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# IRAQ, TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER

## End the Killing— US Out!



The United States dropped thousands of tons of bombs on Iraq, destroying its infrastructure, killing thousands, and creating problems for years to come. This is not only a description of the “shock and awe” campaign begun on March 19, 2003, but also the start of the “Gulf War” on January 16, 1991. That 43-day bombing and ground campaign, ostensibly to drive Iraq out of Kuwait after it invaded that country in August 1990, ended with a cease-fire agreement calling for a nuclear-free Middle East and the continuation of some of the strictest sanctions in history against the people of Iraq (Security Council Resolution 687). Those sanctions were mostly lifted after the 2003 invasion, but by then so much damage had been done that Iraq will still need a generation to rebuild. Some estimate that over 1 million Iraqis died between the imposition of sanctions in August, 1990 and March, 2003. In a famous interview, CBS’ Leslie Stahl asked Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, “We have heard that a half million children have died. I mean, that’s more children than died in Hiroshima. And, you know, is the price worth it?” Albright replied, “I think this is a very hard choice, but the price—we think the price is worth it” (60 Minutes May 12, 1996). While most American troops were withdrawn in December 2011, a ramp-up of “advisors,” special forces and other service people means there are now over 3000 back in the country, with a third Iraq war (ostensibly to fight the Islamic State) starting on August 8, 2014.



1991

We hear a lot in this country about how many deaths the US suffered on 9/11 (2977), and how many American soldiers have died in Iraq (about 4485 through the “withdrawal” at the end of 2011) and Afghanistan (at least 2356 as of Dec. 2014, when the “withdrawal” happened there). But hearing that number of Iraqi dead from “Gulf War part 1” should give us pause to think. What is the term that’s used for attacking the civilian population of a country in order to try influencing its political leaders? Ah, yes, terrorism.

The US’ presence in Iraq includes the largest embassy in the world, America’s fortified site that is the size of the Vatican.

Documents revealed by Wikileaks show the conservative estimates of Iraqi deaths since the 2003 invasion were too low, in part because the US government was not releasing information about death tolls. Statistics indicate at least 151,406

Iraqi civilians have died from war-related violence since 2003, with IraqBodyCount.org adding at least 15,000 more from the Wikileaks documents. The site Airwars.org reports that between 824 and 2387 civilians have been killed in nearly 10,000 US/Western airstrikes in Iraq and Syria since the third Iraq war began.

The sanctions imposed on Iraq in 1990 prevented the repair of civilian infrastructure such as power generators and water treatment plants. These sanctions were supposedly designed to compel the people of Iraq to oust Saddam Hussein, a US goal but not a United Nations mandate. From 1991 to 2003, the US patrolled Iraqi skies, dropping hundreds of bombs in the so-called “no-fly zones.” These bombs were dropped on average on a weekly basis from 1998 to 2003, and killed many civilians including sheep herders and other non-combatants (BBC 2/19/01). Because the sanctions restricted the importing of goods, Iraq suffered from a lack of food, clean water and medicine. For example, sanctions barred importing chlorine, which could be used as a weaponized gas— but also is needed to clean water. To alleviate the suffering of the Iraqis, the UN instituted the “Oil-for-Food program,” which while creating a way for Iraq to buy some humanitarian goods through strictly controlled sale of its own oil supply, did not prevent the deaths of several hundred thousand Iraqis from easily treatable diseases and starvation. These deaths were particularly hard on a country which until 1990 was among the most advanced medically in the Middle East. While most remaining sanctions were lifted in December 2010, oil money will continue flowing through the UN to pay Kuwait and others seeking reparations until 2017 (Associated Press, 10/28/15).



1998



2004

Another purported goal of the sanctions was to get Iraq to dismantle its weapons of mass destruction. President Bill Clinton launched a bombing campaign in December, 1998, just as weapons inspectors were ready to confirm that Iraq had no such weapons. The inspectors left the country, the bombs dropped, and the narrative was spun that Iraq had thrown the inspectors out— even though they left at the behest of the Americans (“Iraq: Former and Recent Military Confrontations with the United States,” Congressional Research Service 10/16/02).

In late 2002, President George W. Bush made connections between Iraq and the 9/11 Al Qaida-linked attacks on the World Trade Center and

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Pentagon, even though the secular Hussein had no connection to the fundamentalist Osama Bin Laden. Bush continued to insist Hussein had weapons of mass destruction. The UN passed a new resolution under pressure from the US which put weapons inspectors back on the ground and called for the Security Council to decide whether Iraq was in compliance. As inspectors were ready to determine that Iraq had no WMDs, Bush circumvented the UN Security Council, launching a massive bombing campaign on March 19, 2003. The US invaded the country, toppling Hussein's regime and installing a puppet government. Despite several elections, the Iraqis are still without a stable government. They cannot count on their own security forces for protection from the Islamic State militants, while militias threaten to harm US soldiers should they more actively participate in combat. (In October 2015, a US soldier was killed fighting alongside Kurdish forces, exposing President Obama's "no boots on the ground" mantra as doublespeak at best.)



The west's treatment of Iraq is only one more catastrophic example of how America's long-standing intervention in the region focuses on oil, and ignores the people living on top of the oil. These policies result in the desperation and hatred that led to the September 11 attacks. The way to stop terrorism is not to ransack a nation of 23 million and prevent the repair of the facilities necessary to support the populace. Also, albeit under the strong arm of a dictator, Iraq's Sunni, Shiite, Arab, Kurd and Christian populations lived side by side, intermarried, and didn't put much thought into who was who. That all changed with the US invasion.

The 1991 war on Iraq also marked the first time the U.S. used ammunition tipped with Depleted Uranium (DU), a low-level radioactive metal so hard it can pierce armor. The particles scattered about Iraq (and later, former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, and Iraq again) are thought to be responsible for an uptick in cancer (a 60% increase in the bombarded areas of Iraq — Reuters 12/1/09) and perhaps the "Gulf War Syndrome" found in returning US military personnel.

### How Iraq Relates to Other US Foreign Policy

The devastation caused in Iraq with little outcry from the international community has led the United States to be able to drop bombs and invade countries with relative impunity. The war on Iraq ushered in the post-Cold War era, in which US intervention in the Middle East (and elsewhere) has become commonplace. Between 1991 and 2015, the US dropped bombs in and/or sent troops into: Haiti (1993+), Somalia (1993 and 2007+), Sudan (1998), Former Yugoslavia (1999), Yemen (2002+), Pakistan (2004+), Libya (2011), Syria (2014-) and of course Afghanistan (1998 & 2001+). The bombs dropped in Pakistan have mostly been from unmanned drones, flown by remote control from bases in the US, and despite the touting of their targeting abilities, have killed hundreds of civilians (The Intercept, 4/17/15).

Another key issue of US foreign policy is its unbending

support for Israel, despite that country's possession of nuclear weapons (Haaretz, 12/12/06). The US bombed Iraq because of (non-existent) WMDs and ratcheted up sanctions against Iran for fear of nuclear weapons, even though Iran is a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty. And, while the 1991 "Gulf War" was launched to force Iraq out of Kuwait for forcibly taking over that country's land and resources, Israel continues to occupy the West Bank and Gaza—Palestinian territory— despite numerous UN resolutions demanding they withdraw (SCR 242 et al).

The US occupation of Afghanistan, now in its fifteenth year, is linked to efforts to build a pipeline designed to bring gas from Turkmenistan to Pakistan and India (known as "TAPI" — Middle East Eye 3/27/15). Meanwhile, Afghanistan's people have suffered nearly as badly as Iraq, with their country torn by war since the 1979 Soviet invasion much like Iraq has been in conflict since the Iran-Iraq war of 1980.

### What Does this Mean to Americans?

One question rarely answered accurately is, "why do they hate us?" The answer is not "because of our freedoms," but rather it is these foreign policy decisions, favoring some countries and punishing others, killing civilians by the hundreds of thousands, and seeking to control the resources of the world, that drive people to want to do harm to the US.

Rather than changing these policies, the US has chosen to chisel away at the freedoms that "terrorists" supposedly hate: instituting the PATRIOT act; becoming more invasive with security measures at airports and in public buildings; jailing people for videotaping police actions; subpoenaing activists before grand juries; and creating "sting operations" to push American Arabs and Muslims into fake bomb plots which justify security measures while perpetuating fear in the general public.

### Can We Make a Difference?

Of course we can. Demand our country change its policies to become a cooperative entity that truly believes in democracy. Challenge media reports that repeat what government spokespeople want us to believe. Work for peace locally, talk to friends, neighbors and co-workers. Find ways to reduce dependence on fossil fuels to halt the wars driven by greed. When this country was founded, women did not have the right to vote, slavery was legal and Native Americans were listed in the Constitution as "savages." We have come a long way and we can create a great future for everyone, but we must stop using violence to enforce US policy.



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