

17 Years Since the Iraq Invasion: TIME TO END ALL US WARS

March 20,
2020

THE WARS HAVE NOT STOPPED FOR THE CORONAVIRUS AND WE SHALL NOT STOP PROTESTING



Seventeen years ago, on March 19, 2003, the United States launched a military campaign dubbed “shock and awe,” then sent in troops to invade and occupy the country of Iraq. Prior to that from 1990-2003, Iraq was subjected to some of the most stringent sanctions in history, resulting in limited access to electricity, medicine and food. These problems still persist as a result of the US invasion and occupation, leading to ongoing protests inside Iraq. The 2003 attack led to the deaths of tens of thousands of Iraqis, both at the hands of the US coalition and militant groups emboldened by the destabilization caused by the war. The US declared “Mission Accomplished” on May 1, 2003, but the war in Iraq continues today. After President Trump ordered the assassination of an Iranian general inside Iraq

in January, the Iraqi parliament voted to demand the US leave their country. Rather than respect their sovereignty, Trump threatened sanctions and demanded to be paid for the US military bases set up in Iraq.

The Iraqi government called on the US not to have any combat troops in their country and to stop using their airspace (Agence France Presse, January 29). Despite this, on March 12 the US bombed sites inside Iraq without the government’s permission in what they called retaliation for rocket attacks on American troops in Iraq the previous day. The two incidents call into question why the US is in Iraq at all.

Andrew Jones, a legal expert from Coventry University, notes that while international law allows a country like Iraq to invite foreign troops on their soil, “there are rules on when a state overstays its welcome and becomes in breach of its international obligations.” Jones notes that the refusal to leave is a violation of Article 2(4) of the United Nations charter (The Conversation, February 6). And yet, somewhere around 5000 US troops remain in Iraq.

Beginning with the “Gulf War” in January 1991, continuing through the invasion in 2003, the war against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) which began in August 2014, and the assassination of General Soleimani (as well as an Iraqi militia leader) in 2020, the US has never really stopped its attacks in Iraq. In 2002, Congress approved an Authorization for Use of Military Force, designed to remove Saddam Hussein from power. Although that goal was accomplished, the 2002 AUMF remains in effect today and was used to justify the war on ISIS. The House of Representatives voted 236-166 on January 30, 2020, to repeal the 2002 AUMF, with 11 Republicans joining Democrats. The Senate did not act on the legislation.

In late 2011, President Obama followed up on a pledge made by President Bush to withdraw US combat troops, but left about 500 military personnel there as “advisors” and to protect the US embassy in Iraq. The fight against ISIS led that number to swell to roughly 9000 under Presidents Obama and Trump. In the efforts to push ISIS out of Mosul, the US damaged or destroyed all of that city’s bridges and hundreds of homes. The US claimed victory after the “liberation” of Mosul. However, to defeat the Islamic State, they caused the deaths of roughly 9600 civilians (Associated Press, December 20, 2017). The “good news” is that although in 2017, the year of the mass bombing of Mosul, 36,898 people were killed in Iraq, “only” 7201 were killed in 2018 and 3092 in 2019 (Antiwar.com). So far in 2020, at least 208 more people have been killed or found dead (Antiwar.com, February 1 and March 1). Overall, just since 2014, roughly 200,403 people were killed in war-related violence in Iraq— equivalent to almost 1/3 the population of Portland.

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The cost in American lives has been far less, but that is not to minimize the deaths of the 4576 people who fought and died in this war. The cost to the US population in dollars has been extremely high, with an estimated \$1.992 trillion spent in the 17 years of warfare (The Conversation, February 4). That money alone could go to bolstering this country's medical capabilities for emergencies like the coronavirus.

The US invasion and occupation was based on knowingly false information presented by the George W Bush administration alleging that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. After the invasion, no such weapons were found. Similar lies about the alleged attack on a US naval destroyer in the Gulf of Tonkin helped justify the Viet Nam war. The current President, who criticized the Iraq war, has made up similar lies to justify violence against Iranian nationals inside Iraq (and Syria)'s borders. Regardless of whether American troops leave, the US embassy in Baghdad is the world's largest, despite Iraq being the 36th largest country by population (39 million people) and 58th largest in size (169,000 square miles, less than 1/20th the size of the US).

Control of the world's oil was one of the main reasons the US attacked Iraq in 1991, though that war was ostensibly to eject Saddam Hussein's troops from Kuwait. Donald Trump told NBC in January 2017: "We should've kept the oil when we got out"— as if the US had the right to take Iraq's oil. For the past few years, the US has been setting up Venezuela to be the next Iraq, demonizing the elected President Nicolas Maduro and trying to provoke a military conflict, bypassing the United Nations to send in humanitarian aid (Reuters, February 6, 2019). Venezuela has the world's largest known oil reserves, more than Saudi Arabia, Iran or Iraq. However, with the price of oil tumbling, Iraq is facing an even more difficult economic future as that is the source of 90% of its income (AFP, March 19).

In February, the US signed an agreement with the Taliban to end the 18-year-old war in Afghanistan, but deliberately did not include the Afghan government in talks, so the hope of true peace there is elusive. Trump also said he would pull US troops out of Syria, which were originally sent in without Congressional, UN or Syrian approval to defeat ISIS. Following an incursion by Turkey in December, the US returned after a short withdrawal, with the explicit mission to guard Syria's oil fields. The US continues to support Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in their war on Yemen, in part because Trump has vetoed two congressional efforts to limit US involvement there. Since Trump took office, the US has exponentially increased its airstrikes in Somalia from 14 in 2016 to 63 in 2019 (Stars and Stripes, December 30). And while the number of US drone strikes in Pakistan have gone down precipitously—the last one reported was in mid-2018 (Radio Free Europe, July 4, 2018), there were at least 550 such strikes in Libya from 2011 to 2019 (the Intercept, June 20, 2018).*-1

Through its diplomatic and military actions, the US is also indicating they could start wars in Iran, North Korea and maybe Russia. The military budget proposed by President Trump is roughly \$750 billion as he plans once again to cut social safety nets (National Priorities Project, February 10). Supposedly one of the wealthiest nations on earth, America's infrastructure is crumbling and thousands of people have no homes or health care. It is clear the US wants to stay in Iraq to control the oil resources not just in Iraq but in the entire region. **It is time to end all US wars and bring the troops home!**

* -1 Peace and Justice Works also notes that March 19 marks nine years since the US attack on Libya unleashed turmoil in that country.



This flyer was prepared
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Meetings usually 2nd Mondays, 7 PM; next one is April 13.

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Contact us about our meetings !