

WHAT HAVE WE ACCOMPLISHED IN IRAQ?

The 8th Anniversary of George W. Bush's War

By Nick Gier

President George W. Bush was engaged in the war rhetorically but maintained an odd detachment from its management. He never got a full handle on it, and over these years of war, too often he failed to lead.

--Bob Woodward in *The War Within*

It is no longer a secret how the Bush White House pushed, cajoled, bullied, and deceived the United States into war with Iraq.

--Fulton Armstrong and Thomas Powers,
"The CIA and WMDs: The Damning Evidence"

Too many lives, too many tears, too many lies, too many years.

--motto on my Palouse Peace Coalition T-shirt

Last week was the 8th anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, and once more it's time to assess what our sacrifice of lives (4,439 killed; 32,033 wounded) and money (\$7.3 billion per month in 2009) have gained us. We should not be surprised to find that the results are disappointing to say the least.

Although "meaningful elections" have been held, Freedom House still concludes that Iraq does not yet have a legitimate electoral democracy. With a Freedom House score of 5 out of 7, Iraqis are "partially free" with regard to political rights, but "not free" with a score of 6 on civil liberties. By comparison Libya scores 7 in both areas and Saudi Arabia comes in at 7 and 6. Was our sacrifice justified with so little improvement in the democratic Iraq that George Bush promised us?

From 2004 to 2009 Iraqi women actually lost some of their freedoms. On a scale of 1-5, Freedom House reported that they achieved slight gains (.5) in three areas, but went down 1.1 points in autonomy and security (from 2.6 to 1.9) and economic rights (from 2.8 to 2.6).

After early violent suppression, Egyptian security forces not only allowed the protesters to stay in Tahrir Square but protected them from hooligan attacks. In contrast water cannons were used on 5,000 people in Baghdad's Tahrir (Independence) Square, and demonstrators threw stones at security police who attacked them. Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki charged that Saddam Hussein supporters and Al Qaeda were encouraged the uprising.

Significantly, top ranking army officers and 37 security ministry personnel resigned their positions and joined the demonstrators. To his credit Maliki has vowed that he will not seek reelection in 2014, and he has already announced some changes in government policies.

During a month of protests all over Iraq, 35 people were killed, 130 wounded, and hundreds more arrested. Over 100,000 demonstrated in Kurdistan and five protesters were shot in Mosul on February 25. Way down south in Basra, the second largest city, water cannons were used to disperse demonstrators and journalists were also beaten.

At 2.4 million barrels per day Iraqi oil production still has not returned to the 3 million barrels in 2000. Before the war people in Baghdad could count on 16-24 hours of electricity day and night, but today they are lucky to get 6 hours. Even after much U.S. aid and effort (most of it wasted), only 37 percent of Iraqi homes are connected to a sewer system and only 30 percent of the drinking water is safe to drink.

Just as in the Vietnam War so has it been in Iraq: we had to destroy towns in order to save them. In the one-month-long campaign in Fallujah, 70,000 residents were evacuated as the town was reduced to rubble. According to a study published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, Fallujah's leukemia "rate is now 38 times higher, the childhood cancer rate is 12 times higher, and breast cancer is 10 times more common than in populations in Egypt, Jordan, and Kuwait." The culprit appears to be the depleted uranium used in armor and munitions, which are also suspects in the wide-spread Gulf War Syndrome.

For years reports have circulated that the Iraqi government maintained secret prisons where detainees were tortured. Prime Minister Maliki always declared that he was not aware of the abuses, and the U.S. of course claimed no involvement. Former Army intelligence analyst Bradley Manning is now in solitary confinement for releasing evidence that proves that these were lies, and a former State Department spokesman was forced to resign when he described Manning's treatment as inhumane.

Among the Wikileaks documents were U. S. Army memos documenting the transfer of prisoners to Iraqi facilities where it was known that they would be tortured. Manning's breaking point was when he realized that "I was actively involved in something that I was completely against."

One report contained the story of one detainee who had been beaten on the feet, given electric shock to his genitals, and had been sodomized with a water bottle. We now know that the CIA routinely flew terrorist suspects long distances to allied countries where they were tortured. As Johnathan Schell states: "In Iraq it was matter of walking across the street."

Iran's influence in the Middle East is much stronger than before our invasion of Iraq. During Saddam's 24-year rule, Prime Minister Maliki, a Shia Muslim, lived in exile (8 years in Iran and 16 years in Syria) where he worked with the Iranian-supported Hezbollah. Maliki's Dawa Party was founded in Iran and continues to receive Iranian funds.

During the course of the war the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani was a voice of moderation, condemning the killing of Iraq's Sunni Muslims and encouraging women to vote, even over the objections of their husbands. Even so, his power and authority is such that one commentator to predict that the "Shia clergy in general and Sistani in particular" will become de facto rulers of Iraq, and "it may come to resemble its neighbor Iran" in the coming years.

Not only has our invasion encouraged the revival of Shia Islam in Iraq, it has caused an increase anti-American sentiment in the Muslim world as well as encouraging many to join

radical Muslim organizations. It is the greatest U. S. foreign policy disaster since the Vietnam War.

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