

The US war and occupation of Iraq—the murder of a society

Part three

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This is the final part of a three-part series. Part one was posted May 19 and part two on May 21. Its purpose is to examine a series of recent reports establishing the immense scale of death, destruction and oppression that have been wrought by the US occupation of Iraq, now in its fifth year. Taken together, these reports confirm that US operations in Iraq have amounted to sociocide—the deliberate and systematic murder of an entire society.

The assault on higher education

Estimates of the number of university professors killed since 2003 range between 250 and 1,000. These educators have been targeted by Islamist militias because they are seen as proponents of secularism and a national identity that cuts across religious-ethnic divides.

Attacks on universities have also driven away students. The first two months of this year saw two bombing attacks on Al Mustansiriya University that claimed a total of 111 lives.

The entire higher educational system—once considered one of the best in the region—is in a state of collapse. Classes are being taught by untrained graduate students and undergraduates.

“Violence and lack of resources have undermined the education sector in Iraq,” Professor Fua’ad Abdel-Razak of Baghdad University told the IRIN news agency. “No student will graduate this year with sufficient competence to perform his or her job, and pupils will end the year with less than 60 percent of the knowledge that was supposed to be imparted to them.”

He added that medical graduates in particular are leaving the university without the knowledge or confidence to provide care. “There is a really huge difference between now and the times of Saddam Hussein, when medical graduates left college with the competence to treat any patient,” he said.

Destruction of the economy and growth of mass poverty

At the base of society, the Iraqi economy has ground to a halt. The official unemployment rate is reported by the Iraqi Ministry of Social Affairs to be 48 percent. However, when one adds the hundreds of thousands of former employees of now closed state enterprises, who still receive 40 percent of their old salaries, the figure climbs to 70 percent.

The inflation rate for 2006 climbed to 50 percent, the second highest in the world. Increased prices for basic necessities, including food, have dramatically affected the living standards for the vast majority of Iraqis. Within the space of just the last two years, the price of fuel has increased five-fold.

The report released in April by the UN aid mission in Iraq found that 54 percent of the population is barely surviving on less than US\$1 a day, while 15 percent must endure extreme poverty, with less than 50 US cents a day. The Iraqi regime’s Central Statistical Bureau echoed these findings, saying that 43 percent of Iraqis suffer from “absolute poverty,” lacking the necessary food, clothing or shelter to survive.

The International Monetary Fund has estimated the country’s per capita Gross Domestic Product at \$1,687, less than half the figure reported 25 years ago. Even oil production—the principal concern of the American occupiers—has yet to be restored to the severely depressed pre-invasion levels, with sabotage curtailing operations and much of what is produced apparently being stolen.

On top of the armed violence and sabotage, decisions imposed by the US occupation authorities have deepened the economic crisis and the agony it has created for millions of Iraqis. Driven by the profit interests of US-based corporations and the right-wing ideology of the US administration, the occupation regime headed by L. Paul Bremer launched the wholesale privatization and shutdown of 192 state-owned enterprises that employed half a million Iraqis.

The *Washington Post* noted recently that among these enterprises—all decreed hopelessly outmoded and inefficient by Bremer—was “a bus and truck factory south of Baghdad that had a modern assembly line, talented managers and skilled employees.” It added, “All but 75 of 10,000 employees had been laid off,” as the Iraqi government, previously its sole customer, has been barred from buying the vehicles.

Clearly, the aim was to eradicate the national economy, sell off whatever profitable sectors existed to US transnationals and, above all, clear the way for the US oil companies to seize control of the Iraqi oilfields.

Bremer also decreed an end to all tariffs aimed at protecting Iraqi agriculture, ostensibly for the purpose of making imported goods cheaper. The effect—and it is hard to believe that it was unintended—was to bankrupt Iraq’s small farms, where production was already hampered by continuous military attacks. Now, as the occupation enters its fifth year, the Iraqi agricultural sector has collapsed and the country is totally dependent upon imported food, which sells at prices that are beyond the reach of much of the population.

Finally, the US colonial administrator implemented a “flat tax”—the dream of the Republican right in the US itself—and issued decrees allowing foreign corporations to repatriate all profits and giving them

equal rights with domestic producers in the Iraqi economy.

Blaming the Iraqis for US war crimes

Both Democrats and Republicans in Washington now find it politically expedient to place the blame for the catastrophe in Iraq on the Iraqi people themselves. They claim that US troops are caught in a sectarian civil war and complain that the Iraqi government has failed to act decisively in quelling the violence and transforming political, economic and social conditions.

This is all self-serving and hypocritical nonsense. First of all, the sectarian violence that exists in Iraq is entirely the responsibility of Washington—legally, politically and morally. The US is an occupying power and, under the Geneva Conventions, is obliged to guarantee the security of the occupied population. But thousands of Iraqis are killed or wounded and tens of thousands driven from their homes every week.

More fundamentally, the eruption of sectarian violence was directly stimulated by US policy. Like colonial conquerors before it, Washington sought to dominate Iraq with a policy of divide and rule. Having destroyed every national institution in the country, it sought to reconstitute political life along ethno-religious lines, giving a weight to the division between Sunnis and Shia that had never before existed in Iraq.

The US occupation authorities handed out political positions in the emerging Iraqi puppet regime along strictly sectarian lines. Tensions between Sunnis and Shia were whipped up and the Iraqi security forces were handed over to the militias of Shia religious parties.

Now, the US occupation has reached the point of trying to erect walls around Sunni neighborhoods in Baghdad, separating populations along ethnic lines in a practice that echoes brutal colonial counterinsurgency wars in a number of countries and, indeed, recalls the Nazis' creation of the Warsaw ghetto.

Before the US invasion, Sunnis and Shia lived side-by-side in Baghdad and other cities, without friction and little concern over the religious background of their neighbors. Fully a third of marriages in Iraq were between the two communities. Now this ethno-religious identity is a matter of life and death for millions, forcing them to flee their homes and condemning them to summary executions at the hands of militias.

As for the demands that the Iraqi government meet "benchmarks," this is strictly for political show. The fact remains that the regime headed by Nouri al-Maliki inside the US-controlled Green Zone is a largely powerless puppet, with the US continuing to exercise effective control over the country.

This reality was underscored last week with the release of a report by the leading British think tank, Chatham House, describing the Iraqi government as "largely irrelevant in terms of ordering social, economic and political life." It added, in what is unquestionably a major understatement, that the country is on the "verge of becoming a failed state."

The poisoning of the River Tigris

Among the most emblematic of the horrific stories coming out of Iraq is the transformation of the River Tigris, cited in the Bible as a tributary of the river flowing from the Garden of Eden and the historic lifeline of civilization in the region from ancient times. It has been turned into a stagnant and fetid waterway, hopelessly polluted by raw sewage,

chemicals and toxic military waste produced by the US war and occupation.

While before the war the river supported fishermen, now it is virtually dead, with boats banned from the water and subject to hostile fire. Much of the river's banks have also been turned into military no-go zones.

The river has also become a dump for corpses, which are pulled daily from the water, most of them bearing the marks of horrible torture. The IRIN news agency quoted an Iraqi Interior Ministry officer as saying that since January 2006, over 800 bodies have been pulled from one area of the river alone, where iron nets had been put in place to catch water lilies and garbage.

The impact of four years of US occupation upon the consciousness of the Iraqi people found at least partial reflection in the recent poll carried out in March by US, British and German news agencies. It found that fully 78 percent of Iraqis oppose the presence of US troops—up from 65 percent in 2005—and 51 percent, a majority, support armed attacks on US military forces, compared to only 17 percent in 2004.

Such a dramatic shift in public opinion is explicable only from the standpoint of the magnitude of the crimes that have been carried out against the Iraqi people, who have been subjected to a bloodbath and seen their society reduced to rubble.

These are world historic crimes, and those responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and thousands of American troops—and for the systematic destruction of an entire society—remain unpunished and occupy the leading positions of power within the US.

"Preemptive war" and the Nuremberg precedent

The government in Washington—both the Republican White House and the Democratic Congress—continues to embrace the doctrine of "preemptive war," i.e., unprovoked aggression, as a principal instrument of US foreign policy. Both the US president and leading figures in the ostensible opposition party—the Democrats—regularly threaten to reprise this policy in an even more catastrophic form in a war against Iran.

A thorough criminal investigation and prosecution of those responsible for the Iraq war is an urgent political task confronting the American people. It is indispensable both for preventing new and even bloodier wars of aggression and for halting and reversing the unprecedented attacks on basic democratic rights within the US itself.

The handful of prosecutions that have been brought against junior enlisted personnel responsible for such horrors as the gang rape and murder of a 14-year-old girl in Mahmoudiya and the slaughter of her entire family, or the massacre perpetrated by Marines in Haditha, only underscores the reality that those who bear the ultimate responsibility not only for these individual atrocities but for the rape of an entire country enjoy continued impunity.

The premeditated destruction of an entire society carried out on the basis of lies and in pursuit of the financial and geo-strategic interests of America's ruling elite constitutes a war crime of historic proportions, punishable under the same statutes and on the basis of the same principles as those used to condemn leading figures of Germany's Third Reich at Nuremberg.

Those responsible for launching the war in Iraq consist not merely of the right-wing Republican cabal grouped around Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz. They include also the Democrats who enabled this war, the heads of US energy conglomerates and finance houses that hoped to profit from it and the chiefs of the media monopolies that promoted it. All of these layers, constituting the political establishment and financial aristocracy of the United States, are guilty of the same fundamental crime

for which the Nazis were prosecuted nearly 60 years ago: the plotting and waging of a war of aggression. It is from this principal crime that all the multiple crimes and horrors inflicted upon the Iraqi people have flowed.

For these crimes to go unpunished and those responsible to continue acting with impunity would have fatal implications for the political, social and indeed moral life of the US and indeed the world. It would only render the next round of war crimes and atrocities that much easier and more inevitable.

The struggle against the war in Iraq must be waged on the basis of the demand for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US troops, the implementation of a massive program of humanitarian and economic aid to the Iraqi people, and the prosecution of all those responsible for this war before an independent and international tribunal.

The six months since the US midterm elections have amply confirmed that none of these demands can be realized through the existing political parties or government institutions. As this is published, congressional Democrats, who gained the leadership of Congress as a result of the massive vote against the war last November, are holding closed-door meetings with their Republican counterparts and White House officials to work out a bill that will provide tens of billions of additional dollars to continue the bloodbath in Iraq. Behind their ever more transparent posturing as opponents of the war, the Democrats have made it clear that they remain committed to the imperialist aims of the 2003 invasion and are determined to maintain tens of thousands of US troops in Iraq to realize those aims.

Ending the war and holding the war conspirators accountable—to prevent further and even more catastrophic acts of aggression—can be achieved only by means of a direct political struggle against both parties of war: the Democrats and Republicans. Workers, students and young people must fight for the building of an independent mass political movement of the working class based upon a socialist program that is directed against the American financial oligarchy in whose interests the war is being waged.

Concluded



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