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Search and Destroy: The rape of Iraq

By Pepe Escobar

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First thing we do, let's kill all mythographers (lawyerly or not): the rape of Iraq is the biggest, man-made humanitarian disaster of our times. It's essential to keep in mind this was a direct consequence of Washington smashing international law to pieces; after Iraq, any freak anywhere can unleash preemptive war, and quote Bush/Cheney 2003 as precedent.

And yet, 10 years after Shock and Awe, even so-called "liberals" have been trying to legitimize something, anything, out of the "Iraq project". There was never a "project"; only a dizzying maze of lies - including a posteriori justifications of bombing the Greater Middle East into "democracy".

I've been thinking about The Catalyst lately. The Catalyst was the tank I had to negotiate every time in and out of my cramped digs on the way to the red zone, in the first weeks of the US occupation of Baghdad. The marines were mainly from Texas and New Mexico. We used to talk. They were convinced they hit Baghdad because "the terrorists attacked us on 9/11".

Years later, most Americans still believed The Outstanding Lie. Which proves that the cosmically arrogant and ignorant neo-cons at least got one thing right. The Saddam Hussein-al-Qaeda connection may not have been the prime piece of the puzzle in their "project" of invading and remaking Iraq from Year Zero (there were also the non-existing WMDs); but it was immensely effective as a brainwashing technique for rallying the galleries.

When the torture porn spectacle of Abu Ghraib was revealed in the spring of 2004 (I was driving

through Texas on an assignment, and virtually everybody deemed the whole show "normal") The Outstanding Lie still ruled. Ten years on, after Abu Ghraib, the destruction of Fallujah, the widespread "dead-checking" (killing wounded Iraqis), "360-degree rotational fire" (target-practice on scores of Iraqi civilians), calling air strikes on civilian areas, not to mention "killing all military-age men"; after US\$3 trillion, and counting, spent (remember the neo-cons promised a short, easy war costing no more than \$60 billion); after over 1 million Iraqis killed directly or indirectly by the invasion and occupation, the maze of lies still engulf us all like a giant Medusa.

Oh yes, and the Oscar-winning CIA - true to character - continues to [cover it all up](#).

Faster, counter-insurgent, kill, kill

Iraq Year Zero lasted roughly 10 days. I watched the official birth of the resistance; a mass rally in Baghdad, starting in Adhamiya, uniting Sunnis and Shi'ites. Then came the exploits of that Stooze Central called the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), "led" by the ghastly Paul Bremer, unfailingly displaying interplanetary ignorance of Mesopotamian culture. And then a sort of larger than life search and destroy offensive, deployed as a "tactic", masquerading as counter-insurgency. No wonder this quickly turned into a sandy Vietnam.

The Sunni resistance drove the Pentagon literally crazy. This is how the ["triangle of death"](#) looked like in the summer of 2004. And this is the Pentagon's response four months later, applying what I called ["precision-strike democracy."](#)

In the end, the triangle of death won - sort of. Fast forward to Dubya's "surge". Gullible millions in the US still believe Horny General David Petraeus's narrative of the surge. I was there at the beginning of the surge, in the spring of 2007. The horrendous US-engineered civil war - remember, it's always about divide and rule - was only subsidizing because Shi'ite commandos - Badr Corps and Madhi Army - had managed to conduct a devastating ethnic cleansing of Sunnis in what used to be mixed neighborhoods. Baghdad, once a slightly predominantly Sunni city, had turned predominantly Shi'ite. This had nothing to do with Petraeus.

As for the Awakening Councils, they were essentially Sunni militias (numbering over 80,000), organized by clans, who became fed up with al-Qaeda in Iraq's gory tactics, mostly in the very same triangle of death, including Fallujah and Ramadi. Petraeus paid them with suitcases full of cash. Before that - when, for instance, they were defending Fallujah in November 2004 - they were branded as "terrorists". Now they were duly reconverted into Ronald Reagan-style "freedom fighters".

I had met some of those sheikhs. Their wily plan was long-term; instead of fighting the Americans, we take their money, lay low for a while, get rid of those al-Qaeda fanatics, and later attack our real enemy; the Shi'ites in power in Baghdad.

That's exactly the next step in Iraq, where yet another civil war is slowly brewing. And by the way, some of these former "terrorists" - with ample battleground experience - are now the key commanders in that alphabet soup of Syrian "rebel" units fighting against the Assad regime in Syria. And yes, they remain "freedom fighters".

Balkanize or bust

Americans obviously don't remember that Joe Biden, when still in the senate, eagerly campaigned for the balkanization of Iraq into three sectarian parts. Considering that he is now one of the Obama 2.0 administration's point man for Syria, he may even end up having it both ways.

True, Iraq is the first Arab nation ruled by a Shi'ite government since fabled Saladin got rid of the Fatimids in Egypt way back in 1171. But this is a nation on the way to total fragmentation.

The Green Zone, once an American town, may now be Shi'ite. But even Grand Ayatollah Sistani - the top Shi'ite religious leader, who actually broke the back of the neo-cons and the CPA in Najaf in 2004 - is disgusted with the mess orchestrated by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. And even Tehran is caught in a bind. Contrary to think tank belief in the Beltway - do these people ever get anything right? - Iran does not manipulate Iraq's politics. Above all, what Tehran really fears in Iraq is a civil war not quite dissimilar to what's happening in Syria.

Patrick Cockburn's coverage of Iraq for these past 10 years as a foreign correspondent is unrivalled. This is his [current evaluation](#).

Important facts are that kingmaker Muqtada al-Sadr - remember when he was the most dangerous man in Iraq, on the cover of every American magazine? - may have criticized Maliki for his Shi'ite hegemony bias, but he does not want regime change. Shi'ites have the numbers, so in a still unified Iraq there's bound to be a Shi'ite majority government anyway.

The overwhelmingly Shi'ite south of Iraq remains very poor. The only possible source of employment is government jobs. Infrastructure, all over, remains in tatters - direct consequence of UN and US sanctions, then the invasion and occupation.

But then there's the shining city on a hill; Iraqi Kurdistan, a somewhat warped development of Pipelineistan.

Big Oil never had a chance to fulfill its 2003 dream of lowering the price of a barrel back to \$20 - in line with Rupert Murdoch's [wishful thinking](#). But there's a lot of action all over the place. Greg Muttitt has been unmatched following the [new Iraq oil boom](#).

Yet nowhere else the action is more convoluted than in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), where up to 60 oil companies - from ExxonMobil to Chevron, Total and Gazprom - are in play.

The holy of the holies is a new pipeline linking Iraqi Kurdistan to Turkey, the theoretical Kurdish passport to export oil bypassing Baghdad. No one knows whether that will be the straw to break the Iraqi camel's back - as Iraqi Kurds are getting closer and closer to Ankara and drifting away from Baghdad. The ball is definitely in Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's court - just as Kurds have a once in many lifetimes chance of juggling between

Ankara, Baghdad and Tehran's interests and finally ending up with an independent, and economically self-sufficient Kurdistan.

So yes, there are plenty of balkanization signs on the horizon. But what about lessons learned by the US out of one of the biggest foreign policy blunders in history? Nothing. Nada. We will have to wait for Nick Turse to come up, in a few years, with an Iraqi equivalent of his masterful book on Vietnam, [Kill Anything That Moves](#). Even more than Vietnam, Iraq's catalogue of horrors was the inevitable result of not only official Pentagon policy, but also official White House policy.

Will this harrowing spiral of Iraqi suffering ever be fully acknowledged? We could always [start here](#), with the case stated by former UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq, Hans Sponeck.

Or, in a pop vein, a non-Hollywood/CIA producer could invest in a made in Iraq movie, distributed worldwide, where in the final act Dubya, Dick, Rummy, Wolfie and assorted hoodlums of the Douglas Feith mould are all sent on a one-way ticket to a Guantanamo faithfully recreated in the triangle of death - to the sound of Bob Dylan's *Masters of War*. Now that would be some global catharsis to die for.