

Remembering the Devastating US Invasion of Iraq 19 Years Later

March 18,
2022

Russia's invasion of Ukraine on the questionable justification of protecting Russians living in that country has drawn parallels to **the March 19, 2003 United States invasion of Iraq**, which was based on **false accusations of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs)**. The US launched a massive military campaign of "shock and awe," killing thousands of people in Iraq, **destroying civilian infrastructure** along with military targets, then invading and occupying the country. Now, nineteen years later, the Iraqis still have not recovered from the damage done by the 2003 invasion, as well as the **1991 "Gulf War,"** a **sanctions regime** that crippled their economy from 1990-2003, and the **US warfare against the Islamic State (ISIS)** from 2014-2017. The US also strained relations when President Donald Trump ordered the assassination by drone of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani and an Iraqi militia leader inside of Iraq in early 2020.

General says US troops to remain in Iraq

The Associated Press Dec 9, 2021



The top U.S. commander for the Middle East said Thursday that the United States will keep the current 2,500 troops in Iraq for the foreseeable future, and he warned that he

Despite a promise from President Joe Biden to withdraw all US troops from Iraq at the end of 2021, instead he **re-categorized the 2500 military personnel** there not as "combat troops" but as **"advisors."** That term is a loaded word used to describe the early troops in Viet Nam. It is important to remember that President Biden, as a Senator in 2002, voted to authorize the war in Iraq. In fact, following Presidents George HW Bush, Bill Clinton, GW Bush, Barack Obama and Trump, **in January 2021 President Biden became the sixth consecutive president to bomb Iraq.**

After the assassination of Soleimani, **the Iraqi parliament voted to demand the US leave their country.** Though this was more symbolic than a legal mandate, it sent a strong message. The next Prime Minister of Iraq will be named by Moqtada Al Sadr, a cleric who led an armed militia which fought to force the US occupation out of their country (Rudaw, March 13). It remains to be seen whether the new leader will direct the last troops to leave.

The "Gulf War" came about as a reaction to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. While that attack was an apparent violation of international law (like the **US attacks on Iraq and Afghanistan** and **Russia's invasion of Ukraine**), the Kuwaitis had been slant-drilling for oil under the Iraqi border, and US Ambassador April Glaspie expressed that the US had "no opinion on your Arab-Arab conflicts." Many took this as a green light for Iraq to invade. America's fierce response is thought to be its message to the world (and to Russia): following the fall of the Berlin Wall, **the US can do what it wants militarily.** Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis died as a result of the war and the sanctions, famously drawing former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to tell Leslie Stahl of *60 Minutes* that the death of half a million children was "worth the price" (May 12, 1996).

The US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 was predicated on the idea that the government there was harboring the Al Qaeda members who plotted the events of 9/11. Even if true, that war was also not justifiable under international law, as no Afghans attacked the US. One reason also given for the US invasion of Iraq was a **supposed connection between Saddam Hussein and 9/11**, which was also untrue. In fact, the official narrative says that the majority of people engaged in the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington, DC were from **Saudi Arabia.** The US continues to support that country, including indirect support for its war against Yemen, despite the Saudis' toll on Yemenis in that conflict, its terrible human rights record, and the murder of American journalist Jamal Kashoggi in 2018.

America's "war on terror" after 9/11 has also involved bombings by drone and conventional aircraft in **Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia.** In 2011, on the eighth anniversary of the Iraq invasion, **the US and its NATO allies waged a devastating war in Libya,** leading to the death of President Mohammed Ghadaffi. Libya's ensuing civil war has still not been resolved, with elections originally planned for December 2021 still on hold due to political fighting. The US also began bombing **Syria** in 2014, later sending in ground troops without that country's permission. Hundreds of US troops remain in Syria today. There have been a few close calls in which Syrian allied Russian planes nearly got into firefights with US aircraft in Syrian airspace, including as recently as February 15 (CNN, February 15).

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19 YEARS SINCE THE IRAQ INVASION 3/18/22 (continued)

The US continues these wars as a means **to control oil and other resources** in the entire region. After invading Iraq, the US built the world's largest embassy in Baghdad, even though Iraq is the 36th largest country by population and 58th largest in size. The US's sanctions on neighboring **Iran** and threats of military conflict over a non-existent nuclear weapons program there are also part of the same strategy. America has been claiming that Iran could build a nuclear bomb within a year for about 20 years now. And meanwhile, American ally **Israel** has occupied the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan Heights since 1967 and itself has dozens of undeclared nuclear weapons. In addition, the US has strict sanctions against **Venezuela**, having gone so far as to recognize an opposition leader who did not win an election rather than President Nicolas Maduro, who did. The release of two US prisoners in March appears to be the beginning of thawing relations with Venezuela (The Hill, March 8). Though likely motivated by the idea of replacing boycotted Russian oil with Venezuelan oil, diplomacy is always better than sanctions and war. The US has also chosen to "**pivot**" its **military attention to China and Russia** rather than the mid-east, including sending warships through the strait of Taiwan and into the Black Sea, actions seen as provocative.

For people hoping that the US will learn to use nonviolent means to resolve conflicts, it was slightly encouraging to read a report from Airwars in December saying that **airstrikes by the US are down 54% under President Biden**, with bombings in Afghanistan down from 660 to 372 (dropping off, of course, after the US withdrew its troops at the end of August) and in Iraq from 201 to 58.

While there are still remnants of **the Islamic State** there, the Iraqis now describe their work to contain the militant group as more of a law enforcement issue than a military effort (Yahoo News, January 26). Perhaps if the US had taken that approach after 9/11, the countries of Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya would not be in shambles. Iraq's official "coalition" military response to ISIS, which included the US, was declared over in December (Rudaw, December 29).

In terms of the **Iraqis' recovery** from 13 years of sanctions followed by 19 years of war and occupation, they would have had more of their own money to rebuild if not for the United Nations making them **pay reparations to Kuwait** for the invasion. Iraq's water, sewage and electrical plants were destroyed by the US in both 1991 and 2003. The final payment on the **\$54 billion** paid to the Gulf Emirate was made in early February, about **31.5 years later**; the UN panel overseeing the reparations was disbanded (The New Arab, February 9).

As Russia prepared its invasion of Ukraine, the US made public statements there would be a "false flag" operation the Russians would use as justification. **America lied** about one of its warships coming under attack in the Gulf of Tonkin in 1964, used as an excuse to enter the war in Viet Nam. As part of the build-up to the "Gulf War" between August 1990 and January 1991, the US shared a false story about Iraqis dashing Kuwaiti babies in incubators to the ground. And then there was Secretary of State Colin Powell telling the United Nations in February 2003 that there were WMDs in Iraq to gain support for the US war. Essentially, the US pointing a finger at Russia revealed America's long-time playbook.

While America's economy continues to struggle in the wake of the pandemic, **the military budget was increased by \$25 billion over what was sought by President Biden, to the tune of \$777 billion** for this fiscal year (Al Jazeera, December 16). Over \$10 billion was then added to that total to fund the Pentagon and Ukraine in response to the Russian invasion, in a package that had \$22 billion in COVID relief cut from it (NBC, March 11).

In the **UN General Assembly** in early March, **Iraq was one of 35 nations to abstain from condemning Russia**, stating: "Iraq has decided to abstain because of our historical background in Iraq and because of our sufferings resulting from the continuing wars against our peoples." If the Russians' attack on Ukrainian civilian targets is prosecuted as a war crime, there are many Americans who also need to be brought up on charges for what the US did to Iraq. **The Iraqis have not been free from US interference by war, sanctions and other means since August of 1990. The US must end its attempts to undermine Iraq's sovereignty once and for all.**



"The International Campaign to Ban Landmines classifies Iraq as the world's most contaminated country with mines... Various conflicts have devastated the nation... The 1980s Iran-Iraq War, Saddam Hussein's war against the Iraqi Kurds, the 1991 Gulf War, and the 2003 US-led invasion left behind vast minefields and unexploded cluster munitions [as well as the Islamic State's] pervasive, industrial-scale use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and inactivated mortar and artillery ammunition..." (Deutsche Welle, February 21).

This flyer was prepared
in March, 2022 by the
Peace and Justice Works Iraq Affinity Group

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Meetings usually 2nd Tuesdays, 7 PM; next one is April 12.

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Contact us about our meetings !

March 18 event held as part of the weekly Friday Rally for Peace and Justice, ongoing since November, 2001.