

Iraq, The Rebuilding of a Nation In the Wake of Sixteen Years of US Sponsored Terrorism and Destruction

An Interview with the Norwegian Refugee Council

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Theme: [History](#), [Media Disinformation](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)
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Iraq, which in the years of Saddam Hussein (1979-2003) lived a long period of prosperity and social stability, then recognized by the UN as one of the Arab countries that most respected religious diversity, has now become one of the most devastated nations in the world since the 1991 Gulf War, followed by the criminal US-imposed economic embargo which among many other catastrophes resulted in the death of more 200,000 children.

The second US invasion and occupation in 2003 was illegal, based on proven lies, undertaken without a UN mandate and in violation of international law and the UN Charter, not to mention the US Constitution.

If all this were not enough for Iraq, after the second invasion by those who promised the Arab nation freedom and security, Iraq was subjected to the attacks of US sponsored terrorist groups including Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS) for almost four years, from 2014 to 2017, not to mention Obama's bombing raids against civilian infrastructure, implemented as part of a fake counterterrorism mandate. The unspoken objective was to destroy.

Since 2003, more than one million Iraqis have been killed. Both Al Qaeda and ISIS-Daesh are supported covertly by the US, funded by Saudi Arabia.

The underlying objective was to destroy Iraq, destabilize and divide the Middle East, which encompasses more than 60 percent of the World's reserves of crude oil.

Tom Peyre-Costa, a spokesperson and activist at the [Norwegian Refugee Council](#) (NRC), details in the following interview the work of his organization especially in Iraq, and discusses the challenges of the Arab country to get out of a quagmire that seems endless – which the American regime historically best does in foreign lands.

"Displaced Iraqis feel abandoned one year after the announced defeat of IS," Peyre regrets acknowledging the Iraqi government's effort, while pointing out weaknesses and neglect of Baghdad to some degree, at this stage of Iraqi reconstruction. "Displaced Iraqis feel abandoned one year after the announced defeat of IS."

The NRC is present today in 31 countries: Cameroon, Central African Republic, Djibouti,

Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mali and Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Yemen, Colombia, Honduras, Afghanistan, Iran, Myanmar, Greece, Ukraine, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Turkey, Norway, Switzerland, USA, United Kingdom.

As a non-profit NGO, the NRC is [funded](#) by voluntary donors – the main ones are Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union Humanitarian Aid, UN Refugee Agency, UKAID, and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.

Below, the full interview with the Norwegian Refugee Council's Tom Peyre-Costa.

Edu Montesanti: How do the 900 NRC specialists, scattered on 200 missions around the world, work?

Tom Peyre-Costa: Our experts work for NRC's various core competencies: camp management, food assistance, clean water, shelter, legal aid, and education.

Edu Montesanti: Does the NRC face dangerous situations in the countries where the organization works?

Tom Peyre-Costa: Given the current unrest in conflict-affected states like the Central African Republic, South Sudan and Syria, some level of exposure to risks is inevitable, and may even be necessary to get the job done.

But the imperative that drives aid workers is to help people in need.

Edu Montesanti: Iraq is a particular case, a shattered country that suffered as a result of the attacks of the Islamic State throughout the national territory as of December of last year, as well as is still suffering the grave consequences of the US invasion and occupation in 2003, also posing a considerable risk to the NRC, right?

Tom Peyre-Costa: In Iraq, the war against the Islamic State (IS) group may be over but there are still numerous attacks in the country. They are even rising in Kirkuk governorate for example.

We, NRC, have a professional staff dedicated to security to mitigate the risks as much as possible, but it will never be reduced to zero.

Edu Montesanti: About running a risk, do you have any personal experience to share?

Tom Peyre-Costa: I am lucky enough to never have been put in a difficult situation. As I recall, the most recent situation was recording videos in Sinjar when there was sporadic shooting in the area.

But this is common in Iraq and can be for various reasons: celebrations, intimidation, protests etc...

Edu Montesanti: Sinjar seems a singular case in Iraq, Tom, according to your experience in the country. "Unlike elsewhere in Iraq, reconstruction never even started," you [wrote](#) in November, referring specifically to Sinjar.

Explain the scenario in this Iraqi province.

Tom Peyre-Costa: Sinjar is singular by its recent history and the Genocide perpetrated against Yazidis. And as said indeed, reconstruction has not even started 3 years on. More than 200,000 people, mostly Yazidis, remain displaced in northern Iraq and abroad, with no homes to return to.

Those who decided to return lack the most basic things to live such as water. Most of the residents from Sinjar are still displaced in camps and cannot come back because of this situation.

Edu Montesanti: How much political corruption influences this situation involving the Yazidis, and what are the Iraqi government's great challenges to overcome this situation?

Tom Peyre-Costa: I can't speculate on corruption and political influences, what I can tell you is that it is essential that the government and the international community understand the extent of the needs and do more to respond to them.

The Iraqi government must overcome religious/sectarian divisions, many of which have widened during the recent conflict, especially when it comes to providing aid to its own population.

Edu Montesanti: Comment on the NRC work among the Yazidis, in Sinjar.

Tom Peyre-Costa: What NRC does in Sinjar and in Yazidi camps:

1. We are present both on the ground in Sinjar and in the camps;
2. We support Yazidi children in the camps to deal with their trauma and psychological distress through educational and recreational activities;
3. In the displacement camps and since recently in Sinjar, we support families in retrieving essential documentation such as IDs and property deeds, essential to be able to rebuild their houses. We also support the youth with vocational training;
4. Through our community centre in Sinjar we facilitate and coordinate a comprehensive humanitarian response between humanitarian partner organizations and communities, to ensure urgent needs are met.

Edu Montesanti: While eight million people in Iraq still lack humanitarian aid, NRC [estimates](#), local and foreign governments especially the US-led-coalition which illegally invaded and occupied the country in 2003, should be held accountable for the Iraqi situation today?

Tom Peyre-Costa: The international community must invest as much in the reconstruction of Iraq as they did in the military operations against IS group. Displaced Iraqis feel abandoned one year after the announced defeat of IS.

There is still an immediate need to clear and rebuild houses, schools, and hospitals to allow them to return home. Reconstruction is beyond the capacity of the Iraqi government alone. The needs are immense.

We talk about entire cities and villages destroyed. \$88 billion are needed just for the reconstruction of basic infrastructure. The conflict involved many actors from the international community so the support is a collective responsibility. This is the key to a sustainable future.

The Iraqi government has done a lot to facilitate the delivery of assistance to Iraqis in need; however much more needs to be done. It's imperative that the Iraqi government ensures receive the assistance they need to retrieve their essential document, return home safely and therefore rebuild their life.

This means they need to ease and expedite the process for them to do so.

Edu Montesanti: What are Iraqis' main needs?

Tom Peyre-Costa: As of today 3.9 million people have returned home and about 1.9 million remain displaced, 1.4 million out of camps, mainly in Ninewa and Anbar governorates. In 2018, more than eight million people in Iraq are still expected to need humanitarian aid according to the most recent [Humanitarian Response Plan](#).

While fighting in Mosul and other areas formerly in the hands of the Islamic state virtually ceased in 2017, the humanitarian needs are immense. Displaced people, particularly in camps, are in need of water and sanitation services as well as medical assistance.

3.2 million children have missed several years of school due to the conflict. They need to catch up classes and psychosocial support to be able to deal with their traumas. Hundreds of schools across the country need to be rebuilt, they need books, desks, stationaries and most of all teachers.

Edu Montesanti: How have government officials responded to these people, and how can these officials better act on this situation?

Tom Peyre-Costa: There is an urgent need to support reconstruction and reconciliation efforts in the country, that should be everyone's priority. Iraqis who have had homes or property destroyed by the fighting should be compensated for their losses. This is a concrete step the Iraqi government can take to help families rebuild.

National and local reconciliation efforts, supported by the international community, are also needed to help address community and tribal tensions that have been widened by the conflict with IS.

Finally, we need to see an end to collective punishment of families with a perceived association to IS group. A large number of these are female-headed households and children who have not committed crimes but are treated as guilty by association—blocked from returning home, unable to leave camps, or move around the country.

Edu Montesanti: Is discrimination against relatives of terrorists or dead ex-terrorists generalized in Iraq?

Tom Peyre-Costa: No, the situation is not generalized, but there are many reported cases. We need to see the government focusing on individual criminal charges rather than punishing entire families, children, and widows, for a crime they often did not commit.

We trust that the government together with local authorities will support reconciliation efforts at every level, to avoid collective punishment and find durable solutions for the families who are unable to return as they face revenge or community exclusion.

Edu Montesanti: How is the state of mind of displaced Iraqis?

Tom Peyre-Costa: Despite the considerable decrease in violence, return movements are slowing down. The majority of the remaining displaced Iraqis are unwilling or unable to go home within the next year as they have no home to return to, or are not allowed to leave their camp.

Displaced Iraqis feel abandoned by their government and the international community. Most of them have lost hope.

Edu Montesanti: Some fear that ISIS can resurge in the country as terrorists remain in northern Iraq, and in the Syrian border. Do you fear that, too?

Tom Peyre-Costa: We hope it's never going to happen. Iraqis have endured the most terrible atrocities under IS and are now suffering from the lack of international support. We need to make sure the international community does not forget them.

More support will allow displaced people to return. More support will ensure sustainability and inclusivity. This is the best way to prevent such a catastrophe to happen again.

Edu Montesanti: You have argued throughout this interview that Iraqis suffer from the lack of international support. Is it not because invasions and wars are far more profitable than the rebuilding of a nation?

Tom Peyre-Costa: It is not profitable for the 1.8 million Iraqis still displaced, and the returnees that still live in a dire situation. Many donors are turning away their heads from Iraq, but the needs are still there. The needs to rebuild, stabilize and reconcile society.

It's not time to abandon Iraqis.

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