

How the US Erase Women's Rights in Iraq

By [Ghali Hassan](#)

Global Research, October 07, 2005

7 October 2005

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#), [Women's Rights](#)

In-depth Report: [IRAQ REPORT](#)

Prior to the arrival of U.S. forces, Iraqi women were free to go wherever they wish and wear whatever they like. The 1970 Iraqi constitution, gave Iraqi women equity and liberty unmatched in the Muslim World. Since the U.S. invasion, Iraqi women's rights have fallen to the lowest level in Iraq's history. Under the new U.S.-crafted constitution, which will be put to referendum on the 15 October while the bloodbath mounts each day, women's rights will be oppressed and the role of women in Iraqi society will be curtailed and relegated to the caring for "children and the elderly".

Immediately after the invasion, the U.S. embarked on cultivating friendships with religious groups and clerics. The aim was the complete destruction of nationalist movements, including women's rights movements, and replacing them with expatriate religious fanatics and criminals piggybacked from Iran, the U.S. and Britain. In the mean time the U.S. moved to liquidate any Iraqi opposition or dissent to the Occupation.

The creation of paramilitary death squads – from the SCIRI and Al- Da'wa militias – tied to the current puppet government and Iran have been terrorising Iraq's secular communities and assassinating large number of prominent Iraqi politicians and professionals (see [Robert Dreyfuss - Death Squads and Diplomacy](#)). By using one group against the other, the US is dancing to the ongoing violence and the prospect of civil strife, while its corporations are siphoning off Iraqi resources and assets.

During his stint in Baghdad as the U.S. Proconsul, L. Paul Bremer often appeared with pro-Occupation women groups to foster the myth that the U.S is "liberating Muslim women", while at the same time signing laws that were detrimental to women's rights. Like George Bush and Tony Blair, Paul Bremer is no feminist, but he used feminism's rhetoric to enforce Western imperialism. "Whether in the hands of patriarchal men or feminists, the idea of feminism essentially functioned to morally justify the attack[s] on native societies and to support the notion of comprehensive superiority of Europe [and America]", wrote Leila Ahmad, professor of women's studies and an expert on gender at Harvard University. Hence, feminism serves as the "handmaid of colonialism", added Ahmed.

Since March 2003, Iraqi women have been brutally attacked, kidnapped and intimidated from participating in Iraqi society. The generation-old equality and liberty laws have been, replaced by Middle Ages laws that strip women of their rights and put them in the same oppressive life as women in Afghanistan, the nation which the U.S. invaded to "liberate" its oppressed women. The 1970 Iraqi constitution is not only the most progressive constitution in the Muslim World, but also the most equal. Iraqis were mentioned only as "citizens", and Iraqi women's rights were specifically protected.

In December 2003, the U.S.-appointed Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) – constituted mostly of the current puppet government – approved resolution 137, which will replace Iraq's 1959 Personal Status Laws with religious law to be administered by conservative religious clerics from different religious groups with different interpretation of Islamic laws. The laws could affect women's rights to education, employment, and freedom of movement, divorce, children custody and inheritance. The 55-member Constitutional Committee, who allegedly drafted – under the American radar – the new constitution, is only 17 per cent women. Like the January elections, the drafting of the constitution was undemocratic and lack public participation. Amid the escalation of violence, Iraqis are asked to vote on a constitution they do not understand. Many Iraqis believe “the new constitution weakens the state and strengthens religion within the government”, which can be used to suppress people's rights and freedom in general and women's rights in particular. Its main purpose is to legitimise the Occupation and the puppet government. Iraqis, women in particular do not need a constitution; they need peace and security.

Under previous governments, “Iraqi women have enjoyed some of the most modern legal protections in the Muslim world, under a civil code that prohibits marriage below the age of 18, arbitrary divorce and male favouritism in child custody and property inheritance disputes”, as accurately described by Pamela Constable of the *Washington Post*. “Saddam did not touch those rights, but the U.S.-appointed IGC have voted to wipe them out”, added Pamela Constable. It is noteworthy that due to women's participation in the Iraqi society, modern Iraq was an important cultural powerhouse before the invasion. It exported education, including arts and sciences to the rest of the Arab World.

Sadly, no where Iraqi women have been more betrayed than among women groups in the Middle East. When Karen Hughes, the Undersecretary of State and Bush's personal confident went to friendly Middle East dictatorships to sell the war and lecture them on women's rights. Her trip was dominated by friendly meetings with audiences filled with U.S.-friendly women and groups who received U.S. funding and consisted mostly of exchange students. Shameful as it was, these Arab women had no concern for the suffering of their sisters in Iraq, and remain silent despite the oppression they endure themselves under despotic regimes.

Only among Turkish women the opposition to the war has been apparent even before the occupation. When Hughes went to Turkey, Turkish women turned the table around and lectured her on women's rights and democracy. According to the *Washington Post*, Fatma Nevin Vargun, a Turkish women's rights activist told Hughes; “War makes the rights of women completely erased and poverty comes after war — and women pay the price”. Vargun has also denounced the arrest of Cindy Sheehan, the American who protested against the war at an antiwar protest.

Today, many Iraqi women have been abused, tortured and raped by U.S. forces. A large number of Iraqi women are still in U.S.-run prisons without charge and without access to lawyer. Two prominent Iraqi female scientists, Dr. Rihab Rashid Taha, a biologist and Dr. Huda Salih Mahdi Ammash, a microbiologist are still imprisoned without charge since the invasion. Former UN chief inspectors – David Kay and Hans Blix – have questioned the continued detention of Iraqi scientists, including the two female scientists, by US forces.

The continued detention of Iraqi scientists without charge and incommunicado appears to violate international law, said the human rights group, Amnesty International. “Women have

been subjected to sexual threats by members of the U.S.-led forces and some women detained by U.S. forces have been sexually abused, possibly raped”, added Amnesty International in its February 2005 report. Given Amnesty International interest in the treatment of prisoners and prison conditions, one would expect Amnesty International to be more vocal than just paying lip service.

“There are no lawyers allowed for the detainees and no information is given about the reason or the evidence surrounding the detentions, Amal Kadhum Swadi, a prominent lawyer in Baghdad, told the WTI in Istanbul, Turkey. “In the process, Iraqi women are being raped. One woman was bleeding for three months and the raping continued. There was no health service. The media does not mention these facts or the fact that all of Iraq has become a prison”, added Swadi. Indeed, there are more prisons in Iraq today than at any time in Iraq’s history.

Indeed, Western mainstream media, Western propagandists, and women movements are deliberately concentrating on the role of Islam in the new constitution, ignoring the Occupation as the main violator of Iraqi women’s rights. Iraq has been a secular society for generations. Iraqi women are more literal with their Islam than any of the surrounding dictatorships who alleged to live according to Islamic laws. Since the U.S. Occupation, Iraqi women started to cover their heads which is continuously promoted in Western media as the face of oppressed Iraqi women. On the contrary, the percentage of Iraqi women in traditional wear was miniscule before the invasion. The brutality of the U.S. Occupation and the violent nature of the US military created the right conditions for the current violence against women.

All evidence shows that violence has increased dramatically since the invasion, because it served the U.S. main objective. “Several [Iraqi] politicians [in the puppet government] have actually suggested that the U.S. is involved in the sectarian killings in Iraq; encouraging sectarian strife with the aim of weakening the Iraqi nation and destabilizing the country, which would justify extending its military presence there”, reported *Al-Jazeera* on 04 October 2005.

U.S.-instigated violence and the miserable living conditions created by the Occupation have forced Iraqi women to lock themselves in their homes. And even in their homes, Iraqi women are less safe today than before the invasion. U.S. forces and their collaborators continue to raid, Iraqi homes days and nights, accompanied by terror and human rights abuses of Iraqi women and their families. Iraqi women are arrested, detained, abused and tortured not because of anything they have done, but to force their close relatives (spouses, sons and brothers) to collaborate with the Occupation and inform against the Resistance fighting to defend their people and Iraq’s independence.

The U.S. is not the “guardian” of human rights, as many Americans still living with this fallacy; the U.S. has become the opposite, a creator of misery and injustice. The American people should be made a ware of the path their nation is taking, and the crimes it is committing in their name against innocent people around the world.

What ever Americans think of their nation and the crimes their government committing against innocent people, “for the people of Iraq and the rest of the world, [the torture and abuses of human rights] will serve as a reminder of America’s unyielding sadism against those who have the misfortune of living under its occupation”, wrote Dr. Joseph Massad of Columbia University in New York. “The [Occupation] proves that the content of the word[s]

‘freedom’ [and “liberty”] that American politicians and propagandists want to impose on the rest of the world [are] nothing more and nothing less than America’s violent domination, racism, torture, sexual humiliation, and the rest of it”, added Dr. Massad. The U.S. Occupation of Iraq proves that freedom and liberty were not the words the United States was founded upon.

The only hope left for Iraqis to gain their freedom and liberty is the immediate and full withdrawal of U.S. troops, and their collaborators from Iraq. The forming of an Iraqi government based on national unity and independence should provide laws that are legitimate and that guarantee human rights for all Iraqis.

Global Research Contributing Ghali Hassan lives in Perth, Western Australia.

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