

2003-2013: Iraqi Resistance, America's "Dirty War" and the Remaking of the Middle East

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The crippling devastation of Iraq today overwhelms all else. It is difficult, given the facts on the ground, to recapture the imperial vision that was to make Iraq an exemplar of American sponsored democracy and a model for the American remaking of the Middle East. Iraq, after all, was to be a test case for the display of American pre-eminent power. That imperial vision is in ruins and Iraqi nationalism has reasserted itself.

The story of Iraq has become a tale of the total collapse of the original American objectives and the unintended consequence of the rise of a persistent Iraqi national resistance movement that, as American power declines, has demonstrated far more resilience than almost anyone imagined.

1. Decline of the American Empire

On March 18, 2003 ECAAR (EConomists Allied for Arms Reduction) prepared a statement against unilateral initiatives for war in Iraq, which was endorsed by more than 200 US economists including seven Nobel Laureates and two former Chairmen of the Council of Economic Advisers. The text of the statement formed the basis of an ad in the Wall Street Journal.

A few excerpts:

As American economists, we oppose unilateral initiatives for war against Iraq, which we see as unnecessary and detrimental to the security and the economy of the United States and the entire world community.

(...) We question whether war would serve security and not increase the risk of future instability and terrorism. We see the immediate human tragedy and devastation of war as clear; and we see as well serious potential economic harm to our nation and to the world.

(...) The prospect of war threatens America's financial, energy and other markets. And the larger commitment of the administration to the military will impede, not advance, the recovery of the technology sector, by drawing resources away from civilian applications.

(...) We fear that war may significantly drive up interest rates and oil prices. If indeed this is so, or if the ongoing decline in the dollar goes too far, the effect could be to unleash a major consumer retrenchment in the United States, overwhelming the added government military spending.

(...) Household budgets will take a serious hit. The war fever in Washington is blocking efforts for revenue sharing with the states, which is a major way the federal government could prevent a state and local calamity, and it is blocking adequate support efforts for homeland security. Nor can we hope, in such a climate, to address our continuing and larger problems of health care, education, unemployment, and poverty, all of which remain urgent concerns here at home.

(...) We do not believe that this war is necessary to the national security of the United States. A sound economy is necessary to the security of the United States and to peaceful world economic development.

The statement draws a painstakingly accurate picture of what was bound to happen: this war has plunged the USA and the rest of the world in an economic crisis and clearly demonstrated the limitations of American power. The Iraqi resistance against the occupation is partly responsible for America's decline, as they predicted in 2004: *We will pin them here in Iraq to drain their resources, manpower, and their will to fight. We will make them spend as much as they steal, if not more. We will disrupt, then halt the flow of our stolen oil, thus, rendering their plans useless.*^[1]

Joseph E. Stiglitz, Nobel Laureate and one of the signatories of this statement, calculated the costs of the Iraq war, including many hidden costs, in his 2008 book *The Three Trillion Dollar War*.^[2] He concludes:

"There is no such thing as a free lunch, and there is no such thing as a free war. The Iraq adventure has seriously weakened the U.S. economy, whose woes now go far beyond loose mortgage lending. You can't spend \$3 trillion — yes, \$3 trillion — on a failed war abroad and not feel the pain at home."^[3]

Stiglitz lists what even one of these trillions could have paid for: 8 million housing units, or 15 million public school teachers, or healthcare for 530 million children for a year, or scholarships to university for 43 million students. Three trillion could have fixed America's social security problem for half a century. America, says Stiglitz, is currently spending \$5bn a year in Africa, and worrying about being outflanked by China there: "Five billion is roughly 10 days' fighting, so you get a new metric of thinking about everything."^[4]

And it's getting worse. "As the United States ends combat in Iraq, it appears that our \$3 trillion estimate (which accounted for both government expenses and the war's broader impact on the U.S. economy) was, if anything, too low. For example, the cost of diagnosing, treating and compensating disabled veterans has proved higher than we expected." Joseph Stiglitz wrote on 03 September 2010 in the Washington Post.^[5]

Even more dramatic are the consequences for the Middle East Region. A report published by the Strategic Foresight Group in India in a book entitled *The Cost of Conflict in the Middle East*, calculates that conflict in the area over the last 20 years has cost the nations and people of the region 12 trillion U.S. dollars. The Indian report adds that the Middle East has recorded "a high record of military expenses in the past 20 years and is considered the most armed region in the world."^[6] Imagine if that sum would have been spent on rural and urban

infrastructure, dams and reservoirs, desalination and irrigation, forestation and fisheries, industry and agriculture, medicine and public health, housing and information technology, jobs, equitable integration of cities and villages, and repairing the ravages of wars rather than on arms that can only create destruction.

2. The Iraq war was Illegal under International Law

In the run up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003 several reasons were given to justify an invasion. However:

A) There were no WMD, be it nuclear, chemical or biological, in contrast to the empty claims of U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell at the UN Security Council in February 2003^[7], allegations which he afterwards called “the lowest point in my life”^[8].

B) There was no link with Al-Qaeda terrorists.

C) Finally, it was said that the war would bring “democracy” in Iraq, an example for the entire Middle East. The “dictator” Saddam had to be removed. This justification is still given by Tony Blair in the Chilcot Inquiry as the main reason for invading Iraq.^[9]

So there was no “smoking gun”, no casus belli. This was an illegal war of aggression, there was no approval of the Security Council. The invasion could not be justified by chapter seven of the Charter of the UN and qualified as self-defense, because Iraq had not attacked the United States and Iraq was no imminent threat. There was no justification for this so called “preventive war”. Leading international personalities, officials and lawyers have said

so very clearly. A.o. Kofi Annan^[10] – former UN Secretary-General – and Hans Blix^[11] – head of the weapons inspection commission of the UN – have openly declared that the Iraq invasion was illegal under international law. More recently the report by the Dutch Commission Davids^[12] concluded, that there was “no adequate international legal mandate for the invasion of Iraq.”

Ex-chief of the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) Mohamed ElBaradei: “Sure, there are dictators, but are you ready every time you want to get rid of a dictator to sacrifice a million innocent civilians? All the indications coming out of [the Chilcot inquiry] are that Iraq was not really about weapons of mass destruction but rather about regime change, and I keep asking the same question – where do you find this regime change in international law? And if it is a violation of international law, who is accountable for that?” “ElBaradei added, “Western policy towards this part of the world has been a total failure, in my view. It has not been based on dialogue, understanding, supporting civil society and empowering people, but rather it’s been based on supporting authoritarian systems as long as the oil keeps pumping.”^[13]

Benjamin Ferencz, a former chief prosecutor of the Nuremberg Trials: “A prima facie case can be made that the United States is guilty of the supreme crime against humanity, that being an illegal war of aggression against a sovereign nation.” Interviewed from his home in New York, Ferencz laid out a simple summary of the case: “The United Nations charter has a provision which was agreed to by the United States, formulated by the United States, in fact, after World War II. It says that from now on, no nation can use armed force without the

permission of the U.N. Security Council. They can use force in connection with self-defense, but a country can't use force in *anticipation* of self-defense. Regarding Iraq, the last Security Council resolution essentially said, 'Look, send the weapons inspectors out to Iraq, have them come back and tell us what they've found — then we'll figure out what we're going to do. The U.S. was impatient, and decided to invade Iraq — which was all pre-arranged of course. So, the United States went to war, in violation of the charter.'^[14]

The International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, which followed World War II, called the waging of aggressive war "essentially an evil thing...to initiate a war of aggression...is not only an international crime; it is the supreme international crime, differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole." [1] Article 39 of the United Nations Charter provides that the UN Security Council shall determine the existence of any act of aggression and "shall make recommendations, or decide what measures shall be taken in accordance with Articles 41 and 42, to maintain or restore international peace and security".

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court refers to the crime of aggression as one of the "most serious crimes of concern to the international community", and provides that the crime falls within the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC).^[15]

The aggression against Iraq was not just immoral, it was properly illegal.

From the signing of the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648^[16], up until 1945, when the United Nations was created, sovereign states in the West had the right to declare war. There were certain limits which they set themselves as to how war might be conducted, but the right itself was never contested.

It was precisely because this principle eventually led to WWII, and all the dramas associated with it, that the world body decided to ban war. That is, one state is not allowed to attack another. It is only allowed to defend itself.

Iraq had not yet attacked the United States when it was invaded. And even if it had, the only body that is authorised in international law to respond to such an act of aggression is the United Nations. Moreover, the UN cannot wage war as such, rather, it is authorised to intervene but only using means which are proportionate to the end, and in a temporary manner.^[17]

This principle is the fundamental principle of polycentrism: of a global system in which nations' and people's fundamental rights can be respected. And it is precisely this principle which has been blankly rejected in the policies of the Project for the New American Century^[18]. Unfortunately, such a rejection calls forth unfortunate comparisons, whether we like it or not: for the last person who blatantly rejected the idea that international relations should be regulated by law was a man called Adolf Hitler. Like the PNAC, he began by writing down his position in *Mein Kampf*, before going on to put them into practice. So what we are seeing today is a repetition of this pattern: first international law is negated in theory, and then that theory is put into practice. This is an extremely dangerous sequence of events.

This is a crime which cannot be accepted. Let us recall the debate on the Iraq war that took place in the UN Security Council, when the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dominique de Villepin^[19], insisted that the law must be respected, and therefore that since there had been no act of aggression, no war could be conducted against Iraq in the circumstances which then held. Colin Powell's response was to tell de Villepin: You belong to the past. But Powell was wrong. Villepin belongs to the present, and to the future. It is Colin Powell who belongs to the past — to the world before 1945, the world that produced Hitler. It is the position of the United States which is driving history into reverse. So now we find ourselves facing a fundamental political question: Do we want the world to be ruled by the absence of rules, as it was in the past? Or do we want the world to be ruled by rules?^[20]

Of course, those rules can be changed and adapted, and the institutions which have the responsibility of enforcing them may need to be reformed. But the central issue which is now under debate is the fundamental principle of whether we have any rules at all. Do we want there to be such a thing as international law? Or do we want the pax americana to become the lex americana : that is, a world in which there are no laws except those which the United States accepts as such? If so, this will entail the total disregard of the rights of all the peoples of the planet. And we will all, Europeans included, find we have become redskins. We will have the right to survive only to the extent that we do not come into conflict with so-called "American interests", which are not, in my opinion, the interests of the people of the United States, but of a minority of dominant economic corporations. That is the fundamental political choice facing us today.^[21]

3. The real reasons of the Bush administration for invading Iraq and occupying the country

Christopher Doran makes the following relevant analysis in his excellent book: *Making the World Safe for Capitalism. How Iraq Threatened the US Economic Empire and had to be Destroyed*— Pluto Books, 08 May 2012

The motivation for the US-led invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq in March 2003 was to eliminate the threats a post UN sanctions Iraq posed to American economic hegemony. This hegemony, rooted in Third World debt and corporate market access, has seen trillions of dollars flow from the Third World to the First via the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and free trade agreements. An independent Iraq, free to develop its own oil resources unimpeded, would have had the potential to challenge Saudi Arabia's petrodollar financing of the US economy, and directly challenge the Saudi state's capacity to serve American interests via its dominant oil producer status.

What have the Americans given the Iraqis? Milton Friedman's neoliberalism. In *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962), Friedman outlined the three key cornerstones of neoliberal policy:

1. Governments must remove all rules and regulations standing in the way of the accumulation of profits.
 2. Governments should sell off any assets they own that corporations could be running at a profit.
 3. Governments should dramatically cut back funding of social programmes.
- These can be summarised as deregulation, privatisation of public entities, and cutbacks of government services: capitalism on crack cocaine. This model has been imposed on Iraq in a

very brutal and extreme way.

The rise of neoliberalism at the American and International levels has coincided with the rise of the US as the world's dominant military power. The two are directly linked. New York Times columnist and free market globalisation advocate Thomas Friedman famously summarised this:

“ ...The hidden hand of the market will never work without the hidden fist. McDonalds cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas.... And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley's technologies to flourish is called the US army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps.”

America is responsible for the world's poorest countries being trapped in an endless cycle of poverty, with little money to invest in education, health care, provision of safe drinking water and basic food, and protection of crucial national and environmental resources.

Public services must now be subject to the neoliberal law of profit, not need. If the service can't be provided by a corporation for profit, it therefore is not really a necessity.

It is preservation of the system that is the focus, and to ensure that regardless of whether a country is a representative democracy or a dictatorship, decision making is taken out of the hands of government and instead government is beholden to the World Bank, the IMF, WTO and free trade agreements.

America has created a global empire where countries are given two choices: acquiesce, or be destroyed. For countries that are already rich, reaping the rewards is allowed with this acquiescence, as in the case of Europe, Japan, Australia, Canada, the Arab oil-producing dictatorships of the Middle East. Resist and you will be potentially destroyed, like Iraq, Chile, Libya and countless others. For most of the planet, there are no rewards, only hardship. The US does not have the world's largest and most powerful military for show. It exists to keep the system in place, to make the rich richer by making the poor poorer, and to be available when a country not only resists, but could be potentially impede the very foundations upon which the system depends.

Rather than trying to prevent the oil embargo in 1973 and its subsequent price shock or reining in Israel in the Yom Kippur War, Nixon and Kissinger instead manipulated the crisis to solidify American dominance. It was Kissinger who negotiated the secret arrangements to ensure the resulting increase of Saudi oil revenues would go to American and British banks. That the population in the U.S. and the rest of the world suffered greatly because of this increase, was not a concern for the U.S. administration.

What was important was that all countries in the world had to quadruple their currency reserves in dollars to purchase oil, which had a particularly beneficial effect on the value of the dollar. Indeed, the dollar was under severe pressure because of the Vietnam War, which cost a lot of money and actually became unpayable. That is why the U.S. in 1971 decided to leave the gold standard to link the value of the dollar to the oil. Since Saudi Arabia is the only oil producing country that has the ability to influence oil prices, the alliance between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia is of vital importance for the U.S.

This is why Iraq not only had to be militarily invaded, but thoroughly destroyed. Because Iraq stood in direct contrast to this World Bank/IMF neoliberal model. As a major oil

producing country, it benefited from the US manipulation of the 1973 OPEC crisis and subsequent quadrupling of oil prices. But unlike Saudi Arabia, it steadfastly refused to send its oil profits to the US in return for US protection and client-state status. Instead, it invested its oil revenues back into its own development, and crucially, advocated other oil-producing Arab states do the same.

The development issue and Arab nationalism were crucial. Beginning with Iraq's 1958 revolution and overthrow of its British-installed puppet monarchy, and continuing through the Baathists, Iraqi society had seen dramatic improvements in literacy and the establishment of free education for all. Land reform was introduced to reduce the influence of the large landholding elites created under British rule. It established control over, and reduced the costs of, rent and food prices, began a large-scale housing programme, and formally recognised unions and peasant organisations. It had also established a free national health care system. By the end of the 1970s, Iraq was widely to be the best-educated country in the Arab world. The Baathists also established the right of women to pursue careers and to participate in public life, and on the eve of the Iraq-Iran war in 1980, women formed a large part of many professions.

But whether the first Bush administration (1989-92), or the Clinton presidency (1993-2000), or the Bush-Cheney administration (2001-2008), the sanctions were intended to remove Saddam Hussein from power, because a resurgent post-sanctions Iraq threatened the very viability of US hegemony and its crucial relationship with Saudi Arabia, and hence US capacity to exert influence over other Arab states in the region. By 2002, the sanctions had failed in their purpose of removing Saddam Hussein. They were also nearing the end of their usefulness as an on-going strategy to contain Iraq, due to the increasing international outcry regarding their devastating effect on the Iraqi people, particularly children. This failure compelled the US to move to the next level: a military invasion and regime change.

On the eve of the invasion, Iraq was estimated to have the world's largest proven oil reserves outside of Saudi Arabia: over 112 billion barrels, or 11% of the world's total. In addition, the US Energy Department estimated that Iraq had up to 220 billion barrels in undiscovered reserves, bringing the Iraq potential total to the equivalent of 98 years of US annual imports. The combined figure would make it equivalent to Saudi Arabia's 260 billion barrels of total reserves, and also put it in a similar position as the Saudis regarding having

enough supply to substantially influence world oil prices.^[22] Iraq's oil is also the cheapest in the world to access: \$1 per barrel to get out of the ground, compared to \$4 in the North Sea and Russia, or \$3 in the rest of the Middle East.^[23]

France and Russia had signed deals in the 1990s with Iraq for its post-sanctions oil. If honoured, Total/Fina/Elf would have had exclusive rights to develop Majnoon and Bin Umar regions, worth \$7 billion. A Russian consortium led by LukOil had exclusive rights to develop the massive West Qurna oilfields in southern Iraq, estimated at 70 million barrels, approximately half of Iraq's reserves. Australia's BHP had also been negotiating with Saddam Hussein's government to develop the Halfayeh oilfield post-sanctions. The total of these contracts were estimated to be worth up to \$1,1 trillion in the long term.

The US was thus eliminated from any future access to developing the world's second largest oil reserves. This explains why the US kept the sanctions in place, no matter what Iraq did in terms of actual compliance. Ending them would mean the US would lose access to Iraqi oil, so in the meantime it ensured no one else had access either. This was one of the central

bargaining chips in the lead-up to the invasion as the US pressured (unsuccessfully) UN Security Council members Russia and France to support military action on Iraq. In addition, there were other market considerations besides oil. Before the first Gulf War, Iraq had proved to be a lucrative export market for other US products, particularly agricultural products. For example, in the 1980s, the US was exporting 20% of its rice crop to Iraq.

Iraq also posed issues because of its socialised command-and-control economy. Iraq, despite the sanctions, existed as a staunch anti-neoliberal, anti-US client state, which had eliminated corporate investors, American or otherwise, from participating in any of its markets post-sanctions: agriculture, health, education, manufacturing, etc. This precluded US or western capital from directly owning or investing in Iraqi industries. Based on past experience, restricting, let alone eliminating US corporations from its markets would be reason enough for the US to take very decisive action.

And there's more. Richard Benson, Citibank and Chase Manhattan analyst summarized very clearly what was at stake: "In the real world.... The one factor underpinning American prosperity is keeping the dollar the World Reserve Currency. This can only be done if the oil producing states keep oil prices in dollars, and all their currency reserve in dollar assets. If anything put the final nail in Saddam Hussein's coffin, it was his move to start selling oil for Euros." This decision compelled the US to move to the next level: a military invasion and regime change.

Also Israel had a stake in the decision to invade and destroy Iraq. It suffices to mention part of a lecture that was delivered by the former Israeli Minister of Security, Avi Dichter, on the Israeli role in Iraq: "We've achieved in Iraq more than we expected or planned."

The lecture was delivered on September 4, 2008, at the Research Institute of Israeli National Security. Dichter included the following points in his speech:

- * Neutralizing Iraq is of the utmost strategic importance for Zionist security
- * Iraq was crushed as a military power and a united country, and our strategic option now is to keep it fragmented
- * Our strategic goal remains to prevent Iraq from returning to its Arab and regional role
- * Israeli goals include supporting Kurds with weapons, training, and a security partnership in order to found an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq that will control the oil in Kirkuk and Kurdistan^[24]

Another reason to invade Iraq is given by Jacques R. Pauwels, historian and political scientist, author of *The Myth of the Good War: America in the Second World War*

The America of wealth and privilege is hooked on war, without regular and ever-stronger doses of war it can no longer function properly, that is, yield the desired profits. Right now, this addiction, this craving is being satisfied by means of a conflict against Iraq, which also happens to be dear to the hearts of the oil barons. However, does anybody believe that the warmongering will stop once Saddam's scalp will join the Taliban turbans in the trophy display case of George W. Bush? The President has already pointed his finger at those whose turn will soon come, namely, the "axis of evil" countries: Iran, Syria, Lybia, Somalia, North Korea, and of course that old thorn in the side of America, Cuba. Welcome to the 21st

century, welcome to George W. Bush's brave new era of permanent war!

Finally this. Some experts claim that wars are actually bad for the American economy. This is partly correct, but also partly false. It all depends about which economy, about whose economy one is talking. For the economy of average Americans, the war in Iraq is definitely a catastrophe, because they will pay its huge bills. With their money, but also with their blood, since it is also the ordinary — and preferably black and/or Hispanic — Americans who supply the cannon fodder and who are exposed to “friendly fire” and to the carcinogenic depleted uranium and other risks associated with handling some of the more exotic weapons in the Pentagon's arsenal, as was already the case during the Gulf War.

The sons of the wealthy and privileged stay safely at home; is this not what young George W. Bush did at the time of the Vietnam War? For the military-industrial complex, for the economy of the Bushes, Cheneys, Rices, Rumsfelds, etc., for the economy of the oil trusts and weapons manufacturers, for the economy of the wealthy Americans who own the shares of these trusts and corporations, this war — like wars in general — is nothing less than wonderful. Because they will pocket the profits that wars generate as profusely as the death and destruction that will befall others. Their economy thrives on war, their “warfare economy” cannot function without war. This is why Bush must continue to find new enemies for America, continue to conjure up new threats, continue to wage war. If peace might ever break out in the world, it would be nothing less than a catastrophe for the economy of Bush's America.^[25]

4. The dramatic consequences of “blossoming democracy” for the nation and the people of Iraq.

The US taxpayer's war money has not only ruined US economy and plunged the world into an economic crisis, it has also ruined a sovereign nation that didn't wish to become part of the “New World Order”. The dramatic situation in Iraq on the ground is in stark contrast with the positive echoes about “progress in Iraq” in the mainstream media. To manage U.S. perceptions of the war in Iraq the Defense Department paid private U.S. contractors in Iraq up to US \$300 million over the years 2009-2011 to produce news stories, entertainment programs and public service advertisements for the Iraqi media in an effort to “engage and inspire” the local population to support U.S. objectives and the Iraqi government.^[26] “Reporters need to examine where the line is between public relations and propaganda, or if there is a line at all.

This year the Pentagon Public Relations Spending cost of ‘winning hearts and minds’ at home and abroad is expected to be at least \$4.7 billion”, the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University reported in 2009.^[27] The public isn't supposed to know the horror stories of Iraq and is being provided only with the twisted information of the US war machine and its befriended media apparatus. “It is essential to the success of the new Iraqi government and the U.S. Forces-Iraq mission that both communicate effectively with our strategic audiences (i.e. Iraqi, pan-Arabic, international, and U.S. and USF-I audiences) to gain widespread acceptance of core themes and messages,” according to the pre-solicitation notice for a team of 12 civilian contractors to provide “strategic communication management services” there.^[28]

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, has noted that Iraq is the world's best-known conflict but the least well-known humanitarian crisis^[29]. So let's have a closer look at some of the devastating "results" of the Iraq war and occupation, which the US elite brands as a "blossoming democracy":

1,45 million excess deaths. The number is shocking and sobering. It is at least 10 times greater than most estimates cited in the US media, yet it is based on a scientific study of violent Iraqi deaths caused by the U.S.-led invasion of March 2003^[30].

Iraq's child mortality rate has increased by 150 % since 1990, when U.N. sanctions were first imposed.

By 2008, only 50 % of primary school-age children were attending class, down from 80 % in 2005.

In 2007, there were 5 million Iraqi orphans, according to official government statistics^[31].

According to UNHCR figures, there are now 2,7 million internally displaced Iraqis and 2.2 million refugees, mostly in neighbouring states. One in six Iraqis is displaced. The Iraqi Red Crescent Society estimates that more than 83 % of those displaced inside Iraq are women and children, and the majority of the children are under 12^[32].

Over eight million Iraqis are in need of humanitarian assistance.^[33]

70 % of Iraqis do not have access to potable water. Unemployment is as high as 50 % officially, 70 % unofficially. 43 % of Iraqis live in abject poverty. 4 million people lack food and are in dire need of humanitarian assistance. 80 % of Iraqis do not have access to effective sanitation^[34].

Only 60% of the 4 million people who depend on food assistance have access to rations from the Public Distribution System (PDS), down from 96% in 2004^[35].

Iraq has run out of money to pay for widows' benefits, farm crops and other programs for the poor, the parliament leader told lawmakers on 21 November 2010, who have collected nearly \$180,000 in 9 months in one of the world's most oil-rich nations.^[36]

Several of Iraq's minorities: Chaldean, Syriac Orthodox, Assyrian, Armenian Christians, Yazidi and Mandaean communities, risk being wiped out as they face unprecedented levels of violence, according to a report by Minority Rights Group International.^[37]

According to an Oxfam-designed survey, 33 % of women had received no humanitarian assistance since 2003; 76 % of widows did not receive a pension; 52 % were unemployed; 55 % had been displaced since 2003; and 55 % had been subjected to violence.^[38]

Years of instability and war have led to between one and two million Female Heads of Households (FHoH) in Iraq: widowed, divorced, separated or taking care for their sick

spouses. Only 2% of the Female Heads of Household are employed regularly, with 98% unemployed, retired, doing odd jobs, or unable or unwilling to work, according to the International Organisation of Migration (IOM)^[39].

The killing of innocent people has become part of daily life.

The Mercer Quality of Living survey^[40] released its results of “most liveable city” in 2010. It ranked Baghdad dead last—the least liveable city on the planet. This is due to the complete destruction of Iraq’s sewage treatment plants, factories, schools, hospitals, museums and power plants by the U.S. military.^[41]

UN-HABITAT, an agency of the United Nations, published a 218-page report entitled *State of the World’s Cities, 2010-2011*.^[42] For the past few decades, prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, the percentage of the urban population living in slums in Iraq hovered just below 20 %. Today, that percentage has risen to 53 %: 11 million of the 19 million total urban dwellers. In the past decade, most countries have made progress toward reducing slum dwellers. But Iraq has gone rapidly and dangerously in the opposite direction.^[43]

The 2007 launched *Global Peace Index (GPI)* ranks countries annually according to peacefulness, identifying key peace or violence drivers. Since 2007 Iraq was considered the most dangerous country in the world. Of the 153 countries in its 2011 report, Iraq ranked second last, before Somalia.^[44]

The *Reputation Institute’s 2011 Country RepTrak*, an annual study measuring the public perceptions of 50 countries around the world, ranked Iraq last.^[45] According to the study, the occupation of the country has resulted in rampant corruption and cronyism in government institutions, in insufficient water and electricity supplies, much worse than under the regime of former President Saddam Hussein. The study confirmed that the massive financial fraud in government agencies has severely damaged the standard of living of the Iraqi people, half of them living under the poverty line, according to UN statistics.^[46]

Iraqi authorities have started the construction of a security wall around the capital Baghdad, reports the country’s Al-Iraqiya TV citing a Baghdad security spokesperson. The concrete wall with eight checkpoints is to be completed in mid-2011.^[47] So not only the people of Baghdad are forced to live in gated communities (concrete “security” barriers between different districts), the whole city will be gated, sealed off from the outside world like a medieval fortress.

Amnesty International estimates that 30,000 detainees are held without trial in Iraq. Ten thousand of those were transferred from US custody as their combat troops ended some operations in Iraq. Several detainees are known to have died in custody, apparently as a result of torture or other ill-treatment by Iraqi interrogators and prison guards, who regularly refuse to confirm their detention or whereabouts to relatives.^[48] Many prisoners are held in secret prisons. Human Rights Watch collected information about three prisons run by the Baghdad Brigade and the Counter-Terrorism Service. The three facilities were all in

Baghdad: the Muthanna airport prison, Camp Justice in Kadhimiya, and the Green Zone's Camp Honor.^[49] The government has tried to deny that any of the three jails were under the control of Maliki. "Eight years after the US invasion, life in Iraq is actually getting worse for women and minorities, while journalists and detainees face significant rights violations," said Joe Stork, deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch, on 21 February 2011.^[50]

On 28 May 2011, Amnesty International released its annual report. Their conclusion: "Serious human rights violations were committed by Iraqi security forces and US troops: thousands of people were detained without charge or trial, including some held for several years. (...) Torture and other ill-treatment of detainees by Iraqi security forces were endemic.(...) The courts handed down death sentences after unfair trials and at least 1,300 prisoners were reported to be on death row."^[51]

According to figures released on January 22, 2008 by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), Iraqi refugees in Syria were suffering from extreme levels of trauma, far higher than among refugees from other recent conflicts elsewhere. The figures revealed that 89.5 % were suffering from depression, 81.6 % from anxiety and 67.6 % from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).^[52]

One in five of those registered with UNHCR since January 2007 – more than 19,000 individuals – were registered as "victims of torture and/or violence" in Iraq. 77% of the Iraqi refugees reported being affected by air bombardments and shelling or rocket attacks. 80% witnessed a shooting. 68% experienced interrogation or harassment by militias or other groups, including receiving death threats, while 16% had been tortured. 72% were eyewitnesses to a car bombing and 75% knew someone who had been killed. The report highlighted the many forms of torture endured by Iraqi refugees, including beatings, electric shocks, objects being placed under fingernails, burns and rape.^[53] UNHCR surveys in 2009 stated that 20% of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) and 5% of refugee returnees reported children to be missing.^[54] This can be attributed to general violence including abductions, possibly armed recruitment and so forth.^[55]

The total internally displaced population as of November 2009 was estimated to be 2.76 million or 467.517 families.^[56] If 20% of these families reported children to be missing, a simple calculation shows that more than 93,500 children of internally displaced families are missing. Moreover, many communities reported missing family members (30% of IDP, 30% of IDP returnees, 27% of refugee returnees) indicating that they were missing because of kidnappings, abductions and detentions and that they did not know what happened to their missing family members.^[57] The ICRC's Paul Henri Arni said that Iraq after three conflicts - a war with Iran in the 1980s, the first Gulf War in 1991 and the U.S.-led operation in 2003 – was probably facing the highest number of missing people in the world^[58]: more than one million, according to UN data ^[59]. Since the war in Iraq in 2003, tens of thousands of people have been seeking family members. Most of those who disappeared are believed to be dead. But even those whose bodies have been found are not always identified quickly; on 25 May 2009, Dr. Munjid Salah al-Deen, the manager of Baghdad's central morgue, told the

New York Times that his staff was working to identify 28,000 bodies from 2006 to 2008 alone^[60].

When former Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) administrator L. Paul Bremer III left Baghdad after the so-called “transfer of sovereignty” in June 2004, he left behind the 100 orders he enacted as chief of the occupation authority in Iraq. These 100 orders turned Iraq into a giant free-market paradise, but a hellish nightmare for Iraqis.

They colonized the country for capital – pillage on the grandest scale, a cutthroat capitalist laboratory, weapons of mass destruction. Iraqis got no role in the planning nor were given subcontracts to share the benefits. New economic laws instituted low taxes, 100% foreign investor ownership of Iraqi assets, the right to expropriate all profits, unrestricted imports, and long-term 30-40 year deals and leases, dispossessing Iraqis of their own resources, so no future government could change them, writes Stephen Lendman^[61]. Among them was Order 81 on “Patent, Industrial Design, Undisclosed Information, Integrated Circuits and Plant Variety.”

For generations, small farmers in Iraq operated in an essentially unregulated, informal seed supply system. Farm-saved seed and the free innovation with an exchange of planting materials among farming communities has long been the basis of agricultural practice. This is now history. The CPA has made it illegal for Iraqi farmers to re-use seeds harvested from new varieties registered under the law.^[62]

The wartime destruction of military and industrial infrastructure has released heavy metals and other hazardous substances into the air, soil, and groundwater. Because of infrastructure damage, sites where municipal and medical wastes have accumulated carry the risk of disease epidemics.

Contamination from Depleted Uranium (DU) and other military-related pollution is strongly suspected of causing a sharp rise in congenital birth defects and cancer cases in Iraq^[63] and makes the country unliveable. Low water levels in lakes and rivers have spelt disaster for water sewage systems and simultaneous poisoning of water rendering it unfit for human and animal consumption. Water supply from Euphrates and Tigris has dramatically dwindled, affecting Iraq’s fertile agricultural lands and the underground water supplies that have depleted with no signs of recovery. Consequently, drought has become a national issue^[64]. “Widespread poverty, economic stagnation, lack of opportunities, environmental degradation and an absence of basic services constitute ‘silent’ human rights violations that affect large sectors of the population”, a UN report released on 08 August 2011 concludes.^[65]

A Transparency International Report states that the corruption in Iraq will probably become “the biggest corruption scandal in history”^[66]. And as the U.S. draws down in Iraq, it is leaving behind hundreds of abandoned or incomplete projects. Huge funds have been stolen or wasted by the occupation authorities and their agents and co-workers. Some examples: Decision of the US administration to get hold of all Iraqi assets and funds all over the world totalling US \$13 billion.

Confiscation of Iraqi funds in the USA (US \$3 billion). Enforced transfer of funds from the

Iraqi UBS account (Swiss bank) to the Americans. The occupation authorities got hold of the accumulated oil-for-food program funds (till March 2003 about US \$21 billion). In the first occupation weeks the American troops got hold and collected in special government buildings in Baghdad about US \$6 billion as well as US \$4 billion from the Central Bank and other Iraqi banks. Collection of US \$2 billion from Iraqi funds in Arab and other foreign banks (emergency national reserves).

Where did all these funds go? Instead of setting an account in the Iraqi Central Bank for depositing these funds as well as the oil export funds, the occupation authorities set the account ("Development Fund for Iraq") in the American Central Bank, New York Branch, where all financial operations are being done in top secrecy.^[67] Around US\$40 billion are "missing" from a post-Gulf War fund that Iraq maintains to protect the money from foreign claims,

Iraq's parliamentary speaker said on 24 February 2012^[68]. A letter in May 2011 from Iraq's parliamentary integrity committee to the United Nations stated that: "There are indications that the U.S. agency stole money from the people of Iraq reconstruction funds, and corruption. US \$17 billion in total." Iraqi Parliament brands this loss of funds as "financial crime."^[69] An estimate in the "Commission on Wartime Contracting" report of 24 February 2011 found that losses to fraud alone in both war zones (Iraq and Afghanistan) could be as high as US \$12 billion.

Khalid Alwani, an MP serving on Iraq's Integrity Committee (CoI) said on 16 July 2011 that financial corruption is estimated at around US\$59 billion and that around 38,000 corruption cases have been filed so far. He said the volume of corruption in Iraq is "tremendous" and attributed the rampant corruption in Iraq to "the high volume of revenue... the lack of accountability and lack of monitoring by the courts."^[70] Iraqi Mp Khalid al-`alwani revealed on 13 July 2012 that the volume of financial and administrative corruption in Iraq could be up to US \$229 billion.^[71]

The U.S. auditing firm PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), in a presentation given in April 2011 in Paris before a UN-appointed watchdog over Iraqi oil revenues, said Iraq still lacks the modern system of metering necessary to track the production, transportation, and export of crude. The firm's report, as well as reports by Iraq's Committee of Financial Experts (COFE) and the International Advisory and Monitoring Board (IAMB), the UN watchdog, noted the metering system's lax implementation is a threat to the country.^[72] "Iraq is the victim of the biggest robbery of its oil production in modern history," headlined Azzaman in March 2006. A May 2006 study of oil production and export figures by Platt's Oilgram News, an industry magazine, showed that up to US\$3 billion a year is unaccounted for.

With billions of dollars to spend and extensive experience with oil infrastructure and Iraqi ports, Halliburton and Parsons seem unable to deal with the routine problem of broken meters at the Southern Iraq terminals. After the 2003 invasion, the meters appear to have been turned off and there have since been no reliable estimates of how much crude has been shipped from the southern oil fields, CorpWatch wrote in March 22nd, 2007^[73].

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