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The Iraq War: Ten Years of U.S. Crimes against Humanity

By Sara Flounders
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The corporate media in the U.S. play a powerful role in preparation for imperialist war. They play an even more insidious role in rewriting the history of U.S. wars and obstructing the purpose of U.S. wars.

They are totally intertwined with U.S. military, oil and banking corporations. In every war, this enormously powerful institution known as the 'fourth estate' attempts, as the public relations arm of corporate dominance, to justify imperialist plunder and overwhelm all dissent.

The corporate media's reminiscences and evaluations this week of the 10th anniversary of the Iraq War, which began March 19, 2003, are a stark reminder of their criminal complicity in the war.

In the many articles there is barely any mention of the hundreds of news stories that totally saturated the media for months leading to the Pentagon onslaught. The news coverage in 2003 was wholly unsubstantiated, with wild fabrications of Iraqi secret "weapons of mass destruction," ominous nuclear threats, germ warfare programs, purchases of yellow cake uranium, nerve gas labs and the racist demonization of Saddam Hussein as the greatest threat to humanity. All of this is now glossed over and forgotten.

No weapons were ever found in Iraq, but no U.S. official was ever charged with fraud. Heroes such as Private B. Manning, however, face life in prison for releasing documents exposing the extent of some these premeditated crimes.

Today, in the popular histories, the barest mention is made of the real reason for the war: the determination to impose regime change on Iraq in order to secure U.S. corporate control and domination of the vast oil and gas resources of the region. Iraq was to be an example to every country attempting independent development that the only choice was complete submission or total destruction.

Now it is no longer even a political debate that the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq were a howling disaster and major imperialist blunder for U.S. strategic interests. Despite every determination to occupy Iraq with 14 permanent military bases, the U.S. army of occupation was forced to withdraw in the face of fierce Iraqi national resistance.

Bush stood on the deck of the U.S. aircraft carrier Lincoln on May Day 2003, with a "Mission Accomplished" banner behind him, to declare the war over. But what the U.S., puffed up by its imperialist arrogance, did not foresee was that the resistance had just begun.

U.S. strategists, so full of conceit about their powerful weapons, ignored the message displayed on signs, billboards and headlines of every Iraqi newspaper. It was even the headline of an English-language newspaper there, when this reporter was in Iraq with a solidarity delegation just a few weeks before the U.S. "shock and awe" onslaught.

The oft-repeated slogan was: "What the jungles of Vietnam were to their resistance, the cities of Iraq will be for us."

The Iraqi government opened the warehouses and distributed six months of food rations to the population in advance of the war. Each package bore the sign: "Remember to feed a resistance fighter." Small arms, explosives and simple instructions for making improvised explosive devices were publicly distributed.

Ultimately U.S. corporate power was defeated in Iraq due to its inability to be a force for human progress on any level. It was incapable of reconstruction.

The overpowering force of U.S. weaponry was able to destroy the proudest accomplishments of past decades of Iraqi sovereignty and inflame old sectarian wounds. But it was unable to defeat the Iraqi resistance or even gain a vote on a status of forces agreement in an Iraqi Parliament that the U.S. planners created.

U.S. media non-coverage

In covering the 10th anniversary, the same media that sold the war 24/7 recount the criminal decision to invade and occupy Iraq as just mistaken intelligence or wrong information. At the same time that they wring their hands over lost opportunities and lack of foresight, they give a passing salute to the 4,448 U.S. soldiers who died and the 32,221 wounded. At least 3,400 U.S. contractors died as well, a number barely mentioned or underreported.

More than 1.1 million U.S. soldiers served in Iraq. The National Council on Disabilities says up to 40 percent of veterans from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury.

The U.S. invasion of Iraq was the most widely and closely reported war in military history. Yet the enormity of the crime committed against the Iraqi people, the hundreds of thousands of silent deaths from lack of medical infrastructure, the millions of refugees, the environmental catastrophe, the radioactive and chemical waste left behind were ignored in coverage then, and today are barely noted.

At the start of the war in March 2003, 775 reporters and photographers were registered and traveling as embedded journalists. The number grew to thousands. These reporters signed contracts with the military that limited what they were allowed to report on.

So it should come as no surprise that what is completely missing from coverage is any responsibility for the calculated destruction of Iraq, the massive corruption and systematic looting, or the conscious policy of inflaming sectarian hatred and violence as a tactic to demoralize the resistance.

Statistics cannot convey the human loss. One out of every four Iraqi children under 18 lost one or both parents. In 2007, there were 5 million Iraqi orphans, according to official government statistics. By 2008, only 50 percent of primary-school-age children were attending classes. Iraq was reduced from having the lowest rate of illiteracy in the region to having the highest. Women suffered the greatest losses in education, professions, childcare, nutrition and their own safety in the brutal occupation.

According to figures of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, there are now 2.7 million internally displaced Iraqis and 2.2 million refugees, mostly in neighboring states. More than one-fourth of Iraq's population is dead, disabled or dislocated refugees due to the years of U.S. occupation. This is hardly liberation.

Missing in the many 10th anniversary evaluations is the essential historical context. The 2003 war was a continuation of the 1991 war to destroy Iraq as a sovereign nation in control of its own resources. There is barely a mention of the targeted destruction in 1991 of drinking water, sanitation, sewage, irrigation, communications and pharmaceutical industry facilities, as well as the civilian electric grid and basic food supply. Erased today is all mention of 13 years of U.S./U.N. starvation sanctions imposed on Iraq from 1990 to 2003, which caused the deaths, through hunger and disease, of more than 1 million Iraqis, more than half of them children.

Despite the horrendous toll, the failure of U.S./U.N.-imposed sanctions to create a total collapse in Iraq compelled U.S. corporate power to opt for a military invasion to impose regime change.

Second anniversary of wars in Libya, Syria

Also missing from evaluations of the U.S. war on Iraq is any mention that this is a week of two other war anniversaries.

March 19 is the second anniversary of the U.S./NATO war on Libya — the seven months of bombing that destroyed the modern, beautiful cities, schools, hospitals and cultural centers built with nationalized oil and gas of Libya. The NATO operation assassinated the Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi in 2011 and laid waste to the whole country. But it has not yet secured a stable source of U.S. profits.

March 15 is the second anniversary of the continuing U.S./NATO effort to destabilize and utterly destroy modern, secular Syria.

Despite U.S./NATO backing and funding from the corrupt feudal monarchies of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, diplomatic support, the arming of death squads and mercenaries, and the setting up of safe havens and bases in Turkey, the Syrian government has mobilized the population and resisted another U.S.-orchestrated regime change. The conflict is at a stalemate. The death toll has passed 70,000.

The Salvador option: mass terror

The clearest expose that the years of sectarian violence in Iraq following the U.S. invasion, death squad assassinations, mass terror campaigns and the harrowing use of torture by trained commando units were deliberate acts sanctioned and developed at the highest level of U.S. political and military command was published the week of March 18 in the London Guardian, with an accompanying BBC documentary film. The expose was based on 18 months of research.

The expose names Col. James Steele, a retired Special Forces veteran, who was sent to Iraq by then Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to organize paramilitaries to crush the Iraqi insurgency. Another special adviser, retired Col. James Coffman, worked alongside Steele and reported directly to General Petraeus.

This U.S. policy of counterinsurgency was called the "Salvador option" — a terrorist model of mass killings by U.S.-sponsored death squads. It was first applied in El Salvador in the 1980s' heyday of resistance against a military dictatorship, resulting in an estimated 75,000 deaths. One million out of a population of 6 million became refugees.

The Salvador option is the central tenet of General David Petraeus' often-praised counterinsurgency strategy in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Guardian researchers analyzed a number of documents from Wikileaks and assembled a huge number of reports of torture carried out by militias trained and supported by the U.S. under this program. The BBC and The Guardian report that their requests for comment to key members of the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, which could investigate the allegations, were declined or ignored.

But in Samarra, an Iraqi city where Iraqis were tortured in a library and that the BBC documentary focuses on, residents held mass demonstrations against the government and planned to set up big screens in the central square to show the whole film.

'Shock and awe' = terror

From the very beginning of war preparation, U.S. plans were calculated to use the most extreme forms of terror on the Iraqi people to force submission to U.S. domination. "Shock and awe" is terrorism by another name.

"Shock and awe" is technically known as rapid dominance. By its very definition, it's a military doctrine that uses overwhelming power and spectacular displays of force to paralyze and destroy the will to fight. Written by Harlan K. Ullman and James P. Wade in 1996, the doctrine is a product of the U.S. National Defense University, developed to exploit the "superior technology, precision engagement, and information dominance" of the United States.

This well-known military strategy requires the capability to disrupt "means of communication, transportation, food production, water supply, and other aspects of infrastructure." According to

these criminal military strategists, the aim is to achieve a level of national shock akin to the effect of dropping nuclear weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

War profiteers

The looting and pillage of Iraq on a grand scale were also planned from the very beginning. It was hardly an accident, a mistaken policy or the fog of war.

The official who had total authority in Iraq immediately following "shock and awe" destruction, the chief of the occupation authority in Iraq, L. Paul Bremer III, enacted 100 orders which turned Iraq overnight into a giant U.S.-dominated capitalist free market. The 100 orders guaranteed 100 percent foreign investor ownership of Iraqi assets, the right to expropriate all profits, unrestricted imports, and long-term 30- to 40-year deals and leases. In the official turnover to Iraqi sovereignty, these colonial orders were to stay in place.

Billions were stolen outright from Iraq. According to Dirk Adriaensens of the BRussells Tribunal, U.S. administrators, as the occupation "authority," seized all Iraqi assets and funds all over the world — totaling U.S. $13 billion. They confiscated all Iraqi funds in the U.S. (U.S. $3 billion). They enforced transfers of funds from the Iraqi UBS account (Swiss bank) to the U.S. forces. They demanded and received from the U.N. the accumulated oil-for-food program funds up to March 2003 (about U.S. $21 billion).

In the first weeks of the occupation, U.S. troops got hold of about U.S. $6 billion as well as U.S. $4 billion from the Central Bank and other Iraqi banks. They collected this money in special government buildings in Baghdad.

Where did all these funds go? Instead of setting up an account in the Iraqi Central Bank for depositing these funds, as well as the oil export funds, the occupation authorities set up the "Development Fund for Iraq" account in the American Central Bank, New York Branch, where all financial operations are carried out in top secrecy. Around $40 billion is "missing" from a post-Gulf War fund.

According to the BBC, in June 10, 2008, another $23 billion in Western aid funds to Iraq were lost, stolen or "not properly accounted for." Tales abounded of millions of dollars in $100 bills that went missing from skids at airports and of deliveries of pizza boxes and duffle bags full of cash.

According to BusinessPundit.com's list of the 25 most vicious war profiteers, these stolen funds were just the beginning of the theft. Major U.S. corporations reported record profits. In the years 2003 to 2006, profits and earnings doubled for Exxon/Mobil Corp. and ChevronTexaco.

Halliburton's KBR, Inc. division, which was directly connected to Vice President Cheney, bilked government agencies to the tune of $17.2 billion in Iraq war-related revenue from 2003 to 2006 alone.

The cost of war

Nobel laureate Joseph E. Stiglitz calculated the cost of the Iraq war, including the many hidden costs, in his 2008 book, "The Three Trillion Dollar War." He concluded: "There is no such thing as a free lunch, and there is no such thing as a free war. The Iraq adventure has seriously

weakened the U.S. economy, whose woes now go far beyond loose mortgage lending. You can't spend $3 trillion — yes, $3 trillion — on a failed war abroad and not feel the pain at home."

Stiglitz lists what even one of these trillions could have paid for: 8 million housing units, or 15 million public school teachers, or health care for 530 million children for a year, or scholarships to universities for 43 million students. Three trillion could have fixed America's so-called Social Security problem for half a century.

According to a Christian Science Monitor report, when ongoing medical treatment, replacement vehicles and other costs are included, the total cost of the Iraq war is projected to cost $4 trillion. (Oct. 25, 2012)

Peoples resistance & the anti-war movement

The corporate media play another important role in rewriting history. Their aim is always to do everything possible to marginalize and disparage the awareness of millions of people in their own power.

While the "shock and awe" attack of March 19, 2003, is still described today, it is rare in the major media to see any reference to the truly massive demonstrations of opposition to the impending war that drew millions of people into the streets. it is projected that before the war, more than 36 million people in more than 3,000 demonstrations mobilized internationally to oppose it — in the two coldest winter months. This was unprecedented.

In Iraq, despite the overwhelming force of "shock and awe," the planned use of sectarian war and mass use of death squads — despite the destruction of every accomplishment built by past generations, along with the destruction of schools and the confiscation of resources — the U.S. war failed on every count. Despite horrendous conditions, the Iraqi resistance drove the occupation out of Iraq. This is an accomplishment of great significance to people all around the world.