

## Politicised Junk Published As Medical Research

*The Lancet* has published a study claiming that about 100,000 Iraqis have died violently since the end of the war – in other words, more than 150 a day for the 87 weeks since then – mostly in Coalition air strikes. The study contains very bad science, as **Tim Worstall at Tech Central Station** explains, and its conclusion is wildly false.

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**UPDATE:** Tim Worstall has **withdrawn** all his criticisms of the science in the article! We therefore withdraw the corresponding criticisms in this article, and thank reader **Henry Sturman** for pointing this out. We apologise for inadvertently misleading our readers. (But see also **this** article on the politicised *Lancet*.)

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We find the blatant political agenda of the *Lancet*'s editor Richard Horton very worrying:

The invasion of Iraq, the displacement of a cruel dictator, and the attempt to impose a liberal democracy by force have, by themselves, been insufficient to bring peace and security to the civilian population. Democratic imperialism has led to more deaths not fewer.

The real reason for the publication of this worthless and tendentious study was that the *Lancet* was attempting to influence the American election. This is bad politics as well as bad science. Does Mr Horton really want Coalition forces to base future policy decisions on bad data? And doesn't this say rather more about his own lack of scientific integrity than about the morality of any war?

Furthermore, trying to turn moral judgements of the war into this sort of numbers game is a trivialisation of the issues involved. We suspect that this fatuous game is being played only because those who oppose the war have run headlong into moral no-man's-land without a compass. After all, what else are they going to say, that spreading democracy and human rights is *intrinsicly* wrong?

Meanwhile, the *British Medical Journal* has **joined in the war against Israel** in what is, if anything, an even more foul and unprincipled abdication from its scientific and moral responsibilities.

## Re:Politicised Junk

"We suspect that this fatuous game is being played only because those who oppose the war have run headlong into moral no-man's-land without a compass. After all, what else are they going to say, that spreading democracy and human rights is intrinsically wrong?"

It is "**The World**" that has run headlong into moral no-man's-land without a compass. The invasion of Iraq has not spread democracy or human rights.

by a reader on Fri, 11/05/2004 - 02:04 | [reply](#)

## Also,

Putting the batter in the oven for one minute has not created a cake.

by a reader on Fri, 11/05/2004 - 19:17 | [reply](#)

## As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free!

by a reader on Sat, 11/06/2004 - 01:16 | [reply](#)

## Tech Central Article retracted

At the end of [this page](#) the author of the Tech Central Station article retracted all his arguments against the Lancet article and admits that leaves him nothing but personal prejudice upon which to stand.

So until a genuine critique of the Lancet appears, the article stands.

## Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Sat, 11/06/2004 - 01:36 | [reply](#)

## What About This One?

Are the criticisms in [this](#) article valid?

## Gil

by [Gil](#) on Sat, 11/06/2004 - 03:57 | [reply](#)

## yes

I think the criticisms Slate article are indeed valid.

To those criticisms I will add another: I cannot imagine how,

exactly, they determine whether a reported dead person was a "civilian". Women, and children less than 14 - sure. But the dead males in Iraqi households are far more difficult to assume away (or take the family's word) as being "civilians", which they admit. Take a man who was shot by a sniper while planting a roadside bomb, or indeed who died while plowing a car bomb into coalition forces (or even into a crowd of Iraqis) - it appears as if the Lancet survey would count him as a "civilian who died following the invasion". (Please correct me if I'm wrong.)

On a more general level, part of my problem with this study is different. Granted it does not appear to be of much scientific merit, but even if it *were*, what's it doing in a *medical* journal? As with many studies involving handgun deaths we see getting published, studies of this kind, even if one can contemplate doing them in a scientifically valid way, are simply NOT medical in nature. This subject is not within the purview of the field of medicine, and so attempts to include it are disturbing and speak of a political agenda rather than sincere search for truth.

--Blix

by a reader on Sat, 11/06/2004 - 04:40 | [reply](#)

## Tech Central Article retracted?

Looking indeed at the [Slate article](#) they mention some of the same arguments that the Tech Central Station article mentioned. In the [Lancet article](#) it says:

*We estimate that 98 000 more deaths than expected (8000–194 000) happened after the invasion outside of Falluja and far more if the outlier Falluja cluster is included.*

This is indeed remarkably unspecific. The authors themselves admit that their 98 000 figure has such a large margin of error it could even be as low as 8000, which would be 10 fold less than the estimate.

So in hindsight I'm not really clear why the Tech Central Station author retracted his scientific arguments against the Lancet article, and it's unfortunate that he didn't explain more specifically what his errors were. His main point about the enormous error margins does seem to be valid.

## Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Sat, 11/06/2004 - 15:46 | [reply](#)

## Explanation of retraction

For explanation, see [this](#), [this](#) and [this](#).

by a reader on Thu, 11/11/2004 - 01:12 | [reply](#)

Whoops, the third "this" should be...

**this!**

by a reader on Thu, 11/11/2004 - 01:18 | [reply](#)

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