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Elections Don't Justify Iraq War

By Amitabh Pal

March 11, 2010

Years after the debate was seemingly settled on the folly of the Iraq War, some in the media are using the recent Iraqi parliamentary elections to excuse the invasion.

The Newsweek cover on the voting crowds “Victory at Last.” Ex-Wall Street Journal alum (and, I’m embarrassed to admit, a fellow schoolmate of mine) Tunku Varadarajan [asserts at the Daily Beast](#), “What Iraq has achieved in five years is a political wonder, and those who would deny that are being very, very dishonest.”

And the New York Times resident Middle East expert becomes all gooey on seeing a picture of an Iraqi mother having her son put her vote in the ballot box. “Former President George W. Bush’s gut instinct that this region craved and needed democracy was always right,” [gushes Thomas Friedman](#). “Democracy was never going to have a virgin birth in a place like Iraq, which has never known any such thing.”

Friedman ought to read his own newspaper more carefully. People in the Middle East itself have been quite unimpressed with the voting.

“Elections across this region have long been viewed as not much more than window dressing to tidy up the image of authoritarian leaders and absolute monarchs eager for greater legitimacy,” [the New York Times reports](#). “That perception, combined with Election Day violence, American

occupation and Iranian influence, left few analysts and commentators in the Middle East declaring the elections a success and Iraq on the road to stability.”

Now, I do admire the courage of Iraqi voters. And the situation in Iraq is more secure than at any time in the last few years. But none of this even remotely justifies the Iraq War and its toll.

Estimates of Iraqi fatalities since Bush’s invasion range from 100,000 to upward of 1 million. Millions of Iraqis were either forced to flee abroad or become refugees in their own country. And crimes against women escalated dramatically in the aftermath. To glibly ignore or dismiss this human wreckage is unconscionable.

“Always we defend these miserable results with the same refrain: Do you want the Taliban back? Do you want Saddam back?” writes Robert Fisk in *The London Independent* in a piece entitled, “Once Again, a Nation Walks Through Fire to Give the West its ‘Democracy.’ ”

Besides, I thought that the reason for invading Iraq was to get rid of those dreaded Weapons of Mass Destruction. (Read Harper’s hilarious satire on the Bush Administration’s excuses for the war.) “Democracy” was never much more than an afterthought for the Bush team, used as a pretext for its misadventure after the fabled WMDs turned out to be fairy tale creations.

“To influence public opinion, to counter criticism, the United States came up with a second reason to invade Iraq—that it had invaded Iraq to advance democracy and human rights,” Iranian Nobel Peace Prize-winner Shirin Ebadi told me in 2004. “North Americans do not understand that you do not throw down human rights like bombs on the Iraqis.”

We would all do well to pay heed to Ebadi’s wisdom.