The first time Richard Garfield, Henrik H. Bendixen Professor of Clinical International Nursing, went to Iraq was in 1996. He visited Baghdad and other cities. He stayed in communities. He talked to people. He was not afraid to walk down the street alone.

Eight years later, Garfield has seen Baghdad evolve into a city where an American walking down the street is simply a target. On his visits to Iraq now, he travels only in “secure vehicles” and makes pre-arranged trips between locations.

Garfield’s ties to Iraq stem from efforts to rebuild and reactivate health services there, working with UNICEF and the World Health Organization. Part of his experience in Iraq has led him to groundbreaking research into the country’s civilian mortality rates. His latest work, published Oct. 29 in The Lancet, is a study titled “Mortality Before and After the 2003 Invasion of Iraq.”

Garfield, who co-authored the study with peers from Johns Hopkins University and Al-Mustansiriya University in Baghdad, said the study found that civilian deaths have been dramatically since the United States and British-led coalition invasion in March 2003. The majority of those deaths were due to violence, according to the study and while the study shows no evidence of “unproper” military action on the ground, findings indicate that women and children were the main victims of post-invasion deaths, many of them killed in air strikes.

Perhaps more important was the calculation that 100,000 Iraqi civilians of all ages have suffered violent deaths since the invasion—an astounding number that Garfield says has become key in the argument of whether the coalition invasion was a success or hindering Iraqi citizens.

The 100,000 is not a magic number; it just looks like one,” says Garfield, “but we just thought it was a good number because it can be easily multiplied. Prior to this study, Garfield says, “People said the number of Iraqi civilians who died in the war was so low that they didn’t really care. But now, we have data that shows that there were a lot of civilian deaths.”

The study has made waves on the world stage, in particular with the British Foreign Ministry, which issued a five-page rebuttal and a formal hearing on the findings in the House of Commons on Dec. 1. Garfield represented his team at the hearing and reports that the two-hour, all-committee meeting in Parliament was a success, only because it represents the open ears of United Kingdom officials.

“In Europe and Britain, people think their soldiers are [in Iraq] for humanitarian causes. They want to know if we’re helping there,” says Garfield. “The question now is, are the militaries of the U.S. and U.K. going to share and examine their effects on civilian casualties?”

Garfield asks, pointing out the widespread mortality that results from air strikes and not ground operations. “I believe our military is doing a good job of trying to follow international law in engagements on the ground, but we need to achieve the same results from the air.”

Garfield plans to return to Iraq in the coming months to assist the Iraqi Ministry of Health and is confident that casting more light on the plight of Iraqi civilians is both possible and necessary. Before this latest study, he says, “People said basically, ‘you can’t do anything,’ and we did go in and got it done. You have to be there to study it.”

Nursing School’s Garfield Examines Civilian Deaths in Iraq

By Abby Chaussee

The study is assisting or hindering Iraqi health services there, working with UNICEF and the World Health Organization. Part of his experience in Iraq has led him to groundbreaking research into the country’s civilian mortality rates. His latest work, published Oct. 29 in The Lancet, is a study titled “Mortality Before and After the 2003 Invasion of Iraq.”

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