



An Occupation by Any Other Name: Iraq 11 Years After the Invasion

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Although the prevailing narrative tells us that the US “fully withdrew” from Iraq in December 2011, the reality is that the American occupation and influence continue long after the March 19, 2003 invasion. The US embassy in Iraq is the largest in the world. In late January, military publication Stars and Stripes reported that there are 250 US troops still in Iraq, “about half assigned to the Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq, which oversees the US military’s interaction with Iraqi forces.”*1 The country is wracked with internal fighting that leaves hundreds dead each month. As the Iraqi government struggles with the forcible takeover of several of its western cities, the US has gladly been selling military equipment to Iraq. Despite the talk of how it is feared that the current government, like Saddam Hussein’s government before it, could use such weapons to repress its political opponents, the sales have received congressional blessing.*2

DEATH TOLLS, DESTROYED NATION

The withdrawal of combat troops in 2011 has reduced American deaths to near none, but at least 4489 soldiers died there after the 2003 invasion. Military figures show that at least 32,239 others were seriously wounded as well.*3

Meanwhile, at least 121,786 civilians in Iraq have died since the invasion.*4 Nearly 9000 died in 2013, with another 1000 killed in January 2014.*5 This level of killing did not exist before the US invasion.

And Iraq, once arguably the most advanced nation in the Middle East, is suffering from massive environmental degradation, with less than 50% as much potable water now available compared to 1977.*6 The countryside is contaminated by the remnants of US artillery tipped with so-called “depleted uranium,” (DU) a heavy armor-piercing metal which is, despite its name, extremely toxic and radioactive. A study released in early February found that DU used over 30 years ago is still harmful to humans, warning that “attempts by the UK and US governments to downplay concerns on the findings... are not supported by the available science.”*7

Moreover, where women in Iraq enjoyed more equal rights than most any nation in the Middle East before the 1991 attack and 2003 invasion, laws are being proposed to cut back on those rights, including allowing nine year old girls to marry.*8

HOW THE WARS KEEP GOING ON

While the US is continuing to push for Afghanistan to sign a long-term agreement to keep thousands of troops in that country past the end of 2014, some in Congress have been calling for the US to send troops back into Iraq to deal with the militant uprisings there.*9 As mentioned above, the US has decided to sell Iraq Hellfire missiles, surveillance drones, tanks, helicopters, boats and aircraft, which can only serve to pour metaphoric gasoline on the fire.*10

But the US could, theoretically, choose to use troops in Iraq to revive the active fighting, since the 2002 Authorization for Use of Military Force signed by Congress has not been revoked—although President Obama himself has called for this action and several Senators including Republican Senator Rand Paul support doing so.*11 (continued)



Sites in Iraq contaminated by Depleted Uranium were identified in the March 2014 Journal of Advanced Science and Engineering Research



Iraqi women protest laws that allow marriage for 9 year olds among other regressive measures (Reuters 3/9/14)

Citations:

- *1-Americas army of contractors now work for Iraq, Stars and Stripes, January 24, 2014
- *2-Congress clears way for Iraq arms sales, Associated Press, January 24, 2014
- *3-Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn casualty list, March 7, 2014
- *4-Iraq Body Count, March 8, 2014
- *5-Iraqi planes, artillery strike rebel-held Falluja, Reuters, January 26, 2014: and More than 1000 killed in Iraq in January, Agence France Presse, January 31, 2014.
- *6-Iraq’s environment, water supply in severe decline, Reuters, January 27, 2014
- *7-Still dangerous after 30 years-Uranium particles from DU weapons, Ecologist, February 1
- *8-Iraqi women protest against proposed Islamic law in Iraq, Reuters, March 8, 2014
- *9-McCain and Graham slam Obama for Iraq violence, CNN, January 4, 2014
- *10-These are the 9 weapons the US is selling Iraq, GlobalPost, February 11, 2014
- *11-Obama backs repeal of law that green-lighted Iraq War, Yahoo News, January 7, 2014

However, this would not resolve the larger issue of the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force, which a recent article analyzed as “the most dangerous sentence in US history.”*12 That AUMF gives the President authority “to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or persons.” It has been used to justify the invasion of Afghanistan, the assault on Libya, and drone strikes on Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia.

(Side note: The US-led strikes on Libya, which began three years ago today, March 19, 2011, were under the auspices of a declaration by President Obama that Libya poses “an unusual and extraordinary threat to U.S. interests,” a declaration he extended in February 2014.*13)

In Oregon, about 950 National Guard members are slated to head to Afghanistan in late 2014, despite the supposed draw-down there.*14 The sticking point on whether the Afghan government will allow US troops to remain is the same one that led to the major withdrawal from Iraq: America insists on legal immunity for the troops who remain, and these sovereign nations balk at that idea. (What would Americans think of foreign troops housed on US soil asking for immunity?)

And even if all military were to be withdrawn from both Iraq and Afghanistan, it appears that the State Department has its own air force of over 100 helicopters and airplanes, under the Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL). The INL “employs contractors and foreign government aviators to fly these aircraft in seven countries: Afghanistan, Bolivia, Columbia, Guatemala, Iraq, Pakistan and Peru.”*15 The State Department also has a contract with Dyncorp to provide “quick reaction forces” in an emergency.*16

There are also American contractors in Iraq, including around 2000 under the employ of the State Department (with another 3000 non-American contractors on payroll) and more paid for by the Iraqi government.*17

THERE IS HOPE

Despite the ongoing interference by the US in the affairs of Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran and countless other nations, polling data show that most Americans do not support this belligerent foreign policy. In January, a USA Today/Pew Research poll showed that Americans called the decision to invade Iraq “wrong” by a 50-38% margin.*18 A December poll by CNN called the Afghan war “arguably [the] most unpopular in US history,” showing only 17% of Americans supporting the war compared to 58% in 2008.*19 And another poll asking whether Americans support diplomacy rather than war in Iran showed 59% in favor of a negotiated deal.*20

If you support the right of the people of a nation to self determination, if you support peace over war, if you want to see the troops come home safely, join Peace and Justice Works and its partner groups in calling for the US to get out of Iraq.

Combined with the sanctions and effects of the 1991 “Gulf War,” Iraq has been under attack for over 23 years. It’s time to let the Iraqi people live.



The sprawling US embassy in Baghdad is the world's largest (image from Reuters, 12/14/11)

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The Iraq Affinity Group is committed to educating the public about the effects of U.S. policy on the people of Iraq, and other areas including SW Asia, North Africa, and the "Middle East."

Contact us about emergency and regular meetings !
Regular meetings usually 2nd Tuesdays, 7 PM.

Citations:

*12- 60 Words And A War Without End: The Most Dangerous Sentence In U.S. History, Buzzfeed.com, January 16, 2014

*13-Libya still a threat, Obama says, UPI, February 21, 2014

*14-Oregon Guard continues to prepare for Afghan deployment, Oregonlive, February 15, 2014

*15-US State Department Has Its Own (Surprisingly Big) Air Force, War is Boring, January 28, 2014; and
Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs

*16 & *17-see footnote 1

*18- Poll: Grim assessment of wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, USA Today, January 30, 2014

*19-Poll: Afghanistan war arguably most unpopular in US history, CNN, December 30, 2013

*20-Polling Reveals Consensus Support For Iran Nuclear Deal, Think Progress, December 23, 2013, citing a December 5-9 AP/GfK poll