Quagmire Iraq: Civilian Deaths, Refugee Count Staggering (Iraq)

SOCORRO, New Mexico (STPNS) -- Second in a three-part series Few Iraqis could have viewed America as savior when we invaded in the spring of 2003. The United States and Britain, at that point, had been bombing Iraq roughly every three days for 12 years. Also, economic sanctions enforced by Clinton (since Bush-the-First overlooked toppling Hussein) had so devastated civilian life that the United Nations believes 500,000 Iraqi children perished for lack of medicine. Still, we marvel at our lack of military “progress” after four and a half years of fighting and flailing. We must ask why things are going so rottenly in Iraq. We examine the Global Policy Forum's recent white paper, "War and Occupation in Iraq," which can be found at www.globalpolicy.org/security/issues/iraq.

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Chief among our war's numerous "public relations" failures is the harm wreaked upon the civilian populace. In the fall of 2004, during the second siege of Fallujah, Louise Arbour, U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, threw up her hands and called for an investigation of possible U.S. war crimes as defined by the Geneva Conventions. Attacks not discriminating between civilian and military targets are illegal. Historic and religious sites may not be targeted. Destroying homes, water systems and hospitals and blocking ambulances and humanitarian aid are forbidden.

The Fallujah offensive began in April 2004; when it was over a half-year later, 70 percent of the city's structures were gone. In the first week alone, more than 600 of Fallujah's 300,000 citizens "mostly kids, women and elderly" died in massive aerial and armored bombardments. White phosphorus, napalm, depleted uranium and cluster bombs were used to clear Fallujah. Physicians testify to "entirely melted" human bodies. That winter, 216,000 survivors huddled in undersupplied, makeshift camps in the desert. Fallujah was a ghost town.

Our list of massive attacks within civilian neighborhoods grew long: Najaf (2004), Tal Afar (2004 and 2005), Samarra (2004, 2005 and 2006), al-Qaim and Haditha (2005), Ramadi (2005 and 2006), plus Baqubah (2007). These operations have directly impacted more than two million Iraqis, spreading the resistance like wildfire. After lengthy aerial bombing to "soften" our ground troops' entry, we storm a city in columns of armored vehicles. Heavy tank fire blasts down structures along the route (often homes), "widening the avenue." Coalition forces then frequently fire on any person or vehicle that moves 'a sniper or someone fleeing a burning house. Many a family-filled automobile attempting to leave town (in belated escape) has been "hit up." Sadly, the Germans' blitzkrieg comes to mind.

In Fallujah, Tal Afar and Samarra, electricity and water were cut off to 750,000 civilians. In Ramadi, no services functioned. The hospital was commandeered, patients "removed" and medical personnel arrested. U.S. snipers were stationed on the roof. In Najaf, the civilian hospital became a coalition military base, while 570 citizens died outside and 785 lay wounded. The United Nations complained that in Tal Afar, the city hospital was converted to billet coalition forces for six months. In Fallujah, the hospital was destroyed in initial air raids. In 2005, U.S. air strikes increased five-fold throughout the land.

The brutality has resulted in 2 million Iraqis internally displaced and more than 2 million refugees. The U.N. refugee commission reports that 50,000 Iraqis per month are leaving and seeking safety elsewhere. International relief agencies are responding weakly, due to obvious dangers, awkward political pressures and serious under-funding. One official bemoaned the calamity as "practically beyond the capacity of the international relief system."

Compounding matters, 2,000 Iraqi doctors have been killed and about 12,000 have left the country. More than a million refugees are in Syria and 750,000 in Jordan; 100,000 in Egypt; 54,000 in Iran; 40,000 in Lebanon; 10,000 in Turkey; and 200,000 in the Gulf States. Another 200,000 are in Western nations where Iraqi asylum applications are up 77 percent, making Iraq the world's leading country of origin.

That brings us to the total of civilian deaths in the Iraq War. This figure is a challenge to track, since the occupiers themselves publicly state, "We don't do body counts." When pressed last year, George Bush placed the number of dead at, "Oh, 30,000, more or less." His press secretary hastened to add, "This is not an official government estimate." Oh? A tally of all non-combatant deaths reported by the English-language press (clearly a partial sum) roughly doubles Bush's estimate. Oh, well. The conservative estimate based on morgue statistics indicates the President is off by about 72,000 individuals. Muslims make every effort to bury their dead before sunset, frequently bypassing the overwhelmed morgue. The U.N. Assistance Mission for Iraq reports that in just one month last autumn, 7,054 civilians were killed. If that is a trend, George's "ballpark" guess is off by a factor of 10. Oh, my!

The most shocking mortality figures were published in October by the prestigious British medical journal Lancet. Johns Hopkins University polled thousands of Iraqis concerning their losses, requiring death certificates to justify claims of recent fatalities. British public health and military science advisors praise the study as "well-constructed, reliable and highly credible," plus "robust and close to best-practice." The study blows the question sky-high: 98,000 civilians were reported lost in the first 18 months of the war. Over the next two years, that death rate more than doubled! The poll strongly indicates that 655,000 Iraqi civilians may have met a violent end since Operation Iraqi Freedom began.

We should support the 80 percent of Iraqis demanding we withdraw our troops.

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