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Mired by the imperial hubris that so often colors humanitarian interventions, the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq is all but a buried memory now. Ten years have passed since “Operation Iraqi Freedom” produced an Iraq that is no more free than a caged bird with broken wings. From the wounds of one disaster emerged another, its repercussions still resonant a decade later.

A Familiar Script

Wars waged under the mendacious guise of humanitarianism are no less imperialistic than those waged expressly for purposes of conquest. Historically, colonial powers conducted wars predominantly to conserve hegemony, preserve regional ‘power dynamics’, to acquire natural resources, and to expand the power and influence of Western civilization.

Echoing these trends, the destruction of Iraq read much like a classical narrative, penned long before the tyranny of Saddam. There were unsubstantiated and later refuted accusations of “weapons of mass destruction”; calls for the liberation of local women from the dastardly clutches of bearded zealots; presumptuous demands for “freedom” to be bestowed upon a soon-to-be-occupied land, and the eternal white man’s burden to civilize and ‘democratize’ a savage brown people. Though the players had changed with the passage of time, the script was the same.

To this day, the occupation of Iraq and its destructive consequences are still tangible, harrowing and intentionally humiliating. The U.S. withdrawal from Iraq at the end of 2011 was not met with celebratory clamor in the streets.

Even Kadom al-Jabouri, known as Iraq’s iconic ‘sledgehammer man’ for having ferociously attacked the concrete base of Saddam Hussein’s infamous statue in Baghdad’s Firdos Square

in 2003, now acknowledges the calamitous reality that followed his defiant act.

The carefully, stage-managed scene was watched by millions: a U.S. soldier briefly draping an American flag across the statue's face, its plinth struck by jubilant Iraqis, a noose wrapped around the bronze head and then finally a conquering army using an armored vehicle to topple the statue of the deposed dictator. Now al-Jabouri, a motorcycle mechanic, regrets his actions that day and rejects its imperial symbolism.

"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](#) , adding:

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.

A fierce opponent of Saddam who spent years in prison for the mildest dissent, al-Jabouri knows who to blame for the devastation of his homeland. "The Americans began it," he explains, "And then with the politicians they destroyed the country. Nothing has changed. And things seem to get worse all the time. There's no future."

Still 'Worth It' After All These Years

Forgotten now, as if by design, are the exuberant American prophecies that accompanied their disastrous adventure, such as CentCom spokesman Brigadier-General Vincent Brooks' myopic [declaration](#)

in April 2003: "Much of Iraq is free from years of repression."

For years the chronicle of Iraq's supposed "liberation" was peddled as a success story by U.S. government officials. In December 2011, U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta [argued](#) that the pillaging of Iraq was laudable, one which, in [his words](#)

, “helped the Iraqi people begin a new chapter in history, free from tyranny and full of hope for prosperity and peace.”

Recalling the “tremendous price that has been paid in lives, in blood” during the decade of occupation, Panetta [insisted](#) , “I think the price has been worth it, to establish a stable government in a very important region of the world.”

Such is the language of humanitarian imperialism, the defense of war crimes written upon the battered skin of the subjugated. Who can forget then U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Madeleine Albright’s all-too-comfortable justification for deadly Western sanctions against Iraq, which claimed the lives of half a million Iraqi children? “I think this is a very hard choice, but the price – we think the price is worth it,” Albright [told](#) Leslie Stahl on *60 Minutes* in 1995

And so, what of this “ [new, democratic Iraq](#) ,” born of American sacrifice and benevolence? A recent statement issued by [Amnesty International](#) reveals that Iraq remains “enmeshed in a grim cycle of human rights abuses, including attacks on civilians, torture of detainees and unfair trials.”

The Iraqi people have been debilitated and traumatized by years of relentless assault; Iraq is now home to the “ [world’s fastest displacement crisis](#) ,” an estimated [one million widows](#) , and upwards of “3 million orphans.” Even in survival there is often [no respite from suffering](#):

A new study confirms what many Iraqi doctors have been saying for years – that there is a virtual epidemic of rare congenital birth defects in cities that suffered bombing and artillery and small arms fire in the U.S.-led attacks and occupations of the country.

Records show that the total number of birth defects observed by medical staff at Al Basrah Maternity Hospital more than doubled between 2003 and 2009. In Fallujah, between 2007 and 2010, more than half the children born there had some form of birth defect, compared to less than two percent in 2000.

Conclusion

Post-occupation Iraq is no hub of democracy. Iraqis, by-and-large, do not share the pride and optimism propagated by those who marketed, then mismanaged, the war. A decade later, these criminals and co-conspirators cloaked in 'good intentions' have yet to be prosecuted.

Mariam Khazim lives daily the [tragic legacy](#) of the Iraq invasion. Her father was killed when a mortar shell struck their home in the besieged city of Sadr, a blockade that dragged on for some four years. For her there is no romanticized fight for freedom, no storied tale of triumph and liberation. Instead, hers is an Iraq of blood-stained rubble and unmarked graves:

The Americans did not leave modern schools or big factories behind them. They left thousands of widows and orphans. The Americans did not leave a free people and country behind them. In fact, they left a ruined country and a divided nation.

The future of Iraq remains uncertain as waves of violence continue to wash over its ravaged landscape. The justice owed Iraq has not been – and most likely never will be – done.