

Iraq: What about the 'surge' in civilian casualties?

By [Global Research](#)

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What about the 'surge' in civilian casualties? In the media coverage of the American 'surge' – committing 20,000 extra troops to the war in Iraq – there has been barely a word about the likely consequences of this intensified combat for the Iraqi civilian population.

A report in the Lancet medical journal last year estimated that, as of July 2006, 655,000 Iraqis had died as a result of the US-UK invasion; one in seven families had lost a household member.

In the Independent earlier this month, Les Roberts, co-author of that report, suggested that Britain and America may already have triggered “an episode more deadly than the Rwandan genocide” in Iraq. The consequences of the latest military ‘surge’ for traumatised civilians, as the world’s superpower makes a last-ditch attempt to save its invasion strategy, will only worsen the situation.

The media has ignored the humanitarian cost of the US troop surge, say David Edwards and David Cromwell. The war has also triggered a refugee crisis which is similarly under-reported. According to the UN, one in every eight Iraqis has been forced to flee their home – a total of 3.7m people. Of these, two million have left the country while another 1.7m have been internally displaced.

Antonio Guterres, former prime minister of Portugal and head of the UNHCR, said recently: “We are facing a humanitarian disaster.” Guterres is attempting to raise an extra \$60m in emergency funds – the same sum the Pentagon spends every five hours on the occupation.

The US has budgeted \$500,000 this year to aid Iraqi refugees, of whom it has accepted 466. According to the British Home Office, 160 Iraqis were accepted by Britain as refugees in 2005. The applications of another 2,685 were rejected. By contrast, Syria has taken more than one million Iraqi refugees, Jordan more

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Also under-reported is the fatality rate among Iraq’s children who are dying in hospitals for lack of the most elementary equipment.

On January 19, nearly 100 eminent doctors, backed by a group of international lawyers, sent a letter to Tony Blair describing conditions in Iraqi hospitals as a breach of the Geneva conventions requiring Britain and the US, as occupying forces, to protect human life. The signatories include Iraqi doctors, British doctors who have worked in Iraqi hospitals and leading UK consultants and GPs.

The doctors described desperate shortages causing 'hundreds' of children to die in hospitals. Some babies are being ventilated using a plastic tube in their noses and dying for lack of an oxygen mask; others are dying because of the lack of a phial of vitamin K or sterile needles –

'Injured children are left to die in their hundreds because they do not have access to basic medicines' items all costing just 95p. Hospitals are unable to stop fatal infections spreading from baby to baby for want of surgical gloves, which cost 3.5p a pair.

The doctors wrote: "Sick or injured children who could otherwise be treated by simple means are left to die in their hundreds because they do not have access to basic medicines or other resources. Children who have lost hands, feet and limbs are left without prostheses. Children with grave psychological distress are left untreated."

This story was mentioned in the Independent on January 19. A Media Lens database search found a further mention in the same newspaper on January 20 and a brief letter to the editor on the subject published on January 23. There have been no mentions in any other national British newspapers.

The authors are the editors of the watchdog Media Lens FIRST POSTED MARCH 6, 2007
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