

"50,000 CASUALTIES" FAQ

by Jon

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WHAT'S THE PURPOSE OF THIS SONG?

It's a two-minute analysis of an unjust war.

More specifically:

As a retrospective summation, it documents the Bush Administration's ineptitude, myopia, deception and arrogance in the execution and management of the Iraq War.

This deeply flawed, counterproductive and costly military excursion has, since 2003, led to tens of thousands of Iraqi deaths (and vastly more injuries and displacements), staggering destruction to the country's infrastructure and social fabric, and thousands of American casualties — for an endeavor of highly questionable strategic merit from the outset.

History will likely regard the incompetent manner in which this war was waged — along with the accompanying expense, damage to America's global prestige and wide-ranging policy abuses (including sanctioned torture, unlawful surveillance and suppression of dissent) — as among the worst disgraces of leadership in the United States' existence.

WHY "50,000 CASUALTIES"?

Tens of thousands of Iraqis were killed, often mistakenly or unintentionally, to further our interests in a dubious endeavor of military aggression. Many who died were bystanders (including children, the elderly and disabled).

The Iraqi people never asked to be invaded, much less destabilized and (in some cases) displaced, wounded or killed. Under the guise of "liberation" and false intelligence, we forced our war upon them.

We're therefore obligated to answer for our nation's actions in Iraq. An intrusion with such enormous and devastating costs (and few beneficial results) deserves the most thorough and unflinching scrutiny possible.

To live up to the noble democratic ideals our country has asserted since its inception, we — as American citizens — have little choice but to hold our leaders (and ourselves) accountable for the immense suffering, destruction and loss of life this war has caused. We cannot escape responsibility for the mess we've made.

Thus in our small, insignificant way, this two-minute song is, from our viewpoint, a testament to the quantifiable loss caused by this regrettable conflict.

HAVE 50,000 PEOPLE REALLY DIED IN THE IRAQ WAR?

In all likelihood, many more than 50,000 have died. Since the combat began on March 19, 2003, the figure of 50,000 is a decidedly low estimate.

Official casualty counts from the U.S. Dept. of Defense have not been released (or simply haven't been tabulated). The actual number of casualties is higher than 50,000 in all probability, particularly in the sectarian fighting and social instability that has occurred in the years since the invasion.

In December 2005, George W. Bush stated publicly — in a notably candid and nonchalant manner — that 30,000 Iraqis had been killed in the two years since the invasion began. Though the White House said this was an estimate based on media reports, it is also, in all likelihood, a low reading.

Iraq Body Count states (as of this writing) that between 86,664 and 94,561 Iraqis have died in the war to date, though that number has been disputed.

In 2006, a team of Iraqi physicians and epidemiologists from Johns Hopkins University estimated "655,000 more people have died in Iraq since coalition forces arrived in March 2003 than would have died if the invasion had not occurred," including additional deaths from disease and starvation as a result of the war, according to the Washington Post.

A 2008 report by the Congressional Research Service surveys a number of different reports, with estimates ranging from 31,245 to 793,663 Iraqi deaths. The calculated average of the surveys' war casualties is 83,105.

This American Life dedicated a program in 2006 to exploring the estimated number of Iraqis killed, entitled "What's In A Number?" We highly recommend listening to this piece.

IF MORE DIED IN IRAQ, WHY SETTLE FOR THE LOWER NUMBER OF 50,000?

Because, according to every reputable source, it's fairly indisputable. In other words:

At the very least, 50,000 people have died in the Iraq War. But again, the actual number is probably far greater.

50,000 PEOPLE IS DIFFICULT TO IMAGINE. HOW CAN ONE VISUALIZE SUCH A HUGE GROUP?

Aloha Stadium in Honolulu holds a seating capacity of 50,000 people — here's a photo. Though a morbid exercise, imagine that entire mass of people being killed in a "preemptive war."

WHAT ABOUT THE PROGRESS TOWARD STABILITY BEING MADE IN IRAQ? DON'T YOU WANT PEACE AND FREEDOM THERE — OR DO YOU PREFER THAT THE ENTIRE OPERATION FAILS?

Though we opposed this war from the outset — and have been appalled by the manner in which the leadership has directed it — we definitely hope to see a peaceful, sustainable resolution that allows the suffering to end and stability to return, both in Iraq and Afghanistan.

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE IN IRAQ? SHOULD U.S. TROOPS LEAVE?

We don't know. As former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan stated in Sept. 2006: "The US has found itself in a position where it cannot stay and it cannot leave."

Recently, the Iraqi government, under Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, has insisted that all foreign troops withdraw from the country by 2011. The onus is then on us, the occupying forces, to leave as requested by Iraq itself — a huge shift in the direction of the war.

Simply put: if Iraq wants us out — and believes it can govern itself independently and stably — then we should go.

WHY DON'T YOU WRITE A SONG CRITICIZING TERRORISTS?

We may yet.

WHAT EFFECT DO YOU THINK THE SONG WILL HAVE?

None. We don't anticipate it will have any effect.

One expresses ideas and emotions in a song because it's what one is honestly thinking and feeling.

That's our sole intention. If it happens to document similar sentiments others have, it's only because such feelings and perspectives are so widely shared.

DID GEORGE W. BUSH ACTUALLY SAY THAT QUOTE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SONG?

He spoke these words at his first trip to Capitol Hill early in his presidency on Dec. 19, 2000 — perhaps, one might speculate, as wishful thinking disguised as jest.

Read the transcript here. Hear the audio here. We certainly wouldn't have the audacity to make that up.

WHY SUGGEST THE WORLD IS MORE DANGEROUS?

With the grudges and grievances that the U.S. has created from the Iraq War — on individual, regional and national levels — it's not hard to consider how we harbor a more dangerous future than before the war was waged.

Iraq and Afghanistan — and parts throughout the Middle East to which victims of the war have migrated — undoubtedly have an abundance of young people whose lives have been shattered by the war, including the loss of family and friends. The likelihood that they will view the United States with extreme hostility in the years to come unfortunately seems inevitable.

Or more bluntly, to paraphrase a protest sticker: "We've made new enemies faster than we can kill them."

HOW WOULD YOU SUM UP THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION'S CHARACTERISTICS THAT LED TO WAR?

Four problematic elements that, when combined, almost always prove disastrous:

1. Excessive ignorance.
2. Excessive zeal.
3. Excessive arrogance.
4. Excessive greed.

DO YOU HAVE ANY EXPERTISE IN THE FIELD OF GEOPOLITICAL AFFAIRS OR MILITARY POLICY?

No. We're merely concerned citizens who try to stay well-informed from a variety of media sources.

IS THIS SONG PROTESTING CONSERVATISM, REPUBLICANISM OR THE MILITARY?

No.

Regarding conservatism: we recognize that, in some contexts and situations, the conservative solution is the correct solution.

Regarding Republicanism: we have friends and family who are committed Republicans, and we respect their viewpoint. None of them want to see a needless, wasteful military engagement, and many have grown opposed to the leadership's direction and handling of the Iraq War.

Regarding the military: without reservation, we hold a great deal of admiration and respect for anyone who serves in the armed forces, as well as their families providing support. This song is in no way a reflection on the work, dedication and sacrifice of those individuals in our country's service.

HOW DO YOU THINK THE LYRICS WOULD BE REGARDED BY PEOPLE OUTSIDE OF THE UNITED STATES?

Much of the world presently loathes the United States because of the very abuses of power by the Bush Administration that are described in the song, as well as the seeming indifference and lack of awareness of its citizenry.

In the very unlikely event anybody elsewhere in the world cares about this song (or can follow the lyrics), they'll perhaps consider such self-scrutiny of American policy by citizens of the United States as a hopeful sign.

SHOULD AMERICANS REALLY BE PUBLICLY CRITICIZING THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF AND HIS ADMINISTRATION?

Aside from the fact that expressing such dissent is a constitutional

right protected by the First Amendment, we'll let another U.S. President handle this:

“To announce that there must be no criticism of the president, or that we are to stand by the president right or wrong, is not only unpatriotic and servile, but is morally treasonable to the American public.”

— Theodore Roosevelt, 26th U.S. President,
from an editorial he wrote in the *Kansas City Star*, May 7, 1918

ISN'T THIS SONG A LITTLE LATE, GIVEN THAT BUSH IS AT THE END OF HIS PRESIDENCY?

Unfortunately, yes. We would've really liked to have written this song in, say, 2004.

But the war continues, and analysis of its execution and leadership remain as relevant today as when the war started. It should be scrutinized for years to come in the hope that future generations won't make similar mistakes.

So consider this a parting gesture and a document of personal dissent, particularly as we move toward a new election.

AREN'T THE THEMES OF THIS SONG LITTLE MORE THAN HOLLOW AGITPROP?

It could certainly be viewed that way, but our intention isn't to persuade or influence anyone's beliefs or opinions.

The song merely expresses and documents our personal point of view (which happens to be shared by many others, nationally and internationally). Above all, it's simply a means to vent five years of extreme frustration into a two-minute song.

Because the aim of this piece isn't to influence or persuade, it doesn't really qualify as propaganda or agitprop — though some may regard it as such anyway.

DO YOU HATE AMERICA?

We're Americans and we love the United States of America. Period.

One doesn't write a song like this because one hates one's country. One writes a song like this because one loves it and hates to see it doing terrible things.

WHAT WERE SOME MUSICAL INFLUENCES/INSPIRATIONS THAT FUELED THIS SONG?

There were lots. A few include:

1. The intrepid, outspoken nature of many political punk and hardcore bands of the 1980s, which I grew up listening to. (This explains why the song is only 2 minutes long.)
2. Aesthetically, a variety of synth-pop artists from the 1980s

(e.g., New Order, Clan of Xymox, etc.) as well as a spectrum of present-day independent artists (e.g., TV On The Radio, Postal Service, M83, etc.).

3. A number of highly charged topical compositions that have long inspired me — among the best:

- Killing Joke: “Follow the Leaders”
- Time Zone: “World Destruction”
- Fugazi: “Burning Two”
- Public Enemy: “Fight the Power”
- Bad Religion: “You Are The Government”
- Ministry: “Isle of Man”
- Hüsker Dü “Divide and Conquer”

HOW LONG DID IT TAKE TO WRITE AND RECORD THIS SONG?

Since we're part-timers in this racket, it took a little more than six months to write the lyrics, about a year to finish composing and recording, around six months to finish the video, a few weeks to master it... and a lot of in-between time.

So... more than two years for two minutes of music. Yeah, we're slow.

HOW WAS THIS SONG MADE?

The song was written, recorded and arranged in pretty typical DIY digital fashion, using:

1. A small (18"-wide), bare-bones, \$50 amateur MIDI keyboard (no discernible brand), purchased around 1997 or so — here's a picture:



2. A cheap, no-name microphone (about \$50).
3. Garageband 3 for all arranging, sequencing and mixing on a 1.83 GHz Intel iMac.
4. T-Racks demo version for (very amateur, rather half-assed) mastering.
5. Many late nights.

HOW WAS THE VIDEO MADE?

It was designed and constructed in Adobe InDesign, then exported to JPEGs and assembled/sequenced in iMovie. The typefaces are Compacta, Futura and Bodoni.

HOW MANY TRACKS WERE USED IN GARAGEBAND?

38 tracks. Excessive, we know.

IS ANY PART OF THIS SONG MADE FROM PRE-RECORDED SAMPLES OR LOOPS?

Nope. (Aside from the Bush quote at the beginning.)

I composed and played every note of the music on the keyboard (including beating out the drum beats) then arranged, mixed and mastered everything.

(But most of the synthesizer voices/sounds are native to — and modified or customized through — Garageband.)

WHY ARE THE VOCALS SO DISTORTED AND RELATIVELY LOW IN THE MIX?

This was intentional: it makes my crappy voice sound a little less crappy. (Though not much.)

WHY DOES YOUR WEBSITE LOOK SO STUPID?

It's temporary and we'll have a cooler site up soon. Yeah, it sucks.

WHY DEVOTE SUCH AN ABSURDLY LONG FAQ TO ONE SONG? DOESN'T THAT SUGGEST A WEAKNESS ON THE PART OF THE SONG'S CONTENT — THAT THE LYRICS CAN'T STAND ON THEIR OWN, INSTEAD REQUIRING A VERBOSE SUPPLEMENTAL EXPLANATION?

Hmmm. Maybe. I guess we prefer not to be misunderstood.

DON'T MUSICIANS USUALLY LEAVE A SONG OPEN TO THE LISTENERS' OWN INTERPRETATIONS?

We're not musicians. (We just make music.)

THESE QUESTIONS AREN'T EXACTLY "FREQUENTLY ASKED," ARE THEY?

Uh, nope. In fact, you're the first.

Thanks.

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