

March 17,
2023

20 Years Later, the US is Still in Iraq

While the world continues to grapple with **Russia's invasion of Ukraine**, many are contemplating the **20th anniversary of the US invasion of Iraq**, which took place on March 19, 2003. In short, the US invasion took place less than two years after 9/11, based on **false accusations** that Iraq was somehow involved in the actions of that day and was building weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). The US invaded, using overwhelming military power with Western allies in a campaign dubbed "shock and awe." The invasion killed tens of thousands of Iraqis, destroyed civilian infrastructure and led to destabilization which remains to this day: Iraq has not had a fully functional government since October 2021. On March 16, the Senate voted 68-27 to move forward a bill to end the authorization for both the 2003 war and the 1991 US attack on Iraq; the vote is expected on the week of March 20 (NPR, March 16). It is important to remember that President Biden, as a Senator in 2002, voted to authorize the war in Iraq.

HISTORY AND HYPOCRISY

The US has a long and ongoing history of warfare against Iraq. **Starting with the "Gulf War" in 1991, every US President has bombed Iraq:** George HW Bush, Bill Clinton, GW Bush, Barack Obama, Donald Trump and Joe Biden. After Trump ordered the assassination of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani in an airstrike on Iraq's soil in 2020, **the Iraqi parliament voted for the US leave their country.** The vote was advisory, and rather than withdraw at the end of 2021 as promised, **Biden recategorized the 2500 military personnel in Iraq as "advisors."** **They remain there to this day.** Iraq's Prime Minister Mohammed Al-Sudani stated in January that he supports their continued presence indefinitely (*Wall Street Journal*, January 15).

Russia has pointed to the American **hypocrisy** of condemning the invasion of Ukraine by pointing not only to the 2003 Iraq war, but also the **US interventions in Yugoslavia in 1999, Afghanistan in 2001 and Libya in 2011** (Fox News, March 3). In a way it is ironic that the "Gulf War" was prompted by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. at the time, the response to Iraq complaining that the Kuwaitis had been slant-drilling for oil under their border was US Ambassador April Glaspie saying the US had "no opinion on your Arab-Arab conflicts." Many took this as a green light for Iraq to invade. America's fierce response to Iraq in 1991 is considered by many a message to the world (and to Russia): following the fall of the Berlin Wall, the US can do what it wants militarily. **Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis died as a result of war and sanctions.** Regarding the deadly sanctions, former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright told Leslie Stahl of 60 Minutes that the death of half a million children was "worth the price" (May 12, 1996).

As with the 2003 war on Iraq, there was also a **false pretext for the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001**. The US said the government there was harboring the Al Qaeda members who plotted the events of 9/11. Even if that were true, **no Afghans attacked the US**, so the war can't be seen as self-defense as defined in the UN Charter. **The majority of people engaged in the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington, DC were from Saudi Arabia.** The US continues to support that country, including indirect support for its war against Yemen, despite the Saudis' toll on Yemenis in that conflict, its terrible human rights record, and the murder of American journalist Jamal Kashoggi in 2018.

In early 2022, the US speculated the Russians would engage in a "false flag" operation to justify invading Ukraine. Looking at history, America lied about one of its warships coming under attack in the **Gulf of Tonkin** in 1964, then used that as **an excuse to enter the war in Viet Nam**. As part of the build-up to the "**Gulf War**," the US shared a **false story about Iraqis dashing Kuwaiti babies in incubators to the ground**. In February, 2003, **Secretary of State Colin Powell told the United Nations in February 2003 there were WMDs in Iraq** to gain support for the US war. So, the US suspected Russia of subterfuge because that is how America makes war.

WAR AND "TERRORISM"

Following 9/11, the US engaged in a global "war on terror," using drones and conventional aircraft to **bomb Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, and Libya**. In 2014, **the US also began bombing Syria**, later sending in ground troops without that country's permission. **Roughly 900 US troops remain in Syria today**, at several bases including one named for Conoco, a company whose oil wells are under US protection (The Hill, February 15). (*continued on other side*)

Congress moves to repeal the Iraq war authorization, 20 years later

It's a significant symbolic move, but US troops are still there, and other parts of the forever war continue.

By Jonathan Guyer | @jonathanguyer | jonathanguyer@vox.com | VOX March 16, 2023

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U.S. soldiers stand guard in Fallujah, May 2003. Congress will vote on whether to repeal the authorization for the use of military force against Iraq in 1991 and in 2002 for two separate armed conflicts in Iraq. (NPR, 3/16/2023)

The Senate is moving forward with a vote to repeal the outdated legal authorizations for the US's wars in Iraq. It's mostly symbolic, but it has some real-world implications.

20 Years Later, the US is Still in Iraq 3/17/23 (continued)

War is the way the United States seeks to control oil and other resources in the region. After the invasion of Iraq, the US built the world's largest embassy in Baghdad, even though Iraq is the 36th largest country by population and 58th largest in size. They also continue to impose sanctions and make military threats against Iraq's neighbor, Iran, alleging that Iran is trying to build a nuclear weapons. As recently as February 2023, the CIA stated that Iran is not building nuclear arms (The Cradle, February 26). American ally Israel has occupied the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan Heights since 1967 and itself has dozens of undeclared nuclear weapons. The US has also chosen to move many of its military assets in order to confront China and Russia rather than the Middle East, including sending warships through the strait of Taiwan and into the Black Sea, actions seen as provocative.

While there are still remnants of the Islamic State in Iraq, their government has described their work to contain the militant group as more of a law enforcement issue than a military effort (Yahoo News, January 26, 2022). Perhaps if the US had taken that approach after 9/11, the countries of Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya would not be in shambles.

MONEY FOR HUMAN NEEDS

The Iraqis are still making efforts to recover from 13 years of strict sanctions followed by 20 years of war and occupation. The country would have had more of its own money to rebuild if not for the United Nations making them pay reparations to Kuwait for the invasion, a process that only ended in February 2022— thirty one and a half years later. Iraq's water, sewage and electrical plants were destroyed by the US in both 1991 and 2003 and there are still issues providing those services to all Iraqis.

The US recently passed its largest military budget ever — \$847 billion, while people continue to live in the streets, face environmental disaster, and lack health care and education. President Biden revealed his proposed budget for next year at \$886 billion for "defense." Rather than pushing back, Republicans responded by saying the increase is not enough (*Military Times*, March 10). While some Republicans and a larger number of Democrats have called to reduce the military budget, the momentum seems to be to feed military contractors, not the people.

Meanwhile the US continues to promote the manufacture of F-35 warplanes, which in the words of a letter signed by 200 organizations in October 2022,* should be abandoned due to "harm caused abroad, cost of the program to the taxpayer, inefficiencies and failures, the environmental impact of F-35s, and the effects training has on local communities." F-35s use 30% more fuel than F-16s. The total cost of the project is estimated at \$1.7 trillion.

CONCLUSION

In the UN General Assembly in 2022, Iraq was one of 35 nations to abstain from condemning Russia, stating: "Iraq has decided to abstain because of our historical background and because of our sufferings resulting from the continuing wars against our peoples." If the Russians' attack on Ukrainian civilian targets is prosecuted as a war crime, there are many Americans who also need to be brought up on charges for what the US did to Iraq. The Iraqis have not been free from US interference by war, sanctions and other means since August of 1990. The US must end its attempts to undermine Iraq's sovereignty once and for all.

*- Peace and Justice Works Iraq Affinity Group is a signatory to this letter which can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/NoF35s2022>.

Drone shot down over Iraqi air base, Ain al-Asad, hosting US forces

A drone was shot down over an Iraqi air base hosting US forces, the Iraqi military said on Sunday.



As of August last year, there were roughly 2,500 US troops still in Iraq (source: Getty)

Al Arabiya January 8, 2023

In January 2023, the US shot down a drone near a military base in Iraq. If the US withdrew its troops from Iraq in 2021 as promised, there would be no incentive for these drone attacks.

This flyer was prepared
in March, 2023 by the

Peace and Justice Works Iraq Affinity Group

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Meetings usually 2nd Tuesdays, 7 PM; next one is April 11.

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Contact us about our meetings !

The March 17 event is being held as part of the weekly Friday Rally for Peace and Justice, ongoing since November, 2001, now hosted by the IAG.

The United National Atiwar Coalition is marching on Washington, DC on March 18 to use the 20th anniversary of the Iraq war to demand "No War in Ukraine! No to NATO!" and more; see unacpeace.org for information about the full week of action.