lancet* study.

Extrapolating from roughly 2,000 families onto the total population of then 26 million is, of course, fraught with considerable uncertainty. Yet, the numbers gained from passive observation are not, as many believe, more solid. As experience from other conflicts tell us, only a small portion of the actual number of victims can be captured during times of war. This can also be shown for Iraq by taking samples from the IBC online database (see "Incomplete Databases").

For instance, the fate of Iraqi medical doctors is relatively well documented. According to the independent Iraq Medical Association, almost 2,000 out of the 34,000 registered medical doctors have been killed. The Iraq Body Count database, however, merely counts 70 killed medical doctors. Often, even U.S. army offensives lasting for weeks, including massive air and artillery strikes on entire urban areas, did not leave a mark in the IBC database. In many cases, there was also no database entry even if there were credible reports from local witnesses on dozens of people falling victim.

When comparing the deaths listed in the U.S. military war logs published by WikiLeaks with the IBC database entries, in both cases tremendous gaps come to fore. Only every fourth entry in the war logs was to be found in the IBC as well, which often concerned cases from Baghdad and victims from attacks resulting in many deaths, where both were using the same sources. At the same time, numerous cases of death are missing from both.

Information on perpetrators of deadly violence

Western media reports heavily focused on terrorist acts of violence, such as car bomb attacks against civilian facilities. These victims are very much represented in the IBC database, whereas those resulting from intense military confrontations – due to the lack of reporting from theaters of war – are barely accounted for. While, according to the families interviewed for the *Lancet* study, at least 30% of murdered relatives were killed at the hands of occupation forces (more than 13% through air strikes), this was the case with only 10% of the victims registered by the IBC (among them 7% through air strikes).

The 2013 PLOS Study

A new study on mortality published in October 2013 in the medical journal PLOS estimates the number of war dead in Iraq at roughly half a million. Its authors applied more refined and conservative statistical methods and, by taking into consideration the objections leveled against past studies, they attempted to counter any criticism against their methods from the outset. Thereby, they produced an estimate that can be barely “attacked” but one which is also relatively low.

Despite the discrepancy with the estimates provided by the Lancet studies, the PLOS study is buttressing rather than refuting them. On the one hand, the latter’s extrapolation far exceeds the number usually cited by the media. On the other, the involved scientists themselves consider their result as an underestimation. One problem lies in the long period that has passed since the war’s hottest phases. A more serious problem consists in the more than three million refugees that have not been adequately accounted for in the study – precisely those families who have extraordinarily suffered from war.

There is wide consensus in regard to perpetrators and weapons. While the 2006 Lancet study had only distinguished between foreigners and Iraqis, with the perpetrators being “unknown or uncertain” in 45% of cases, the authors of the PLOS study used a more detailed categorization of perpetrators into “coalition troops,” “Iraqi troops,” “militias,” and “criminals.” In 45.8% of cases occupation forces were made responsible and in 27% of cases, militias. Only 16.7% of the perpetrators were considered “unknown.”

Taking the time period of the Lancet study, the confidence intervals are overlapping over a wide range. While the numbers provided by the PLOS study appear to be too low, those of the Lancet study can be deemed a bit too high. Therefore, the number of roughly one million victims for the time period until the December 2011 U.S. troop withdrawal unfortunately remains realistic.

The difference in the results notwithstanding, the new study reiterates the necessity of statistical investigations.

Afghanistan

There have so far been no representative studies on the number of victims from the ongoing UN-mandated NATO war in Afghanistan. The few investigations that exist on deaths as a result of that war are all based on passive observation.

Professor Neta Crawford from Boston University estimates the number of civilian deaths for the time period until June 2011 – on the basis of 14 individual studies conducted over various time periods – at between 12,700 and 14,500. UNAMA, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, has registered 17,687 civilian deaths from 2007 to the end of 2013. This does not include the victims from 2007, which Crawford puts at 3,500. As a result, we obtain a total number of 21,200 killed civilians until the end of 2013. In average, this amounts to 5.9 civilians killed per 100,000 inhabitants – as such, lagging behind the rate of violent deaths in Frankfurt (Germany) of 6.9 per 100,000 inhabitants.

Of course, the findings from Iraq regarding the ratio between those civilians killed estimated through passive observation and the total number of war deaths gained from representative surveys cannot be transferred one-to-one onto Afghanistan. Yet, they suggest that also here the total number of victims lies ten times higher than the number of registered civilian deaths and may well exceed 200,000.

Regarding the number of victims among those numerous armed groups fighting NATO troops, who mostly are misleadingly referred to as “Taliban,” we only have data on a few years. Thus, for the year 2007 roughly 4,700 and for 2010 about 5,200 killed “Taliban” could be detected. The remaining years were calculated by proportionally interpolating indicators on the intensity of warfare, e.g. the annual number of air strikes on resistance positions. In total, 55,000 killed insurgents were estimated. In addition, according to the Brookings Institution’s Afghanistan Index and the German government’s “progress report Afghanistan” of January 2014, roughly 15,000 security forces were killed between 2007 and 2013 – with the numbers growing rapidly.

Pakistan

The war in Pakistan is closely connected to the one in Afghanistan.

The civil war in the Pakistani province Balochistan is mixed with a war on the Taliban whose whereabouts vary between Afghanistan and the north-western provinces of Pakistan. Moreover, supply routes for U.S. troops run via Pakistan and thus become susceptible to attacks there. Furthermore, tensions between India and Pakistan have an impact on the conflict in the regions bordering Afghanistan as well as in Afghanistan itself. From 2004 to October 2012, U.S. drone attacks killed between 2,318 and 2,912 people, a great many of them civilians. However, the majority of killed civilians is likely to be the result of U.S.-supported fights waged by the Pakistani army against various terror groups. In Pakistan, the number of killed civilians and combatants is much harder to determine than in Afghanistan. Even data based on passive observation are barely existent. It can be suggested that at least 80,000 Pakistanis (insurgents, security forces, civilians) have been killed, with twice as many civilians killed than insurgent fighters. Taking all sources and factors into account, a total number of 300,000 war deaths in the AfPak War-Theatre until 2013 seems realistic.



“90% of what happens in the video has been daily routine in Iraq for seven years. And the 10% that is different is simply due to the fact that two of the gentlemen killed were journalists.”

Comment by an U.S. soldiers on the 2007 *WikiLeaks* video “Collateral Murder” showing how battle helicopters in Iraq kill journalists, civilians, and children.¹⁴

Iraq

“Body Count” in Iraq

Did 100,000, 200,000, or More Than a Million People Die in Iraq as a Consequence of the War?

Joachim Guilliard, October 2011 (updated July 2012)

“Europe has failed to take any effective steps to pressure [the government] to stop the war crimes and crimes against humanity being committed by its troops and proxy militias,” wrote former British EU Commissioner for External Relations Chris Patten in an article for *The Irish Times* the day after the fourth anniversary of the Iraq War. “During this time over two million people have been forced from their homes, and more than 200,000 civilians have died,” he continued, going on to demand harsh sanctions against those responsible.¹⁵ Only shortly thereafter, former German Foreign Minister Joseph Fischer took the same line in the *Frankfurter Rundschau*.¹⁶

However, Patten and Fischer were not talking about the war and occupation in Iraq and the administration of George W. Bush; their comments were related to the crisis region Darfur in Sudan, and their anger was directed towards the administration of Omar al-Bashir. The numbers, however, are similar: In the same period that Patten wrote about, two million people were also driven from their homes in Iraq. A scientific study published by the renowned professional medical journal

¹⁴ <http://www.theatlantic.com/daily-dish/archive/2010/04/the-lies-of-the-pentagon-ctd/188500/>

¹⁵ Chris Patten, “Sudan's crimes against humanity need real EU action, not empty words,” *The Irish Times*, March 28, 2007.

¹⁶ Joseph Fischer, “Darfur – die EU muss endlich handeln” [Darfur – the EU must finally act], *Frankfurter Rundschau* (Germany), April 3, 2007.

The Lancet in 2006 even estimated the number of victims up to that time to be around 655,000.¹⁷

The number of casualties in Darfur was estimated on the basis of a representative study – the same method that was used in Iraq.¹⁸ The resulting death figure of 200,000 in the Sudanese province was then used by international NGOs as the basis of their Sudan campaigns, and also made its way into UN Security Council resolutions. Les Roberts, one of the scientists who directed the surveys in Iraq, had already conducted a similar study in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in 2000.¹⁹ The shocking result of 1.7 million war deaths that the study arrived at was also met with broad acceptance and was cited as one of the rationales for a UN resolution. The *Lancet* study on Iraq, however, was immediately attacked by politicians and the media in the West as being speculative and biased, and its shocking results were soon shelved as “controversial.” This number is not even mentioned in mainstream media anymore; they only quote figures given by the pro-U.S. administration in Iraq or by the project Iraq Body Count (IBC), which by now has basically established itself as the “standard.” Over the same time period that was used in the *Lancet* study, IBC registered around 43,000 civilian deaths.²⁰

There is probably no other war that has seen such a fierce and drawn-out controversy surrounding the number of its victims. One main reason for this is the lack of legitimacy for the U.S.-led attack on Iraq – even in the U.S. itself. The original pretexts for going to war quickly turned out to be spurious, and from then on only the “liberation of the country from a violent dictatorship” and the “democratization” and “stabilization” of Iraq remained as justification for the war and occupation. This picture, laboriously constructed with the help of the media, is of course impossible to reconcile with the many hundreds of thousands of war casualties.

The numbers relayed by the media (previously 43,000 and now 110,000) should in themselves be terrifying enough, as they correspond to the annihilation of an entire city’s population. But apparently they are still perceived as tolerable and, moreover, even easy to explain given the picture of excessive religiously motivated violence. The figure of 655,000 deaths in the first three war years alone, however, clearly points to a crime against humanity approaching genocide. Had this been understood and recognized by the public at large, the Iraq policy of the U.S. and its European allies would not have been tenable for long.

Many anti-war activists fail to see much reason in debating the question of whether some tens of thousands more or less were killed in a war, because any person killed by war is one too many. But the following reflections are not about some minor inexactitudes; they are about an assessment of general magnitude that is of decisive political importance. A poll carried out by the Associated Press (AP) two years ago found that, on average, U.S. citizens believe that only 9,900 Iraqis were

¹⁷ Gilbert Burnham, Shannon Doocy, Riyadh Lafta & Les Roberts, “[Mortality after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: a cross-sectional cluster sample survey](#),” *The Lancet*, October 13, 2006. For the study itself, see “[The Human Cost of the War in Iraq 2002-2006](#),” and for the appendices, see http://www.iraqtribunal.de/dokus/studies/lancet2/mortality_invasion_study2006app.pdf.

¹⁸ John Hagan & Alberto Palloni, “[Death in Darfur](#),” *Science Magazine*, No. 5793 (September 15, 2006), pp. 1578-1579, <http://protection.unsudanig.org/data/darfur/papers/Hagan-%20Death%20in%20Darfur%20%28Sep06%29.pdf>.

¹⁹ “The man who did the counting – Les Roberts’ personal account of his mission in the Congo,” *CNN.com*, June 21, 2000.

²⁰ *Iraq Body Count*, www.iraqbodycount.org/.

killed during the occupation.²¹ With such distorted figures, outrage about the war is hardly to be expected. This state of affairs could be very different if the public were made aware that the actual number is likely to be more than a hundred times higher.

Different Methods of Counting

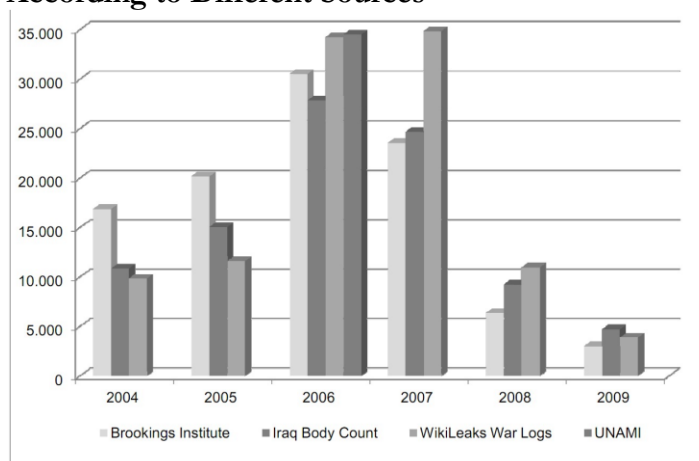
Victims of a war are, of course, not just those who died, but also the wounded, the traumatized, the expelled, the deported, the incarcerated etc. All the same, whenever the following text talks about “victims,” it is always solely referring to those who have lost their lives. There is also often mention of “civilian” casualties. More precisely, this term refers to “non-combatants,” i.e. civilians not engaged in combat operations at the moment of their death.

By now, there are a number of institutions, organizations, and media outlets that have issued casualty figures regarding the Iraq War, though most do not take into account the whole timeframe. Even the U.S. military has, at times, registered Iraqi casualty figures, despite the pithy remark by U.S. General Tommy Franks who led the invasion of Iraq: “We don’t do body counts.”²²

In December 2005, U.S. President George W. Bush stated that, as far as he knew, 30,000 Iraqis had been killed thus far.²³ In June 2006, the *Los Angeles Times* talked about more than 50,000 deaths and added, to put this into perspective, i.e. relative to the size of the population, this was equivalent to the deaths of 570,000 U.S. citizens over three years.²⁴

Based on data by city governments, morgues, and hospitals, the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) reported 34,452 civilian war casualties for the year of 2006.²⁵ According to the AP, by February 2009 Iraq’s Ministry of Health had registered around 87,000 Iraqi casualties since March 2003. Supplemented by its own data and additional sources, in April 2009 the agency estimated the number of war casualties at over 110,000.²⁶ But already in October 2006, then Health Minister of

**Annual Progression of the Number of Iraqis Killed
According to Different Sources**



²¹ “[Military/Civilian Deaths in Iraq Study](#),” AP/Ipsos Poll, February 24, 2007.

²² “[How many Iraqis died? We may never know](#),” *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 3, 2003.

²³ George W. Bush, “[President Discusses War on Terror and Upcoming Iraqi Elections](#),” transcript by the White House, December 12, 2005.

²⁴ “[War’s Iraqi Death Toll Tops 50,000 - Higher Than the U.S. Estimate But Thought To Be Undercounted](#),” *Los Angeles Times*, June 25, 2006.

²⁵ “[Iraqi Death Toll Exceeded 34,000 in ‘06, U.N. Says](#),” *New York Times*, January 17, 2007.

²⁶ “[Secret tally has 87,215 Iraqis dead](#),” AP, April 24, 2009.

Iraq Ali al-Shemari had estimated the total number of victims at between 100,000 and 150,000.²⁷

In October 2010, the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) suddenly published information on its website, stating that from the beginning of 2004 to mid-2008, 77,000 civilians and security workers had been killed.²⁸ However, the Iraq War Logs – the war diaries of the U.S. military later published by *WikiLeaks* – register 104,924 Iraqi casualties, among them 92,000 (according to *Der Spiegel*), or 66,081 (according to *The Guardian*) civilians.²⁹

Table: Estimates of Casualty Figures per Year and Inhabitants

Author	Time period	Category of victims	Estimated number of victims		
			combined	per year	per year and 100,000 inhabitants
Estimate by passive observation					
U.S. President George. W. Bush	March 03 – Dec. 05		30,000	10,909	42
<i>Los Angeles Times</i> , 25.06.2006 ³⁰	March 03 – June 06	V	50,000	15,385	57
Health Minister Ali al-Shemari	March 03 – Nov. 06	V	125,000	34,091	126
UNAMI	2006	V	34,500	34,500	128
Iraqi Ministry of Health	Jan. 05 – Feb. 09	V	87,215	21,359	76
Associated Press, 24.4.2009	March 03 – April 09	V	110,600	18,181	65
U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM)	2004 – mid-2008	V	77,000	17,111	61
WikiLeaks – Iraq War Logs	Jan. 04 – Dec. 09	V	104,924	17,487	58
Iraq Body Count (medium figure v. min./max.)	March 03 – Sep. 11	C	107,570	12,655	42
Brookings Institution, Iraq Index	March 03 – July 11	C	115,250	13,830	46
Costs of War	March 03 – Aug. 11	V	165,000	19,604	65
Estimate by representative survey					
Iraq Living Conditions survey ³¹	March 03 – May 04	V	24,000	20,571	79
Iraqiyyun ³²	March 03 – July 05	V	128,000	54,857	211
<i>Lancet</i> study 2004 ³³	March 03 – June 04	A	98,000	78,400	302
<i>Lancet</i> study 2006	March 03 – June 06	A	655,000	201,538	746
Iraq Family Health Survey ³⁴	March 03 – June 06	C	151,000	46,462	172
Opinion Research Business survey ³⁵	March 03 – July 07	A	1,033,000	238,385	851
PLOS Medicine Survey 2013 ³⁶	March 03 – Jun 11	A	460.000	55.758	174

²⁷ “[Iraqi death toll estimates go as high as 150,000](#),” *Taipei Times*, November 11, 2006.

²⁸ “[U.S. Says Iraq War led to 77k Deaths over 5 Years](#),” *Associated Press*, October 14, 2010.

²⁹ “[Protokolle der Grausamkeit](#)” [Protocols of atrocity], *Der Spiegel*, October 25, 2010; “[WikiLeaks Iraq: data journalism maps every death](#),” *The Guardian*, October 23, 2010.

³⁰ “[War's Iraqi Death Toll Tops 50,000](#),” *Los Angeles Times*, June 25, 2006.

³¹ “[Iraq Living Conditions Survey 2004](#),” May 12, 2005.

³² “[Iraqi civilian casualties](#),” UPI, July 12, 2005.

³³ Gilbert Burnham *et al.* “[Mortality after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: a cross-sectional cluster sample survey](#),” *The Lancet*, Vol. 368, No. 9545 (October 21, 2006), pp. 1421-1428.

³⁴ “[Violence-Related Mortality in Iraq from 2002 to 2006](#),” *New England Journal of Medicine*, January 2008.

³⁵ “[Update on Iraqi Casualty Data](#),” Open Research Business (ORB), January 2008.

³⁶ Amy Hagopian, Abraham D. Flaxman, Tim K. Takaro, Sahar A. Esa Al Shatari, Julie Rajaratnam, Stan Becker, Alison Levin-Rector, Lindsay Galway, Berq J. Hadi Al-Yasseri, William M. Weiss, Christopher J. Murray & Gilbert Burnham, “Mortality in Iraq Associated with the 2003-2011 War and Occupation: Findings from a National Cluster Sample Survey by the University Collaborative Iraq Mortality Study,” *PLOS Medicine*, Vol. 10, No. 10 (October 2013).

Abbreviations within “Category of victims”:

- V: violent deaths
- C: civilian casualties from violence
- A: all additional war-related deaths

Figures from the Iraq Index of the Brookings Institution and those from the IBC project are still being regularly updated. The IBC figures are the ones most frequently quoted, but the statistics of the Brookings Institution are themselves largely based on the IBC data. IBC reports a maximum of 112,000 violence-related civilian casualties for the period before September 2011, to which the project claims an estimated 15,000 from the Iraq War Logs must be added, because they are not contained in the project’s database. The Brookings Institution arrives at 115,000 Iraqi deaths for the period before August 2011, without the correction.³⁷

The Costs of War project at Brown University in Rhode-Island, which is critical of the war and has set out to assess the economic and humanitarian costs of the wars on the Hindu Kush and in Iraq, arrives at the “extremely conservative estimate” of a minimum of 125,000 civilian casualties and a total number of 165,000 Iraqi deaths as a consequence of the war.³⁸

Fragmentary Observations

Regardless of the differences between these estimates, they are all based on the sum of all deaths reported by the media or registered by hospitals, morgues, or other authorities. Regarding the numbers of deaths per year, there is little difference between them. Only the estimates from the Iraqi Minister of Health in November 2006 and from UNAMI for 2006 are unusual because of their number of 35,000 deaths per year, which is almost twice as much as the other estimates.

The media mostly quote IBC figures, as this project is seen as the most reliable source. Related to a general population of 30 million, IBC’s research arrives at 42 violent deaths per year and per 100,000 inhabitants. That would be far less than the murder rates in Honduras or El Salvador, which are estimated at 82 and 66 murders per 100,000 inhabitants respectively in a recent UN report.³⁹ The IBC number is also even lower than the number of murders per year in major cities in the U.S. In 2006, for example, Detroit had a murder rate of over 48 per 100,000 inhabitants.⁴⁰ Since the U.S. administration mainly used the lack of security in Iraq to justify the ongoing occupation, co-author of the *Lancet* study Les Roberts ironically asked in his presentation at the International Iraq Conference on March 8, 2011, in Berlin whether the U.S. would not do better, therefore, to deploy its troops in Detroit, Baltimore, or Chicago.

Experts know from experience that attempts to assess the number of casualties by compiling reported and registered deaths often greatly underestimate the actual figure. The *Lancet* study mentioned above claims that there has been no conflict where it was possible to determine more than 20% of the actual victims by these so-called “passive investigation methods.” During the most intense phases of the

³⁷ Brookings Institution, *Iraq Index*, August 30, 2011.

³⁸ Neta C. Crawford, “[Civilian Death and Injury in Iraq, 2003-2011](#),” Boston University / costsofwar.org, September 2011.

³⁹ “[U.N.-Bericht: Brasilien führt weltweite Mord-Statistik an](#)” [UN report: Brazil leads world ranking on homicide], *RLA Novosti*, October 7, 2011.

⁴⁰ See e.g. the [statement by Les Roberts](#) at the hearing of the Left Party parliamentary group in the Bundestag, ahead of the International Iraq Conference on March 7, 2008 in Berlin.

civil war in Guatemala, this number even dropped to 5%.⁴¹ In the section on the IBC project below, it is demonstrated that this project very probably also suffers similar gaps. A comparison of the deaths cited in the Iraq logs published by *WikiLeaks* with the entries in the IBC database carried out by Les Roberts and students of the Columbia University School of Public Health concluded that only every fourth or fifth act of violence committed against civilians and noted by U.S. soldiers was registered by IBC. This suggests that the actual number of victims must have been four to five times higher – and perhaps even more, as the Iraq Logs registered the victims quite sporadically and often used the same sources as IBC (morgues, information from Iraqi ministries and municipalities etc.).⁴²

In Iraq itself, only a small number of casualties made it to the central hospitals or morgues where they could be registered. That proportion decreased the more intense the military battles were and the more the violence between various sections of the population escalated. Since Islam requires a funeral within one day, relatives generally had no choice but to bury their dead directly – either in their yards or close to their homes.⁴³

Moreover, the occupying power often forbade the hospitals and morgues from making their numbers public. These numbers were published, if at all, by the Ministry of Health. But according to employees of the morgues, the numbers were then often considerably lowered.⁴⁴

Reports made by Western media always had a strong focus on the capital city of Baghdad. There were practically no reports from those regions with the heaviest fighting.⁴⁵ As the examples in the section on IBC show, there were numerous large offensives by the occupying troops and attacks on cities lasting several days that did not leave even a single entry in the IBC databases, even though it is all but certain that they led to dozens, if not hundreds, of casualties. Similarly, the massive increase in air attacks, which had reached an average of 48 per day by 2007,⁴⁶ is in no way reflected in the IBC database.

These methods not only lead to a gross underestimate of the number of civilian casualties, but also to an underestimate of the proportion of those directly killed by the occupation troops. This effect is heightened still by the fact that the Western media mainly focus on terrorist acts of violence such as car bombings of civilian facilities and institutions, suicide attacks against markets or crowds of pilgrims, and other events that fit nicely into the image of the war they are trying to create. For that reason, the victims of those types of attacks are very strongly represented in the database, whereas the casualties of U.S. air attacks are not.

⁴¹ See Patrick Ball, Paul Kobrak & Herbert F. Spier, *State Violence in Guatemala, 1960-1996: A Quantitative Reflection*, ch. 7, Guatemala City: International Center for Human Rights Research (CI-IDH), January 14, 1999.

⁴² Les Roberts, "Do WikiLeaks and Iraq Body Count tell the same story?", brussellstribunal.org, May 5, 2011.

⁴³ See e.g. "[U.S. Airstrikes Take Toll on Civilians - Eyewitnesses Cite Scores Killed in Marine Offensive in Western Iraq](#)," *Washington Post*, December 24, 2005; "[War and Occupation in Iraq](#)," New York: Global Policy Forum, June 2007; UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), *Human Rights Report: November-December 2006*, January 16, 2007; Dahr Jamail, "[Reason for Their Death Is Known](#)," *Truthout*, May 3, 2006.

⁴⁴ Lourdes Garcia-Navarro, "[Though Numbers Unclear, Iraqi Deaths Touch Many](#)," *National Public Radio*, February 24, 2009.

⁴⁵ See e.g. "[Western Journalists in Iraq Stage Pullback of Their Own](#)," *Washington Post*, October 11, 2008

⁴⁶ "[War and Occupation in Iraq](#)," New York: Global Policy Forum, June 2007.

The Iraq Body Count limits itself exclusively to civilian victims of direct violence. For one thing, this is morally questionable, as in principle all people who may still be alive if it were not for the war and the occupation should be counted as casualties – regardless of whether, for instance, they resorted to armed resistance against the occupation or allowed themselves to be hired by the occupying forces as ancillary troops in the battle against their own compatriots. But above all, there is the problem of how to distinguish between civilian and combatant deaths. On this issue, Western news agencies mostly adopt the version of the occupying forces, which means that, for the most part, only those deaths that are the result of actions of the resistance or of terrorist groups count as civilian casualties; otherwise they are listed as “insurgents” or “terrorists.”

For this reason, Boston University political scientist Neta C. Crawford, who wrote a valuable study on the number of casualties for the anti-war Costs of War project, took the casualty number of IBC as the baseline and then added to this the

Each air attack in Iraq has resulted in an average of 17 civilian deaths.

See
http://www.rhul.ac.uk/Resources/Helper_apps/Mes-sage.asp?ref_no=1922



number of Iraqi combatant casualties, which she compiled from various sources. She estimated that, during the invasion, at least 10,000 Iraqi soldiers were killed by the U.S.-led troops, who then went on to kill another 19,000 insurgents between June 2003 and September 2007. To this, she adds 10,100 members of the troops and police forces of the new Iraqi administration killed by opponents of the occupation. By this method, she arrived at a total number of 165,000 killed Iraqis – 65 deaths per year and per 100,000 inhabitants, which is less than the murder rate in Central America. Regretfully, she said, she could not make any statement about the number of indirect casualties of the war.⁴⁷

Realistic Estimates through Representative Polls

“The least scientific but most powerful testimony to the many civilian victims here is anecdotal,” summarized Lourdes Garcia-Navarro in her report for Nation-

⁴⁷ Neta C. Crawford, “[Civilian Death and Injury in Iraq, 2003-2011](#),” Boston University / costsofwar.org, September 2011.

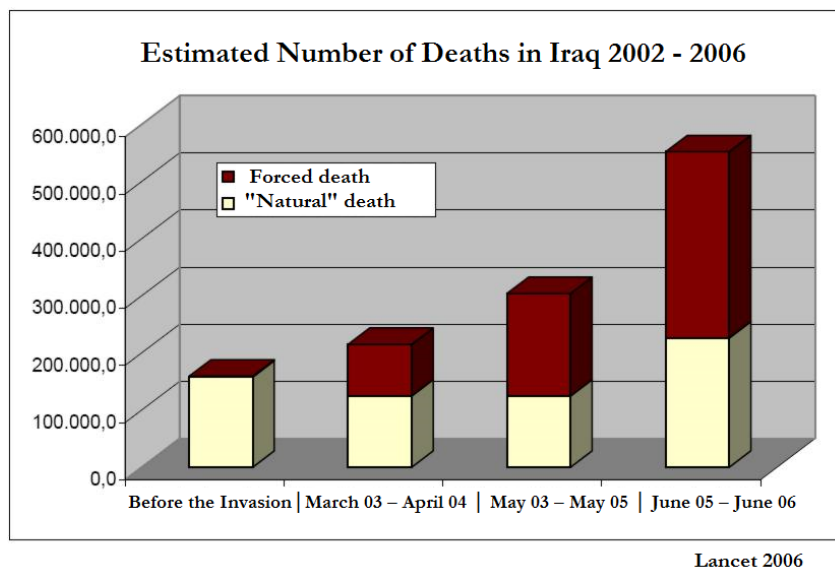
al Public Radio on the different estimates. “Stop anyone on any street corner in almost in any part of Iraq, and they’ll have a personal story of the violence.”⁴⁸

This simple observation can in fact be turned into a scientific method. Whoever – in the absence of a functioning and reliable death register – wants to assess the aggregate humanitarian costs of a war must indeed conduct an on-site investigation and ask the families about relatives who have died as a direct or indirect consequence of the war, as well as about the conditions under which that person died. To come up with numbers that are exact to a certain degree is a lengthy and costly process; the only feasible way to get a usable estimate quickly is to conduct a poll using a selection of households representative of the entire country. In Iraq, several studies have used this method. The Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University carried out two studies; apart from the 2006 study already mentioned, there was an earlier one in 2004.⁴⁹ Both were published after thorough review by *The Lancet*. This was followed in 2007 with a poll by the prestigious British opinion poll agency Opinion Research Business (ORB),⁵⁰ and in January 2008 the *New England Journal of Medicine* published a study based on the Iraq Family Health Survey (IFHS) household poll carried out by the Iraqi Ministry of Health and the World Health Organization (WHO).⁵¹

A/N: In October 2013 the results of a new study on the number of war victims that went on till 2011 was published in the journal PLOS Medicine.⁵² Since the results were released when this chapter was already completed, it is treated in a separate section below.

The Lancet Study of 2006

Despite the furious criticism it attracted, most experts see the second *Lancet* study



⁴⁸ Lourdes Garcia-Navarro, *op. cit.*

⁴⁹ Gilbert Burnham *et al.*, [“Mortality after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: a cross-sectional cluster sample survey,”](#) *op. cit.*

⁵⁰ [“Update on Iraqi Casualty Data,”](#) Open Research Business (ORB), January 2008.

⁵¹ Iraq Family Health Survey Study Group, [“Violence-Related Mortality in Iraq from 2002 to 2006,”](#) *New England Journal of Medicine*, No. 358 (January 31, 2008), pp. 484-493.

⁵² Amy Hagopian, Abraham D. Flaxman, Tim K. Takaro, Sahar A. Esa Al Shatari, Julie Rajaratnam, Stan Becker, Alison Levin-Rector, Lindsay Galway, Berq J. Hadi Al-Yasseri, William M. Weiss, Christopher J. Murray & Gilbert Burnham, “Mortality in Iraq Associated with the 2003-2011 War and Occupation: Findings from a National Cluster Sample Survey by the University Collaborative Iraq Mortality Study,” *PLOS Medicine*, Vol. 10, No. 10 (October 2013). (muss auf Seite davor, gehört zu A/N)

of October 2006 as the most solid estimate of the number of casualties, up to the period of its publication.

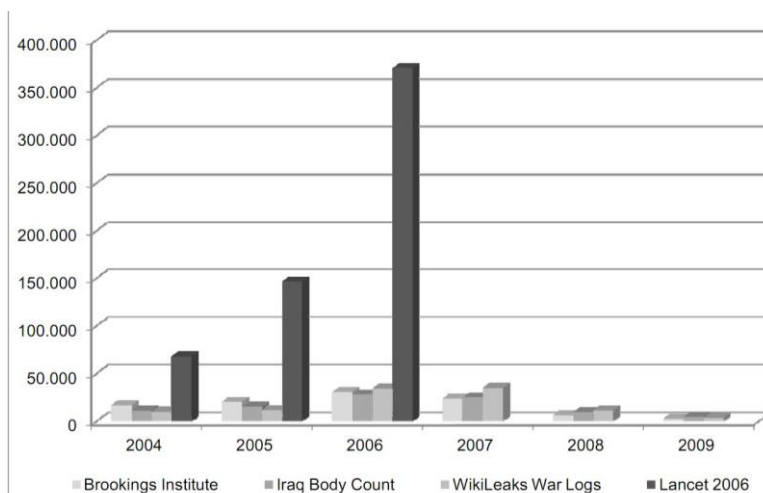
The study is based on a poll of a representative selection of 1,850 households and almost 13,000 participants. It compiles the deaths both in the 15 months before and those within the 40 months after the start of the war. According to these data, the mortality rate rose from 5.5 deaths per thousand inhabitants in the year before the war to 13.3 per year thereafter. The difference shows the number of persons per thousand that would still be alive if it were not for the war and occupation. If this figure is projected over the population at that time of 26 million a time frame of 40 months, the result is an additional 655,000 deaths – so-called “excess deaths” in epidemiology. Among these – and this is also a projection – 601,000 were victims of violence. Alarming at the time of the publication was not only the number itself, but also the massive annual increase contained within it. The number of victims of violence almost doubled year by year – from 90,000 to 180,000 to 330,000 (see graph). The explosion of violence observed since February 2006 suggested that this increase would also continue in 2007, pushing the number of victims to over one million in the process. This estimate was finally corroborated by the Opinion Research Business poll (see below).

Such a high number of victims – reaching genocidal dimensions – represented a massive indictment of the U.S. administration and its allies that they simply could not allow to stand. Hence, the study was furiously criticized. Even though nearly all the experts in the field, including the scientists of the British administration, confirmed the accuracy of the study, it was slandered in what amounted to a full blown media campaign and was finally labeled as “controversial” and put to one side (the “Numbers War” section below describes the controversy in more detail).⁵³

Of course, extrapolation from relatively few families to a whole country carries a high risk of

inaccuracy. But, for the most part, this inaccuracy can be mathematically determined. From the *Lancet* study data, therefore, it can be calculated that there is a 95% likelihood that the real number of victims lies between 390,000 and 940,000. This wide range shows substantial uncertainty in the estimate. But, as 27 leading experts wrote in an open letter to the Melbourne daily *The Age*, such uncertainties are inevitable in polls in war-affected areas. According to them, however, this in no way calls into question the core results: The study, they said, was methodologically correct and thus gave the best up-to-date data on mortality rates in Iraq. Even though precision always remained a problem, one can safely say that the

**Progression of Annual Number of Iraqis Killed
According to Various Sources, Including the Lancet Study**



⁵³ See also “[Democracy and Debate - Killing Iraq](#),” *MediaLens*, October 18, 2006.

number of casualties was higher than 390,000, and possibly even as high as 940,000.⁵⁴

The WHO Study

The IFSH study based on the household poll by the Iraqi Ministry of Health and WHO determined a number of 151,000 deaths for the same time period as the *Lancet* study – clearly a much lower number of casualties. The number of polled households was five times higher than in the *Lancet* study, and for that reason the 95% confidence interval of 104,000 to 223,000 is much narrower.⁵⁵ This study, however, included only a fairly arbitrarily defined selection of civilian victims of violence. If one looks at all the deaths sampled here, the IFHS study also shows an annual doubling of the deaths each year since March 2003 – almost the same as the *Lancet* study, which determined a factor of 2.4. Because no other reasons are plausible, this annual doubling of cases of death can only be the result of the war and occupation.

Possible Distortions in Mortality Studies

There is a lot of academic literature that analyzes and discusses possible limitations and distortions of mortality studies in general, and those of the *Lancet* studies in particular. The authors of the *Lancet* study themselves even recognize the possibility of distortions, and actually address this problem frequently within the study.

As a whole, however, the likelihood of underestimating the number of the dead in such investigations is greater than the danger of overestimating it. One serious weakness of polls that involve questioning a certain number of households grouped around a randomly chosen location (so-called “clusters”) is the possibility that, in the meantime, families might have disappeared from the neighborhood. Since this is particularly often the case with families who are heavily affected by violence and other consequences of the war, this can mean that a great many deaths never make it into the statistics. In Iraq, where religious minorities are frequently expelled from many of their neighborhoods through murderous violence, the likelihood of this occurring is quite high. In addition, air raids frequently wipe out whole families.

It is of course also possible for interviewees to exaggerate the number of deaths for political reasons. However, in this case over 90% of the deaths were confirmed by death certificates.

But even if the result should be distorted by 10 or even 20% in one direction or another by such imponderables, this does not change the sheer magnitude of the figures – in the case of the *Lancet* study, for example, a number of war casualties in the realm of several hundred thousand to almost one million.

The Question of Who Are the Perpetrators

Aside from the number of the victims of a conflict, it is of course also important to know who is responsible for them and to what extent. A priori, of course, those who started the war also carry the main responsibility for all victims. Since the assault on Iraq unequivocally constituted an aggression in violation of international law, the U.S. and its allies are also responsible for all its consequences.

But in Western discourse, soon after the start of the war its illegal character ceased to be discussed. In the years that followed, the terrible conditions of life under

⁵⁴ “The Iraq deaths study was valid and correct: 27 academics in the fields of the medical sciences attest,” *The Age*, October 21, 2006.

⁵⁵ “[Violence-Related Mortality in Iraq from 2002 to 2006](#),” *New England Journal of Medicine*, January 2008.

occupation and the escalation of violence were explained away by many reasons except one – the occupation itself. Given the reporting, all those who simply relied on the news for information were likely to be convinced that most of those murdered in Iraq were victims of car bombs, suicide attacks, and similar acts; the role of the occupying power in the country and the violence exercised by its troops disappeared entirely into the background. The foreign troops appeared as a neutral power honestly striving for security and order. This picture played a major role in the broad acceptance of the continued occupation.

This is also reflected in a February 2011 study carried out by IBC founders John A. Sloboda and Hamit Dardagan together with Michael Spagat and Madelyn Hsiao-Rei Hicks – the fiercest opponents of the *Lancet* study. It was an analysis of violent deaths categorized by perpetrator, weapon, time, and location.⁵⁶ But among the events recorded in the IBC database, only 12.4% of the cases named the occupation troops (so-called “coalition forces”) as the perpetrators; 10.7% were registered as civilians killed in attacks by the Iraqi resistance (“anti-coalition forces”) against occupation troops; 73.9% were victims of assault by non-identifiable perpetrators; only 0.6% were attributed to the Iraqi police and military. According to the authors, the unknown perpetrators were by and large religiously motivated fighters, resistance groups, or criminals. However, half of those killed by unknown perpetrators were victims of executions and small arms (with suicide attacks accounting for 18%). Thus, many people may very well have fallen victim to the dirty war of the occupation troops and various militias closely related to the Iraqi government.⁵⁷ As the British Guardian and the BBC reported in 2013, Washington invested eight billion dollars in special forces and death squads, mostly from within the ranks of radical Shiite militias. With their help in 2005 the occupiers, spearheaded by US General David Petraeus, fought a dirty war against the entire population of the centre of resistance⁵⁸ which eventually – in cooperation with the terror of Al Qaeda related troops - led to the escalating, terrible wave of religiously motivated violence in 2006.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Madelyn Hsiao-Rei Hicks, Hamit Dardagan, Gabriela Guerrero Serdán, Peter M. Bagnall, John A. Sloboda & Michael Spagat, “[Violent Deaths of Iraqi Civilians, 2003-2008: Analysis by Perpetrator, Weapon, Time, and Location](#),” *PLOS Medicine*, February 15, 2011.

⁵⁷ Mona Mahmood, Maggie O’Kane, Chavala Madlena and Teresa Smith, [Revealed: Pentagon's link to Iraqi torture centres](#), Guardian, 6.3.2013

⁵⁸ “The Sunni population is paying no price for the support it is giving to the terrorists,” a military source from the Pentagon debate said to Newsweek. “From their point of view, it is cost-free. We have to change that equation.” (Michael Hirsh u. John Barry, [‘The Salvador Option’ -- The Pentagon may put Special-Forces-led assassination or kidnapping teams in Iraq](#), Newsweek, 8.1.2005)

⁵⁹ Joachim Guilliard, [Gezielte Zerstörung – Zehn Jahre Krieg der USA im Irak](#), junge Welt, 29.04.2013

The *Lancet* study portrays a very different picture with regard to the role of the occupying forces in the violence. According to the interviewees, at least until June 2006 the occupation troops themselves were responsible for most of the victims of violence: 31% of all victims of violence were killed by Western troops – mainly by air attacks and artillery projectiles (see table below). In line with general increase of the death toll, their absolute number almost tripled between 2003 and 2006. To this must be added a considerable number of cases in which those concerned were killed during joint attacks of the occupiers and Iraqi troops. These are therefore contained within the 45% of the victims for whose death it was impossible to unequivocally determine whether foreign soldiers or Iraqis were the responsible.⁶⁰

Summary

Unfortunately, the second *Lancet* study ends in June 2006, at a time when the violence literally exploded. Between 2006 and 2008, presumably the highest number of lives were lost due to the war and civil war-like conditions. At first solely the study of the British Institute "Opinion Research Business" ORB followed, which also gave an estimate only for the years until July 2007. It was not before October 2013 that another mortality study appeared in the journal *PLOS Medicine*. Its main shortcoming, however, was the long time-lag to the height of violence (see Chapter "well investigated but too late"). The ORB study did not have the same quality as the *Lancet* studies, however, since their results agree well the estimated number of 1,033,000 fatalities seems plausible. The number of casualties may thus have had exceeded one million already by mid - 2007.⁶¹

Source of the violence:	Time frame			Total	
	March 03 – April 04	May 04 – May 05	June 05 – June 06	%	Deaths (ex- trapolated)
Occupation troops	35.6%	38.9%	26.1%	31.5%	189,000
Others	8.9%	18.9%	30.3%	23.5%	141,000
Unknown or unsure	55.6%	42.2%	43.6%	45.0%	271,000
Firearms	80.0%	51.1%	52.7%	56.0%	336,000
Car bomb	2.2%	7.8%	18.2%	12.6%	76,000
Other explosion / artillery ammunition	2.2%	23.3%	12.1%	14.2%	86,000
Aerial attack	13.3%	14.4%	12.1%	13.2%	80,000
Unknown or unsure	0.0%	2.2%	2.4%	2.0%	12,000
Accident	2.2%	1.1%	2.4%	2.0%	12,000
Violent deaths as a whole	90,000	179,000	328,000	100.0%	601,000

Source: *Lancet* study 2006

⁶⁰ See also: Joachim Guilliard, "[Irak – Die verschwiegenen Besatzungsoffer](#)" [Iraq – The concealed victims of the occupation], *Ausdruck*, Tübingen (Germany): Information Center on Militarization (IMI), October 2007, pp. 11-15.

⁶¹ "[Update on Iraqi Casualty Data](#)," *op. cit.*

Moreover, according to the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP), between 250,000 and one million persons are presumed missing in Iraq.⁶²

For an estimate of the current casualty numbers, one has to interpolate. The U.S. NGO Just Foreign Policy does exactly this with its Iraqi Death Estimator, where it multiplies the number of victims of violence determined by the *Lancet* study as of June 2006 by the increase in the number since then as provided by IBC. From the relation between the current number given by IBC and the one given for the end of June 2006 (43,394), it concludes that the number of Iraqis killed up to September 2011 is at around 1.46 million.⁶³

Even though this is certainly the most useful method available, the result is very imprecise. Also, the longer it is practiced the more speculative it becomes. For one thing, the number of reported and registered deaths generally increases whenever the intensity of violent conflict subsides. That would mean that a continued projection of the *Lancet* numbers – which are ten times higher – using the trend given by IBC would overestimate the number of deaths. However, reporting on Iraq has also decreased considerably. Due to most Western reporters having been withdrawn, it is probable that many deaths are failing to make it into the media reports used by IBC. Thus, the projection from their numbers may unfortunately still be close to reality.

On the other hand, IBC is still only counting civilian victims of violence. Like many other experts, the authors of the *Lancet* study assume that, with the number of around 50,000 additional non-violent deaths computed in their study, they have as of yet only recorded a small fraction of all the Iraqis who became indirect victims of the war – i.e. who died because of consequences of the war such as lack of food, drinking water, medicine, access to hospitals etc. Firstly, even when there is a sudden and drastic drop in the quality of living conditions, the mortality rate of a population does not increase immediately, but rather in a slow process of sustained malnutrition and increase in disease etc. Secondly, after June 2006 living conditions in Iraq worsened drastically once again. While the health care system largely collapsed, diseases spread because of the lack of access to drinking water and the contamination of rivers. Almost three million people became internal refugees; as a consequence, large parts of the cities turned into slums.⁶⁴

The long-term consequences through the poisoning of the environment brought about by the war must also be taken into consideration. Many areas of Iraq that were subjected to furious attacks by the occupying forces show a dramatic increase in the number of diseases. In many areas, the number of occurrences of various forms of cancer, of miscarriages and abnormal and deformed babies multiplied. A major reason for this is likely to be the massive use of ammunition containing depleted uranium. On impact, this material combusts into extremely fine, highly toxic and radioactive uranium dust, which is able to spread very widely and can enter the body not just through the air but also via water and food.⁶⁵

⁶² “[Iraq](#),” ICMP [last accessed October 8, 2011].

⁶³ “[Iraqi Death Estimator](#),” Just Foreign Policy.

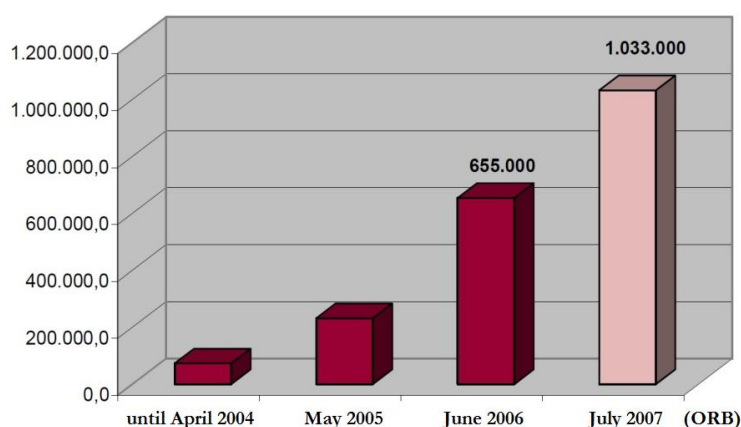
⁶⁴ See “[Iraq: Coping with violence and striving to earn a living](#),” ICRC, March 30, 2010; “[IRAQ: Food insecurity on the rise, says official](#),” IRIN (UN OCHA), November 8, 2009; “[Fact sheet: Housing & shelter in Iraq](#),” UN Human Settlements Program (UN-HABITAT), October 05, 2010; Joachim Guilliard, “[Die vergessene Besatzung](#)” [The forgotten occupation], *junge Welt*, February 18, 2011.

⁶⁵ [Iraq littered with high levels of nuclear and dioxin contamination, study finds](#), The Guardian, 22 January 2010.

According to the Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) and the Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC), since 2003 U.S. and UK troops have used around 13,000 cluster bombs in Iraq. Iraq littered with high levels of nuclear and dioxin contamination, study finds, These have disseminated their sub-ammunition – almost 2 million bomblets – widely in and around the fought-over cities. In addition, the 20 million bomblets from the 61,000 cluster bombs dropped in 1991 have also still not all been cleared. This makes Iraq one of the countries with the highest contamination of highly explosive unexploded ordnance in the world.⁶⁶

The most extreme example of the increase in disease can be witnessed in Fallujah. This major city, which was home to some 300,000 inhabitants, was largely destroyed by two attacks by U.S. troops in April and November 2004. Crawford

Increase in the Total Number of Additional Deaths Until July 2007



Source: *Lancet* study 2006 & ORB study 2008

describes this very extensively in her study for Costs of War.⁶⁷ Apart from uranium ammunition, chemical weapons were used including bombs containing white phosphorus. As shown by a study by the *International Journal of Environment Research and Public Health*, child mortality multiplied in the following years, the number of occurrences of cancer quadrupled, and the number of cases of leukemia increased by a factor of 40.⁶⁸ Even if there are no definitely determined factors yet that account for this alarming increase, it is beyond doubt that they are consequences of the attacks on the city. The likeliest cause of most cases is the contamination by the weapons that were used.⁶⁹ Since these were used by the US forces in

Hindin et al., [Teratogenicity of depleted uranium aerosols: A review from an epidemiological perspective](#), *Int J Environ Res Public Health* 2010, 4:17, 2005.

Al-Hadithi et al., [Birth defects in Iraq and the plausibility of environmental exposure: a review](#), *Conflict and Health*, 28 July 2012.

Dahr Jamail, [Iraqi Doctors Call Depleted Uranium Use “Genocid”](#), *Truthout*, 14 October 2014
[In a State of Uncertainty: impact and implications of the use of depleted uranium in Iraq](#), IKV Pax Christi, 7 March 2013.

⁶⁶ Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, [“Country Profiles Iraq 2011”](#) and [“Cluster Munition Monitor 2010”](#), Mines Action Canada, October 2010; both available at www.the-monitor.org.

⁶⁷ Neta C. Crawford, [“Civilian Death and Injury in Iraq, 2003-2011.”](#)

⁶⁸ Chris Busby, Malak Hamdan & Entesar Ariabi, [“Cancer, Infant Mortality and Birth Sex-Ratio in Fallujah, Iraq 2005–2009,”](#) *International Journal of Environment Research and Public Health*, Vol. 7 No. 7, (July 6, 2010), pp. 2828-2837.

⁶⁹ Alaani et al., [Uranium and other contaminants in hair from the parents of children with congenital anomalies in Fallujah, Iraq](#), S. Alaani, M. Savabieasfahani, M. Tafash and P. Manduca, [Four Polygamous Families with Congenital Birth Defects from Fallujah, Iraq](#), *Int J Environ Res Public*

many other cities as well, similar, though less pronounced long-term consequences are to be expected also in these areas.

If all this is taken into consideration the total number of indirect victims is probably much higher than that of direct victims.

Ostrich Policy

The war against Iraq was led by the U.S. and a number of European states. After the invasion, the U.N. Security Council gave this “coalition of the willing” the mandate to take care of security and stability in the country. But whereas a large number of mortality studies were conducted in and around the Sudanese region of Darfur (24 between April 2004 and January 2005 alone),⁷⁰ interest in the humanitarian consequences of the – in terms of international law – highly questionable actions of the coalition in Iraq has remained low. Even though the “multinational armed forces” were operating in the country under the mandate of the U.N., the latter did little to evaluate the full extent of the humanitarian consequences of this mission. The U.N.’s demeanor in Afghanistan displays the same kind of irresponsibility, and there are no indications that after NATO’s war in Libya, U.N. organizations will take any serious measures to find out how many Libyans have paid for the deployment of French, British, and U.S. troops “for the protection of the civilian population” with their lives, and how many of them became victims of the conditions created by that very same intervention afterwards.

In Darfur, on the other hand, surveys were carried out by U.N. organizations WHO, UNICEF, UNHCR and the World Food Program as well as numerous Western aid organizations such as Doctors without Borders. Here, too, the estimates varied between several tens to several hundreds of thousands of victims. Finally, in 2006, there appeared an analysis in *Science Magazine* which combined the results of different studies in an attempt “to begin to comprehend the tragedy of the conflict and the extent of the *genocide*.”⁷¹ In the end, the two authors, John Hagan and Alberto Palloni, estimated the number of victims at around 200,000. Since then, this number has been adopted and is in general use – mostly without citing the source or mentioning that it represents a rather rough estimate.

While the U.S. media watchdog organization FAIR found this number quoted in more than 1,000 articles in major U.S. newspapers during the year 2007, they could find barely a trace of both the *Lancet* and the ORB studies. The pattern of differential treatment is simple: “Journalists question or outright ignore studies that reveal the humanitarian costs of U.S. military policy,” FAIR says, “while those estimates that reflect badly on official enemies, as in Darfur, take on the solidity of undisputed fact.”⁷²

Health, August 2011

Manduca et al., “[High Prevalence Data and Increase in Time of Birth Defects in Fallujah, Iraq: Historical Reproductive Life and Hair Metal Load in Newborns and Children with Birth Defects and Their Families.](#)” Newweapons Committee, March 26, 2011.

⁷⁰ Debarati Guha-Sapir & Olivier Degomme, “[Counting the Deaths in Darfur: Estimating mortality from multiple survey data.](#)” HiCN Working Paper 15, April 2006. See also Olivier Degomme & Debarati Guha-Sapir, “[Assessing Mortality in Conflicts: A Comparison of Surveys from Iraq, Darfur and the Democratic Republic of Congo.](#)” *JSM*, 2008.

⁷¹ John Hagan & Alberto Palloni, “[Death in Darfur.](#)” *op. cit.* (emphasis added); for the differential treatment of the murders in Darfur and Iraq, see Mahmood Mamdani, “[The Politics of Naming: Genocide, Civil War, Insurgency.](#)” *London Review of Books*, Vol. 29 No. 5 (March 8, 2007); and Edward S. Herman, “[Genocide Inflation is the Real Human Rights Threat: Yugoslavia and Rwanda.](#)” *ZNet*, October 26, 2007.

⁷² Patrick McElwee, “[A Million Iraqi Dead? - The U.S. press buries the evidence.](#)” *Extral*, January/February 2008, New York: FAIR.

“When the President of Sudan denies widespread massacres in Darfur, when President Ahmadinejad downplays the Holocaust, we are all appalled,” *Lancet* co-author Les Roberts said during a hearing in the German Bundestag organized by the Left Party parliamentary group. “Please do not allow Germany to be associated with the Americans doing the same thing as part of their so-called war on terror.”⁷³

Incomplete Databases

Joachim Guilliard

The project Iraq Body Count (IBC) is a good example of the enormous gaps that can occur when trying to record the victims of violence during a war.

IBC is certainly the most elaborate and careful project concerned with recording the civilian victims of any war to date; it is very reliable with regard to the number of Iraqi civilians that we can be sure were killed since the start of the war. But even IBC is by no means able to record every casualty, and its data must therefore only be considered as the lowest limit in estimating the true number of war victims. If we regard them as the best number, it means running the risk of very seriously underestimating the actual extent of a humanitarian catastrophe.

Since the IBC’s passive methods are also used in other conflicts to achieve estimates of casualty numbers, it is worth trying to ascertain how big the gaps in the records actually are. There is good reason to closely investigate the IBC data because of the fact they are freely accessible.

IBC exclusively registers the numbers of killed civilians that are reported in respected English-language media. This is defined on the project’s website as “non-combatants killed by military or paramilitary action and the breakdown in civil security following the invasion.”⁷⁴ The project counts all cases reported by at least two independent sources. If the data differ, the larger number counts as the “maximum,” the smaller one as the “minimum.” These cases are supplemented by matching them with the data of some of the larger Iraqi morgues and hospitals. In September 2011, IBC put its minimum at close to 103,000 and its maximum at around 112,000 killed Iraqi civilians.

Actually, the scientists at IBC concede – although not in a particularly visible place – that their methods can only partially ascertain the number of deaths. “We are not a news organization ourselves and like everyone else can only base our information on what has been reported so far,” IBC says on its homepage. “Our maximum therefore refers to *reported deaths* – which can only be a sample of true deaths unless one assumes that every civilian death has been reported. It is likely that many if not most civilian casualties will go unreported by the media. That is the sad nature of war.”⁷⁵

IBC Criticism of the *Lancet* Studies

Nevertheless, the leading figures of the IBC project are now among the fiercest critics of the two *Lancet* studies as well as of the PLOS study published in 2013.⁷⁶

⁷³ Les Roberts, “[Statement prepared for Heike Hansel, MP & colleagues](#),” Berlin, March 7, 2008.

⁷⁴ Iraq Body Count website, www.iraqbodycount.org/.

⁷⁵ See IBC website under “Quick FAQ.”

⁷⁶ In his critique of the carefully designed PLOS study 2013 Michael Spagat rejects the attempt to take the indirect war victims into account by estimating the “Excess Deaths” as “pretty squishy” He claims that the increase calculated for total mortality could be due to different factors than only to the direct and indirect consequences of war. However, he remains short on proposals for possi-

With indefatigable zeal, they also challenge the scientists who defend the *Lancet* studies and editors of media that speak positively about them.⁷⁷

Their arguments are not really based on scientific grounds, but rather on simple doubts about the general statistical investigative methods. “Speculation is no substitute,” was the headline of an article in which they defended their project against the first *Lancet* study.⁷⁸ It is impossible, they argued in an attempt to cast doubt on the second study, to extrapolate from 300 deaths among 12,000 Iraqis to a total number of the victims of violence in a population of 26 million by multiplying every death by a factor of more than 2,000. But the argument completely ignores that the exact same thing is done – and broadly accepted – on a daily basis in countless other representative polls, despite the mostly much smaller sample base.

IBC concluded, therefore, that the *Lancet* figure of 601,000 deaths, which was more than twelve times higher than their own, had to be vastly exaggerated. It was hardly likely, IBC said, that such a high percentage of deaths had never made it into the media, and it was equally unimaginable that in the last year of the study, 900 Iraqis had been killed per day, yet on average only 80 of these had been registered. Finally, IBC deemed it unbelievable that the occupation forces had killed more Iraqis during the study’s final year than during the “massive ‘Shock and Awe’ invasion.”

According to IBC, the only fact that could be concluded from the *Lancet* study was that “some 300 post-invasion violent deaths occurred among the members of the households interviewed.” This, they said, was a significant contribution in registering the casualties. The details of those deaths could thus be added to the list of around 50,000 other cases already collected by IBC.⁷⁹

This line of argument impressed most journalists and activists who, for the most part, are not exactly experts in statistics. To many, the clean and clear data of IBC seemed more reliable and less speculative. Intuitively, most were inclined to believe IBC co-founder John Sloboda’s assertion that the actual casualty numbers could well be as much as double. In the face of these fierce controversies about casualty numbers, even Neta C. Crawford, Professor of Political Science at Boston University, finally decided to take the IBC data as the baseline of her recommendable study that she carried out for the anti-war project Costs of War of Brown University. Upon the advice of Michael Spagat, one of the most vehement critics of the *Lancet* studies, this committed political scientist is also suspicious of representative studies in this context. Although she quite correctly describes a number of flaws in the method of passive registration, she still describes “the IBC method of recording of civilian death as the most transparent and up to date.”⁸⁰

But given the awful situation in Iraq, was the number of 900 Iraqis killed per day really so unimaginable? Is it really so unlikely that IBC only recorded every twelfth victim of violence?

ble other serious causes. [Questioning The Lancet, PLOS, And Other Surveys On Iraqi Deaths, An Interview With Univ. of London Professor Michael Spagat](#), Musings on Iraq, January 27, 2014)

⁷⁷ See the IBC statement of October 16, 2006 “[Reality checks: some responses to the latest Lancet estimates](#),” the letter to the 27 Australian scientists, quoted by Stephen Soldz: “[Iraq Body Count finds a task worth their time](#),” and the written exchange between IBC and the [World Socialist Web Site of 06.04.2007](#), published at [www.wsws.org](#).

⁷⁸ Hamit Dardagan, John Sloboda & Josh Dougherty, “[Speculation is no substitute: a defence of Iraq Body Count](#),” [www.iraqbodycount.org](#), April 2006.

⁷⁹ “[Reality checks: some responses to the latest Lancet estimates](#),” *op. cit.*

⁸⁰ Neta C. Crawford, “[Civilian Death and Injury in Iraq, 2003-2011](#),” Boston University / [costsofwar.org](#), September 2011.

Evidence of a Gross Underestimation by IBC

The fate of Iraqi physicians is one area that is very well documented. According to data from the independent Iraqi Medical Association, of the 34,000 registered physicians, almost 2,000 have been killed and 20,000 have, by now, left the country.⁸¹ In its database, IBC lists only 70 Iraqi physicians.⁸² Even though this may in part be due to a lack of data on the profession of the victims, this piece of evidence alone suggests very large gaps in IBC's calculations.

According to the Najaf governorate's spokesperson Ahmed Di'aibil (member of the Supreme Islamic Council of Iraq), in this city alone, which has a population of close to 600,000, 40,000 non-identified corpses were buried since the start of the war.⁸³ The IBC database documents only 1,354 victims in Najaf.

In a September 2009 speech, Samir Sumaidaie, the Iraqi ambassador to the U.S. installed by the occupation power, talked about 500,000 newly widowed persons in Iraq. A February 2007 BBC poll came to the conclusion that 17% of all Iraqi households have lost at least one member through violence since 2003.⁸⁴ Given the total population at the time of some 27 million, this too suggests that more than 500,000 Iraqis fell victim to the war and its consequences within the first four years.

By 2008, the number of refugees in foreign countries and internally displaced persons had risen to almost 5 million. According to John Tirman, Director of the Center for International Studies at MIT, in all wars since 1945 the ratio of refugees to persons killed has been under 10:1; mostly around the 5:1 mark. These figures would also point, therefore, to a number of war casualties between half a million and one million.⁸⁵

Even though these are certainly very rough estimates, they point to a large underestimation of the number of casualties by IBC. The IBC estimates are also much lower than the numbers that were repeatedly published by the UN, which were based on the numbers from hospitals and morgues communicated by the Iraqi Ministry of Health. These reports are available only for certain years or quarter years, since the occupying power repeatedly banned the transmission of these figures. For 2006, the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) put the total number of those murdered at 34,500; IBC gave a "maximum" of 23,000 for the same year.⁸⁶

In October 2006, then Iraqi Minister of Health Ali al-Shemari estimated the total number of victims since March 2003 at between 100,000 and 150,000;⁸⁷ IBC gave a number of "only" 48,000 victims for the same period.

At present, IBC has registered 112,000 deaths. But the Iraq War Logs of the U.S. military, published by *WikiLeaks*,⁸⁸ contain data on 92,000 Iraqi civilians killed in the years between 2004 and 2009 – quite a high number given the fact that they

⁸¹ Dahr Jamail and Ali Al-Fadhily, "[Medical System Becomes Sickening](#)," *Inter Press Service*, November 23, 2006; Hannah Gurman, "[The Iraq withdrawal: An Orwellian success](#)," *Salon.com*, August 15, 2010.

⁸² Dirk Adriaenssens, "[Iraq: The Age Of Darkness](#)," *BRussels Tribunal Newsletter*, September 2011.

⁸³ "[40,000 unidentified corpses buried in Najaf since the beginning of the U.S.-led invasion](#)," *Middle East Online*, September 9, 2007.

⁸⁴ Gilbert Burnham and Les Roberts, "[U.S. must face huge death toll of Iraqi civilians](#)," *Baltimore Sun*, October 9, 2007.

⁸⁵ "[Looking Back on Ten Years of War, Trauma, Death, & Displacement](#)," *Iraq: the Human Cost*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Center for International Studies, December 2011.

⁸⁶ UNAMI, [press statement from January 16 2007](#), available at www.uniraq.org.

⁸⁷ "[Iraqi death toll estimates go as high as 150,000](#)," *Taipei Times*, November 11, 2006.

⁸⁸ See www.iraqwarlogs.com.

were not systematically registered.⁸⁹ Among them there are many never reported by the media, which is what led IBC to estimate that the Logs contain 15,000 deaths that are missing in its own database. A careful analysis carried out by scientists at Columbia University, however, showed that in two-thirds of incidents, one source was not included in the other study (see below).⁹⁰

Health Minister al-Shemari had based his significantly higher estimate on the deaths that were registered on a daily basis in the hospitals and morgues. He estimated the number of violent deaths in the whole country to be 100 per day and added these up for the years 2003 to 2006. But Dr. Abdul-Razzaq al-Obaidi, the head of the central morgue of Baghdad, thinks this number is far too low; according to him, the daily number for his own morgue alone was 60. Thus, according to al-Obaidi, the Ministry had seemingly not taken into account the data provided by many smaller hospitals in the city in its calculations. A member of staff at the central morgue's department of statistics goes even further, accusing the Health Ministry of a conscious strategy to downplay the number of the victims: "By orders of the minister's office, we cannot talk about the real number of deaths." He says this has been the situation since 2004, and believes it is because the numbers registered by the morgue were never consistent with what the Ministries of Health and the Interior publicly announced. "They do it on purpose," he says. "The ministry would say ten people got killed in the whole of Iraq, while I had received in that day more than 50 dead bodies in Baghdad alone."⁹¹

But far greater holes in the statistics arise from the fact that only a small fraction of those killed ever reached an institution where they would or could be registered. And the number of those that can be registered decreases with the measure of fierce military battles and the escalation of the violence between various groups of the population. Thus, in the cities and city neighborhoods attacked and encircled by the occupation troops, many of the wounded did not see a hospital for days or weeks, and many of the dead could never be brought to a cemetery.⁹² The wounded frequently died at home, and – as noted above – since Islam demands a burial within one day, they could often only be buried in the family's courtyard or garden. And even where it would have theoretically been possible for those affected to bring their relatives and friends to a morgue, many often refrained from doing this out of the realistic fear of then becoming targets for the murderers themselves.⁹³

Some simple examples show just how obviously incomplete reporting from the most violent war regions can be. In June 2006, for example, not a single violent death was reported from the province of Anbar, even though most battles between the occupation forces and its opponents took place in this stronghold of the resistance. According to the data of the most frequently quoted sources (IBC, U.N., and Brookings Institute), at that time 80 percent of the registered violent cases of death occurred in Baghdad. Yet the degree of violence in Baghdad, where around a fifth of the population were living, did not greatly exceed the average for

⁸⁹ "[Protokolle der Grausamkeit](#)," *op. cit.*

⁹⁰ Dustin Carpenter, Tova Fuller & Les Roberts, "[WikiLeaks and Iraq Body Count: the Sum of Parts May Not Add Up to the Whole – A Comparison of Two Tallies of Iraqi Civilian Deaths](#)," *Prehospital and Disaster Medicine*, Vol. 28 No. 3 (June 2013), pp. 223-229.

⁹¹ Lourdes Garcia-Navarro, "[Though Numbers Unclear, Iraqi Deaths Touch Many](#)," *National Public Radio*, February 24, 2009.

⁹² "[War and Occupation in Iraq](#)," *op. cit.*

⁹³ Juan Cole, "[655,000 Dead in Iraq since Bush Invasion](#)," *Informed Comment*, October 11, 2006.

the whole country.⁹⁴ Clearly, a large number of the violent deaths that occurred in the other four fifths of Iraq were somehow omitted.

Even in the capital, however, the level of reporting was far from thorough. Random spot checks have suggested that more than two-thirds of all violent deaths that occurred in Baghdad between 2003 and 2007 did not appear in the media, and were therefore not included in IBC's statistics.⁹⁵

A comparison between the deaths listed in the War Logs of the U.S. military published by *WikiLeaks* and the entries in the IBC database also points to enormous gaps in both.⁹⁶ A group of 23 students from a course on epidemiological methods at the Columbia University School of Public Health checked 2,300 randomly selected entries on civilian victims in the Iraq War Logs to see how many of them could also be found in the IBC database. They found matching entries only for 19.3%, with a further 8.7% – mostly individual murders in Baghdad – *perhaps* corresponding to IBC entries. Correlation between the sources was mostly found in important events with many deaths, which is unsurprising given the broad coverage of these incidents. Generally, however, the students found that only every sixth individual death in the Logs had a match in the IBC database. They also found strong evidence for the severe underrepresentation of the country as a whole compared to that of Baghdad; for most of the deaths registered in the Logs that occurred outside of Baghdad, they could not find even a similar case in the IBC database for the days and the province in question.

From the fact that IBC did not register more than a fourth or a fifth of the deaths recorded on a second list obtained from the Iraqi war log, we can conclude that the actual number of the victims has to be at least four or five times higher. Actually, the factor is probably even higher still, as the U.S. soldiers did not record the fatalities among Iraqis in their war logs in a systematic fashion, but rather when and if circumstances required it. The logs, too, often only quoted media reports, data from morgues, or reports from Iraqi ministries – i.e. the same sources used by IBC. This would substantially increase the number of corresponding entries. On the other hand, the victims of many incidents are missing in both documents. For example, evidence of the 27,000 bombs that were dropped in 2003 during the invasion of Iraqi cities is practically non-existent in the IBC database,⁹⁷ and the War Logs contain barely any information on the victims of U.S. air strikes.

***Lancet* Study Figures Appear More Plausible**

According to the renowned U.S. Middle East expert Juan Cole, if one takes the situation in the whole country into account then the *Lancet* numbers are quite plausible. At the time, Cole argued that Ramadi, the capital of the Anbar province, was the scene of daily violent clashes between guerillas, inhabitants of the town and tribes on one side and U.S. Marines and Iraqi security forces on the other. But there were practically no reports on the violence, nor did one ever hear anything about any victims in Ramadi: “Does one person a day die there of political violence? Is it more like four? Ten? What about Samarra? Tikrit? No one is saying.”⁹⁸ There are about 90 major cities in Iraq. Even though the situation in those in the

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Anne Siegler, Les Roberts *et al.*, “[Media Coverage of Violent Deaths in Iraq: An Opportunistic Capture-Recapture Assessment](#),” *Prehospital and Disaster Medicine*, Vol. 23 No. 4 (August 2008), pp. 369-371.

⁹⁶ Carpenter, Fuller & Roberts, *op. cit.*; see also Les Roberts, “Do WikiLeaks and Iraq Body Count tell the same story?,” *brussellstribunal.org*, March 5, 2011.

⁹⁷ Robert A. Pape, “The True Worth of Air Power,” *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2004.

⁹⁸ Cole, *op. cit.*

south was often quieter than in Baghdad, many others suffered a level of violence comparable to that of the capital, where the morgues registered an average of 100 persons murdered every day throughout 2006. In Basra, about half the size of Baghdad, a number of 40 is certainly very likely according to Cole. Even if all other cities had on average “only” four murder cases per day, combined with the Baghdad fatalities this would already add up to 460 deaths each day – half the number estimated in the *Lancet* study for 2006.

One can go even further with this line of reasoning: The province of Nineveh, with the third-largest Iraqi city Mosul as its capital, was also the scene of heavy fighting. The same is true for the provinces Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk und Saladin, the combined population of which is one and a half times larger than that of Baghdad. Here, too, one must therefore assume more than 150 deaths per day.

Deficient and One-Sided Reporting

Like many others, the leading figures of IBC accuse the *Lancet* authors of not having distinguished between civilian victims and combatants in their study. But this criticism backfires greatly, as how can such a distinction be reliably applied? The *Lancet* authors felt it impossible to achieve. IBC relies on reports in English-language media, which in turn mostly report data given to them by the U.S. military or the Iraqi government. Of course, these two parties have a vested interest to present the victims of their own attacks as “insurgents” and those of their opponents as “civilians”.

The reports by the Arab media – based on eyewitness reports – often strongly diverge from their Western counterparts in this respect. But among these, IBC processes only those that also appear in English translation.

Western media reports heavily concentrate on terrorist violence, such as car bombs and suicide attacks against markets or crowds of pilgrims. Not only were these sensational and occurred in easily accessible areas, they also fitted very nicely into the image of the war that leading circles in the West were trying to portray. In contrast to this, reports on the massive military battles in the strongholds of the resistance, on large-scale round-ups, and on the numerous fatal incidents at checkpoints were extremely rare. Therefore, the victims of bombings and suicide attacks against crowds, recruitment offices, police stations etc. are heavily represented in the IBC database – at present they account for 26% of the registered civilian victims. The lack of presence in and reporting from the major hotspots of war has led to a situation where less than 10% of the victims that appear in the database were killed by occupation troops, and only 7% by air attacks. According to the families polled in the context of the *Lancet* study, however, in 30% of cases their relatives were killed by occupation troops, and in 13% by air attacks.⁹⁹

A comparison with the known increase in aerial attacks (see box below) shows just how strongly IBC is probably underrepresenting victims of violence by the foreign armies. When the British media watchdog organization MediaLens searched the IBC database for the period between January and July 2005 for civilians killed by the occupation forces, they found just three incidents with a total number of 15 victims, despite the number of air attacks having increased from 25 to 120 in 2005.¹⁰⁰ For the period between July 2005 and January 2006, they also found no more than six entries that suggested deaths resulting from air attacks.

⁹⁹ “[Casualties of suicide bombings in Iraq, 2003-2010](#),” Iraq Body Count, September 3, 2011.

¹⁰⁰ “[U.S. Airstrikes Take Toll on Civilians - Eyewitnesses Cite Scores Killed in Marine Offensive in Western Iraq](#),” *Washington Post*, December 24, 2005.

In many cases, the occupying power explicitly blocked journalists from investigating instances where the British or American forces were accused of mass killings. Numerous journalists in Iraq who tried to report on the activities of the occupation troops and their consequences were killed or arrested. “The trouble is that a lot of the military – particularly the American military – do not want us there,” analyzed veteran BBC news reporter Nik Gowen. “And I think that this [...] is leading to security forces in some instances feeling it is legitimate to target us with deadly force and with impunity.”¹⁰¹ Khalid Samim of the Iraqi Association of Journalists also reported many threats against his colleagues after they had published articles that the U.S. military did not like, and Baghdad-based journalist Muhammad Hayat added that, while he was unable to blame anyone directly, the fact that critical articles were regularly followed by threats could very hardly be considered as a mere coincidence.¹⁰²

Examples of Large Gaps

Of course, missing deaths in the database can rarely be directly proven because such gaps arise from the very fact that reports are not available. However, some of these cases did become known later through other sources, and there are a number of incidents such as aerial attacks or military offensives where the number of casualties is roughly known or can be estimated. Moreover, spot checks have shown very clearly how vast the gaps in the IBC database are – particularly among deaths for which the occupying forces were responsible.

One example is a U.S.-led attack on May 3, 2005, which was brought to public knowledge because the small U.S. aid organization No More Victims had treated

Excursion: Air Attacks

Since 2005, the occupation forces have increasingly relied on the use of the air force in order to minimize their own losses. According to statements by the U.S. military, the number of air attacks quintupled during the year 2005. In 2006, already over 10,500 fighter plane sorties had been deployed for “aerial support,” i.e., almost 30 per day.

During these raids, the attackers dropped 177 heavy bombs with a combined weight of around 50,000 kg, fired 52 Hellfire rockets and thousands of smaller remote-controlled or unguided missiles, and shot tens of thousands of rounds from aircraft cannons. Not included in these numbers for the U.S. Air Force are the sorties flown by the fighter planes and fighter helicopters of the U.S. Marines.

According to its own data, in 2007 the U.S. Air Force once more quadrupled the number of aerial sorties as compared to 2006, while the number of the bombs dropped increased tenfold in the same period.

Occasionally, the air force even used its powerful fighter planes to intervene in the street fighting in major Iraqi cities. This was the case during the battles in Haifa Street, a once wealthy business quarter in Baghdad, which apart from the usual Apache helicopters and F15 Jets also saw the use of the B1b Lancer. According to an “embedded” journalist, such a long-distance bomber, whose bomb load capacity of 34 tons is the largest in the whole U.S. Air Force, played a decisive role in the “street battles”: It was in the air for a full 10 hours, bombarded 25 targets, and dropped thousands of pounds of explosives. Among the buildings destroyed in the process was a hospital of the “insurgents.”

In its human rights report on Iraq for the period from April 1 to June 30, 2007, the U.N. Mission in Iraq, UNAMI, criticized the extensive aerial raids because of the high number of civilian casualties. Neither the extent of nor the massive increase in the air raids since 2005 are mirrored in the IBC database in any way.

¹⁰¹ Jeremy Scahill, “Shooting the Messenger,” *The Nation*, February 17, 2005.

¹⁰² “Iraqis express anger over ‘covert’ US press plan,” *IRIN* (Integrated Regional Information Networks), December 19, 2005.

one of the survivors. Little Alaa' Khalid had been severely wounded when a U.S. tank demolished her family's house in al-Qaim. Fourteen women and children were killed or wounded that afternoon; the men had not yet come home from work. Among the dead were two of Alaa's brothers and three of her cousins.¹⁰³

If anything, the media on that day only reported that U.S. troops had "killed nine insurgents" near al-Qaim. The Reuters news agency mentioned an additional three deaths and two wounded persons – one of them a six-year-old girl.¹⁰⁴ The IBC database does not contain any evidence of this crime.

After a whole series of massacres by the occupation troops, al-Qaim – a major city on the Euphrates with a population of 100,000 to 150,000 – had developed into a stronghold of the opposition. In April and May 2005, it was the focus of the U.S. attacks in the context of "Operation Matador." According to local physicians, this offensive cost more than a hundred lives, and international aid organizations spoke of over 12,000 inhabitants who fled the city. Some observers compared the situation with the one in Fallujah in 2004. Although most of the Western media looked the other way, there were some reports on the attack (i.e. by the news agency Inter Press Service (IPS)¹⁰⁵ and *The Guardian*).¹⁰⁶ For the entire period, however, there is not one single death in al-Qaim recorded in the database. Thus, either those deaths did not meet the IBC criteria, or all victims were categorized as "combatants." In its own report, which detailed the success of the offensive, the U.S. military mentioned 125 killed "militants."

On December 24, 2005, the *Washington Post* printed a remarkably detailed report on the possible civilian casualties of a military offensive carried out the month before up the Euphrates west of Baghdad. According to the report, as well as "insurgents" numerous civilians had also been killed, primarily by the air force. How many civilians were among the dead was controversial, but hospitals, medical personnel, and eyewitnesses all testified that "scores of noncombatants" had fallen victim to the 17-day operation "Steel Curtain." This was just one of the many offensives through which the occupation forces tried to subdue the unruly province.

Some 2,500 U.S. Marines und 1,000 Iraqi soldiers took part in operation "Steel Curtain." According to the U.S. military, 139 "insurgents" and ten U.S. Marines were killed; no information was given about the number of killed Iraqi soldiers or civilian casualties.¹⁰⁷

On November 7, the third day of the offensive, eyewitnesses quoted in the *Washington Post* spoke of U.S. fighter planes that had destroyed a number of houses in the district Kamaliyat of Husaybah. In the end, at least one family – the parents and three children of the ages five, eleven, and fourteen – were dead before they

¹⁰³ <http://www.nomorevictims.org/category/children/alaa/> [last accessed October 19, 2014].

¹⁰⁴ "In Al Qaim, near the Syrian border, American troops killed at least nine insurgents on Monday after they stopped a truck carrying heavily armed men and were fired upon, the military said." [Iraqi Cabinet Is Sworn In, but 6 Positions Still Remain Unfilled](#), *New York Times*, May 4, 2005; "[12 Die in U.S. Raid Near Syrian Border](#)," *Reuters*, May 3, 2005.

¹⁰⁵ Dahr Jamal, "[U.S. Claims Over Siege Challenged](#)," *IPS*, May 19, 2005; *ibid.*, A 'Welcome Parade' of Blood and Seething Anger, *Antimwar.com*, May 16, 2005.

¹⁰⁶ Jason Burke, "[Civilians die in gunfights on border](#)," *The Observer*, April 25, 2004.

¹⁰⁷ "U.S. Airstrikes Take Toll on Civilians: Eyewitnesses Cite Scores Killed in Marine Offensive in Western Iraq," *Washington Post*, December 24, 2005; see also Dahr Jamal, "Operation Steel Curtain", *dahrjamil.net*, November 7, 2005; Bill Van Auken, "Steel Curtain in Iraq—another US war crime," *World Social Web Site*, November 8, 2005.

could be retrieved from the rubble. The IBC database does not even register this incident.

Washington Post reporters also inspected a cemetery near al-Qaim where, according to officials of the Anbar province, 80 to 90 victims of the offensive had been buried. And indeed, the journalist discovered dozens of fresh graves. People living nearby told them that on this very day, more than 40 of the battle's casualties were still scheduled to be buried. Eleven corpses already lay in their caskets, among them two women. The son of one of the women said they had been killed during air raids. The IBC database does not contain any incidents for al-Qaim for November 2005.

According to statements by tribal leaders, there had also been at least 80 deaths in nearby Husaybah, among them women and children. It was impossible, said one of the leaders, to give an exact number, because "people buried bodies in backyards and parking lots" while other bodies still lay under the rubble. On Husaybah, too, there is nothing in the IBC database: There are simply no casualties from air strikes registered at all for November 2005.

The U.S. military generally denies having killed civilians during these offensives. One of the few cases where it admitted there had been civilian victims was an air attack against residential houses in Husaybah on November 8, where five civilians were found in the ruins. The military leadership claimed that insurgents had used these victims as hostages and human shields – a very frequent claim whenever it was impossible to deny civilian air strike victims. The credibility of this justification is irrelevant here, as in any case these are still civilian victims of the war. Yet even these five were not registered by IBC. Inge van de Merlen of the Brussels Tribunal discovered an additional number of similar gaps when she investigated a massive attack against the Adhamiya quarter in Baghdad in June 2006.¹⁰⁸

The examples above were consciously taken from the time prior to February 2006, the point in time when inner-Iraqi violence escalated after the bombing of the Golden Mosque in Samarra and the situation became even more confusing than before. Millions of Iraqis fled or were expelled, and there were fewer and fewer reliable data about the number of the victims. During this period, therefore, the trend registered by IBC, which until mid-2006 was quite synchronous with the trend shown in the *Lancet* studies, probably did not reflect the whole extent of the escalation.

The IBC project provides valuable data on the humanitarian costs of the war: More than 6,000 victims are given a name through IBC's table of those among the dead who could be identified. Apart from a reliable minimum of the number of civilian casualties over all the years up to today, it provides useful data on the course the level of violence in Iraq took in the years since 2003. However, using these numbers without taking into account the limits of what they can tell us, thoroughly obscures the real extent of the catastrophe.

¹⁰⁸ Inge van de Merlen, "[The assault on Adhamiya: Limitations and perspectives of war reporting from Iraq](#)," *BRussels Tribunal*, July 24, 2006.

Unfortunately, leading figures of IBC can be accused of doing exactly this more and more in their own studies – for example those that they conduct together with Michael Spagat and Madelyn Hsiao-Rei Hicks, who are among the fiercest opponents of the *Lancet* studies. In one of the most recent of these studies published in February 2011 and utilizing the IBC database in order to determine the number of deaths per perpetrator group, the authors say: “A strength of our study is its use of verifiable data on 92,614 actual civilian deaths from armed violence. Surveys extrapolate from relatively few actual violent deaths.”¹⁰⁹ They should not be surprised, therefore, when they are met with harsh criticism, such as the analysis by MediaLens “Iraq Body Count: A Very Misleading Exercise”.¹¹⁰

“The Numbers War”: On the Dispute Surrounding the Credibility of the *Lancet* Studies

Joachim Guilliard

Since Iraq Body Count is probably the most careful project of its kind, other sta-

On November 19, 2005, 24 civilians, including women and children, were murdered in Haditha, Iraq. Following this incident, four U.S. Marines were indicted of murder, but were finally acquitted in January 2012.



tistics relying on reported and registered cases of death are likely to use even less complete databases and thus underestimate the number of the victims to an even greater extent. If one wants to estimate the humanitarian costs of a war more precisely, one has to go to the affected locations and ask the families about the number of deaths they have suffered. In Iraq, this was done in several studies (see “‘Body Count’ in Iraq”).

According to most experts, the most solid estimate of the number of casualties was provided by the second *Lancet* study, conducted in 2006.¹¹¹ The ensuing controversy over the figures, therefore, also tended to focus on this study. The criticism was targeted not just at the quality of the study itself; opponents also frequently tried to call into question the plausibility of the results of representative studies in general. This section begins, therefore, by addressing in-depth the scientific and political controversies surrounding the study. Following this, the differences between the *Lancet* study and the study by the Iraqi Health Ministry, WHO, and the IFHS are analyzed, in an attempt to show that, on closer inspection, the latter study tends to confirm rather than reject the findings of the *Lancet*.

The *Lancet* study

The basis of the *Lancet* study, which was executed by a U.S.-Iraqi team led by renowned scientists at the Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University, was a survey of a representative selection of 1,850 Iraqi households

¹⁰⁹ Hicks, Dardagan, Serdán, Bagnall, Sloboda & Spagat, *op. cit.*

¹¹⁰ “Iraq Body Count: A Very Misleading Exercise”, Media Lens, October 3, 2007.

¹¹¹ Burnham, Doocy, Lafta & Roberts, *op. cit.*

across the entire country. Altogether, almost 13,000 persons participated in the poll. The study recorded both the deaths in the 15 months before and the deaths in the 40 months after the start of the war; over 90% of these deaths were corroborated by death certificates.

According to the study, the mortality rate increased from 5.5 deaths per annum and per 1,000 inhabitants the year before the war to 13.3 in the period thereafter. The difference between the two gives the number of persons per 1,000 who would be still alive without the war and occupation. Projected over a total population of around 26 million and a time frame of around 40 months, we are talking about 655,000 lives lost. This is only an estimate, but the imprecision of this number due to the very small fraction of the population polled can be determined mathematically. According to this calculation, the actual number of casualties has a 95 percent likelihood of being between 390,000 and 940,000 – the so-called 95% confidence interval. Within this interval, numbers around 655,000 have the greatest likelihood, whereas higher and lower numbers become more unlikely the further away from this value they are. The likelihood that the actual casualty number is under 600,000 is less than 20%; that the number is fewer than 390,000 has a likelihood of only 2.5%. By the same method, the number of violent deaths was estimated at 601,000, with a confidence interval between 426,000 and 794,000.

The method applied here is standard. It was also applied in the DRC, Angola and Bosnia and was widely accepted.

The study under discussion was already the second study to be conducted by the Bloomberg School – the first having been carried out in summer 2004. With regard to the results of the time period dealt with in the first study, the results of the new study confirmed them fairly well. The first study had estimated almost 100,000 casualties for the first 18 months after the start of the war. It is true that this is somewhat less than the 112,000 casualties that the second study gave for this period, but the first study had left out the very large number of deaths in Fallujah in April 2004 on the grounds they were “extreme values”. This was, it turned out, too cautious.¹¹²

Spontaneous Rejection

Of course, the war-declaring governments could not simply let these explosive figures go unchallenged. Following the lead of U.S. President Bush, British Prime Minister Tony Blair also immediately dismissed the *Lancet* study as not credible: The study, he said, had used an “extrapolation method” and, furthermore, had done so using a relatively small sample from an area of Iraq that was not representative for the whole country. But, as the BBC revealed in March 2007, the government’s own scientists, when questioned, had confirmed that the study was in fact accurate and credible.

“The study design is robust and employs methods that are regarded as close to ‘best practice’ in this area,” responded chief scientific adviser of the Ministry of Defense, Sir Roy Anderson. He went on to recommend caution in publicly criticizing the study. Some scientists of the UK’s Department for International Development even voiced the opinion that the *Lancet* study actually underestimated the mortality rates because of the methods it applied.¹¹³

¹¹² See Joachim Guilliard, “[Die verheimlichten Opfer](#)” [The concealed victims], February 10, 2006, ITI – Initiative Internationales Tribunal der Völker gegen die Aggression gegen den Irak: website for the German Iraq Tribunal Initiative.

¹¹³ “[Iraqi deaths survey ‘was robust’](#),” *BBC News*, March 26, 2007.

E-mails that the BBC was able to procure based on the British Freedom of Information act show that Blair's advisors were fairly frustrated at first to hear that the *Lancet* study's method of investigation was unshakeable. The government finally declared that, even though the method had also been used in other conflict situations, the *Lancet* numbers were much higher than those provided by statistics from other sources, and that this demonstrated how greatly estimates could vary depending on the method of data collection.

From the very small circle of scientists who had initially expressed fierce criticism, after a while the only thing one heard was that "there is considerable debate amongst the scientific community over the accuracy of the figures." From then on, most of the media would mention the study, if at all, only with the addendum "controversial."

Barely Disputed Among Experts

This label, however, is simply untrue. Richard Garfield, Professor for Public Health at Columbia University, explained in an interview with the *Christian Science Monitor*: "I don't think there's anyone who's been involved in mortality research who thinks there's a better way to do it [i.e., determine the number of the casualties] in unsecured areas."¹¹⁴

And indeed, practically all specialists in the realm of epidemiology and population statistics who were asked for their opinion supported the study in principle.¹¹⁵ One example of this was the open letter written by 27 leading experts that stated that, of course, in areas of war uncertainties would always remain, but that these could certainly not call into question the basic results. According to them, the study was methodologically correct and thus provided the best up-to-date data on mortality rates in Iraq. Even though precision was always a problem, one could safely say that the number of the victims lay above 390,000 and was possibly even as large as 940,000.¹¹⁶

In an interview with the *Associated Press*, Richard Brennan, head of health programs at the New York-based International Rescue Committee, confirmed that the method of the study was "the most practical and appropriate methodology for sampling that we have in humanitarian conflict zones." Brennan's group had carried out similar projects in Kosovo, Uganda, and the DRC. "While the results of this survey may startle people, it's hard to argue with the methodology at this point."¹¹⁷ Sarah Leah Whitson of Human Rights Watch in New York also said that there was "no reason to question the findings or the accuracy" of the survey.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ "Iraq casualty figures open up new battleground", *Christian Science Monitor*, December 13, 2006.

¹¹⁵ MediaLens provides a whole collection: "[Democracy and Debate - Killing Iraq](#)," *MediaLens*, October 18, 2006.

¹¹⁶ "[The Iraq deaths study was valid and correct](#)," *The Age*, October 21, 2006.

¹¹⁷ Malcolm Ritter, "Bush Dismisses Iraq Death Toll Study", *Associated Press*, October 12, 2006.

¹¹⁸ "[Study Claims Iraq's 'Excess' Death Toll Has Reached 655,000](#)," *Washington Post*, October 11, 2006.

Further Expert Voices on the Study

Ronald Waldman, epidemiologist at Columbia University, describes the research method as “tested and reliable” and adds that it is currently the best estimate available.

Dr. David Rush, a professor and epidemiologist at Tufts University in Boston, suspects that under the given conditions the actual casualty numbers were more likely underestimated than overestimated.¹¹⁹

To Frank Harrell Jr., chair of the biostatistics department at Vanderbilt University, the design of the study is appropriate and the analysis of the data “solid” and “well-justified.”

Steve Heeringa, director of the statistical design group at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan, adds that he could not imagine how anyone could do more and in a much more rigorous fashion under the given circumstances.¹²⁰

Professor Sheila Bird of the Biostatistics Unit at the Medical Research Council also states that the precision of the study had substantially improved [in comparison to the first one] and that this is the “only scientifically based estimate that we have got where proper sampling has been done and where we get a proper measure of certainty about these results.”¹²¹

John Zogby, whose New York polling agency has also done several surveys in Iraq since the start of the war also unequivocally states: “The sampling is solid. The methodology is as good as it gets.”¹²² After all, Zogby says, the critics also see no problems in accepting the method for opinion polls where only 1,000 Americans are polled in a country with a population of 300 million.

Even Sir Richard Peto, Professor of Medical Statistics at the University of Oxford, who criticized the first *Lancet* study because of its small database, now described the new study on BBC television as “statistically reliable.”¹²³

In 2008, epidemiologists Christine Tapp, Frederick M. Burkle, Kumanan Wilson, Tim Takaro, Gordon H. Guyatt, Hani Amad, and Edward Mills subjected 13 of the studies or projects on casualty numbers in Iraq mentioned in our section “‘Body Count’ in Iraq” to systematic investigation – among them Iraq Body Count, the *Lancet* studies and the IFHS study.

In their evaluation, Tapp and her colleagues came to the conclusion that, out of all the “population-based studies” they had reviewed, “the Roberts and Burnham studies provided the most rigorous methodology as their primary outcome was mortality.” The IFHS study comes off considerably worse, not least because, as the IFHS authors themselves note, “the completeness in reporting of deaths was 62 percent” and “the underreporting for violent deaths may be as much as 50 percent.”

The IBC estimate is considered by Tapp *et al.* as “problematic as it relies solely on news reports that would likely considerably underestimate the total mortality. This method does not count indirect deaths, such as increased chronic illness due to the war, or deaths that are not publicly reported.”

Criticism from Scientists

But none of this has impressed the opponents of the *Lancet* study. Time and again, the big Western media, particularly the London *Times* and the German magazine *Der Spiegel*, impassively regurgitate old accusations. *Der Spiegel* was particularly unscrupulous in this regard, generically claiming that fellow experts questioned the methods of the study’s authors and even talked about fraud: The au-

¹¹⁹ Deena Beasley, “[Iraq death rate estimates defended by researchers](#),” *Reuters*, October 21, 2006.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Channel 4 News, October 11, 2006, quoted after “Democracy and Debate ...,” *op. cit.*

¹²² “[Critics say 600,000 Iraqi dead doesn't tally](#),” *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 12, 2006.

¹²³ BBC Newsnight, October 11, 2006, quoted in: “Democracy and Debate ...,” *op. cit.*

thors allegedly handpicked only the results they wanted and dodged all inconvenient questions.¹²⁴

Most of the time, in fact, it is just two “fellow experts” that are referred to: Professor Michael Spagat of the University of London and Dr. Madelyn Hicks of the London Institute of Psychiatry (IoP). Strictly speaking, Spagat, who to this day is the most quoted critic, is not even a “fellow expert”; he is an economist.¹²⁵

“Main Street Bias”

In the beginning, Spagat’s main argument as to why the study did “not stand up to scientific criteria” was the so-called “main street bias”: Casualty numbers were overestimated, Spagat said, because those polled were mainly families that lived on main streets. Allegedly, these families were at a far greater risk of dying in crossfire or through car bombs than those who lived further away.¹²⁶

In fact, the interviewers by no means focused on main streets; they polled residential quarters determined by a random allotment in such a way that every Iraqi family had the same chance of participating in the study. All in all, 50 so-called “clusters” with 40 households each were selected for the poll, with the number of clusters per province calculated in proportion to the population size. In a first step, a random generator selected a city or a village for each cluster, then one of the main streets in the location as well as a street that crossed the main street. Finally, the number of the house where the polling was to begin was randomly selected. Starting from that house, the neighboring houses were then successively visited and polled until 40 families were in the sample. There were problems with three of the clusters, which is why in the end only 1,849 clusters could be polled.

Critics objected that different methods were used for the drawing of the first house, and that this is not mentioned in the study report. Actually, however, the method has no consequences for the random character of the selection. Basically, the opponents of the study simply use this admonition as a spurious “proof” for the allegedly non-serious character of this work.

Quite independently of all this, there is no evidence for the theory that there is a higher risk of death risk along the main streets, as the forms of violence range from crackdowns to air attacks to car bombs and pre-planned assassinations by death squads. For that very reason, most victims were killed outside of their residential quarters. And if there actually were a “main street bias,” it would never lead, as suggested by Spagat, to an overestimate of the real number.¹²⁷

“40 Households per Day Not Feasible”

Equally untenable is Madelyn Hicks’ main argument, according to which the polling of 1,849 households could not have been achieved in the time available. Hicks argued that with 40 families to visit per day, that would have allowed only 15 minutes per family for questioning – even if working a ten-hour day.¹²⁸ But in her

¹²⁴ “[Kriegsopfer im Irak – Forscher bezweifeln Zahl von 650.000 Toten](#)” [Iraq war victims – researchers doubt the number of 650,000 deaths], *Spiegel Online*, March 6, 2007.

¹²⁵ See the [publication overview of Michael Spagat](#), on his website at the Department of Economics, Royal Holloway College, University of London.

¹²⁶ Neil F. Johnson, Michael Spagat, Sean Gourley, Jukka-Pekka Onnela & Gesine Reinert, “[Bias in Epidemiological Studies of Conflict Mortality](#),” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 45 No. 5 (September 2008), pp. 653-663.

¹²⁷ See also Tim Lambert, “[‘Main Street Bias’ paper](#),” *ScienceBlogs*, December 1, 2006.

¹²⁸ Madelyn Hsiao-Rei Hicks, “[Mortality after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: Were valid and ethical field methods used in this survey?](#),” HiCN Research Design Notes, No. 3 (December 1, 2006), Households in Conflict Network (HiCN), Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex (GB).

argument, she conveniently overlooks the fact that two teams both consisting of two women and two men carried out the study – information that is also registered in the study report.

“1,849 interviews in 49 days described in our study suggest that 38 interviews had to be conducted each day by our eight interviewers,” the authors say in response to their critics. For the most part, the teams informed the families about their plan beforehand through local children, and in the households where there were no deaths – the overwhelming majority, of course – the polled family only had to answer five questions.¹²⁹

“No Response to Critical Questions”

Of course it is not only legitimate to view such studies with a critical eye – it is in fact a necessity. For that reason, the authors patiently responded to all criticisms and were able to rebut most of them. The accusation that they did not react to critical questions is therefore completely without foundation. In fact, one of the authors, Les Roberts, had already answered all the critical questions posed to the authors by the end of October 2006. The British media watchdog organization MediaLens then summarized these answers.¹³⁰ As the only one among the larger media outlets, the BBC at least partially published them. And the criticisms mentioned above as well as others were also discussed in even more detail during a hearing on the *Lancet* study organized by U.S. Congressmen Dennis Kucinich and Ron Paul on December 11, 2006. At the hearing, both Les Roberts and Gilbert Burnham, Co-Director at the Johns Hopkins University and director of the study, were on-hand to respond to any and all criticisms.¹³¹

“Decrease in Child Mortality”

Also disproven on that occasion was the claim that the study had to be systematically flawed because it shows an implausibly low child mortality rate – a decrease of two thirds since the start of the war. In fact, the study’s numbers simply do not show such a decrease. Within the 15 months before the beginning of the war, 14 children below the age of 14 died – all due to natural causes. In comparison, over the 40 months that followed 40 children died a natural death, while 26 died from violence – among these 13 from air attacks alone. The number of natural deaths thus remained constant at a rate of one per month. The escalating violence, however, led to an increase in child mortality by 60%.

“Low Pre-War Mortality”

More serious are those critics who justify their doubts about the study by pointing to the low pre-war mortality rate registered in Iraq – the rate of 5.5 deaths per 1,000 inhabitants found by the study is even lower than in Europe. And indeed, if one took the pre-war mortality rate of 10 per 1,000 given by the U.N. as a baseline, the difference between the wartime mortality and the pre-war mortality – and therefore the overall number of the victims of the war – would decrease by more than 50 percent. Since there has been no systematic registering of child mortality in Iraq for a long time, the U.N. data are no more than raw estimates. Those of the *Lancet* study, however, are based on an investigation, and moreover one whose results are in line with both the first *Lancet* study in 2004 and the numbers given in the World Factbook of the CIA.

¹²⁹ Les Roberts and Gilbert Burnham, “Authors defend study that shows high Iraqi death toll,” *Nature*, April 5, 2007, quoted after Tim Lambert, “[Lancet authors reply in Nature](#),” *ScienceBlogs*, April 7, 2007.

¹³⁰ “[Lancet author answers your questions](#),” *BBC News*, October 30, 2006.

¹³¹ For the transcript of the hearing, see http://www.iraqtribunal.de/dokus/studies/lancet2/kucinich_hearing_civilian_deaths.html.

Even so, the number of 5.5 is fairly low; past figures include 8.1 per 1,000 for 1980-85 and 6.8 for 1985-90.¹³² Because of the many victims of the embargo, one could have expected an increase in the mortality rate. But this is also greatly dependent on the age pattern of the country. Since the percentage of old people in EU states is far greater, those countries have a higher mortality rate than the Arab and Middle Eastern states: Jordan has a rate of 4.2, Iran 5.3, and Syria 3.5.¹³³ And in Iraq, too, corresponding to the impoverishment of the country, the percentage of young Iraqis has substantially increased. Despite the enormous number of war deaths, the *Lancet* study found the number of births was twice as high as the number of deaths in the period it investigated.

Danger of Underestimation Greater than Danger of Overestimation

Burnham, Roberts, and their colleagues also see the danger of distortions, which is why they discuss it in detail in their article on the study. But the likelihood of underestimating the number of deaths is far greater than the likelihood of overestimating it. For example, the deaths of very young children often go unrecorded, and there is the possibility that families did not report the deaths of resistance fighters out of fear of repression.

There are also those deaths that go unrecorded because the whole family was annihilated or because only the children were left. Very frequently, whole families fled their homes because of attacks by the occupation forces or because of religiously motivated violence; understandably a great many did so after relatives were killed. In both cases, the victims completely disappear from the statistics. Of course, it is also possible that some of those interviewed exaggerated the number for political reasons. However, around 92% of the reported deaths were corroborated by death certificates.

With regard to this study, the discussion about the methods of statistical calculation is probably more intense than in any mortality study before. In an article written for *The Lancet*, Debarati Guha-Sapir, Olivier Degomme, and Jon Pedersen criticize the evaluation of the data, writing that much more attention should have been paid to the large differences in the numbers of deaths in the various provinces.¹³⁴

However, using so-called “distribution free” or “non-parametric” approaches, which are considered as more robust for dealing with the unequal distribution of mortalities in the various provinces, statistics expert Pierre Spray of the U.S. magazine *Counterpunch* actually reached smaller confidence intervals but even larger casualty numbers than the *Lancet* study.¹³⁵

By using different approaches for the determination of confidence intervals, other experts, such as the Professor of Statistics Mark van der Laan, end up with broader intervals and somewhat lower deaths estimates.¹³⁶

There are also some critics who object to the fact that there are no very precise data for the total population, i.e. the number that is used to reach the extrapolated

¹³² See also Tim Lambert, “[Slate's war on epidemiology continues](#),” *ScienceBlogs*, October 22, 2006.

¹³³ Gilbert Burnham & Les Roberts, “[Counting Corpses, The Lancet number crunchers respond to Slate's Fred Kaplan](#),” *Slate*, November 20, 2006, “[Lancet author answers your questions](#),” *op. cit.*

¹³⁴ Debarati Guha-Sapir, Olivier Degomme and Jon Pedersen, “[Mortality in Iraq](#),” *The Lancet*, No. 9556 (January 13, 2007), p. 102.

¹³⁵ Andrew Cockburn, “[How Many Iraqis Have Died Since the U.S. Invasion in 2003?](#),” *Counterpunch*, January 9, 2006.

¹³⁶ Mark J. van der Laan, “[Mortality after the 2003 invasion of Iraq – An Approximate Confidence Interval for Total Number of Violent Deaths in the Post Invasion Period](#),” Division of Biostatistics, University of California, Berkeley, October 26, 2006.

total figure from the determined sample death rates. This is true, but even a mistake to the order of one million would change the final result only by plus or minus 4%.

Other experts have wondered about the low percentage of indirect victims. In many conflicts, the number of such casualties actually exceeds the number of the victims of war-related violence. It is therefore possible that the cause of death has not always been properly reported.

But even if the final result was distorted by 10 or even 30% in one direction or the other by such imponderables, this would not alter the fact that the number of the victims in the investigated period is in the realm of several hundred thousand.

General Doubts in Representative Methods

Essentially, therefore, rejection of the study's results is not based on scientific criticism, but simply because of the incredibly high numbers, which represent a multiple of the figures given by the U.S. administration, the UN and various NGOs. For many, the fact that the most quoted source, the IBC project, registered a number of 43,000 victims – i.e. only a twelfth of the *Lancet* number – for the time period covered by the study is enough proof that the *Lancet* numbers must be too high.

However, these numbers cannot simply be compared against each other. According to the *Lancet* study, in no conflict to date has it been possible to record more than 20% of the casualties by the so-called “passive methods” as used by IBC. A closer examination of 13 countries afflicted by war confirmed this assessment.¹³⁷ In the section on IBC above, it was demonstrated that similarly large gaps are also likely in this project.

The IFHS Study

In January 2008, the *New England Journal of Medicine* (NEJM) published a study that, at first glance, seemed to conform to the demand for “non-passivity.” It was based on a representative household poll in Iraq that was supervised by the World Health Organization (WHO). As part of the Iraq Family Health Survey (IFHS) carried out in 2006 and 2007, interviewees were asked various questions including how many of their family members had died in recent years, and what the causes of these deaths were. However, this survey was not in the hands of independent researchers, but the Iraqi Ministry of Health. The period of the survey was selected in such a manner that the results are directly comparable with the *Lancet* study of 2006. According to this new study, between March 2003 and June 2006, about 151,000 Iraqis died a violence-related death.¹³⁸

Even though this WHO-supervised survey is also based on a representative poll, its methodology is quite different from that of the *Lancet* studies. The IFHS Study is based on a poll of 9,345 households with a total of 61,636 persons. Eleven percent of the selected households could not be visited for security reasons. Because the researchers suspected from comparable data that they would be able to determine only 65% of all deaths, the numbers they found were correspondingly corrected and amended. Further adjustments were made to compensate for the massive refugee movements. The numbers for areas where no polls could be carried out were extrapolated with the help of IBC data from other areas.

¹³⁷ Gilbert Burnham & Les Roberts, “[U.S. must face huge death toll of Iraqi civilians](#),” *Baltimore Sun*, October 9, 2007.

¹³⁸ “[Violence-Related Mortality in Iraq from 2002 to 2006](#),” *New England Journal of Medicine*, January 2008. For the whole FHS Study, see <http://www.emro.who.int/iraq/ifhs.htm>.

Limiting itself to the number of deaths qualified as violent, the final estimate that appeared in the *New England Journal of Medicine* stood at 151,000; the 95 percent confidence interval was given as 104,000 to 223,000.

Flaws of the IFHS Study¹³⁹

Reports on this study mainly emphasize the very large number of polled families. For most observers, this equals greater precision and therefore higher credibility. Indeed, the confidence interval of this study is much narrower than that of the 2006 *Lancet* study. But while the latter calculated the interval in a classic manner directly from the data, the statisticians of the IFHS study used a variety of methods mainly employed to assess the uncertainties of the various adjustment factors. Pierre Sprey, a statistics expert for the U.S. newsletter and Internet magazine *Counterpunch*, who rates the new study as generally “sloppy,” regards this method as “simply speculation.”¹⁴⁰

The number of individuals polled in itself is no guarantee of precision; much more important is the method used. The number of persons interviewed for the *Lancet* study is sufficient to come to reliable conclusions on the mortality in Iraq, therefore the differences between the studies cannot be put down to different levels of precision due to varying sample sizes.

As the 27 experts wrote in their open letter mentioned above, “we can be confident that the excess deaths were above 390,000.” But, according to the IFHS study, the number of casualties should just as surely be below 223,000. The authors of the new study therefore simply claim that the *Lancet* study “considerably overestimated the number of violent deaths” – without, however, giving any reason for this.¹⁴¹ There are, therefore, only two possibilities: Either the scientists of the *Lancet* study have invented deaths, or the IFHS shows too few of them.

The IFHS data clearly suggest the latter. According to the results, the number of the victims remained almost constant between 2003 and 2006. But this is in flagrant contradiction to the escalation of violence observed in the country since spring 2005, which is reflected in all other statistics from IBC to the figures from Iraqi morgues; just like the *Lancet* study, they all show a substantial annual increase in the number of the victims of violence.

The relatively small percentage of victims of violence within the total number of deaths is also in total contradiction to the registered cases. Even though the IFHS study does register a massive increase in mortality, its assessment concludes that violent deaths account for only one third within this increase. According to the *Lancet* study, however, the increase consists almost exclusively of violent deaths – a result that is fully corroborated by data from hospitals and morgues.

One possible reason for the lower number of victims of violence is given by the authors of the article in the *New England Journal of Medicine* themselves: The areas of Baghdad and the provinces of Anbar and Nineveh – where the highest levels of violence occurred – had to be excluded from the survey for security reasons. Inhabitants in these areas made up eleven percent of the overall sample. While it is true that the IFHS statisticians tried to make up for this by extrapolating recorded numbers to these areas with the help of available data from IBC, it was these heavily fought-over regions that were most severely underrepresented in

¹³⁹ The following analysis of the IFHS Study first appeared in *junge Welt* (Germany), February 12, 2008.

¹⁴⁰ Andrew Cockburn, “[Gross Distortions, Sloppy Methodology and Tendentious Reporting](#),” *CounterPunch*, January 12, 2008.

¹⁴¹ “[Violence-Related Mortality in Iraq from 2002 to 2006](#),” *op. cit.*

reporting, which is why relatively few deaths from there are found in the IBC database (see “Fragmentary Databases” above).

Politically Motivated Restriction

The main reason for the discrepancy between the published results of the IFHS study and the *Lancet* study, however, is the general design of the IFHS study itself. Interestingly, the two studies largely converge with regard to non-violent deaths. IFHS gives an estimate of 372 per day for the first three years after the start of the war; the *Lancet* study puts the number at 416. The two studies also do not differ greatly with regard to the increase in total deaths. According to the IFHS, the annual number of deaths approximately doubled after the invasion; the corresponding factor of the *Lancet* study is 2.4. This difference could well be due to the omission of the zones in Baghdad, Anbar, and Nineveh where the fiercest fighting occurred.

Curiously, however, nowhere do the authors of the IFHS study try to address this massive increase in general deaths, which is also visible in their own data. Since there are no other potential factors – i.e. environmental catastrophes – war and occupation are the only plausible reasons for this increase. How else could the 65% increase in illness-related deaths noted by IFHS possibly be explained?

Restricting the figures to victims of violence is thus obviously not a scientific decision, but a purely political one. It works like a form of self-censorship, which in the end serves to “round down” the true extent of the humanitarian catastrophe. Moreover, this restriction is quite arbitrary: Is the death of a pregnant woman who cannot reach a hospital because of an ongoing bombardment not just as much a consequence of the violence of war as the death of those directly hit by a bomb?

Furthermore, the increase in the number of traffic deaths by a factor of 3.7 indicates that the categorization of “violent” and “non-violent” deaths was achieved quite creatively. This nurtures already lingering doubts about the independence of an investigation that was carried out under the aegis of an Iraqi ministry. After all, these ministries are staffed by the closest allies of the U.S. and were totally dependent on the occupying power.

How little the Ministry of Health is interested in actually recording the truth about the number of victims at the hand of the occupation was demonstrated the year prior to the study: Despite fierce protests by the UN, under pressure from the U.S. it once again ordered the country’s hospitals and morgues not to release data on their registered deaths.¹⁴²¹⁴³¹⁴⁴¹⁴⁵

The fact that employees of the Ministry of Health carried out the interviews is probably another key reason for the much too small number of registered victims of violence. Many Iraqis distrust the government and could possibly shy away from telling government employees about the violent death of a relative, as they would be worried about attracting the attention of the occupiers or their allies. Reporting such cases is dangerous – not only in cases where a husband or son was killed in a confrontation with the occupation troops or the security forces, but also where such relatives were killed by militia or death squads. This is due to the likelihood that survivors have good reason to assume that the perpetrators in such

¹⁴² [Iraq's Health Ministry ordered to stop counting civilian dead from war](#), Associated Press, 10.12.2003.

¹⁴³ [Official Says Leading Shiite Party Suppressed Body Count](#), Washington Post, 9.3.2006.

¹⁴⁴ [Exact Death Toll of Iraqis Remains Murky](#), Associated Press, 10.3.2006.

¹⁴⁵ [What is the real death toll in Iraq?](#) The Guardian, 19.3.2008.

cases are often members of the militia of the government parties and the police, which harbors many members of these militias in its midst.

Who Did the Killing?

At first glance, the publication in the *New England Journal of Medicine* looks like an attempt to gather information about the humanitarian costs of a war where, right from the outset, the full extent of the violence was constrained by political guidelines. Since the calculated casualty numbers were considerably higher than those of IBC, they were certainly not very convenient for the U.S. On the other hand, the new study, carrying the WHO's seal of approval, was very well suited to remove the thorn in the side of the Iraq occupation that the *Lancet* Study still represents.

Ultimately, it was above all an attempt to skirt the most crucial question: How many human lives has Bush's war cost so far? Moreover, not only were all cases where the victim's death was only an indirect result of the war ignored, but the same was true of the question about who was responsible. The *Lancet* study, on the other hand, did research the latter, noting, for example, whether the victim had been killed by a car bomb or an air attack. If the answer could not be determined, it was registered as "uncertain/unknown." With regard to the perpetrators, unfortunately the only distinction was between foreigners and Iraqis. Despite all the inaccuracies of such a poll, the answers still allowed for the conclusion that approximately one third of all victims of violence had been directly killed by the occupation forces. Since they are also potential perpetrators in the 45% of cases where the source of the violence is listed as "uncertain/unknown," the actual role of the occupiers in the violence must be far higher. One seventh of all victims were killed in aerial attacks.¹⁴⁶

This deadly violence of the occupation troops is not mentioned in the IFHS study. For that reason, the generally very sympathetic reports on the new WHO study had to overcome few barriers in order to project the impression that the enormous number of murdered individuals could simply be ascribed to religious hatred, the fury of Shiite militia, and the bombs of Sunni "insurgents." This all suggested that the Iraqis themselves were to be held responsible for the ongoing mass slaughter.

Political Attacks against the Authors of the *Lancet* Studies

Over the years, the attacks against the *Lancet* study assumed an increasingly political character, and focused more and more on discrediting the authors personally. Right from the start, two core points in the critics' argumentation were by no means scientific. One of those arguments – particularly prominent in the U.S. – tried to undermine the credibility of the studies by pointing to the anti-war stance of its authors and the respective publication date: The first study had been published shortly before the 2004 presidential elections, the second one before the U.S. Congress elections in 2006. But is it really surprising that only critics of the war were ready to commit themselves to such a dangerous and career-destroying task? And what is wrong about collecting data on the consequences of the current government's politics and making them available to the voters by publishing them?

Either way, the accusation of political bias is hypocritical since the critics of the study rarely have any problem with resorting to sources from the occupation forces, and have never been troubled by the fact that scientific institutions close

¹⁴⁶ See Joachim Guilliard, "Die verschwiegene Besatzungsopfer und Wege aus der Eskalation," *op. cit.*

to the government published extremely positive reports on the “reconstruction” of Iraq immediately before the election. But most of all, there are no serious hints as to how opposition to the war could have had a significant influence on the results of the research presented in that study.

Of course, as elsewhere, the personal stance of the authors may have had a certain influence on the result – e.g. on the areas they chose to concentrate on in their evaluation. But to question the magnitude of the casualty numbers determined by them on that basis alone basically amounts to accusing them of massive and conscious fraud. If that were the case, how are we to explain the level of correspondence between the *Lancet* studies with that of ORB and, in its final analysis, the overall conclusion of the IFHS?

Burnham and Roberts have suggested a simple method by which the critics could attain the desired clarity: They would only have to collect random samples in particular clusters to determine whether the number of deaths can be verified by graves, death certificates etc. An even better alternative would be to have independent scientists carry out a new, even larger study, as was proposed by the *Lancet* authors right from the beginning.

Michael Spagat, who has been devoting a lot of his time to opposing the *Lancet* study, finally started a full-on attack against it in his paper “Ethical and Data-Integrity Problems in the Second *Lancet* Survey of Mortality in Iraq,” which was published in the U.S. journal *Defense & Peace Economics*. In it, he accused Burnham and his colleagues of data corruption.¹⁴⁷

The accusation was in part based on statements from the polling agency association American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR), whose executive council had accused the *Lancet* authors of having violated the AAPOR rules.¹⁴⁸ But the *Lancet* authors are not even members of the association. The main charge of AAPOR and Spagat is that the director of the *Lancet* study, Gilbert Burnham, allegedly refused to make all the data of the study, including the original questionnaires, accessible for inspection.

But for checking the *Lancet* study’s evaluation, the data that Burnham and his co-authors did supply to other researchers on request were entirely sufficient¹⁴⁹ – apart from the complete data samples from the questionnaires, these also included information on the polled households. Moreover, they published a detailed research report that supplied extensive data on the study’s execution.¹⁵⁰ Even when explicitly asked, AAPOR did not give a satisfactory answer as to why they thought that even more information was necessary.¹⁵¹

“There is no direct evidence that the latest attack on Burnham is politically motivated,” Debora MacKenzie wrote in the U.S. magazine *New Scientist*, but then con-

¹⁴⁷ Michael Spagat, “[Ethical and Data-Integrity Problems in the Second *Lancet* Survey of Mortality in Iraq](#),” *Defense & Peace Economics*, Vol. 21 Issue 1, 2010, online since April 19, 2010.

¹⁴⁸ “[AAPOR Finds Gilbert Burnham in Violation of Ethics Code](#),” press release, Deerfield, IL, AAPOR, February 4, 2009.

¹⁴⁹ See “[Mortality In Iraq Studies -- Release of Data Requests](#),” Bloomberg School of Public Health, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD.

¹⁵⁰ Gilbert Burnham, Shannon Doocy, Elizabeth Dzeng, Riyadh Lafta & Les Roberts, [The Human Cost of the War in Iraq: A Mortality Study, 2002-2006](#), Bloomberg School of Public Health, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD & School of Medicine, Al Mustansiriya University, Baghdad; in cooperation with the Center for International Studies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Cambridge, MA.

¹⁵¹ Tim Lambert, “[Reaction to the AAPOR press release](#),” *ScienceBlogs*, February 5, 2009.

tinued that AAPOR's alleged goal "to ensure survey-based research meets high standards has been questioned by experts."¹⁵²

Inquiries by the *New Scientist* confirmed that "Burnham has sent his data and methods to other researchers, who found it sufficient." In March 2008, AAPOR's own journal also published an analysis of the data of the Iraq study.¹⁵³ A representative of the Bloomberg School of Public Health, wrote MacKenzie, had told Burnham not to supply AAPOR with the requested additional material since neither Burnham nor the Bloomberg School are AAPOR members, and therefore AAPOR had no right to play judge in this case.¹⁵⁴

Moreover, part of the original questionnaires contains data that would allow for an identification of the persons that were polled.¹⁵⁵ This is against the norms for such studies, but since the U.S. researchers do not speak Arabic, they became aware of this possibility only when it was too late. As the director of the study, Burnham was reprimanded for this by the Bloomberg School for violating the principles of the institution. But, according to the School, there was no indication that anyone had actually been harmed – precisely because the researchers never supplied this part of the data to anyone else.¹⁵⁶

In its own internal investigation of the study, the Bloomberg School conducted a careful review of the 1,800 original questionnaires and concluded that, based on the variation of the handwriting, language and the way the sheets were filled out, the questionnaires appeared to be authentic. "The information contained on the forms was validated against the two numerical databases used in the study analyses. These numerical databases have been available to outside researchers and provided to them upon request since April 2007. Some minor, ordinary errors in transcription were detected, but they were not of variables that affected the study's primary mortality analysis or causes of death. The review concluded that the data files used in the study accurately reflect the information collected on the original field surveys."¹⁵⁷

Justified Criticism

Of course, some of the justified criticisms do remain. Thus, Debarati Guha-Sapir, Olivier Degomme, and Jon Pedersen wrote in an article for *The Lancet* that even though "Gilbert Burnham and colleagues' Iraq mortality study fills an important information gap in a country where reliable mortality statistics are rare" and the study "transforms anecdotes of violence into systematic evidence," the paper should have taken into account certain methodological problems, which would have enhanced the study's credibility.¹⁵⁸

One concrete criticism concerns a diagram in which the authors of the study oppose the cumulated casualty figures of Iraq Body Count to the mortality rates of

¹⁵² Debora MacKenzie, "[What is behind criticism of Iraq deaths estimate?](#)," *New Scientist*, February 9, 2009.

¹⁵³ David A. Marker, "The Polls – Review: Methodological Review of 'Mortality After the 2003 Invasion of Iraq: A Cross-Sectional Cluster Sample Survey'," *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, Vol. 72 No. 2 (Summer 2008), pp. 345-363.

¹⁵⁴ MacKenzie, *op. cit.*

¹⁵⁵ Christoph Schrader, "[Zivile Kriegsoffer im Irak: Streit um die Zahl der Toten](#)," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, May 17, 2002.

¹⁵⁶ John Bohannon, "[Author of Iraqi Deaths Study Sanctioned](#)," *Science*, No. 5919 (March 6, 2009), p. 1278.

¹⁵⁷ "[Review Completed of 2006 Iraq Mortality Study](#)," Bloomberg School of Public Health, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD, February 23, 2009.

¹⁵⁸ Debarati Guha-Sapir, Olivier Degomme and Jon Pedersen, "[Mortality in Iraq](#)," *The Lancet*, No. 9556 (January 13, 2007), p. 102.

their own and other studies for the three intervals into which they had divided their research period. And, indeed, the comparison of rates of individual intervals with cumulated numbers does produce a false picture. But the pattern of the calculated rates from IBC presented in Guha-Sapir et al.'s own diagram is also misleading, as it suggests an almost constant mortality rate. Actually, the casualty numbers of IBC increased from 11,400 in 2004 to more than 16,000 in 2005 and some 28,800 in 2006 – and the same is of course true for the mortality rates.¹⁵⁹ If one leaves out the invasion phase of March/April 2003, for which IBC disproportionately registered many casualties, and instead looks at the intervals from May to April in the following years, periods which also correspond well to the escalation waves in Iraq, the increase is even more pronounced – namely from 7,600 (2003/04), 11,100 (2004/05), 16,900 (2005/06) to 29,800 deaths from May 2006 until April 2007.

Another point Guha-Sapir *et al.* criticize is that the study should have devoted more attention to the question of why the proportion of violent deaths in the increase of mortality was so extraordinarily high (90%). In other conflicts, the percentage of casualties of war who die from consequences of the war, such as diseases, malnutrition etc., is generally much higher. They contend that of 17 studies in Darfur only one determined a similarly high proportion of violent deaths, and this was the case only for an interval of three months.

Another frequent criticism is the high participation rate. The percentage of families that actually responded is indeed fairly high – e.g. 98% in 2006. This raises the suspicion that the interviewers, at least in part, only interviewed families who had already signaled their readiness to participate. This would mean the selection was no longer entirely random, which could lead to a certain amount of distortion if, for example, families who had lost relatives were more eager to participate.

Summary

But quite apart from the specific justification for these criticisms, they certainly do not call into question the results of the *Lancet* studies as a whole. These figures still represent the best estimates that are currently available. Even if they should diverge from the actual numbers by 10 or 20%, this does not alter the sheer magnitude of the number of victims that the U.S. war on Iraq has brought about. And precisely this is what is relevant for the political, legal, and moral evaluation of this enterprise.

Meticulous, But Late: A New Mortality Study on the Iraq War

Joachim Guilliard

500,000 deaths from the war on Iraq: According to a new survey, the number of victims of the Iraq War is higher than reported by most media, yet lower than in previous representative studies

In October 2013, the results of a new study on the number of victims of the Iraq War since March 2003 were published by the professional medical journal *PLOS Medicine*.¹⁶⁰ Between May and July 2011, scientists from the University of Washing-

¹⁵⁹ See IBC database at <https://www.iraqbodycount.org/database/> [last accessed October 24, 2014].

¹⁶⁰ Amy Hagopian, Abraham D. Flaxman, Tim K. Takaro, Sahar A. Esa Al Shatari, Julie Rajaratnam, Stan Becker, Alison Levin-Rector, Lindsay Galway, Berq J. Hadi Al-Yasseri, William M. Weiss, Christopher J. Murray & Gilbert Burnham, "Mortality in Iraq Associated with the 2003-2011 War and Occupation: Findings from a National Cluster Sample Survey by the University Collaborative Iraq Mortality Study," *PLOS Medicine*, Vol. 10, No. 10 (October 2013).

ton in Seattle, the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, the Simon Fraser University in Canada, and Iraq's Health Ministry conducted a new representative survey on the development of mortality in Iraq after the U.S.-led invasion. "Previous estimates of mortality in Iraq attributable to the 2003 invasion have been heterogeneous and controversial, and none were produced after 2006. The purpose of this research was to estimate direct and indirect deaths attributable to the war in Iraq between 2003 and 2011."¹⁶¹

Overall "we think it is roughly around half a million people dead," explained Amy Hagopian, a health expert from the University of Washington who headed that study. She then added: "And that is likely a low estimate."¹⁶²

According to the study, about 60% of the victims were killed by the direct use of violence, such as shooting, bombs, and air strikes. In 35% of these cases the occupation forces were made responsible, in 32% the militias.

One third of the victims died as an indirect result of war, such as stress-related heart attacks, the collapse of the health system, of water supply, and of sanitation in Iraq, or lack of nutrition.

Core Details of the Study

The researchers randomly selected 100 locations in Iraq, where they interviewed a cluster of 20 households, also chosen at random. This is twice as many clusters as in the survey of the Johns Hopkins University in 2006 (known as the 2006 *Lancet* study) in which 50 clusters of 40 households were selected. The households in which a cluster survey was carried out were randomly selected from a map containing a network of 10 meter squares.

In two of the selected locations, the survey could not be performed for safety reasons. In the remaining 98 clusters, a total of 1,960 households and 10,670 people were interviewed about the births and deaths of their relatives, a similar number to the *Lancet* study, which covered 1,849 households with 12,801 people. At the same time, data were collected for all 15- to 60-year old siblings in a so-called "sibling analysis." The 4,287 adults indicated the total number of 24,759 siblings, of whom 2,531 had died during the period under question.

Analysis of household data showed a mortality rate of 2.89 deaths per thousand person-years (ptpy) in the 26 months before the war began, and 4.55 in the period from then until June 2011. In the *Lancet* study of 2006, there were 5.5 dead ptpy in the 14 months before and 13.3 in the 40 months after the war began.

Extrapolated to the entire population, the *PLOS* study calculates 405,000 additional deaths (known as "excess deaths") for the 100 months between March 2003 and June 2011. These are deaths in excess of the number which would have been expected from a constant mortality rate. The "95% uncertainty interval," comparable to a "95% confidence interval," ranges between 48,000 and 751,000. It states that the probability of the actual number being in this range is 95%, with 405,000 being the most likely figure (with values towards the edge of this range being increasingly unlikely).

The number of victims among the families who had fled abroad could not be detected by the study, but was estimated using secondary sources to be at least 55,000. As the authors themselves see this as a very conservative estimate, they

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² Cited in: Dan Vergano, "Half-Million Iraqis Died in the War, New Study Says: Household survey records deaths from all war-related causes, 2003 to 2011," *National Geographic*, October 15, 2013.

rounded up the figure for the total number of victims to reach “around half a million.”

Comparing the *PLOS* and *Lancet* Studies

This means that the estimates of the *PLOS* study are three or four times higher than the figures usually cited in the media, even if they are significantly lower than the estimates of previous studies by the Johns Hopkins University and the British polling agency Opinion Research Business (ORB). The *Lancet* study of 2006 showed 655,000 victims until June 2005 and ORB calculated around one million up until July 2007.

The difference between the results of these studies and the significantly lower results from the Iraq Family Health Survey (IFHS) that was carried out by the Iraqi Ministry of Health and the WHO, can be largely attributed to the selective approach which resulted in a majority of the identified deaths being hidden (see the section “IFHS Study” in the chapter “Numbers War”). The *PLOS* study does not contain these arbitrary restrictions.

According to most experts, the *PLOS* study is very thorough. The authors applied refined and conservative statistical methods, and tried to account for the objections raised against the *Lancet* study as a way to prevent criticism of their methods right from the start. This resulted in an estimate that is difficult to criticize, but also relatively low.

When asked about the difference, Dr. Gilbert Burnham, head of the 2006 *Lancet* study and co-author of the new study, said that the results of both studies were valid: “From a statistical standpoint, the numbers are not really different from each other. These represent estimates, and that’s what we’ve always said.”¹⁶³

In fact, the differences are less serious than they appear to be at first glance. In the *PLOS* study, two-thirds of the detected “excess deaths” fall inside the period 2003-2006: that is 270,000 if you do not include the two-thirds of victims among migrants, and 310,000 if you do so. Taking a rough estimate for the 95% uncertainty interval, using two-thirds of the uncertainty interval for the whole period, we arrive at an interval between 32,000 and 570,000. The *Lancet* study calculated around 650,000 “excess deaths” for the 40 months between March 2003 and June 2006, and a 95% confidence interval ranging from 390,000 to 940,000. This means that the two intervals overlap within the wide spectrum of 390,000 to 570,000 and makes it likely that the number of victims up until June 2006 lies within that range, i.e. lower than the estimated figure in the *Lancet* study, but significantly higher than that in the *PLOS* study.

Epidemiologist Les Roberts, co-author of the *Lancet* study, who besides Iraq also carried out mortality studies in Congo and Zimbabwe, praises the study as being serious and credible. Nonetheless, he believes that its result is clearly too low due to the distance in time and the incomplete coverage of refugee families.

Reasons for the Difference Between the *PLOS* Study and Earlier Studies

The *PLOS* authors see three possible reasons for producing lower mortality rates than those in the *Lancet* studies. Firstly, by doubling the number of clusters, they may have avoided an over-representation of areas with a large number of deaths. Secondly, as a result of the large time interval they may not have captured all deaths. Given the strong sectarian tensions and the continuing everyday threats

¹⁶³ Cited in: Joseph Brownstein, “[Iraq war claimed half a million lives, study finds: Some critics of previously controversial survey methods praise new approach, while others remain sceptical](#),” *Al Jazeera America*, October 15, 2013.

and violence in many areas, it is possible that some families have concealed their dead. Thirdly, the war has led to significant movements of population. The authors are aware that they have overlooked families who fled the country or were internally displaced. Such families, who were particularly confronted with violence, could have well suffered from a disproportionately higher number of victims.

The last aspect is probably the most important reason for that difference. According to a 2010 national survey, since 2005 one sixth of all households have moved home to escape violence.¹⁶⁴ More than three million Iraqis, i.e. over 10% of the total population, have fled the country or remain internally displaced to this day. Hence, the probability was high that many of the households that experienced the worst fighting were no longer located at the selected spots. The statistics, therefore, did not capture households that had fled the country as a result of violence, disintegrated after many family members had died, or were fully wiped out.

The study registered a total of 75 deaths from war-related violence. If only 18 of the 1,960 households, i.e. less than 1%, had lost two family members in the war but could no longer be found, the actual number of war casualties would be 50% higher. Since, unfortunately, such families are not rare, this scenario can be seen as quite likely. There are many families, of whom all male members have been killed, resulting in them fleeing or the household breaking up completely.

Adjustments for Migration in the *PLOS* Study

The study's authors were fully aware of this problem. They wrote that "there is no accepted method for adjusting household figures to account for households entirely destroyed subsequent to the death of all members, or lost to migration out of the country, especially for households that experienced a death."¹⁶⁵ As intellectuals, academics, and others with a higher income were disproportionately targeted by attacks, but also had many more opportunities to go abroad, the scientists assume that the mortality rate among refugee families is significantly higher than the average.

In 2011, 1.75 million Iraqis who fled the country since 2003 were still registered with the UN refugee agency UNCHR.¹⁶⁶ Over 1.3 million Iraqis were still registered as internally displayed persons, most of whom fled or were displaced after 2006. These numbers are probably much too low, as UNHCR representatives report that many refugees are not registered. Either because they fear the stigma associated with requesting aid, or because they do not see any reason as long as they do not require any support.¹⁶⁷ As a result, other sources on which the study is based assume a total of 2 to 2.4 million refugees abroad. The *PLOS* authors chose 2 million as a mean estimate.

In order to estimate the number of war victims among the refugees, they used a 2009 study on Iraqi refugees in Syria, which found that 14.9% of refugee households had experienced at least one death since 2003.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Gilbert Burnham *et al.*, "Perceptions and utilization of primary health care services in Iraq: findings from a national household survey", *BMC International Health and Human Rights*, London: BioMed Central (BMC), Vol. 11, No. 15 (December 2011).

¹⁶⁵ Hagopian *et al.*, *op. cit.*

¹⁶⁶ "[UNHCR Global Report 2011 – Iraq](#)," UNHCR, June 1, 2012.

¹⁶⁷ "[Iraqi refugees – interpreting the statistics](#)," IRIN, December 28, 2010.

¹⁶⁸ S. Doocy & G. Burnham, *The Iraqi Population in Syria*, Baltimore, MD: International Catholic Migration Commission Baltimore & Johns Hopkins University, May 2009.

Assuming in their own study the figure of two million refugees and an average household size of 5.34 people, they calculated roughly 370,000 refugee households. Taking the conservative estimation of only one death for 14.9% of households, they calculated 55,000 additional deaths among migrant families (this accounted for around 18 extra deaths within the study). This is, as the authors note, the minimum that ought to be added to the estimate stated in the survey.

Presumably, however, the actual figure is higher. Firstly, the internally displaced persons are not considered. As they live in crowded camps and slums, which are barely captured in maps, they had little chance of being covered by the study. When discussing the limitation of the study, the authors remarked: “our sample likely did not include a good representation of the 1.1 million people who were living in camps or buildings as internally displaced people.”¹⁶⁹ Also not taken into account were households that were completely wiped out or were dissolved after the death of the father, mother, or another head of the household.

It is difficult to estimate how many deaths are therefore missing from the study. The number of such households, however, is clearly high. Although reports from the combat zones are rare, there are still many accounts of air attacks, in which whole families were buried under the rubble or cars that were sprayed with gunfire at checkpoints. From 2005 onwards, the occupying forces began to increasingly use the air force. In 2006, according to its own reports the U.S. Air Force flew over 10,500 sorties, i.e. almost 30 per day, for “air support” of ground troops.

According to the *Lancet* study, air strikes were responsible for 13% of all deaths until June 2006, i.e. approximately 80,000 cases. In 2007, the U.S. Air Force quadrupled the number of air raids to about 40,000. This means that the number of victims is likely to have increased accordingly. The household analysis of the *PLOS* study found only five victims of air raids, which would constitute about 7% of all violent deaths. The sibling analysis in the *PLOS* study recorded 25 from 187, i.e. 13%, a similar figure to that in the 2006 *Lancet* study.

The sibling analysis also included people who have moved far away or now live in refugee camps. This discrepancy could indicate “lost” families in the household analysis.

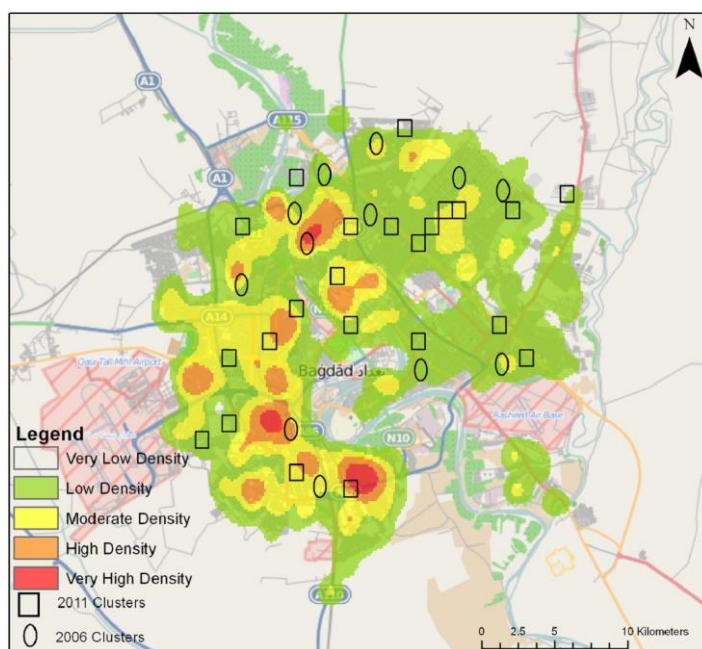
As the sibling analysis only covers 15- to 60-year olds, with most of the men killed being within this age range, we can expect a higher percentage of violent deaths. The household analysis of the *PLOS* study puts their ratio at 60%, in the sibling analysis it is put at 70%. We can take into account that air strikes are less particularly directed at people of a certain age or sex, yet this is rather the case with those killed by soldiers and militias. As the sibling analysis contained nearly twice the number of air raid victims, just about the only explanation is that the families that it documents were exposed to air attacks much more than the households covered by the survey. Fatal bombing raids also probably and regularly result in migration.

¹⁶⁹ Hagopian *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p12.

Finally, irrespective of the methods used, the large number of missing people prevents us from gaining an exact picture. According to the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) between 250,000 and one million people in Iraq are missing as a consequence of over 30 years of war and conflict, most of them since 2003.¹⁷⁰ In a statement of twenty international human rights organization submitted to the UN Human Rights Council, only the number of missing people among refugee families can be estimated at 260,000: most of these are the victims of violent displacement. In total, they reckon with half a million since the U.S.-led invasion.¹⁷¹ Many of the displaced and missing people are probably already dead, but do not appear in any statistics.

Consensus

There is a general consensus in the reports when it comes to perpetrators and weapons. According to the 2006 *Lancet* study, at least 31.5% of the victims of violence between 2003 and 2006 were killed by occupation forces, 23% by “others.” In 45% of cases the study lists the identity of the perpetrators to be unknown or uncertain. *PLOS* used a more subtle distinction, dividing perpetrators into “coalition forces,” “Iraqi troops,” “militias,” and “criminals.” According to that, occupation forces (the so-called “coalition”) have been responsible in 45.8% of the cases, and militias in 27% of cases. Here, only 16.7% of the perpetrators have been considered “unknown.” In the sibling analysis, the figure for occupation troops is only 34.7% against 43% for the militias. In contrast, a 2011 analysis on perpetrators and weapons made by the Iraq Body Count team based on their own data, allocated responsibility to the occupation forces in only 12.4% of cases.¹⁷² This is likely to be the result of the selective reporting on which the recording of deaths was based.



Density of civilians killed in Baghdad, according to the Wikileaks war logs and location of the cluster of the 2011 PLOS study and the 2006 Lancet study

(Source: PLOS study)

¹⁷⁰ ICMP's Iraq country profile available at <http://www.ic-mp.org/where-we-work/middle-east-and-north-africa/iraq/>.

¹⁷¹ *Disappearances and Missing Persons in Iraq – 2003-2013*, joint declaration by human rights organization, A/HRC/22/NGO/157, UN Human Rights Council, 22nd Session, February 25, 2013; Dirk Adriaenssens, “Enforced Disappearance: The Missing Persons of Iraq,” adapted from his presentation at the 6th International Conference Against Disappearances in London on December 9-12, 2010, *Global Research*, Montreal: Centre for Research on Globalization, November 29, 2010.

¹⁷² Hicks, Dardagan, Serdán, Bagnall, Sloboda & Spagat, *op. cit.*

As with the *Lancet* study, the *PLOS* study states that 63% of the deaths resulted from firearms and only around 20% by car bombs and “other explosions.” The latter incidents appear to be the main cause of death in both the media and the IBC analysis. According to the IBC database, over 40% of the cases resulted from bomb attacks and only 32% from firearms.

Whereas in the *Lancet* study, 92% of all war-related deaths had been victims of violence, in the *PLOS* study this figure is only “over 60%.” This is not a contradiction, but suggests that after 2006 the people of Iraq increasingly died from indirect effects of war and occupation. Such an increase has often been observed in prolonged conflicts, as the reserves of the population dwindle and the humanitarian situation comes to a head. In the case of Iraq, this is confirmed by reports of the UN and other aid agencies.

“Response Rate”

Only 29 households refused to participate or were not interviewed because of hostile behavior. This results in a response rate of 98.55%. In the *Lancet* study, a similar high rate of 98.3% was seen as an indication of cheating in the field work. However, referring to a UN study, the *PLOS* study says that such a low refusal rate is not unusual for investigations in such countries.¹⁷³

Problems with the Cluster Selection

The 2006 *Lancet* study surveyed only 50 clusters, which is a very small number of samples given the size of the country. The surveyors were well aware of this. More clusters would not just have meant greater effort and cost, but above all a higher risk for the interviewers. Nonetheless, such risk was already high in spring 2006, when the violence in the country was considerably escalating.

With 100 clusters, the *PLOS* study examined twice as many locations, thus reducing the risk of either missing or including too many areas with extreme mortality rates. However, the number of clusters is probably still too low.

The map on page 12 of the *PLOS* study clearly shows the problem. It contains the distribution of the density of civilian casualties in Baghdad according to the U.S. army war logs as published by *WikiLeaks*. If we look at the position of the clusters in the *PLOS* and *Lancet* studies, we see that the scientists of the *Lancet* study were “luckier” in finding areas with a higher or much higher density of violent deaths than those of the *PLOS* study. Whereas *PLOS* study has only one cluster in an area with high density and six in one with moderate density, the *Lancet* study found two high-density areas and five with moderate density, although each *Lancet* cluster contained twice as many families.

Although Baghdad has almost a quarter of the population of Iraq, the distribution over the whole country can, of course, be averaged out. The example shows, however, how the accuracy may be affected by the coarse grid due to the small number of clusters.

The *Lancet* studies calculated estimated values and the confidence interval according to classical statistical methods assuming a normal distribution of detected mortality data. Early on, critics have deemed this as inappropriate, noting that extreme values are assigned too much weight, and proposed so-called “distribution-free” or “non-parametric” methods. Pierre Sprey, statistical advisor to the U.S. magazine *CounterPunch*, has applied such methods to the data of the 2004 *Lancet* study and calculated a higher estimate and closer confidence intervals.

¹⁷³ Vaessen, Thiam & Lêt, *op. cit.*

The *PLOS* scientists chose an approach that tried to determine the accuracy of their results by a simulation method known as the *Bootstrap* method. 1,000 new samples were collected in which a series of 98 clusters was randomly chosen from the 98 clusters included, meaning that some were selected several times and some not at all (this is known as “sampling with replacement”). Following this, using the same method, a selection of households within the cluster was made. The mortality rate was determined for each of these 1,000 simulated samples. The 95% uncertainty interval was then removed from the spread of the 1,000 different results.

By simulating a large number of other possible selection scenarios with this two-step process, an attempt was made to take the effect of “clustering” into account. The result is a lower estimate and a very broad confidence or uncertainty interval, as less information is included in the calculation if the form of distribution is excluded. As a consequence, the problem of violence levels strongly varying between locations is dealt with better than in the *Lancet* studies. However, “bootstrapping” is not a universal method that is appropriate for every kind of distribution.¹⁷⁴ As the lower limit of the uncertainty interval in the *PLOS* study is lower than the number of victims recorded by IBC and the Iraq War Logs, which can be seen as a safe minimum, the result is obviously too conservative.

In the discussion forum of the British media analysis portal MediaLens it was therefore suggested to make estimates more accurate with Bayesian statistics using conditional probabilities, and to take the number of deaths listed by IBC and Iraq War Logs as a lower limit. This would mean that the possibility of there being fewer than 110,000 deaths would be zero. As these figures only include victims who are classified as civilians and were killed by war-related violence, the estimates of Prof. Neta Crawford would be more appropriate. Including the number of combatants killed, she came to the figure of at least 165,000 victims of the Iraq War, not including the number of indirect victims. Nevertheless, taking such a secure lower limit into account, the results would be higher and the uncertainty interval narrower.¹⁷⁵

Responses to the *PLOS* Study

Even if the estimates in the *Lancet* studies may be too high, they are still defended by experts in the field. For example, Dr. Paul Spiegel, Deputy Director of the Division of Program Support and Management at the UN refugee agency UNHCR, who has carried out similar investigations, said the results of the 2006 *Lancet* study were too high and the others were too low. In his view, they should not be discredited, as the methods used at the time were generally accepted. For Spiegel they act as a counterweight to the figures of the other studies, which were much too low. This had enabled the public to learn more about the extent of deaths that occurred during this period.

Economist Michael Spagat, one of the harshest critics of the *Lancet* studies, judges that the new study is much better than the *Lancet* study, as it eliminated some methodological deficiencies. He also feels vindicated by the significantly lower figures. Unlike Spiegel, he claims in a statement that the public has always been aware of the general number of fatalities in the Iraq War. Yet, we can barely make such a claim. Although the most conservative assumptions about the number of victims, such as those by the Iraq Body Count, now are well above 100,000, ac-

¹⁷⁴ [“Bootstrap-Konfidenzintervalle”](#) [Bootstrap confidence intervals], Projekt Neue Statistik 2003, Free University of Berlin.

¹⁷⁵ “For JMC, Joe, Jeff B and those interested in IBC and PLOS”, Media Lens Forum, November 25, 2013.

According to current polls, most Americans and Britons believe that the war their administrations waged against Iraq cost merely 10,000 human lives.¹⁷⁶

Hagopian describes the motivation of her research teams as follows: “people [in North America] need to know the cost in human lives of the decision to go to war.”¹⁷⁷ She hoped that a conclusion drawn from her paper would be the realization that invading a country would have severe consequences for the health of the citizens of the invaded country, also those who are not directly linked to the violence.¹⁷⁸ She added: “We think it is high time for the global health community to view war as a serious threat to public health and to push for accurate measurement of its impact on the populations at risk. [...] The public health community needs to stop shying away from the politics of all this.”¹⁷⁹

The criticism leveled against the *Lancet* studies was, among other things, justified by pointing out financial support for the studies came from a foundation attached to George Soros, who is depicted as being “left-wing.” However, these criticisms assiduously ignore the fact that at the time there was virtually nobody else in the U.S. or any other Western country who was prepared to finance such studies. Unfortunately, this situation has clearly not changed. Hagopian reported that she could not find any academic institution or government organization that was prepared to help finance her study. According to Hagopian, the biggest problem is official politics: they demand that we should not count the dead.

¹⁷⁶ *Iraqi Death Toll Survey*, London & Brussels: ComRes, June 2013; “Military/Civilian Deaths in Iraq Study,” AP/Ipsos Survey, Washington: Ipsos Public Affairs, February 16, 2007.

¹⁷⁷ Vergano, *op. cit.*

¹⁷⁸ Brownstein, *op. cit.*

¹⁷⁹ Cited in: Tom Paulson, “[The great* Iraq death toll debate: Putting war on the global health agenda](#),” *Humanosphere*, October 18, 2013.



“We’ve shot an amazing number of people and killed a number and, to my knowledge, none has proven to have been a real threat to the force.”

U.S. General Stanley A. McChrystal, ISAF Commander 2009-2010, at a video conference with U.S. troops on civilian deaths at U.S. checkpoints.¹⁸⁰

Editor’s note: The text on page 77 “Body Count” – Number of Victims after 12 Years of the “War on Terror” in Afghanistan and Pakistan, published as a newspaper article in “junge Welt” (Berlin) on July 7, 2014, contains figures on war deaths in Afghanistan from October 2001 till the end of 2013.

The following text entitled “Estimates of the Number of War Deaths in Afghanistan from October 7, 2001 to December 31, 2011” from the second edition of the IPPNW Body Count has been adapted with no changes, since it explains the source material in a more comprehensive manner. We therefore apologize for any redundancy.

Afghanistan

Estimates of the Number of War Deaths in Afghanistan from October 7, 2001 to December 31, 2011

Lübr Henken

The total number of those killed is composed of deaths of civilians and combatants of both parties to the conflict, whose death may have come about in either a direct or an indirect manner.

For Afghanistan, only passive methods of investigation are available. There are no polls or on-site inquiries.

The most up-to-date and comprehensive collection of estimates is contained in the September 2011 study by Prof. Neta C. Crawford from Boston University,¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ Cited in: Justin Elliott, “[Gen. McChrystal: We’ve Shot ‘An Amazing Number Of People’ Who Were Not Threats](#),” *Talking Points Memo (TPM)*, April 2, 2010.

whose numbers form the most important basis for the following compilation. For the estimates of numbers concerning periods after the publication of the Crawford study, the present article relies mainly on updates from the sources used by Crawford.

1. Civilians

Among civilians, it can be distinguished between those directly and those indirectly killed. Among those directly killed, we have locals as well as people working for non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

1.1. Directly Killed Civilians

1.1.1. Directly killed Afghan civilians

Crawford lists the following research results for the period October 7, 2001 to June 2011. There is no distinction with regard to those responsible for the deaths.

Lowest number of each estimate for directly killed civilians (Table 1)

(For the meaning of the abbreviations used, see the appendix.)

Year	AR M	AN- SO	UN AM A	HR W	CRS	Wiki leaks	GE	AI	AIHR C	ISAF	L.A. Time s	UNA MA/ NCT C	Her- old ¹⁸²	PDA
01							824				1067		2650	1500
02													475	
03														
04						210						230		
05						178						348	408	
06		1315		929		800		1000				635	653	
07		1495	1523	1633	1523	747		2000				1603	1010	
08	4050	1755	2118		2118	1241		2000	1800 ¹⁸³	1231		1923	864	
09	2502	2054	2412		2412				1252	1157		2100		
10	2421	2428	2777		2777				2777	1380		2312		
11			3021		2262									

¹⁸¹ See Neta C. Crawford, *Civilian Death and Injury in Afghanistan, 2001-2011*, Cost of War Project, Watson Institute for International Studies, Boston University, September 2011.

¹⁸² The figures for 2001 in Tables 1 and 2 diverge from Crawford's figures, because Herold later on corrected his original data in a downward direction. In fact the problem was that the original data were based on double-counts due to confusing website names (see Marc Herold, "Counting the Dead," *The Guardian* [online], August 8, 2002). These corrections then may also apply to Herold's December 20, 2001, statements made to the German political TV program "Monitor" (broadcast by the public broadcaster ARD), in which he corrected his estimate of 3,800 civilian deaths upwards to "probably 5,000" (see the German-language transcript of the program: <http://www.ag-friedensforschung.de/regionen/Afghanistan/opfer-monitor.html>). The data in the tables for 2002 are taken from the August 8, 2002 *Guardian* article and are absent in Crawford's study. In it, Herold gave an estimate of between 3,125 to 3,620 for the total period of October 7 to July 31, 2002. The numbers for 2002 indicate the differences to his numbers for 2001.

¹⁸³ "Civilian casualties in the War in Afghanistan (2001–present)," *Wikipedia*, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civilian_casualties_in_the_War_in_Afghanistan_\(2001%E2%80%993present\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civilian_casualties_in_the_War_in_Afghanistan_(2001%E2%80%993present)).

Highest Number of Each Estimate for Directly Killed Civilians (Table 2)

Year	ARM	ANSO	UNA MA	HRW	CRS	AI	AIHR C	ISAF	L.A. Times	UNA MA/ NCTC	Herald	PDA
01									1201		2970	3300
02											650	
03												
04										230		
05										348	478	
06		1315		929		1000				635	769	
07		1495	1523	1633	1523	2000				1603	1297	
08	4050	1755	2118		2118	2000	1800	1231		1923	864	
09	2502	2054	2412		2412		1252	1157		2100	1017	
10	2421	2428	2790		2777		2777	1380		2312		
11			3021		2262							

Crawford uses the data material to determine the mean value for each year. Using the extreme values for each year would result in a different picture:

Mean values and extreme values for directly killed civilians in Afghanistan (October 7, 2001 to December 31, 2011) (Table 3)

Year	Lowest Number Average	Highest Number Average	Extreme Values
2001	1537	2490	824 – 3300
2002	475	650	475 - 650
2003	200	450	0
2004	214	230	210 – 230
2005	378	413	178 – 478
2006	939	930	635 – 1315
2007	1442	1582	747 – 2000
2008	1656	2118	864 – 4050
2009	1984	1964	1157 – 2502
2010	2410	2582	1380 – 2777
2011	2641	2641	2262 - 3021
Sum	13876	16050	8732 - 20323

Columns 1 and 2 yield a mean value of 14,963; the mean value of the right-most column is 14,527.

Assuming a conservative average value of 14,500 directly killed civilians, we get a number of 5.2 killed per year and 100,000 inhabitants if we estimate the total population of Afghanistan at 28 million. This rate of deaths would be slightly above the one for the United States for the year 2009 (5.0) and slightly more than twice above the low rate for individual homicide in Afghanistan, which the WHO put at 2.4 per 100,000 for 2008.¹⁸⁴ Assuming the highest value of 20,323 would yield a killing rate of 7.25 per 100,000 and year. Even so, Afghanistan would be still well below the world average which UNDP put at a rate of 7.9 per 100,000.¹⁸⁵ This would be vastly below the 2006 murder rates for Baltimore (43) and Detroit (48).¹⁸⁶ But it is hard to imagine that life in Afghanistan is so much safer than in those major U.S. cities. One reason is that since 2004, more than 27,000 sorties by the U.S. Air Force have wreaked enormous havoc among the civilian popula-

¹⁸⁴ [2011 Global Study on Homicide: Trends, Contexts, Data](#), Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 2011.

¹⁸⁵ *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (Switzerland), October 29, 2011.

¹⁸⁶ Les Roberts at the hearing of the parliamentary group Die Linke (“Left Party”) at the German *Bundestag*, March 8, 2008.

tion.¹⁸⁷ We just need to recall the air attacks against the fuel trucks in Kunduz and the numerous wedding parties that were annihilated by bombs (see the Introduction by the Editor). Moreover and quite apart from the ground war, U.S. special units had carried out up to 40 round-ups per night; 2,900 in the 12 months before September 2011 alone. They had often endangered innocents, the reason why the night raids are despised by the civilian population, as a September 2011 report highlighted.¹⁸⁸

The problem in determining the number of killed civilians is the “passive” research method itself. It can capture only a fraction of all cases. Only deaths reported from hospitals and morgues or by the media are registered. As a result of the custom usually practiced across Afghanistan to bury the dead within 24 hours, the number of numerous killed civilians will remain unknown. In order to get more reliable approximations, on-site research and scientific polls would be necessary. In Afghanistan, these do simply not exist.

However, there are studies about other countries that are based on such polls. It needs to be determined whether their results can be transferred onto the Afghanistan case. A comparative study published in 2008 that looks at estimates of the numbers of war dead in 13 countries (without Afghanistan) between 1955 and 2002 concludes that on average only one third of the killed civilians are reported by the media.¹⁸⁹ There is, however, a very large variation in this. There were differences from country to country that ranged from a factor of 4.64 to 0.7. Other studies showed substantially higher underestimates. Representative surveys on the victims of the Iraq War indicate that a factor of 12 could be closer to the truth.

Thus, there cannot be a definitive determination of a factor of 3 for Afghanistan, even though it also cannot be excluded. Yet another example may serve to underline the uncertainty in this respect: During the “hot phase of the civil war” in Guatemala, only 5% of the killed were detected by “passive investigative methods.” That would amount to a factor of 20.

Therefore, there is no generally valid factor – that could be used with some certainty based on previous experiences – in order to calculate the total number of deaths from those deaths that could be determined.

Thus, for the time being, the number of civilian deaths in Afghanistan remains unclear. 14,500 killed civilians constitute the absolute lower limit. Even assuming a number three times as big as suggested by the average factor found by Obermeyer, Murray and Gakidou seems arbitrary given the concrete circumstances prevailing in Afghanistan. In addition their study is considered as inherently conservative. Thus, it underestimates the number of killed adults. And the fact that their investigation in some countries determined even fewer war victims than those who had been registered also points to serious methodological flaws. Add to this that, compared to Iraq, where urbanization is more pronounced, and monitoring by local and foreign media is more intense than in Afghanistan, the registration of civilian deaths has been much more fragmentary. Given the fact that in

¹⁸⁷ See U.S. Air Forces Central Combined Air and Space Operations Center, “2004-2008: Combined Air Component Commander Airpower Statistics,” August 31, 2008; “Combined Forces Air Component Commander 2006-2011 Airpower Statistics,” December 31, 2011, <http://www.wired.com/2012/01/afghan-air-war/#more-65463>.

¹⁸⁸ Open Society Foundations & The Liaison Office (2011) *The Cost of Kill/Capture: Impact of the Night Raid Surge on Afghan Civilians*, Kabul, September 19.

¹⁸⁹ Ziad Obermeyer, Christopher J. L. Murray & Emmanuela Gakidou, “Fifty years of violent war deaths from Vietnam to Bosnia: analysis of data from the world survey programme,” *BMJ*, Vol. 336, June 26, 2008.

Iraq, only every fourth or fifth act of violence against civilians by U.S. soldiers was captured through passive methods (see the chapter above on Iraq, “Fragmentary Databases”), one has to expect at least an equal error rate for Afghanistan. Moreover, an indeterminable number of civilians were wrongly put in the category of killed “Taliban” (see Chapter 2.4). This is an easy way for interested parties to hide the number of inadvertently killed civilians from the public. Thus, it is indeed possible that the real number of killed civilians is five to eight times higher than the lower limit of 14,500 civilian deaths. This would mean that Afghanistan has had to suffer between 72,500 to 116,000 civilian deaths.

1.1.2. Directly Killed NGO Workers

The numbers are taken from the quarterly reports of the Afghanistan NGO Safety Office (ANSO) from 2005 to late 2011.¹⁹⁰

Killed Aid Workers (Table 4)

Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Sum
Killed NGO Workers		2	12	24	8	24	15	31	19	37	31	213

1.2. Indirectly Killed Civilians

The term “indirectly killed” refers to persons who die from deficiency diseases such as malnutrition and other ailments, mostly while seeking refuge, and who could have been treated successfully, had there not been the war. For Afghanistan, there is only one single estimate for persons who were indirectly killed. Based on a polling of aid organizations primarily active in refugee camps, a May 2002 article published by *The Guardian* concluded that the number of indirectly killed stood between 20,000 and 49,600.¹⁹¹ Crawford assumes that this was preceded by extremely intense bombardments that were not repeated until 2009, but also notes that there has been a substantial increase in fighting since that year.

Crawford basically ascribes the lack of comprehensive estimates of the number of those indirectly killed by the war to the absence of any population census before or after 2001, which could have gathered data on the nutritional status, access to clean drinking water, medical care, age-specific mortality rates, maternal mortality, and the life expectancy of the population. At the same time, notes Crawford, it is clear that the war generates indirect victims. But she refrains from giving a concrete number. Her reference to an investigation by Lacina and Gleditsch does not remedy the situation, according to whom data from other armed conflicts suggest that in any military conflict the number of indirect deaths may be much greater than direct deaths.¹⁹²

2. Killed Combatants

Within the category of killed combatants, there are the fighters of the Northern Alliance who successfully fought alongside Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) against the “Taliban” from October 7, 2001, to early 2002. There are no numbers for them. There are only figures for the dead of the Afghan Army (ANA), the Afghan Police (ANP) and ISAF, so that to some degree we have reliable data for

¹⁹⁰ *The Afghanistan NGO Safety Office: ANSO Quarterly Data Report Q. 4 2011*, January 2012, London: International NGO Safety Office (INSA).

¹⁹¹ Jonathan Steele, “Forgotten victims: The full human cost of US air strikes will never be known, but many more dies than those killed directly by bombs,” *The Guardian* (online), May 20, 2002.

¹⁹² Bethany Lacina & Nils Petter Gleditsch, “Monitoring Trends in Global Combat: A New Dataset of Battle Deaths,” *European Journal of Population*, Vol. 21, Nos. 2-3, pp. 145-166, here pp. 149-160.

them. The number of killed “Taliban” can also be estimated indirectly in a relatively reliable manner.

2.1. Killed Afghan Security Forces

The Brookings Institution has divided the numbers of killed members of the Afghan National Security Forces into members of the army (ANA) and those of the police force (ANP) separately for the period from January 1, 2007, to July 31, 2011.¹⁹³

Killed Afghan Security Forces (Table 5)

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Sum
ANA	209	226	282	519	325	1,561
ANP	803	880	646	961	830	4,120
Sum	1,012	1,106	928	1,480	1,155	5,681

This aggregate number of 5,681 killed Afghan security forces for the period 2007 till late July 2011 barely differs from the one provided by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). For the latter, Susan G. Chesser estimated the number of 5,603 killed Afghan security forces for the period 2007 to August 31, 2011.¹⁹⁴ Crawford believes that the numbers given by Chesser are incomplete,¹⁹⁵ and estimates the number of the killed security forces of both ANA and ANP between 2007 and 2011 at anywhere from 5,138 to 8,000.¹⁹⁶ In this, the lower value only captures counts until May 2011. It would be thus better to use 5,603 as the lowest limit because this number takes all deaths until the end of August into account.

In response to a parliamentary query raised by the Left Party (*Die Linke*) on September 8, 2010, the German government provided data about the number of killed Afghan police forces: “According to information supplied by the Afghan Ministry of the Interior, a total of 4,500 policemen have lost their lives since 2003.”¹⁹⁷ Included in that figure should be about 700 of the 961 police officers killed in 2010 as listed in Table 5 (corresponding to a period from January till August), which means that to obtain the total number of killed policemen, we must add the difference (261) and the number for 2011 (830), yielding an aggregate of 5,600. Adding this number to the figure of killed Afghan soldiers (1,561) results in the number of 7,161 killed security forces, a number that is quite close to the upper limit given by Crawford.

2.2 Killed ISAF and OEF Soldiers

The regularly updated list kept by iCasualties.org¹⁹⁸ shows that from October 7, 2001 to December 30, 2011 a total of 2,842 ISAF and OEF soldiers¹⁹⁹ were killed. For all those the years, the figure is broken down as follows:

¹⁹³ See Ian S. Livingston & Michael O’Hanlon, *Afghanistan Index*, Washington: Brookings Institution, May 16, 2012, p. 14.

¹⁹⁴ Susan G. Chesser, *Afghanistan Casualties: Military Forces and Civilians*, Washington: Congressional Research Service (CRS Report for Congress, R41084), December 6, 2012.

¹⁹⁵ Crawford, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

¹⁹⁶ Crawford, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

¹⁹⁷ *Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die große Anfrage der Fraktion Die Linke – Drucksache 17/2878 – vom 08.09.2010* [Response by the Federal Government to the query by the *Die Linke* parliamentary group], 60 pages, p. 40.

¹⁹⁸ See <http://icasualties.org/oef/>.

Killed ISAF and OEF Soldiers (Table 6)

Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Sum
Deaths	12	70	58	60	131	191	232	295	521	711	566	2,842

2.3 Killed Staff of Private Security Contractors

The U.S. think-tank Brookings has listed the numbers of members of U.S. security contractors killed from September 1, 2001 to September 30, 2011. Adding them up over the years yields a total number of 981 killed persons.²⁰⁰

Killed Staff of Private U.S. Security Contractors (Table 7)

Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Sum
Deaths	0	0	0	1	28	15	47	55	142	423	270	981

2.4. Killed “Taliban”

Here, the renowned German almanac, *Fischer Weltalmanach*, gives the following summary for the period from October to December 2001: “Estimates about the military and civilian dead and wounded of the two-month war must by necessity be vague, but probably the number of victims amounts to at least 10,000 among the ‘Taliban’ and al-Qaeda fighters alone.”²⁰¹

Not included in this number are the approximately 3,000 “Taliban” who have simply disappeared after their capture and a massacre in Mazar-e Sharif. The Irish documentary filmmaker Jamie Doran provided evidence for this in the September 2002 issue of *Le Monde diplomatique*.²⁰² However, until the present day the case remains unsolved.

For 2007, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon gave a total number of 8,000 for all persons killed;²⁰³ the highest number since 2001. From this, one can approximately extract the number of killed “Taliban.” Subtracting from 8,000 the numbers for civilian deaths (maximally 2,000), NGO workers (15), Afghan security forces (1,012), and ISAF and OEF troops, this results in an estimate of 4,741 killed “Taliban” for 2007.

Crawford has provided only two numbers for one and the same year. She quotes the Afghanistan Rights Monitor (ARM), which for 2010 puts the number of killed “Taliban” at 5,000.²⁰⁴ Another source cites a spokesperson of the Afghan Ministry of the Interior who, for the same year, estimates the number of killed enemies at “over 5,200.”²⁰⁵ Crawford interprets the estimate for 2010 as the consequence of a period of intense ISAF and U.S. military activity. She assumes that the numbers for 2009 were lower, and even lower for 2002 to 2008, resulting in a total estimate of 5,000 to 15,000 for the period 2002 to 2009. From all this, Crawford concludes

¹⁹⁹ The U.S. military determined a total number of 2,847 killed coalition troops for the period from October 7, 2001 to December 30, 2011. But included in this number are five OEF soldiers who were killed outside of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

²⁰⁰ Livingston & O’Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

²⁰¹ *Der Fischer Weltalmanach 2003*, Frankfurt, October 2002, column 55.

²⁰² Jamie Doran, “Afghanistan’s Secret Graves” (Part 1: “[A Drive to Death in the Desert](#)”; Part 2: “[The Wedding Bombing](#),” translated by W. Kristianasen), *Le Monde diplomatique* (English edition), September 2002.

²⁰³ “[Afghanistan: Mehr als 8000 Menschen kamen 2007 gewaltsam ums Leben](#)” [Afghanistan: More than 8000 people have died through violence in 2007], *Spiegel Online*, March 10, 2008.

²⁰⁴ Crawford, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

²⁰⁵ “[Analysis: Afghan Police – Civilians or Combatants?](#),” IRIN, April 7, 2011.

that the number of killed “Taliban” from 2001 to 2011 stood between 10,000 and 20,000.²⁰⁶

Here, it should be investigated whether, beyond Crawford’s reasoning, it is possible to project conclusions from the data on killed “Taliban” in 2007 (4,741) and 2010 (5,200) to the periods before, in between, and after. One indicator for the intensity of the war is the use of heavy ammunition and bombs by the OEF/ISAF air forces in Close Air Support (CAS). For the periods 2006 to 2011 and 2004 to 2008, numbers for the use of weapons have been released.²⁰⁷

Use of Weapons by ISAF/OEF Air Forces from 2006 to 2011 (Table 8)

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Use of Weapons	2,644	5,198	5,215	4,163	5,101	4,896

The resulting picture is that in the years 2007 and 2011, the use of ammunition by the OEF/ISAF air forces was at approximately the same level, and this level was kept in 2008. In 2009, we have about 80% of the level of those four years, but in 2006 it is only about half as much as in the two following years.

A second, older table of the U.S. Air Force,²⁰⁸ using a different counting method confirms these levels:

Use of Weapons by the ISAF/OEF Air Forces from 2004 to 2008 (Table 9)

Year	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Use of Weapons	86	176	1,770	3,572	3,369

Table 9 shows both similar figures for 2007 and 2008 and a doubling of the use of ammunition from 2006 to 2007. In comparison, the numbers for 2004 and 2005 are almost negligible.

All of this suggests the following conclusion: Since the heavy aerial attacks of approximately equal intensity in 2007 and 2010 correlated with approximately equally high estimates for the number of killed “Taliban,” it should be possible to project the level of the air attacks onto the estimates for killed “Taliban.” Let us now try to check this in a larger context.

Beyond the use of the air force, there has been an enormous expansion of ground troops of ISAF, OEF, and U.S. Special Forces, as well as of Afghan security forces. Since the end of 2008, the number of U.S. troops has tripled to 100,000, since 2007 quadrupled, and since 2006 quintupled. Since the beginning of 2007, the military presence of the other ISAF member states has doubled to 40,000, and since 2006 it has quadrupled. The number of Afghan security forces has doubled to about 312,000 since early 2009, which is an increase by more than five times since 2005.²⁰⁹ This tremendous increase in the presence of foreign and Afghan troops is very likely to have led to an escalating rate of killing of “Taliban,” particularly in eastern and southern Afghanistan. Unfortunately, the effect of this mas-

²⁰⁶ Crawford, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

²⁰⁷ Combined Forces Air Component Commander 2008-2011 Airpower Statistics, in: “U.S. Air Forces Central Public Affairs,” News Release, August 3, 2011, available at http://www.globalsecurity.org/jhtml/jframe.html#http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2011/cfacc_2008-2011_afd-110804-001.pdf; Combined Forces Air Component Commander 2006-2011 Airpower Statistics, available at <http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2012/01/afghan-air-war/#more-65463>.

²⁰⁸ <http://www.afa.org/edop/2009/2004-08CFACCstats123108.pdf>.

²⁰⁹ See Livingston & O’Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 4 and 6.

sive increase cannot be reflected in numbers. This is, however, not the case with the use of the U.S. Special Forces.

The intensified use of U.S. Special Forces since early 2009 has led to a substantial increase in the number of killed “Taliban.” NATO statistics show “that the number of night raids increased by a factor of five between February 2009 and December 2010. Accordingly, on average there were 19 times house searcher per night, with NATO soldiers rousing people from their sleep. Asked by DW-WORLD.DE, the spokesman of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force ISAF, Jimmy Cummings, confirmed that such night-time operations were also carried out during the twelve months before September 2011. Cummings gave a number of altogether 2,900 raids for that period. That would amount to eight security raids per night.”²¹⁰ These important data show that there must have been in total 13,300 of such raids during the 700 days from February 2009 to December 2010 (700 times 19). This is also the period when the spokesman of General David Petraeus, Commander of ISAF and U.S. Forces in Afghanistan, made a quite precise statement. He said that within a period of 90 days (May 9 to August 8, 2010), along with 365 captured or killed “Taliban” leaders, 1,031 insurgents were killed in the course of 2,900 “kill-and-capture” operations.²¹¹ Assuming this means that altogether 1,200 “Taliban” were killed, this suggests a killing rate of 0.41 per raid. Accordingly, during the period from February 2009 to December 2010, 5,453 “Taliban” (13,300 times 0.41) would have been killed. Assuming that this five-fold increase is distributed linearly over the 23 months in question, one-third of the “Taliban” (1,817) were killed during the first half of the period (from February 2009 to mid-January 2010), and two-thirds (3,635) killed in 2010. This theoretically determined value closely resembles the numbers published by the Brookings Institution. According to the think-tank, within one single year (ending in early 2011), about 3,200 insurgents were killed and about 1,500 leaders were captured or killed by U.S. Special Forces.²¹² Crawford’s study does not contain any information about raids, and thus it is reasonable to assume that these numbers were been included in her calculations. From all that, the following conclusions can be drawn:

If we take the year 2007 as the base value, with 4,741 killed “Taliban” during 5,198 heavy air attacks, the corresponding number of killed “Taliban” for 2008 should be around 4,800 – and 2,400 for 2006, 250 for 2005, and around 100 for 2004. On the basis of the heavy air attacks, we should assume a number of 3,800 killed “Taliban” (80% of the number for 2008) for 2009. But because the number of security raids increased since the beginning of 2009, the number of 1,817 would have to be added, which leads to an estimated number of 5,614 for 2009. For 2010, using a base value of 4,700 (98% of the 2007 value), one arrives at an aggregate estimate of 8,335 (4,700 + 3,635) “Taliban” killed during crackdowns.

For 2011, no estimates are available. If we apply the same principle and project the intensity of the heavy air attacks onto the number of killed civilians, this should result in 95% of the value for 2007, which would be 4,503. In mid-September 2011, the ISAF spokesperson told *Deutsche Welle (DW)* that up to that time, there had on average been eight security raids every night. Assuming that this was also the case for the rest of the year, 2011 would be another year with

²¹⁰ Cited in: Naomi Conrad, “[Afghanistan: Nchtliche Razzien schuren Hass auf NATO](#)” [Afghanistan: Night raids stir up hatred against NATO], *Deutsche Welle*, September 19, 2011..

²¹¹ “[Petraeus: ‘We’re doing everything we can to achieve progress’](#),” *The Washington Post*, August 15, 2010.

²¹² Livingston & O’Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 10, Figure 1.21.

2,900 raids and 1,200 “Taliban” killed during those operations. The aggregate number of killed “Taliban” for 2011 would then be 5,703.

Estimates of Killed “Taliban” from 2001 to December 3, 2011 (Table 10)

Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Sum
Killed “Taliban”	13,000			100	250	2,400	4,741	4,800	5,614	8,335	5,703	44,943

Afghanistan

Lübr Henken

“Body Count” – Number of Victims after 12 Years of the “War on Terror” in Afghanistan and Pakistan

The number of war dead is a political issue. If Western countries wage war for ostensibly humanitarian reasons, they must plausibly show the critical public at home that the war has led to an improvement in the humanitarian situation on the ground. A high number of casualties from your own country has a counter-productive effect, as do high casualties in the country being attacked.

For this reason, the U.S. and NATO do not count the number of dead victims in foreign countries, although they meticulously count the number of dead soldiers on their own side. All other body counts are based on estimates that are usually made in two different ways. On the one hand, we have the passive method according to which deaths are counted from reports in the media, police reports or hospital announcements. Experience has shown that the passive method only captures a fraction of those killed. On the other hand, we have the active method with which we more accurate results can be obtained through local polls. Using the active method, results can be extrapolated by using statistical methods, which is common in representative surveys.

In Afghanistan, the longest war in NATO’s history, body counts have only been made on the basis of the passive method. This means that the numbers circulating in our media are too low. A quick look at the *Wikipedia* article on the war in Afghanistan since 2001 reveals the number of 14,576 domestic and foreign security forces killed, and between 12,500 and 14,700 civilians killed (as of 2012).²¹³ Searching for the number of Al-Qaida and “Taliban” members, it is stated that no reliable data are possible. This in turn suggests that the other figures indicated are somehow reliable. But in fact, they are not. This is not meant as criticism of the diligent Wikipedia writers, rather as a comment on the general superficiality used to deal with the devastating consequences of the war.

The interrelation between the wars in Afghanistan and in Pakistan is almost completely absent from Western public perception. However, the common use of the term “AfPak” (reportedly first used by the late Richard Holbrooke, then the U.S. Special Envoy) is an indication that U.S. military strategy under President Barack Obama has viewed these two countries in the Hindu Kush as being interconnected. Let us begin our analysis with the war waged by the U.S. and the UK on October 7, 2001 against the government set up by the “Taliban” in Afghanistan. The period covered by our analysis ends on December 31, 2013.

Security Forces Killed in Afghanistan

It is relatively easy to identify the number of ISAF and OEF soldiers killed. The Website iCasualties.org keeps a running count of these figures. Until the end of

²¹³ “Civilian casualties in the War in Afghanistan (2001–present),” *op. cit.*

2013, 3,409 soldiers of different nationalities were killed. The number of employees of private U.S. military contractors killed has been recorded by Professors Crawford and Lutz from Boston University, who counted 2,986 until September 2013.²¹⁴ This suggests that more than 3,000 by the end of 2013.

In the “Afghanistan Index” produced by the Brookings Institution we find statistics of killed Afghan security forces. For the time period between 2007 and the end of 2012, the U.S. think-tank reports 9,876 native soldiers and police killed.²¹⁵ These statistics do not include the figures for 2013. For 2013, we have the so-called “progress report for Afghanistan” issued by the German government issued in 2014.²¹⁶ There, we learn that 4,600 died in the first eleven months of 2013. This means that we can mourn around 5,000 dead Afghan soldiers and police for the year 2013, resulting in a number of nearly 15,000 killed between 2007 and the end of 2013. In these statistics, the number of police killed is nearly three times as high as that of soldiers. It is also significant that the number of killed security forces in the last two years has increased rapidly. 8,400 of the 15,000 people in uniform died in the last two years of the seven-year period.

Insurgents Killed in Afghanistan

Determining the number of dead “Taliban” is a bit more complicated. The simplistic term “Taliban” is used to describe militant resistance fighters, largely from the Haqqani network, the Hekmatyar group, and the Taliban.

For the first months of the war, a renowned German almanac (in its 2003 edition) puts the number killed at 10,000.²¹⁷ In addition, however, we should take into account the 3,000 people who disappeared in November 2001, whose whereabouts after being captured in Mazar-e Sharif remain unexplained.²¹⁸

In order to quantify the number of “Taliban” killed in the subsequent period, there are two key points. We can estimate that approximately 4,700 “Taliban” were killed in 2007 and 5,200 in 2010. For figures before, between and after these years, we can draw conclusions from indicators on the intensity of fighting. One of these indicators is the “Close Air Support” by NATO war planes; another are the figures provided from the Pentagon on the intensity of night raids, which also containing information on fatalities. From this information, we arrive at a figure of 37,000 insurgents killed between 2002 and 2012.²¹⁹

If we add the 2001 number to the number of dead “Taliban,” the sum of the estimates results in a figure of around 50,000 by the end of 2012; this leads to an annual average of 4,545 for 11 years. The Sanctions Committee of the United Nations has reported the number of “Taliban” losses in 2013. According to that report, between 10,000 and 12,000 “Taliban” were killed, wounded or captured in the first ten and a half months of 2013.²²⁰ The source indicated are government and internal Taliban statistics. This order of magnitude is roughly in accordance to

²¹⁴ <http://goo.gl/Eka6ky>, “Cost of War Project,” Watson Institute for International Studies, Boston University.

²¹⁵ Livingston & O’Hanlon, *op. cit.*

²¹⁶ German Government, “Fortschrittsbericht Afghanistan zur Unterrichtung des Deutschen Bundestags” [Progress report Afghanistan as information for the German Parliament], January 2014, 49 pages, p. 8.

²¹⁷ *Der Fischer Weltalmanach 2003*, *op. cit.*

²¹⁸ Doran, *op. cit.*

²¹⁹ For the calculation of the number of “Taliban” killed, see section 2.4 of this publication.

²²⁰ “[UNO: 12.000 Taliban dieses Jahr getötet, verletzt oder gefangen](#)” [UN: 12,000 Taliban killed, injured or captured this year], *Zeit Online* (Germany), November 18, 2013.

the estimates for 2012. If we add an estimated 4,545 “Taliban” killed for 2014, we arrive at a figure of roughly 55,000 “Taliban” killed by the end of 2013.

Civilian Employees of the US Government Killed

The Brookings Institution also keeps statistics on civilian employees of the U.S. government killed in Afghanistan and registered 1,176 for the period up to March 2011.²²¹ To be able to estimate how many civilian U.S. government employees were killed before the end of 2013, we can use the monthly death rate from April 2010 until March 2011 (15.8), which produces an estimated number of 521 deaths between April 2011 and the end of December 2013. This increases the number of civilian employees of the U.S. government killed, which we can then estimate at 1,700 by the end of 2013.

Journalists Killed in Afghanistan

In the period 2001-2013, 22 journalists were recorded to have been killed in Afghanistan.²²²

Civilians Killed in Afghanistan

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) keeps statistics of the national and international aid workers killed during development work in Afghanistan. It lists 251 U.S. and 35 international aid workers killed, i.e. a total of 281.²²³ The UN has identified Afghanistan as the world’s most dangerous country for aid workers.²²⁴

Significantly more complicated is the determination of a plausible approximation for civilians killed overall, where it is still unclear whether they were killed by “Taliban” or ISAF troops. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) regularly states that the “Taliban” are responsible for around three-quarters of civilians killed, mostly as a result of the detonation of explosive devices. However, studies by the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) imply that only 20% to 30% of “Taliban” attacks have been directed against civilians, that is to say that 70% to 80% of attacks were conducted against ISAF troops and Afghan security forces.²²⁵ Targets like civilians and police are not well-protected, resulting in a high number of casualties.

Professor Crawford from Boston University has evaluated 14 different studies that estimate the number of civilian deaths in different time periods,²²⁶ and has reached a conclusion of between 12,700 and 14,500 deaths until June 2011.²²⁷ Yet, Crawford said these figures are a conservative estimate.

The most independent source for determining the number of civil victims in Afghanistan should be UNAMA. UNAMA gives the number of civilians killed between 2007 and the end of 2013 as 17,687.²²⁸ This figure does not include the deaths before 2007, which relying on Crawford we can estimate at around 3,500.

²²¹ Livingston & O’Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

²²² Livingston & O’Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

²²³ *Security incident date* (2014), Aid Worker Security Database (AWSDB) project, “Humanitarian Outcomes” 24 October.

²²⁴ *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Germany), December 2, 2013.

²²⁵ United States Government Accountability Office (GOA), “Report to Congressional Addresses, Afghanistan Key Oversight Issues,” February 2013, 59 pages, p. 17.

²²⁶ Crawford, *op. cit.*

²²⁷ See “Civilian casualties in the War in Afghanistan (2001–present),” *op. cit.*

²²⁸ In 2013 only, there were 2,959, which is the second highest figure since 2009 (UNAMA & OHCHR, *Afghanistan Annual Report 2013: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, Kabul, February 2014, 93 pages, p. 23). The total number from 2007 until 2012 stands at 14,728 civilians killed, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, February 20, 2013.

This produces a total number of 21,200 civilians killed by the end of 2013. This number also appears to be relatively low, and produces a death rate of 5.9 per 100,000 inhabitants of Afghanistan. This death rate is lower than that of the German city of Frankfurt, where the rate for 2010 was 6.9 per 100,000 inhabitants.²²⁹ It is hard to believe that life in Afghanistan is safer than in Frankfurt.²³⁰ If the record of violence were transferred from Afghanistan to Frankfurt, this would translate into a deadly raid every four days, an air raid every five days, and three deadly attacks every two days in the German metropolis.

The reason for the numbers being so low lies with the fact that the U.S. Special Operation Forces (SOF) operate so secretly that even the U.S. military has no information about the operations, never mind about the number of civilian deaths. The magnitude of these killings has been illustrated in a U.S. study by Lewis and Sewall on civilian casualties: “Between 2007 and mid-2009, SOF operations (including SOF-directed airstrikes) caused about half of all US-caused civilian casualties”²³¹ The above-mentioned DIA study indicates that the number of “Taliban” attacks varies seasonally between 60 and 150 a day (between 2010 and 2012). Alone in 2012, there were a total of around 37,000.

It is clear that the figures generated by the passive method are much too small. Thus, what is the real number of civilian casualties in Afghanistan? Is there a relationship between the two methods of investigation – that is between estimates based on survey and the passive method? In fact, there are analyses from which we can draw some conclusions.

The most comprehensive is the work conducted by U.S. scientists from the universities of Seattle and Harvard, published by the *British Medical Journal* in 2008. They explored the numbers of civilian deaths in 13 wars between 1955 and 2002 and compared the two investigation methods with each other. They noted that on average only a third of deaths were reported in the media, i.e. the actual number of civilians killed is on average three times as high as the published figures suggest. However, the range of variation between the different wars investigated is very high. At one extreme, we have the figure of 0.7, meaning that more deaths were reported in the media than in surveys. At the other extreme, we have a figure of between 4 and 6.

Simply taking the average of all 13 investigated wars, and expecting that a tripling of civilian deaths will apply to Afghanistan appears to be arbitrary. Indeed, the investigation shows significant methodological deficits, when the number of war deaths surveyed in some countries is lower than the one registered in surveys. Additionally, compared to Iraq, where urbanization is more pronounced and observation by domestic and foreign media is more intense than in Afghanistan, the registration of civilian deaths in Afghanistan was significantly less thorough. The study of the renowned medical journal *The Lancet* established that the passive method recorded only every fourth or fifth act of violence by U.S. troops against civilians (see “Fragmentary Observations” in the chapter on Iraq),²³² which would result in at least as high an error rate in Afghanistan. In addition, the number of “Taliban” killed will include an indeterminate number of wrongly attributed civil-

²²⁹ “Stadt der Morde” [City of murder], *Der Tagesspiegel* (Germany), February 18, 2012.

²³⁰ Especially so, since in Afghanistan an average of a dozen raids are carried out every night and an average of eleven air strikes every day.

²³¹ Cited in: Bod Dreyfuss & Nick Turse, “[America’s Afghan Victims](#),” *The Nation*, October 7, 2013.

²³² See Burnham *et al.*, *The Human Cost of the War in Iraq*, p. 13.

ians. This enables interested parties to hide accidental civil casualties from the public.

In other words, we can speculate that the actual number of Afghans killed is somewhere between five and eight times as high as the conservative estimate of 21,200 that constitutes the lower limit. If the factors of 5 to 8 are correct, this would mean that we mourn between 106,000 and 170,000 excess deaths in Afghanistan.

If we add up all the categories of war deaths, we can estimate the number for Afghanistan as around 200,000 until the end of 2013. This translates roughly into 1,400 deaths per month since the beginning of the war. Do we have any other indications that these figures are legitimate? Yes, indeed. For June 2013, Afghanistan's Interior Ministry declared that in total 1,200 people had been killed.²³³ Considering the incompleteness of the observations, it appears that even our estimates are low.

Afghanistan Summary (October 2001 until the end of 2013)

Civilians and Combatants	Directly Killed
Excess deaths incl. Afghan Civilians	106,000 – 170,000
Journalists	22
NGO Workers	281
Afghan Security Forces	15,000
Private U.S. Security Forces	3,000
ISAF and OEF Soldiers	3,409
Civilian employees of the US government	1,700
“Taliban”	55,000
Total	~ 200,000



The „Bundeswehr“, the German army, remains an alien element in Afghanistan

²³³ 1232 deaths, comprised of 299 Afghan security forces, 753 “Taliban,” and 180 civilians (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, July 2, 2013).

Abbreviations

ARM: Afghanistan Rights Monitor, “The Crisis of Afghan Civilians in 2008,” <http://www.arm.org.af/index.php>; Afghanistan Rights Monitor, “[ARM Mid-Year Report, January-June 2010](#),” Kabul; “[ARM Annual Report, Civilian Casualties of War](#),” Kabul, February 2011.

ANSO: “Afghanistan NGO Safety Office: ANSO Quarterly Data Report,” Kabul, Afghanistan; data from 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010 quarterly data reports, and 2011 (second quarter), London: International NGO Safety Office (INSA).

UNAMA: United Nations Assistance Mission on Afghanistan, [Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, 2008](#), January 2009; United Nations Assistance Mission on Afghanistan, [Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, 2009](#), January 2010; UNAMA & UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, [Afghanistan Annual Report 2011: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflicts](#), Kabul, February 2012.

<http://unama.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=12254&ctl=Details&mid=15756&ItemID=38492&language=en-US>

HRW: Human Rights Watch, “[Troops in Contact: Airstrikes and Civilian Deaths in Afghanistan](#),” New York, 2008. HRW states that the total number of killed civilians for 2006 and 2007, 929 and 1,633 respectively, are “a minimum.” Human Rights Watch, [The Human Cost: The Consequence of Insurgent Attacks in Afghanistan](#), New York, April 2007.

CRS: Susan G. Chesser, *Afghanistan Casualties*, Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service (CRS), September 24, 2010, February 3, 2011, April 6, 2011, January 18, 2012, and December 6, 2012, all available at www.crs.gov. The 2011 figure concerns the period till end of November.

WikiLeaks: Chris Wilson & Jeremy Singer-Vine, “[Afghanistan’s Census of the Dead](#),” *Slate*, July 27, 2010.

GE: Global Exchange, [Afghan Portraits of Grief: The Civilian/Innocent Victims of U.S. Bombing in Afghanistan](#), San Francisco, September 2002. The Global Exchange “survey [found] at least 824 Afghan civilians were killed between October 7 and January 2002 by the US-led bombing campaign.”

AI: Amnesty International’s Afghanistan reports 2007, 2008, and 2009, available at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/afghanistan>.

AIHRC: Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), [Civilian Casualty Figure: First Seven Months of 2010 \(1st January - 31st July\)](#), August 8, 2010.

ISAF: [Afghanistan Report 2009](#), Brussels: NATO Public Diplomacy Division, 2009.

L.A. Times: David Zucchino, “[The Untold War: ‘The Americans ... They Just Drop Their Bombs and Leave’](#),” *Los Angeles Times*, June 2, 2002. The text does not give 1,067 deaths as the highest figure, as noted by Crawford, but rather 1,201 deaths.

NCTC: “Worldwide Incidents Tracking System,” McLean, VA: (United States) National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), database available at www.nctc.gov.

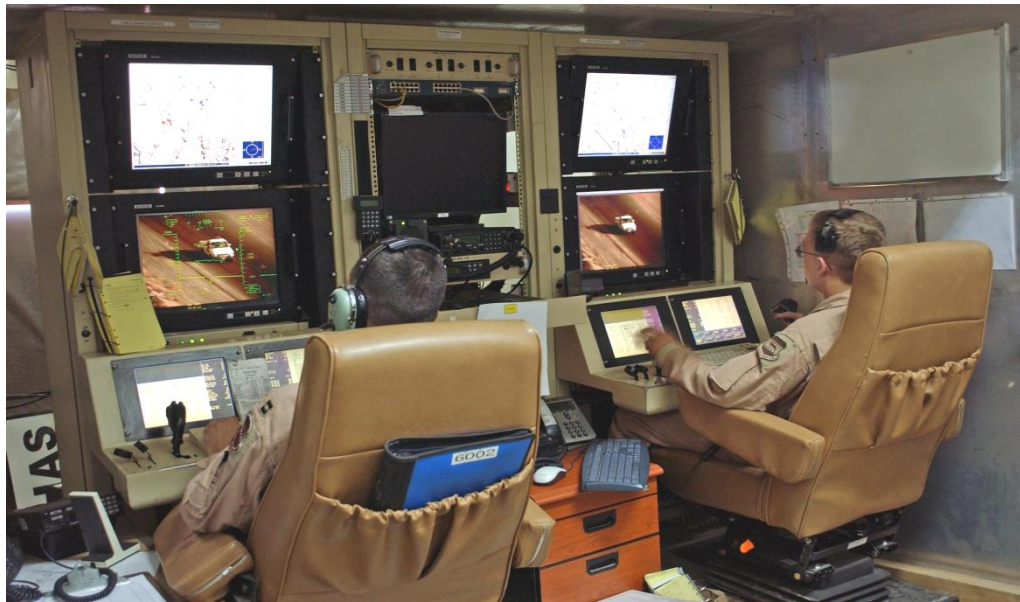
Herold: Marc Herold, “[Appendix 4. Daily Casualty Count of Afghan Civilians Killed by U.S Bombing and Special Forces Attacks, October 7 until present day](#),” University of New Hampshire, October 16, 2003 version. Marc Herold, “[Afghan](#)

[Tragedy: Obama's Afghan war, the U.S. media, and the United Nations – the new metric of civilian casualties](#),” *Frontline* (India), Vol. 26, No. 13 (June 20 – July 3, 2009).

PDA: Carl Conetta, [Operation Enduring Freedom: Why a Higher Rate of Civilian Bombing Casualties](#), Washington, DC: Project on Defense Alternatives (PDA) (*Briefing Report*, No. 13, January 18, 2002, revised January 24, 2002), Center for International Policy.



Source: Map Resources. Adapted by CRS. (K.Yancey 11/22/05)



Remote-controlled drones

"[...] we've been doing this so long we're now bombing low-level guys who don't deserve a Hell-fire missile up their ass. [...] Not every target has to be a rock star."

Roger Cressey, proponent of the use of drone warfare and former member of the U.S. National Security Council, on the drone war in Pakistan²³⁴

Pakistan

Overview: Pakistan

Lühr Henken

Afghanistan's neighbor Pakistan is also at war, and there are basically four reasons for this. First, we have the expulsion of the al-Qaeda leadership and thousands of "Taliban" fighters from Afghanistan to Pakistan since the end of 2001: since then, they have had maintained their headquarters in Pakistan, where they have trained Afghanistan fighters. Second, we have the historic Pashtun settlements on both sides of the Afghan–Pakistani border, which are not recognized by Afghanistan. Third, the role of Pakistan as the most important transit route for the supply of U.S. and ISAF forces in Afghanistan should be noted. Fourth, Pakistan and India regard Afghanistan as the battlefield for their long-lasting rivalry. The last aspect has resulted in Pakistani support for the "Taliban," as Pakistan is interested in having a "Taliban" government in Kabul in place, which would provide Islamabad with a strategically secure hinterland against the arch-enemy India.²³⁵²³⁶

The war in Pakistan is therefore a consequence of the U.S./NATO war in Afghanistan. It began in 2004 with the massive advance of the Pakistani military against Al-Qaeda hide-outs and "Taliban" in southern Waziristan. The initial hope that this could contain the war has turned into its opposite. The war intensified, terrorist reprisals increased, and the war spread to other areas of Pakistan. Under

²³⁴ Cited in: Jane Mayer, "[The Predator War: What are the risks of the C.I.A.'s covert drone program?](#)," *The New Yorker*, October, 2009.

²³⁵ See "Pakistan's undeclared war" http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/3645114.stm, BBC NEWS, September, 2004

²³⁶ See "Pakistan gegen die Taliban" http://swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/aktuell/2010A30_sbg_wgn_wmr_ks.pdf, SWP-Aktuell, Deutsches Institut für Internationale Politik und Sicherheit, March 2013

intense U.S. pressure, the Pakistani governments have acted against the *Tebrik-i-Taliban Pakistan* (ITP, the “Taliban Movement of Pakistan”), a coalition of more than a dozen jihadist groups that was formed in 2007, also known as the “Pakistani Taliban.” These groups have become popular because of the precarious social situation of Pakistani youth, the brutal actions of the heavily armed Pakistani army, and the terror unleashed by the CIA’s killer drone attacks.^{237,238}

Civilians Killed in Pakistan

Prof. Neta Crawford from Boston University cites two independent sources in her studies: the PAK Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) in Islamabad and the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) of the Institute for Conflict Management in New Delhi.²³⁹

Crawford adopts the conservative PIPS studies according to which 34,242 civilians were killed between 2005 and 2010.²⁴⁰ She adds, however, that this number is even more unreliable than those for Afghanistan, because access to the affected regions in Pakistan is more restricted. In 2011, an additional 6,550 (7,107 minus 557 killed by U.S. drones) civilians were killed in Pakistan,²⁴¹ and in 2012 4,711 (5,057 minus 336 killed by U.S. drones).²⁴² For 2013, SATP calculated 3,001 civilian deaths in Pakistan. This results in a probable total of 48,504 civilian casualties up until the end of 2013. To this we must add the estimated number of civilian victims of drone attacks. The Bureau of Investigative Journalism in London has kept accounts and puts the number of civilians in Pakistan killed by U.S. drones at 416 to 951.²⁴³ This results in around 49,000 civilian victims of the war in Pakistan up until the end of 2013. As calculations are made from media and hospital reports – and are not based on scientific polls –, the real figures are probably significantly higher.

Journalists Killed in Pakistan

Between 2005 and 2013, 45 journalists were killed in Pakistan. In this period, the country had consistently been among the world’s top five countries with regard to deadly consequences for journalists.²⁴⁴

Militants and Security Forces Killed in Pakistan

SATP has meticulously recorded the number of militants and Pakistani security forces killed in Pakistan. It reports that 26,862 “terrorists” (or insurgents) and 5,498 security forces were killed by the end of 2013.²⁴⁵

This produces a total for Pakistan of over 80,000 Pakistanis – combatants as well as non-combatants – killed as a consequence of the war.

²³⁷ See “Backgrounders“, <http://www.cfr.org/pakistan/pakistans-new-generation-terrorists>, *Council on Foreign Relations*, November 2013

²³⁸ See “Recommendations and Report of the Task Force on US Drone Policy“, http://www.stimson.org/images/uploads/task_force_report_final_web_062414.pdf, STIMSON, June 2014

²³⁹ “*Fatalities in Terrorist Violence in Pakistan 2003-2014*”, New Delhi: SATP.

²⁴⁰ Neta C. Crawford, *War Related Death and Injury in Pakistan 2004-2011*, September 2011, p. 25.

²⁴¹ *Pakistan Security Report 2011*, Islamabad: PIPS, p. 5 onwards.

²⁴² *Pakistan Security Report 2012*, Islamabad: PIPS, p. 9.

²⁴³ “Drone strikes in Pakistan,” London: The Bureau of Investigative Journalism.

²⁴⁴ Livingston & O’Hanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

²⁴⁵ *Fatalities in Terrorist Violence in Pakistan 2003-2014*, *op. cit.*

Pakistan Summary (2004 until the end of 2013)

Civilians and combatants	Directly killed
Pakistani civilians	48,504
Journalists killed	45
Civilians killed by drones	416 – 951
Pakistani security forces	5,498
Militants	26,862
Total	81,325 – 81,860

If we add the estimates made for the “AfPak” area, we reach a balance of between 265,000 and 330,000 war dead. The figure of 108,000 combatants killed is accompanied by the larger figure of between 157,000 and 221,000 non-combatants. The number of bystanders killed is thus 50 to 100% greater than the number of combatants killed.

These estimated figures from renowned sources about direct killings exceed the public perception of figures available in the West by a factor of around 10. Rejection of the war in Western societies would be more pronounced, had people been aware of the real extent of the war damages. In addition, the studies only record victims of direct killings. Those wounded and maimed receive just as little attention in the register as those killed indirectly. “Indirect killings” are deaths caused by deficiency diseases such as malnutrition and other fatal diseases, usually occurring when people are fleeing – in absence of war, these diseases could have been successfully treated. Figures of indirect deaths are only available for Afghanistan.

A 2002 *Guardian* article, using surveys by aid organizations, especially in refugee camps, talked about 20,000 to 49,600 indirect killings.²⁴⁶ This figure is two to five times higher than the number of direct killings.



²⁴⁶ Steele, *op. cit.*

Victims of the “War on Terror” in Pakistan

Knuth Mellenthin

On the tenth anniversary of the September 11 attacks, the *Wall Street Journal* carried an ad on behalf of the Pakistani government with the headline “Which country can do more for your peace?”²⁴⁷

Like notes on a bulletin board, a series of numbers were displayed:
21,672 Pakistani civilians lost their lives or were seriously wounded;

2,795 soldiers were martyred;

8,671 soldiers were wounded;

3.5 million residents were displaced from their homes;

there were 3,486 bomb blasts and 283 major suicide attacks;

the combined loss for the Pakistani national economy amounts to 68 billion dollars.



Advert in *Wall Street Journal*

with the heading

„Which country can do more for your peace?”

There are no precise and comprehensive insights into the number of killed civilians, even though the ad deceptively suggests otherwise. Even the very notion of ‘civilian’ is interpreted quite differently in Pakistan and internationally. Pakistani security forces principally never supply data on non-combatants killed during their operations, even though their number must be substantial. In the ad, the killed and wounded ‘militants’ do not appear at all, even though according to official military reports their number adds up to several thousands and even though it is quite safe to assume that many among those killed under that label were not at all combatants. With regard

to the notion of ‘soldiers’ used in the ad, it remains unclear whether this only includes members of the armed forces or whether it actually refers to all uniformed forces including the police, border guards and so forth.

The numbers used in the ad are very different from the ones which were, according to the September 13, 2011, issue of *Dawn* – the country’s most widely read English-language daily– presented by Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani²⁴⁸ at a

²⁴⁷ See Wallstreet Journal <http://online.wsj.com/public/resources/documents/WSJ.pdf>, September 10-11, 2011

²⁴⁸ Gilani served as Pakistan’s 16th Prime Minister between March 25, 2008, and April 26, 2012.

meeting with the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad²⁴⁹. There, he said that Pakistan had lost 5,000 soldiers and 35,000 civilians during the “war on terror.” The *Dawn* article did not specify whether Gilani had exclusively referred to incidents of death, but this is very likely since these numbers are the same that are officially used most of the time, usually to refer to persons killed. Why the numbers indicated in the ad are markedly lower is inexplicable. From a propagandistic viewpoint, it was certainly in the interest of the ad sponsor to “lay it on thick” rather than to downplay the losses. This makes it even more puzzling.

For the moment, let’s leave aside all sorts of indirect losses related to the “war on terror,” which in fact to me seem very difficult to calculate. This shall be taken up further below.

A closer look shows that more or less politically motivated violence in Pakistan – including sectarian acts of violence – does not exclusively stem from the “war on terror.” Some of the strands of violence date back to way before 2001 and have their own very specific causes, even though by now those factors influence each other and even blend. It can be assumed or partly proven that the different contexts of violence are also being mixed up in the official numbers of the Pakistani government referred to above.

The Most Important Areas of Conflict aside from the “War on Terror”:

There is an armed conflict between nationalist-separatist forces and the Pakistani state’s security forces in Balochistan province that dates back to the 1950s. The Pakistani government and military leadership declares all uniformed forces that are killed in these battles to be victims of the “war on terror” and counts them as such, even though this is neither factually nor politically justified. There are no official data on the victims from the opposing side, among them hundreds or thousands of “disappeared” and “extra-legally executed.” They do not distinguish between the “war on terror” and the war in Balochistan. They justify the one with the other, although or because there is much more criticism on the warfare in Balochistan than on the “war on terror”, which can by now be considered as commonly accepted.

There are conflicts between the Sunni majority and the Shiite minority that often escalate into violence, which is accompanied by terror attacks against mosques and other religious sites, as well as by violent confrontations between masses of people. By now, this conflict is also influenced by the “war on terror,” but cannot be reduced to it, neither factually nor historically.

Finally, there are the gang wars in the country’s largest city, Karachi, which are motivated by ethnic conflict, party politics or criminal agendas. Their roots also date back to at least the 1990s. According to recent data (*The Dawn*, October 6, 2011), at least 800 persons had been killed in these conflicts during that year. This is close to the average of previous years. Quite often, these are murders for hire. All of the major parties are considered as more or less involved and complicit in these crimes.

Some additional remarks on Balochistan and the problem of the intermingling of numbers and areas of conflict are in order: According to a BBC report on April 17, 2009, Pakistan’s Ministry of the Interior at that time presented the very first comprehensive data collection on “terror attacks” that had occurred over the previous years. According to that collection, in 2008 there were

²⁴⁹ Ahmadinejad served as Iran’s President between August 3, 2005, and August 3, 2013.

1,842 “terrorist attacks” in which 1,395 persons were killed.

This numerical relation between attacks and victims in this collection raises doubts about what was categorized as “terror attacks.” Under the latter rubric we can certainly count attacks on pipelines, power supply lines, and other installations that are quite frequently occurrence in Balochistan but rarely result in harming people. But at least, that publication contained an interesting regional breakdown. According to that, most of the “terror attacks,” namely 1,122, i.e. more than 60%, occurred in the Balochistan province. Then came the North-West Frontier Province (now renamed as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), where the civil war mainly takes place, with 692 “terror attacks”, followed by Punjab with 12, and Sindh with 9. Regarding the number of deaths, the (former) North-West Frontier Province topped the list with 732 cases, followed by Balochistan (432), Punjab (119), and Sindh (21) provinces.

The majority of the deaths, according to the BBC, resulted from assaults and attacks directed against security forces, yet “civilians” accidentally present in the target location were also often hit. Apart from the specific situation in Balochistan, such violent actions against security forces have been on the rise only since 2007. On their own, the fundamentalist and Pashtuni-tribalist forces didn’t harbor a motive to target the military and the police, but quite on the contrary, they saw themselves more or less as the security forces’ allies in the struggle for the purportedly overriding interests of the Pakistani nation. Besides, this kind of “peaceful” coexistence between the populations of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in the North-West Frontier Province and government bodies was secured by a series of treaties.

This situation only changed after the U.S. succeeded, since 2006, in pushing General Pervez Musharraf – who had assumed power after a coup d’état in 1999 – and the military leadership to break these treaties and to conduct military operations in the so-called tribal areas. One turning point rarely registered in the West was the military raid of the Red Mosque in Islamabad on July 10, 2007, which cost the lives of more than 100 mostly teenage occupiers.

In 2010, the Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) released a study on the “terror attacks” that had occurred in 2009. According to a report on the *The Guardian* website on January 11, 2010, there were 3,021 deaths resulting from “terror attacks,” which is described as an increase of 48% compared to the previous year.²⁵⁰ This is barely compatible with above-mentioned the Ministry of the Interior report for 2008, because based on the latter the rise should have been more than 100%.

According to *The Guardian*, the PIPS study stated a total number of more than “12,600 violent deaths across the country in 2009, 14 times more than in 2006.” This number was broken down as follows:

“At least half of the dead were militants who were killed in US drone strikes or, mostly, sweeping army offensives against their mountain strongholds of Swat and South Waziristan along the Afghan border. Another 2,000 or so Pakistanis died in bloodshed unrelated to militancy: political clashes, tribal feuds and border skirmishes.”

Apparently not included in that total number of deaths are the ‘civilian’ casualties of the military operations, for which information is generally barely available. In fact, because of the ruthless warfare on the part of the security forces, their num-

²⁵⁰ See Declan Walsh, “Pakistan Suffers from Record Number of Deaths Due to Militant Violence,” *theguardian.com*, January 11, 2010.

ber must have been substantial. But the military does not provide any information, nor do the “Pakistani Taliban,” while the media are largely kept out of the fighting areas. So far, I have not seen any estimates concerning this aspect of the “war on terror.”

An Assessment of the General Data Situation:

The probably most detailed information available to us concern the victims of all ‘terror attacks.’ Pakistani media outlets regularly provide reports on this topic.

- Data on the consequences of U.S. drone attacks are a bit less reliable. Even the counting process itself is controversial, e.g. when a target is attacked twice in a row in an interval of 30 or 60 minutes. Data on the number of the killed – the number of the wounded is smaller here because of the ‘efficiency’ of the weapons used – are mostly provided by anonymous ‘officials’ whose positions held as well as sources remain unknown. These sources of information are often the very same informers and spies of the Americans who had previously helped in selecting the targets. Apart from a few exceptions, the killed are consistently and purely schematically referred to as ‘militants.’ A study published by the City University London’s Bureau of Investigative Journalism in August 2011 is noteworthy here:²⁵¹ It concludes that the names of merely 5% of the killed are known. This suggests that the lion’s share of the attacks have been totally random; quite rarely those killings were ‘extrajudicial executions,’ i.e. operations conducted against actual or alleged wanted leaders who held high- or mid-level positions and who were known by name.

According to the study, since the start of the drone attacks in 2004, between 2,292 and 2,863 people have been killed in the course of at least 291 attacks. This constitutes at least 40% more than previous estimates had indicated. The authors claim that at least 385 of these deaths were ‘civilians,’ among them 168 teenagers and children under 18 years of age. The distinction between ‘civilians’ and ‘militants’ might be useful for the purpose of media reporting since the U.S. government is in almost total denial about any killed ‘civilians,’ but in this case this is fundamentally non-sensical and misguided: Only a very small portion of those killed could be counted as combatants in an international “war on terror.”

U.S. authorities commented on the study, stating that only 2,050 people were killed in drone attacks and that except for 50 people all of them were ‘militants.’ They further claimed that over the previous year there had been no non-combatants among the victims at all. The study, however, puts the number of ‘civilians’ killed in that period at least at 45.

However, U.S. authorities are not qualified to supply comprehensive information about the number and composition of the casualties of drone attacks. This is due to the fact that the means available to them – aerial reconnaissance and reports by spies – are not sufficient for gaining qualified insights about casualties. On top of that there is the propagandistic guideline to downplay the number of killed civilians.

In mid-October, the Bureau of Investigative Journalism published yet another report. According to that study, during the night of October 14 to 15, the 300th drone attack was carried out. The number of attacks for 2011 was put at 66. Altogether, between 2,318 and 2,912 people have been killed since 2004. Among

²⁵¹ See The Bureau, Get the Data: Drone Wars, <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2011/08/10/obama-2010-strikes/>, August 10, 2011

these, between 386 and 1,225 were ‘civilians,’ among them 173 teenagers or children. Between 1,141 and 1,225 persons have been reportedly wounded.

- The military regularly supplies numbers for ‘militants’ allegedly killed in air attacks and ground operations (exclusively in the former North-West Frontier Province and the tribal areas), but these numbers are probably incomplete. In how far the persons killed were actually ‘militants’ cannot be verified. The total number since the beginning of these attacks – as mentioned above, they began to play a larger role only after 2006 – must be in the realm of several thousand, but is probably lower than ten thousand. The military gave a number of 1,600 killed and 700 captured ‘militants’ for the main battle phase of the campaign (late April till early July) just in the area of Swat – a valley and an administrative district in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province. But this had also been by far the most extensive and longest campaign.
- There is no official information about the number of people who were extra-judicially killed in the context of such military operations and whose corpses were dropped or very visibly hung at busy roads “for deterrence”. The Pakistani media generally assume that the number must have been at least in the hundreds.
- There is also no official data on the losses among the ‘civilian population’ caused by the military operations. It is very likely that these are, only in part, hidden behind the numbers for killed ‘militants.’ In years of reading the reports in the English-language Pakistani media, I have only very rarely found data or explanations on this topic.

Indirect consequences: Thanks to the Pakistani solidarity systems, according to my impressions from the local media, refugees from the war and displaced persons are so far not subjected to situations of extreme misery. Around 90% of them find accommodation and help from relatives, members of their tribe or clan. Yet, there must of course be numerous diseases and deaths caused by the situation of flight and displacement. But as of now, I have not been able to find studies on this. Background information: Since around 2008, mass expulsions by decree or threats, even the use of aerial bombardments constitute the usual means to ‘cleanse’ the area of operation in such a manner that it is possible to attack the remaining population of armed men with absolute ruthlessness.²⁵²

There are many areas from which the ‘civilian population’ has been expelled for several times in the course of the last years. Thus, the number in the *WSJ* ad referred to above, according to which 3.5 million people have been displaced, does not reflect the full scale of the situation. During the Swat campaign alone, the total number of displaced persons and refugees – which was not confined to the operational area itself – was around 2.5 million. But overwhelmingly, these were not cases of permanent expulsion or relocation. Even so, current reports suggest that in fall/winter 2011, several hundred thousand Pakistanis from the north-west of the country still had to live far away from their original home. The total number could be up to one million – and it would again increase should the U.S. government be successful in its drive to again intensify the civil war in the north-west. Even though this might sound cynical, because of the mass expulsions preceding almost all larger military operations so far – which are, at least in this form, gener-

²⁵² Mass Expulsion in Pakistan: In the Shadow of the Caucasus Crisis by Knut Mellenthin, [MRZine, Monthly Review Foundation, 8/2008](http://MRZine.MonthlyReviewFoundation.org/8/2008)

ally absent in Afghanistan – the percentage of ‘civilian’ victims of the military confrontations is likely to be smaller than in Afghanistan. But the long-term social, economic, and individual ramifications of this practice are of course enormous – and are virtually ignored by the ‘international public’: agricultural areas that cannot be sowed, cultivated or harvested; untended livestock that cannot be taken along during the flight and thus perishes; children who receive school education, if at all, only sporadically; people who have neither perspective nor motivation because they must always fear to be expelled again at any time – and this is just to mention a few. Of course, due to the total lack of security, nobody is ready to invest in the north-western Pakistani civil war areas – in a very striking contrast to the PR by U.S. authorities of ‘prosperity zones’ that are supposed to emerge there sometime in the future.

Summary

If one wants to get to an estimate of the casualties in comparison to Afghanistan, the following has to be taken into account:

- Apart from the terrorist attacks and the specific situation in Balochistan province, which is actually not part of the ‘war on terror’ (see above), the Pakistani civil war is basically limited to the so-called tribal areas in the north-west, the home of less than four million people, less than a seventh of the population of Afghanistan.
- In contrast to from Afghanistan, Pakistan has not been involved in the war since October 2001, but basically only since 2006.

Another difference to Afghanistan is that the Pakistani armed forces do not lead a continuous war against the local Taliban, but rather engage in temporally and geographically limited campaigns.

From the above-mentioned ad by the Government of Pakistan, we get a total number of 24,467 deaths caused by the ‘war on terror’: 21,672 civilians and 2,795 soldiers. Not included in this number are apparently the numbers of all killed ‘militants,’ insurgents, tribal warriors, Taliban or whatever one might want to call these individuals.

The same is true for the other numbers mentioned above, as presented by Prime Minister Gilani in September 2011. They put the number of fatalities at 40,000: 35,000 civilians and 5,000 soldiers.

Both statistics apparently do not distinguish between the ‘war on terror’ and the anti-insurgency campaign in the province of Balochistan, since the latter is not identical to the former. Moreover, given the fact that the Pakistani armed forces do not report civilian casualties of its own operations, we can assume that the number that is given for killed civilians only refers to those for whose death the ‘militants’ are held responsible, and not to those who were victims of the armed forces. If this assumption is correct, then these figures can be assumed to be exaggerated.

As for the intrinsic credibility of this or any other official or semi-official statistical estimate, one needs to take into account that they rather tend to ‘correct’ the number of the victims in an upward, not downward direction. The propagandistic purpose here always consists in the attempt to highlight Pakistan’s participation in the ‘war on terror’ and its consequences, in order to counter the permanent complaints on the part of the U.S. that Pakistan needs to ‘do more.’

On the other hand, we need to be aware of the fact that these statistics do not at all contain certain categories of victims – killed ‘militants’ and civilians that were killed by the military or other security forces.

It is certain that civilians are by far the largest group of victims. But apart from those killed by terrorist attacks, very little is known about civilian losses. The government provides no information, its opponents do so only rarely and a little, and journalists are amply ‘locked out’ from the battle zones. In contrast to Afghanistan, where ‘collateral damage’ are repeatedly reported, in Pakistan these cases are virtually consistently concealed. All this notwithstanding, an estimate of the actual number of the Pakistani deaths directly brought about by the ‘war on terror’ somewhere between 40,000 and 50,000 could be approximately correct.

“Crowd Killings”

Knut Mellenthin

Under President Barack Obama the use of armed drones abroad massively increased. Both the administration and the opposition in Washington have worked hand in hand to block any debate about the legitimacy and the mounting number of civilian victims of these extra-legal attacks.

In late May 2012, reports about two secret war programs of the administration generated quite a stir in Washington: the “Cyber

War,” involving spying and intentionally damaging foreign computer systems as well as using armed drones against countries with which the U.S. is not at war. In a joint declaration, top politicians from both parties in the U.S. Congress demanded a rigorous investigation and appropriate consequences. But this demand was not about the explosive content of the revelations published in major mainstream media outlets or their relevance with regard to law or foreign policy, but about how this information could have made its way into the press – and how it would be possible to prevent such “leaks” even more effectively in the future. “This is one of the most serious of breaches in the last couple of articles that have come out that I have seen. It puts us at risk. It puts lives at risk. It hurts our ability with our allies to get – have them work with us and get information. And it hurts us in recruiting assets that give us intelligence information that will allow us to protect our citizens, to work through issues that are so important to the whole issue of peace throughout the world and how we protect our citizens throughout the world.”²⁵³

Expansion of the Man Hunt

The administration’s reaction was not long in coming. Shortly afterwards, Attorney General Eric H. Holder appointed two prosecutors to direct the investigation on the recent leaks. Both the administration and the opposition obviously share the goal of preventing an informed public debate about the legitimacy, goals, and consequences – and in particular, about victims – of that secret war.



Undeclared war: So far, the U.S. has used combat drones of the type MQ-9 Reaper (here equipped with Hellfire missiles) primarily in Pakistan and Yemen. Apparently, the use of unmanned warfare is now also to be increased in Somalia.

²⁵³ “[Press Conference: Leaks of Classified National Security Information](#),” transcript, Statement by members of Congress Feinstein and Rogers, June 7, 2012, Washington, DC.

The main trigger for this turmoil was an unconventionally long and meticulously researched article published by *The New York Times* in late May 2012.²⁵⁴ There, the authors Becker and Shane extensively deal with the legal, political, and moral implications of the drone war. This war had already been started by George W. Bush after September 11, 2001, but was massively expanded by his successor after his inauguration in January 2009. Among the more than 300 attacks carried out against targets in Pakistan since 2004, not even 15% occurred under President Bush's watch. The conservative *Long War Journal* estimates (probably too low) that 2,000 people have been killed in Pakistan and Yemen since the Obama administration took office – as compared to 500 during the two terms of his predecessor. Up to June 2012, there had already been 22 drone attacks in Yemen, more than in the preceding nine years combined.

There are, moreover, signs that the White House also intends to expand the murderous operations onto Somalia, where they have been quite infrequent so far. One indication is that in early June 2012, the U.S. administration announced rewards amounting to a total of 33 million dollars for several leading members of the Islamist organization Shabab.²⁵⁵ As we know from Pakistani and Yemeni cases, this signals that those concerned are now to be systematically hunted down and killed.

In their article, Becker and Shane describe how President Obama studies and signs death lists, using criteria and considerations that were never officially and verifiably laid down. They also describe how missiles are fired into houses, crowds, or cars without any U.S. agency ever explaining the reasons or consequences – except for a general denial that there could ever be “civilian” deaths, or a grudging admission of a “number in the single-digit realm” at the very most. The strict secrecy otherwise constantly invoked is only broken in cases where there is an opportunity to triumphantly announce the death of a “high-profile target,” e.g. in the case of an alleged “al-Qaeda commander.”

The authors also describe how the denial of “civilian deaths” is facilitated by the language regime employed by the administration: All male victims of an age “fit to bear arms” – and this includes 14- and 15-year olds – are automatically declared as “militants.” This word has a broad range of meanings, but in all cases serves to exclude the possibility that the victims could ever be “civilians.”

²⁵⁴ Jo Becker & Scott Shane, “[Secret ‘Kill List’ Proves a Test of Obama’s Principles and Will](#),” *New York Times*, May 29, 2012.

²⁵⁵ Jeffrey Gettleman, “[United States Offers Rewards in Hunt for Somali Militants](#),” *New York Times*, June 7, 2012.

Transparency Demanded

The main instrument for denying and ignoring the facts remains the non-disclosure of the consequences of the attacks, which is inadequately justified by “national security.” Although the U.S. government might under certain circumstances admit military mistakes and resulting “civilian” victims at the hand of its armed forces in Afghanistan, and even in exceptional cases might express its regret, it has never done for cases in Pakistan, Yemen, or Somalia.

In their summary, the two journalists write that President Obama’s “focus on strikes has made it impossible to forge, for now, the new relationship with the

Muslim world that he had envisioned. Both Pakistan and Yemen are arguably less stable and more hostile to the United States than when Mr. Obama became president. Justly or not, drones have become a provocative symbol of American power, running roughshod over national sovereignty and killing innocents. With China and Russia



Enormous damage to foreign policy: protests against drone killings in the Pakistani capital Islamabad, December 10, 2010 (“CIA or Taliban. Who are the terrorists? Ask the victims of the drone attacks”)

watching, the United States has set an international precedent for sending drones over borders to kill enemies.”

Two days after Becker and Shane’s article, the *New York Times* added a commentary entitled “Too Much Power for a President.” In this editorial, the paper’s editors demanded that Obama publish “clear guidelines” for the drone attacks, to make assassination “truly a last resort,” and to allow an outside court to review the evidence before placing U.S. citizens on a kill list. Moreover, the administration “should release the legal briefs upon which the targeted killing was based.”²⁵⁶

The *New York Times* editorial further read: “How can the world know whether the targets chosen by this president or his successors are truly dangerous terrorists and not just people with the wrong associations? (It is clear, for instance, that many of those rounded up after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks weren’t terrorists.) [...] It is too easy to say that this is a natural power of a commander in chief. The United States cannot be in a perpetual war on terror that allows lethal force against anyone, anywhere, for any perceived threat. That power is too great, and too easily abused, as those who lived through the George W. Bush administration will remember.”

“Tough Guy” Obama

These arguments are obviously very forceful, even though they are barely new. Yet, it is not very probable that they will succeed in triggering a serious debate. This is mainly due to the consensus that exists between Democrats and Republicans to keep the delicate subject out of public debate and scrutiny. Ultimately, of course, should the next president come from their own ranks, it is quite likely that the Republicans would continue Obama’s policy of both undeclared wars without explicit congressional approval and “covert operations.”

²⁵⁶ “[Too Much Power for a President](#),” editorial, *New York Times*, May 30, 2012.

A Deceived Public

Meanwhile, the U.S. administration has affirmed that it is going to continue its murder operations unchanged and at the same level. Thus, Leon Panetta, then the Secretary of Defense, picked, of all things, a visit to Pakistan's decade-long enemy India to justify the drone attacks as "self-defense." Questions by journalists as to whether this did not violate the Pakistani sovereignty were dismissed by Panetta, saying "It's just as much about our sovereignty."²⁵⁷

In fact, it can be observed that U.S. officials, military and security service personnel, who all attach great importance to their anonymity, provide quite nonsensical statement to often compliant journalists about the allegedly very strict and narrow guidelines for the execution of "targeted killings": of course, they stress, U.S. agencies do everything in their power to avoid "innocent" victims. Apparently, only people who represent a direct and immediate threat to the U.S. are killed: those, for example, who were in the process of building a bomb or those preparing an attack. Mere membership of al-Qaeda is not sufficient for an execution order. In order to sell this propaganda lie even better – never mind any secrecy – a new concept has been invented: Drone attacks are now known as "terrorist attack disruption strikes," abbreviated as TADS, i.e. military strikes geared towards preventing terrorist attacks.

In reality, the term generally used for this operation, "targeted killings," is already a deliberate deception: Only in a few exceptional cases are people murdered because, according to the assessment of the U.S. administration, they hold an important position in the hierarchy of al-Qaeda or any other group of local insurgents. A study on Pakistan by the London-based Bureau of Investigative Journalism published in August 2011 concluded that only around 5% of those killed are even known by name.²⁵⁸ This means that overwhelmingly the attacks are entirely random. In the parlance of U.S. institutions, this practice is accurately and graphically described as "crowd killing": People have to die because they happen to be in the midst of a group or crowd of people whom the drone operators consider to be a worthy target.²⁵⁹ Under the cover of anonymity, some administration officials even justify the practice by claiming that it has already resulted in the deaths of more "high-level targets" by mere accident than was achieved by systematically hunting them down.

Festive Parties as Target

For these "crowd killings" the CIA, which directs the attacks, prefers to exploit collective events. These can be collective meals on festive occasions, often during Ramadan or on other religious holidays, and also funerals. For instance, in June 2009, more than hundred people were killed when attending the burial of drone victims from the previous day.²⁶⁰ According to Pakistani media reports, 40 of the killed were "low-level militants" without any rank. The other victims were described as "civilians." Apparently, ten of the killed were children between five-

²⁵⁷ Gardiner Harris, "[Defense Chief Shrugs Off Objections to Drones](#)," *New York Times*, June 6, 2012; "[US to continue drone attacks in Pak: Leon Panetta](#)" (video), *Times of India*, June 7, 2012.

²⁵⁸ Chris Woods, [Drone War Exposed – the complete picture of CIA strikes in Pakistan](#), The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, August 10, 2011.

²⁵⁹ See, *inter alia*, Daniel Klaidman, "[Drones: How Obama Learned to Kill](#)," *Newsweek*, May 28, 2012; Micah Zenko, "[Targeted Killings and Signature Strikes](#)," *cfr.org*, New York: Council on Foreign Relations, July 16, 2012; *ibid.*, "[Daniel Klaidman's Revelations](#)," *cfr.org*, July 2, 2012.

²⁶⁰ Chris Woods & Christina Lamb, "[Obama terror drones: CIA tactics in Pakistan include targeting rescuers and funerals](#)," London: The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, February 4, 2012.

and ten-year old.²⁶¹ In March 2011, Obama authorized an attack against a tribal assembly that gathered to settle a conflict on property rights. At least 45 participants were killed, while most of the others were severely wounded.²⁶²

The presence of noncombatants at these entirely peaceful assemblies is totally ignored. Frequently, the first drone attack is followed by a second one an hour or two later, directed against people who are searching for survivors and trying to find the dead in order to bury them.

To justify the practice, it is insinuated that the insurgents consist of groups totally isolated from the population who never mingle with anyone else. That way, each person present at such an occasion can automatically be assumed to be, in the infantilized language of many U.S. officials, a “bad guy.” The anonymous informants in the governmental apparatus also tell the media that the killing operations are generally directed against people living in some distant locations. In fact, the attacks in Pakistan are overwhelmingly directed against houses and farms that are clearly within sight of neighboring properties. Quite often the “militants” live there together with their families whose death is accepted by the U.S. administration from the outset. The attacks with Hellfire missiles, which are normally fired simultaneously in whole bunches, lack so much “precision” – a favorite expression of the official propaganda – that there are usually few survivors in the target area. Sometimes the attacks also lead to the collapse of residential houses located nearby.

Disregard for International Law

The above-mentioned London study of August 2011 speaks of a total of at least 291 drone attacks on Pakistani targets since they started in 2004, with between 2,292 and 2,863 people killed. U.S. authorities only admitted the number of 2,050 deaths by drone attacks and claimed that all but 50 people killed had been “militants.” Given the circumstances described above, this can safely be called a deliberate deception (see the section “Victims of the ‘War on Terror’ in Pakistan.”) As a basic principle, distinguishing victims of such attacks as “civilians” and “militants” is barely meaningful, since according to international law virtually none of those killed can be rightfully described as a combatant in a war, not even in an international “War on Terror.”

On June 7, 2012, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay addressed the topic during a visit to Pakistan lasting several days. The South African legal expert emphatically demanded that the UN initiate an investigation into the legal basis of the attacks and the number of people killed, particularly “civilians.” But Pillay’s call will probably lead nowhere, given the passivity of the Pakistani government.²⁶³

The main arguments made against drone murders had already been presented, again by a UN representative, in October 2009 – barely three weeks before Obama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. This time, the Special Rapporteur of the UN Human Rights Council for extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions Philip Alston, in a report to the UN General Assembly, expressed concern that the drone attacks took place under conditions that might possibly violate interna-

²⁶¹ Mushtaq Yusufzai, Irfan Burki & Malik Mumtaz, “[No prominent militant killed in drone attack](#),” *The News* (Pakistan), June 25, 2009.

²⁶² “[Pak-US tensions undermine fight against terror](#),” *Dawn*, March 19, 2011; Raja Muhammad Khan, “[Drone Attacks: The Level of Sovereignty](#),” *Opinion Maker* (Pakistan), O.M. Center for Policy Studies, March 21, 2011.

²⁶³ “[U.N. investigator decries U.S. use of killer drones](#),” *Reuters*, June 19, 2012.

tional law as well as human rights. He, however, added that an investigation was next to impossible, given the total lack of transparency and the refusal on the part of the U.S. to cooperate.

Alston also complained that the administration in Washington had refused to answer any of his questions. This was justified by the claim that neither the Human Rights Council nor the General Assembly of the UN had the right to deal with killings that took place during armed conflicts. But according to Alston, this would indeed apply to a large majority of all killings currently being examined by these institutions. As examples, he mentioned the Congolese civil war, the Goldstone Report on the Israeli war on Gaza, as well as the armed conflicts in Kenya and Sri Lanka. He added that the U.S. position was therefore untenable. Further, “the onus is really on the government of the United States to reveal more about the ways in which it makes sure that arbitrary executions, extrajudicial executions, are not in fact being carried out through the use of these weapons.” Alston demanded that the White House disclose on what legal basis these operations are carried out, what structures are implicated in the execution of the program, and what mechanisms are in place in terms of accountability.²⁶⁴

Furthermore, Washington should indicate what kind of cautionary measures have been taken to ensure that the armed drones are exclusively used for purposes which conform to international law as well as human rights. Otherwise, the suggestion would be that the CIA is pursuing a program that kills a considerable number of people, without assuming the slightest responsibility according to the norms of the relevant prescripts in international law.

Alston’s warnings did not yield an international response. So far, neither the General Assembly nor the Security Council of the UN has dealt with the matter. Russia and China also seem uninterested in a political debate held publically – for reasons we can only speculate about given the absence of official statements. For the time being, the U.S. and Israel are the only states that use armed drones.

*An extended version of this text appeared in *junge Welt* (Germany) on June 12, 2012.

²⁶⁴ “[Press Conference by Special Rapporteur on Summary or Arbitrary Executions](#),” UN, October 27, 2009; “[US warned on deadly drone attacks](#),” *BBC News*, October 28, 2009; “[Record AfPak Drone Attacks Under Obama May Violate International Law](#),” Interview mit Philip Alston, *Democracy Now!*, October 28, 2009. See also: UN General Assembly, “[Report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions Philip Alston](#),” Human Rights Council, 14th Session, A.HRC.14.24.Add6, May 28, 2010.

Authors / Contributors

Joachim Guilliard

Born in 1958, Guilliard studied physics and is a veteran activist in the German peace and solidarity movement. He is the author of numerous articles on the Middle East, particularly on Iraq, and has co-edited and co-authored several books on the same subjects. Moreover, he has worked as a statistician, conducting e.g. social medicine evaluations (cardiovascular studies), health evaluations in developing countries (Benin, Burkina Faso), and pharmaceutical studies.

Lühr Henken

Born in 1953, Henken is one of the spokespersons of the *Bundesausschuss Friedensratschlag*, a German counseling body at the intersection of peace research and the peace movement. He also serves in the advisory board of the Information Center on Militarization (IMI, *Informationsstelle Militarisierung*) in Tübingen (Germany) that deals with a wide range of peace policy issues with a strong focus on Germany and its role in the world.

Knut Mellenthin

Born 1946, Mellenthin is a Hamburg-based freelance journalist and author. His regular publications mainly deal with contemporary international politics. Since September 11th 2001, he has focused on U.S. warfare and war strategy in the Middle East.

Tim K. Takaro, MD, MPH, MS

Dr. Takaro, member of Physicians for Social Responsibility (USA) and Physicians for Global Survival (Canada), studied at Yale and the Universities of North Carolina and Washington. He is a professor of health sciences at Simon Fraser University and Clinical Professor at the University of Washington. His research focuses on the health effects of climate change and conflict and the determinants of childhood asthma.

Robert M. Gould, MD

Born in 1952, Bob worked as a Pathologist at San Jose Kaiser Hospital from 1981 through 2012 before joining University of California San Francisco Medical Center, where he serves as Director of Health Professional Outreach and Education for the Program on Reproductive Health and the Environment (PRHE). He has been President of the San Francisco Bay Area chapter of Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) since 1989, and President of National PSR in 2003 and 2014. He is also currently co-Chair of the Peace Caucus of the American Public Health Association.

Ali Fathollah-Nejad

an Iranian–German political scientist based in Berlin, is a Research Fellow at the German Orient Institute. Educated at universities in France (Sciences-Po Lille), Germany (Münster) and the Netherlands (Twente), he has pursued his Ph.D. studies in International Relations at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London.

Jens Wagner

Born 1972, Dr. Wagner is a physician, member of IPPNW Germany and a long time peace activist. Since the late 1990s, his research interests have included globalization, neo-liberalism, military strategy, and geopolitics.

Picture Credits

Title picture:	After the urban warfare, Fallujah, Iraq, Nov. 2004, photo by Lance Cpl. James J. Vooris
Page 5:	Retirement ceremony, ISAF General Stanley A. McChrystal, July 2010, Washington D.C., photo by Master Sgt. Jerry Morrison
Page 13:	Anders Fogh Rasmussen, Davos 2008, photo by World Economic Forum
Page 19:	<i>WikiLeaks</i> Video Collateral Murder, Screenshot von YouTube, April 5, 2010
Page 25:	Fallujah 2004, bombardment: air attack on Fallujah, Iraq, Nov. 2004, photo by CPL Joel A. Chaverri
Page 43:	Haditha, Iraq, Nov. 19, 2005, photo by U.S. Marine Corps
Page 65:	U.S. Checkpoint, Province Helmand, Afghanistan, Jan. 2010, photo by Tech. Sgt. Efren Lopez
Page 78:	Showing presence and collecting information, German troops in Nawabad, Afghanistan, Sep. 2011. Photo: Sascha Schuermann/dapd
Page 81:	Remote-controlled drone, Iraq, Aug. 2007, photo by Master Sergeant Steve Horton
Page 90:	U.S. Air Force photo by Paul Ridgeway, retrieved from Wikipedia
Page 92:	Photo: AP
Back page:	House search in Amiriyah, Fallujah, Iraq, an area in which particularly many people died, May, 2007. Photo by Sgt. Tierney Nowland

List of Acronyms

ANA	Afghan National Army
ANP	Afghan National Police
IBC	Iraq Body Count
ICMP	International Commission on Missing Persons
IFHS	Iraq Family Health Survey
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
OHCHR	United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
ORB	Opinion Research Business (ORB) International; http://www.opinion.co.uk/
PIPS	Pak Institute for Peace Studies (Islamabad); http://san-pips.com/
SATP	South Asia Terrorism Portal (Neu-Delhi: Institute for Conflict Management); http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/satp/index.html
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UN(O)	United Nations (Organization)
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
WHO	World Health Organization



House search in Amiriyah Fallujah, Iraq, an area, where a particularly large number of people died, May 2007

Among the general public and even the peace movement, knowledge is often scarce regarding the nature and extent of the devastations brought about by modern warfare as well as the humanitarian and societal consequences of political decisions in favor of military intervention.

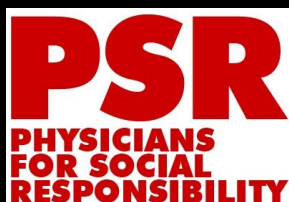
Underestimating the sheer dimensions of the devastations mainly results from Western war parties' efforts to prevent a comprehensive damage assessment from being conducted, and from the difficulty to access solid information from inside those countries where war is raging.

In cases where such information is in fact accessible, it is extremely difficult to make them available to a larger audience, given the partisanship of big media.

However, this study demonstrates that there are indeed ways to fill that gap. By compiling existing data, we can provide an assessment of the situation that is reflective of the reality on the ground.



Edited by the US, German Canadian affiliates of the
International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW)



PHYSICIANS FOR GLOBAL SURVIVAL
MÉDECINS POUR LA SURVIE MONDIALE
CANADA