

The Fall of Baghdad 16 Years Ago

A moment that defines the events now shaping our world

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Three weeks into the invasion of Iraq, coalition forces led by the US army entered Baghdad and formally occupied it on April 9, 2003. The city's infrastructure was seriously damaged. The Al-Yarmouk Hospital in the south received about 100 new patients every hour at the time of fighting. And many treasures at the National Museum of Iraq—from ancient Mesopotamia and early Islamic culture—were stolen or broken while the Iraqi National Library and National Archives housing thousands of manuscripts from civilisations dating as far back as 7,000 years were burned down and many of its items destroyed.

Like it was an attack on the past, the invasion, from when it occurred, has also proved to be an attack on the future of civilisation. But to most Iraqis, that was obvious from the get-go.

In his eyewitness account of “liberated” Iraq in May 2003, Radio France Internationale’s Tony Cross recalled seeing daily protests against the Americans. Of witnessing western boys of 18-25 years-old standing with their tanks and advanced military equipment, looking fearful (and helpful sometimes) of the host population whose language none of them understood. The most interesting contradiction he points to was between the widely held believe among Iraqis that there was a Zionist-American plot to wipe out their history and subdue them through prolonged occupation, versus a 23-year-old US marine’s statement that,

“I talked to a few Iraqis yesterday and some of them said that they didn’t really like us being here. But we liberated them, so I hope they appreciate it.”

Years later, ordinary people in the west still don’t understand the true nature of the horror that it brought to Iraq. In an April 2013 poll by ComRes supported by Media Lens, 44 percent of people estimated that less than 5,000 Iraqis had died since 2003, while 59 percent believed that fewer than 10,000 had died—out of 2,021 respondents. The more likely estimate, according to most independent sources, is in excess of one million.

In 2010, WikiLeaks’ disclosure of 391,832 US army field reports of the Iraq War from 2004 to 2009 exposed that the army itself recorded 109,000 deaths among which 66,081 were civilians. Aided by these documents, Iraq Body Count, which has compiled the most comprehensive record of deaths caused by the war, confirmed the death toll to have exceeded 150,000 in 2010 with roughly 80 percent of them being civilians.

The leaks moreover revealed information about the torture of Iraqis, including by British forces. Adding to the worldwide condemnation that followed Seymour Hersh’s disclosure on the gruesome and humiliating torture carried out by American soldiers on Iraqis in Abu

Ghraib. In his 2004 report published by *The New Yorker*, Hersh had earlier shed light on a 53-page report by Major General Antonio Taguba, who wrote that

“between October and December of 2003 there were numerous instances of ‘sadistic, blatant, and wanton criminal abuses’ at Abu Ghraib.”

That included:

“Breaking chemical lights and pouring the phosphoric liquid on detainees; pouring cold water on naked detainees; beating detainees with a broom handle and a chair; threatening male detainees with rape; allowing a military police guard to stitch the wound of a detainee who was injured after being slammed against the wall in his cell; sodomising a detainee with a chemical light and perhaps a broom stick, and using military working dogs to frighten and intimidate detainees with threats of attack, and in one instance actually biting a detainee.”

Such brutality naturally created resentment. And that resentment could just as well have inspired the formation of forces such as ISIS and their ferocious treatment of those they saw as their enemy or opponent.

Yet, it was as if no lessons were learned by western governments. Who used the same blueprint of exploiting lies and deceptions to concoct new wars. In the case of Syria, by fostering tensions between Shiites and Sunnis, to cause its government to overreact by increasing paranoia of an imminent coup, and use that to get Islamic extremists to act against the Syrian government.

And also in Libya, through similar destabilising efforts, followed by more direct intervention which overthrew its government and created a quagmire in what was the wealthiest country in all of Africa before the 2011 NATO intervention—a country where less people lived below the poverty line than in the Netherlands, where there is now a thriving slave market according to the UN.

As former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi warned prior to him being overthrown by NATO—and sodomised with a bayonet and killed by extremist forces on live television—without a unified and stable Libya, there would be no one to control countless migrants from Africa and the Middle East from fleeing to Europe. And that is exactly what happened since, turning American political scientist Samuel Huntington’s theory of Clash of Civilisation now into near reality.

So what should we make of the fall of Baghdad 16 years ago, or the broader invasion and destruction of Iraq, which by now has clearly turned out to be one of the most important events of the 21st century?

One, that greed for power often causes leaders of powerful countries to lie their citizens into waging wars against less powerful nations. And given the sophistry of modern weaponry, those wars are now costlier in terms of destroying human lives than ever.

Two, this is especially true for democracies, where, as Julian Assange explains, “wars are a result of lies”—lies such as Iraq has weapons of mass destruction, Gaddafi is providing Viagra to his soldiers to rape women, Assad is attacking unarmed Syrian civilians, etc., all of

which have now been proven untrue.

Third, had these lies been exposed early enough, there is a chance that all these wars could have been avoided, and millions of lives spared. However, as most mainstream media outlets became the “stenographer of great power”, as John Pilger describes it, opting to spread lies and propaganda, rather than tell truth to the public and report the facts, the exposure of these lies came too late.

Fourth, the public has entered a state of mind where they can repeatedly be lied into wars. Where through some form of mental gymnastics, they seem to convince themselves time and again that: “this time they are taking us to war for humanitarian reasons, not for greed or for power.” Giving the impression that they are suffering from some sort of mass mind-control. Which is the ultimate goal of propaganda.

That is why it is so important for alternative sources to inform the public about the true nature of wars. To record and reveal the real history of events that shape our world and to counter propaganda with facts. Because if we are to learn anything from the Iraq War and its subsequent events, it is that: “If wars can be started by lies, peace can be started by truth.”

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