



Media Reality ✓ Check

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ABC, CBS and NBC Skip Army Soldier's Heroics; ABC and CBS Downplay Democratic Constitution

Morbid Networks Tout Iraq War's "Milestone"

Aligning themselves with Cindy Sheehan, network news shows touted the 2,000th death of an American serviceman in Iraq on Tuesday. Anticipating what anchor Aaron Brown termed "another milestone" on Monday's *NewsNight*, CNN's Tom Foreman suggested left-wing activists were not trying to be exploitative: "War protesters are carefully saying the 2,000 dead should not be played for political advantage." The next day, CNN's cameras were among those broadcasting Sheehan's rainy photo-op on the sidewalk in front of the White House.

Tuesday's evening broadcasts deemed the death count far more significant than the adoption of Iraq's first democratic constitution. Officials yesterday announced that an overwhelming 79 percent of Iraqis voted in favor of the new constitution back on October 15, but if you had sneezed, you'd have missed hearing about it on either the *CBS Evening News* or *ABC's World News Tonight*.

CBS anchor Bob Schieffer delivered only this single sentence — "Iraq's government announced today that voters did approve the country's new constitution in this month's referendum" — before moving on to a full story about the 2,000th death. Schieffer saved time for this snide aside: "More than 90 percent of the 2,000 who died in the war have died since the President declared major combat was at an end in May 2003."

On ABC, anchor Elizabeth Vargas only briefly noted how "in Iraq today, there was a milestone on the road to democracy: The official results show that a new constitution was ratified by an overwhelming margin." That was it for Iraqi democracy. ABC chose as its lead story what Vargas called the "terrible milestone" of 2,000 killed in Iraq. Viewers saw two stories: Martha Raddatz on the anguish of Army medical personnel and Barbara Pinto on parents in an Ohio town who have lost sons in Iraq.

The *NBC Nightly News* devoted a full story to the 2,000 "milestone" followed by a piece from Iraq which began with the overwhelming approval of the constitution by 79

percent, what reporter Richard Engel at least called "a historic milestone" before he provided a general status report on the war, stressing both the ongoing violence and how "there are some bright spots," such as more jobs.

This morning, all three broadcast shows led with the death count. CBS's Hannah Storm announced: "We're marking a grim milestone this morning, as 2,000 American soldiers and Marines now have died in the war in Iraq." ABC's Jake Tapper at least pointed out "the war in Iraq can be viewed through any number of positive milestones: the capture of Saddam Hussein, the first election, or the

ratification of the constitution," before launching into his report on 2,000th death. On NBC's *Today*, Richard Engel limited his coverage on Wednesday to the 2,000th death, although he acknowledged that "U.S. troops here in Iraq are not holding any special events." Indeed, the military does not deem it a "milestone" in Iraq. (See box.)

A recent MRC study of this year's Iraq war news found the networks had already produced 400 evening

news stories noting America's war casualties, far more than those discussing episodes of heroism on the part of those same troops. Indeed, on Tuesday morning only FNC's *Fox & Friends* and CNN's *American Morning* showcased Army Specialist Darrell Green, who thwarted the suicide bomber who tried to destroy Baghdad's Palestine Hotel on Monday, saving many lives. Green's captain told CNN that while "this was definitely a large explosion...this was a success story thanks to soldiers like Specialist Green."

ABC, CBS and NBC didn't interview Specialist Green or mention his heroics. Evidently, they don't consider him to be as newsworthy as the 2,000 victims of Bush's war.

— Brent Baker and Rich Noyes

Military: This Is Not a "Milestone"

"The 2,000 service members killed in Iraq supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom is not a milestone. It is an artificial mark on the wall set by individuals or groups with specific agendas and ulterior motives."

— U.S. Army spokesman Lt. Col. Steve Boylan in an e-mail to reporters in Baghdad, quoted in the October 26 *Washington Times*.

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