

March 19,
2013

IRAQ: THE INVASION AND OCCUPATION 10 YEARS LATER



Below are quotations from various authors and publications telling the story of Iraq in 2003 and 2013 (as well as some history from 1990-2003 from “Gulf War part I.”)

BACKGROUND

Scott Johnson in the *NYTimes* (3/7/13):

If U.S. media coverage during the run up to the Iraq war is widely seen as less than skeptical, to put it mildly, the pushback 10 years later is full-throated indeed.

Most of the stories ... focus on the tremendous losses incurred in the war, be they economic (**\$3 trillion in taxpayer dollars evaporated**), human (**4,486 American dead, 32,226 American wounded and more than 100,000 Iraqi dead**) or political (the loss of American prestige abroad for years), instead of the victory over Saddam Hussein.

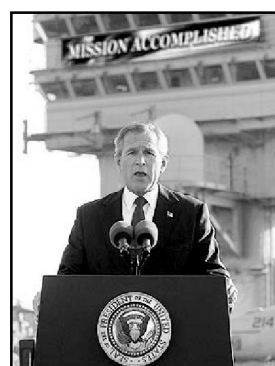
Even the conservative **former Bush speechwriter** and the conservative columnist David Frum conceded in the *Daily Beast* that **“most Americans have condemned it as a disastrous mistake.”** And the *Military Times*, in the first of a four-part series, acknowledged that military leaders still had questions about the “legality” of the war.

Tom Engelhardt, creator of Tomdispatch.com, a project of The Nation Institute, on Tom Dispatch (3/8/13):

Take the 10th anniversary of George W. Bush’s invasion of Iraq. You could describe what happened in that country as an unmitigated disaster — from the moment, in April 2003, U.S. troops first entered a Baghdad in flames and being looted (“stuff happens”) and were assigned to guard only the Interior Ministry (i.e. the secret police) and the Oil Ministry.

By invading Iraq, the U.S. did more to destabilize the Middle East than we could possibly have imagined at the time.

Peter Van Buren, a retired 24-year veteran of the State Department, who served in Iraq, on Tom Dispatch (3/8/13):



On May 1, 2003, President Bush announced “Mission Accomplished” in Iraq.

A State Department official in Iraq wrote in his weekly summary to me, “At our project ribbon-cuttings we are typically greeted now with a cursory ‘thank you,’ followed by a **long list of crushing needs for essential services such as water and power.**”

In 2003, at that infamous “mission accomplished” moment [on May 1, when GW Bush landed on an aircraft carrier], **only Afghanistan** was on the list of overseas embassies that were considered “**extreme danger posts.**” Soon enough, however, **Iraq** and **Pakistan** were added. Today, **Yemen** and **Libya**, once boring but secure outposts for State’s officials, now fall into the same category. Other places once considered safe for diplomats and their families such as **Syria** and **Mali** have been evacuated and have no American diplomatic presence at all.

Valerie Plame Wilson, former CIA operations officer, and Joe Wilson, former US diplomat, in the *Guardian* (2/27):

It has been 10 long years since “Shock and Awe” — the opening bombardment of Baghdad — lit up the skies above the Tigris. A decade later, we know far more about the case the Bush administration made to the world to justify its war of choice to overthrow Saddam Hussein.

For nearly a year prior to the invasion, President Bush and his administration peppered the airwaves with serious accusations against Saddam Hussein, including claims of aluminum tubes that could be used in centrifuges to enrich uranium, and of Iraqi efforts to purchase uranium yellowcake from Africa.

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“Shock and Awe” involved thousands of tons of ordnance dropped on Iraq in the early days of the invasion. (image from dontpaniconline.com)

Meanwhile, Turkey is now engaged in an open war with the Kurds of northern Iraq. Turkey is, of course, part of NATO, so imagine the U.S. government sitting by silently [if] Germany bombed Poland.—Peter Van Buren

The intelligence supporting the claims was either not believed or was highly disputed by the experts. But that did not stop senior government officials from repeating them incessantly; nor did it prevent the powerful neoconservative ideologues who were the war's most fervent supporters from parroting them with menacingly jingoistic passion.

Who can forget the trademark line, delivered by Condoleezza Rice: "We don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud."

David Corn writing about the MSNBC documentary "Hubris" (based on his book) in *Mother Jones* (2/16/13):

One chilling moment comes in an interview with **retired General Anthony Zinni, a former commander in chief of US Central Command**. In August 2002, the Bush-Cheney administration opened its propaganda campaign for war with **[Vice President Dick] Cheney's** speech at the Veterans of Foreign Wars convention. The veep made a stark declaration: "**There is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction**. There is no doubt he is amassing them to use against our friends, against our allies, and against us." No doubt, he proclaimed, Saddam was arming himself with WMD in preparation for attacking the US.

Zinni was sitting on the stage during the speech, and in the documentary he recalls his reaction: "It was a shock. **It was a total shock. I couldn't believe the vice president was saying this**, you know? In doing work with the CIA on Iraq WMD, through all the briefings I heard at Langley, I never saw one piece of credible evidence that there was an ongoing program. And that's when I began to believe they're getting serious about this. They wanna go into Iraq."

IRAQ TODAY

Peter Beaumont in *The Observer* (3/9/13):

Ten years ago, Kadom al-Jabouri became the face of the fall of Baghdad. **Almost exactly a decade later, the "sledgehammer man" — who was helped by a US tank carrier to finally topple the statue [of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein]— furiously regrets that afternoon** and the symbolism of what he was involved in. "I hated Saddam," the 52-year-old owner of a motorcycle spares shop told the *Observer*. "I dreamed for five years of bringing down that statue, but what has followed has been a bitter disappointment.

"**Then we had only one dictator. Now we have hundreds,**" he says, echoing a popular sentiment in a country mired in political problems and corruption, where killings still occur on an almost daily basis. "Nothing has changed for the better. ... **Under Saddam** there was security. There was corruption, but nothing like this. Our lives were protected. And **many of the basics like electricity and gas were more affordable**. After two years I saw no progress. Then there came the killings, robberies and sectarian violence."

The "saturation coverage" of the fall of Saddam's statue — according to the most in-depth analysis by the *New Yorker's* Peter Maass two years ago — "fuelled the perception that the war had been won, and diverted attention from Iraq at precisely the moment that more attention was needed, not less."

Patrick Cockburn in *Counterpunch* (3/4/13):

I was in Baghdad at the end of January when there were a couple of days of heavy rain. **For years, contractors — Iraqi and foreign — have supposedly been building a new sewage system for the Iraqi capital but none of the water was disappearing down the**



The "sledgehammer man" who helped topple Saddam Hussein's statue expressed regrets in March, 2013. (image from the Guardian)

drains. I drove for miles in Baghdad through streets flooded with grey, murky water, diluted with sewage.

... and in the *Independent* (also 3/4/13):

Why is the corruption in Iraq so bad? The simple answer that Iraqis give is that "**UN sanctions destroyed Iraqi society in the 1990s and the Americans destroyed the Iraqi state after 2003.**" Patronage based on party, family or community determines who gets a job. There are many winners as well as losers and all depends on Iraqi oil exports going up and prices staying high. "I only once saw panic in the cabinet," says an ex-minister, "and that was when there was a sharp drop in the price of oil."

Hans von Sponeck, former administrator of the UN oil-for-food program, on *Antiwar.com* (2/26/13):

Since the years of war, sanctions and occupation, **Iraq's once state-of-the-art medical system has all but collapsed.**

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Malnutrition and diseases, almost forgotten in Iraq, such as respiratory infections; measles; typhoid fever and tuberculosis have re-emerged on a large scale. The **planned destruction of water and sanitation facilities**, especially in the 1991 war, and recurrent drug shortages, throughout the period of sanctions and after the 2003 invasion, promoted significantly ill-being, morbidity and mortality in the country (World Health Organization).

Iraq is said to have the third largest oil reserves in the world. Its current oil exports remain below the average export of 2.2 million barrels/day Iraq was able to market during the years of sanctions.

An oil-rich country but **22.9% out of the est. 33 million Iraqis have been living in poverty.** The per capita [income] (2011) amounted to \$2,640 (World Bank). Despite the despicable gap between the rich and the poor, the Iraqi authorities signed a deal (2011) with the US Government for the purchase of 18 F-16 fighter jets at a cost of \$ 3 billion! At that time almost a quarter of the Iraqi population lived in poverty and the unemployment rate exceeded 28% (United Nations).

Prior to Iraq's invasion into Kuwait in August 1990, Iraq had among the highest literacy rates in the Middle East. Sanctions changed that. A World Bank/Government of Iraq survey (2007) showed that "almost 23 percent of Iraqis were illiterate," 5 million school age children were not in school and gender disparity in education had become severe.

The devastation of Iraq by 2003 after 12 years of sanctions [was] so dreadful and overwhelming that two of the UN's own key administrators of the sanctions program, Denis J. Halliday and Hans von Sponeck, resigned in protest. (from a description of the book *GENOCIDE IN IRAQ: The Case Against the UN Security Council and Member States* (Mareeg 2/2/13).

Iraq's Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs indicates (2011) **an estimated 4.5 million Iraqi children have lost their parents** — 14% of Iraq's population are orphans! 70% became orphans since the 2003 invasion.

[On the 1996-2003 **Oil for food program (OFFP):**] Out of a total oil income of \$64 billion, about \$ 19 billion were transferred to the UN Compensation Commission in Geneva. At that time Iraq's child mortality of 130/1000 was among the highest in the world. This transfer was to compensate individuals, companies and governments, especially the Government of Kuwait, for claims resulting from Iraq's invasion into Kuwait. During the years of US occupation, the monthly cost of maintaining troops in Iraq amounted to an est. US \$12 billion. In other words, what Iraqis had from the OFFP for survival during the entire 6-1/2 years corresponded to less than 3 months of the cost of maintaining US troops in Iraq!

Depleted uranium (DU), the armour-piercing radio-active munition, and white phosphorus used by the US military in 1991 and 2003 have created serious health and environmental dangers in Iraq. In early 2000 the US Government sought to prevent WHO from surveying areas in southern Iraq where DU had been used. It also rejected any causality with increases in lung cancer, leukaemia and congenital birth defects.

Rob Edwards in the *Guardian* adds (3/6/13):

DU is a chemically toxic and radioactive heavy metal produced as waste by the nuclear power industry. It is used in weapons because it is an extremely hard material capable of piercing armour. **Cleaning up more than 300 sites in Iraq still contaminated by DU weapons will cost at least \$30m**, according to a [March 7] report by a Dutch peace group. [The report] documents evidence that DU munitions were fired at light vehicles, buildings and other civilian infrastructure including the Iraqi Ministry of Planning in Baghdad — casting doubt on official assurances that only armoured vehicles were targeted. **More than 400 tonnes of DU ammunition are estimated to have been fired by jets and tanks in the two Iraq wars in 1991 and 2003, the vast majority by US forces.**

Iraqi doctors have reported increases in cancers, and an alleged rise in birth defects is under investigation by the World Health Organisation and the Iraqi Ministry of Health. The health effects are disputed by the US and UK governments, who joined with France and Israel to vote against a resolution calling for "a precautionary approach" to the use of DU weapons at the United Nations general assembly in December [2012]; 155 countries voted in favour of the resolution.

Haifa Zangana in the *Guardian* (2/25/13):

According to Mohamed al-Dainy, an Iraqi MP, **there were 1,053 cases of documented rape cases by the occupying troops and Iraqi forces between 2003 and 2007.** Lawyers acting on behalf of former detainees say that UK detention practices between 2003 and 2008 included unlawful killings, beatings, hooding, sleep deprivation, forced nudity and sexual humiliation, sometimes involving women and children. (continues on next page)



The people of Fallujah (IRAQ) are experiencing higher rates of cancer, leukemia, infant mortality, and sexual mutations than those recorded among survivors in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the years after those Japanese cities were incinerated by US atomic bomb strikes in 1945. Source: FaithAndSurvival.com

A political quota system, established in post-invasion Iraq, was designed to **ensure that at least 25% of the members of the parliament were women.** That was applauded as a great achievement of the “New Iraq” — compared with 8% female representation under Ba’athist regime. But this token statistic has repeatedly been trotted out to cover up the regime’s crimes against women. In reality, the al-Maliki government has since dispensed with the quota for government posts: **there is only one woman minister among 44 positions.** But even this appointment contains a grim irony: the minister for women’s affairs, Ibtihal al-Zaidi, didn’t hesitate to announce: “I am against the equality between men and woman. If women are equal to men, they are going to lose a lot.”

US CONTINUED PRESENCE IN IRAQ

Ted Galen Carpenter in the *National Interest* (1/3/13):

The United States still maintains a mammoth embassy—a facility nearly as large as Vatican City housing a diplomatic corps larger than those in such major countries as Japan, Germany and India. **There are also [thousands of] private contractors,** most of whom are armed security personnel guarding those diplomats and other U.S. government officials. Iraqis might be excused if they see their country as still being under U.S. supervision.



The sprawling US embassy in Baghdad, sitting on the Tigris river, is the world’s largest (image from walkingbutterfly.com)

Adam Schreck of The Associated Press (12/17/12):

The number of U.S. government employees and contractors working at diplomatic outposts around the country has fallen below 14,000, according to figures provided by the embassy in Baghdad. That is down from about 16,000 earlier [in 2012]. It is expected to shrink to about 12,000 in 2013.

Even after the last American bases were handed over to the Iraqis and U.S. troops rolled out across the border with Kuwait on Dec. 18, 2011, a small number of military personnel stayed in Iraq as an arm of the American Embassy. They are responsible for facilitating Iraqi arms purchases, including three C-130J transport planes handed over [in December], and training the Iraqis how to use and maintain the weapons. Fewer than 200 of those trainers and administrators remain in the country, and their numbers are expected to decline further into [2013].

IRAQ WAR SUPPORTER ABOUT-FACE

Luke Johnson in the *Huffington Post* (2/25/13):

Rep. Walter Jones (R-N.C.), an outspoken critic of the war in Afghanistan, said that former Vice President Dick Cheney would probably end up in hell for the Iraq War. “Congress will not hold anyone to blame. Lyndon Johnson’s probably rotting in hell right now because of the Vietnam War, and he probably needs to move

US TORTURE EXPERT EXPOSED

The Pentagon sent Col. James Steele, a US veteran of the “dirty wars” in Central America to oversee sectarian police commando units in Iraq that set up secret detention and torture centres to get information from insurgents. These units conducted some of the worst acts of torture during the US occupation. The pattern provides an eerie parallel to the well-documented human rights abuses committed by US-advised and funded paramilitary squads in Central America in the 1980s. Steele was head of a US team of special military advisers that trained units of El Salvador’s security forces in counterinsurgency (*Guardian* 3/6/13).

over for Dick Cheney,” Jones said at a Young Americans for Liberty conference in Raleigh.

Jones voted for the Iraq War and circulated a letter in 2003 to change the name of french fries to “freedom fries” in the House cafeterias. He has since regretted it and become a staunch opponent of the war. “If you’re ever going to send young men and women to die, it needs to be with the Constitution and debated by the Congress.”

CONCLUSION

With an ongoing presence in Iraq, continued occupation in Afghanistan, ratcheting tensions with Iran, and drone strikes in Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia and Libya, the U.S. has contributed to the ongoing destabilization of the entire “Middle East,” SW Asia and North Africa region. The recent “fiscal cliff” and “sequester” financial dilemmas could have been avoided had the US never entered these wars of choice, and considerable money could be saved by bringing all the troops (and contractors) home from Afghanistan now rather than waiting until the end of 2014.

Join the Peace and Justice Works Iraq Affinity Group in calling to bring all the troops and contractors home, turn the US embassy in Iraq over to the Iraqi people while opening a reasonable-sized diplomatic outpost, and end the drone wars.

For info:

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The Iraq Affinity Group is committed to educating the public about the effects of U.S. policy on the people of Iraq, and other areas including SW Asia, North Africa, and the “Middle East.”