

The Almighty Mess in Iraq, Courtesy of Bush and Cheney

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Global Research, June 16, 2014

[EricMargolis.com](#) 14 June 2014

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

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The late Saddam Hussein was certainly right when he predicted that America's invasion of Iraq would become "the Mother of All Battles." Eleven years later, it continues.

This week saw the collapse of two divisions of Iraq's government army, a full 30,000 men running like chickens before the relentless advance of the fighters of ISIS – the Islamic State of Iraq and Shams (Syria). The same puppet army trained and equipped for a decade by the US at a cost of \$14 billion. An evil portent of what awaits Afghanistan's US-led army and police.

Remember when President George W. Bush boasted, "mission accomplished?" Was not the wicked Saddam Hussein lynched by US Shia allies? Wasn't the dreaded al-Qaida defeated and its leader, Osama bin Laden, assassinated? Remember all that crowing from Washington about "draining the swamp" in Iraq?

As soon as the US knocks down one challenger to its domination of the Mideast – which I call the American Raj – another rises up. The latest: ISIS, a fierce jihadist force that now controls large parts of Syria and Iraq.

ISIS is a combination of Sunni jihadist groups fighting the Shia-backed Damascus government of Bashar Assad (a US enemy backed by Shia Iran), and resurgent units of Saddam's old Ba'athist army, led by Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri, the last surviving member of Saddam's inner circle, and a handful of al-Qaida in Iraq.

They are battling to overthrow the US-installed Shia regime in Baghdad of Nuri al-Maliki, an Iranian ally. There are suspicions ISIS may be secretly financed by Sunni Saudi Arabia, a US ally.

Wait a minute. My enemy's enemy is my friend, as the old Mideast saying goes. The US is trying to overthrow Syria's secular government to undermine its ally, Iran. The US has been using brutal jihadist groups against the Assad regime in Damascus. But now these jihadists in Syria have mostly fallen under the sway of ISIS – which is chewing up the US-backed regime in Baghdad. Confusing, is it not? My enemy's enemy has become my friend's enemy.

The 2003 invasion of Iraq, the stupidest war in US history, which was rousing backed by Congress and the media, has produced a monumental mess of mind-numbing complexity as Washington trips over its own feet. The ladies advising President Barack Obama on his Mideast policy are hopelessly befuddled.

Washington, now in a major panic over ISIS, is moving towards air strikes against Iraq using

warplanes based in Kuwait and the Gulf. The US also has two full mechanized combat brigades in Kuwait. Republicans are calling for US ground forces to re-enter Iraq to shore up the widely detested Maliki regime.

While Washington dithers, its little Kurdish protectorate in northern Iraq is threatening to send its combat-effective 'pesh merga' fighters to battle ISIS. But this is making both Turkey, which opposes any Kurdish state, and Iran, with its own Kurdish problem, very uneasy. Iraq used to be part of the Ottoman Empire. Its vast oil reserves are a constant enticement to energy-deprived Turkey.

This awful mess can be directly traced to neoconservative strategists in Washington clustered around Vice President Dick Cheney. In 2002, their primary goal, according to Cheney, was to wreck Iraq, the most industrially advanced and progressive Arab state, so removing a major foe of Israel, and then grabbing Iraq's oil.

Following the time-tested Roman imperial formula of 'divide et impera' (divide and rule), Washington played Iraq's long downtrodden Shia against its Sunni minority, igniting a wider Sunni-Shia conflict in the Arab world, notably in Syria.

In fact, Israel emerged as the sole strategic victor of the Bush/Cheney war against Iraq. That war, so far, has cost the US 4,500 soldiers killed, 35,700 wounded, 45,000 sick and over \$1 trillion. Iraq lies in ruins, likely shattered beyond all attempts to put it back together. No senior American or British official has faced trial for this disastrous, trumped-up war.

Nuri Maliki has totally excluded Sunnis from power in Iraq, and uses brutal secret police and torture to repress them. Small wonder he faces a major uprising. Iraq's oil-based economy remains in ruins. Many Iraqis believe their now wretched nation was far better off under Saddam Hussein, as brutal and clumsy as he was.

Interestingly, efforts by ISIS to forge an Islamic state in a merged Syria and Iraq is one of the first major challenges to the foul Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916 under which the British and French Empires secretly colluded to divide up the moribund Ottoman Empire's Mideast domains. Today's artificial Mideast borders were drawn by the Anglo-French imperialists to impose their rule on the region. Iraq and Syria were the most egregious examples.

ISIS appears set on erasing the British-French borders and re-creating the unified Ottoman province (Turkish: vilayat) of Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. In the West, the neocon-dominated commentariat calls ISIS terrorists. In the Mideast, many see them as anti-colonial fighters struggling to reunite the Arab world sundered and splintered by the western powers. The western powers are now preparing to strike back.

Columnist and author [Eric Margolis](#) is a veteran of many conflicts in the Middle East, Margolis recently was featured in a special appearance on Britain's Sky News TV as "the man who got it right" in his predictions about the dangerous risks and entanglements the US would face in Iraq. His latest book is [American Raj: Liberation or Domination?: Resolving the Conflict Between the West and the Muslim World](#).

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