

A DUMMY'S GUIDE TO

IRAQ

by Ahmed Habib

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Ten years after America's war

**DEDICATED TO THE PEOPLE OF IRAQ,
WHEREVER THEY MAY BE.**

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WHAT IS IRAQ? 10,000 BC – 1932

For many, Iraq is everything. Not out of nationalism, but out of an unbreakable bond between the destiny of a nation and the fate of its inhabitants. Exiled, widowed, or broken apart, the lives of Iraqis, more than thirty million of whom live within its borders, ten million living outside, have been determined by the tumultuous history that is Iraq. However, to fully understand the present, and gain perspectives on the future, contextualizing Iraq within historical developments is important, to say the least.

The Iraqis are a people bound by the history of their land, partly imposed, partly carved out by their resilience. They are Arabs and Kurds, Azeris, Armenians and Assyrians, descendants of different times, each carrying with them their respective stories in their language or faith. Many know Iraq through the depth of its culture, the magic of its Maqam, the wisdom of its poetry, and the languages and dialects of its tongue. To others, Iraq is the dignity of their homes, the pride in their mother's eyes, and the tears welled up in their father's soul.

Iraq is a story told at a school in London, or a conversation overheard on the bus in Sodertalje. It is a slum in Damascus, and people sitting on the sidewalk in Amman, selling their lives at the lowest price. Iraq induces anger and frustration in the same way it nurtures imagination and strength. It is football and food to some, and graveyards and begging to others.

Iraq is not immune to class disparities or patriarchy, nor is it free of religious fundamentalism and tribal mentalities. But, to attribute these phenomena as natural outcomes of the way Iraqis are is false and racist. The social conditions that determine the everyday lives of Iraqis, wherever it may exist, are designed by historical events that need to be accounted for, laid out on the table for all to see, dissected and understood.

Iraq is ancient, holding in its soil thousands of years of meaning and substance to the minds of people who try and grasp its identity. Writing, the twenty four hour day, map making, astronomy, medicine, and irrigation are just some of the scientific developments that have their origins in Iraq. Although the word "Iraq" has only been used for two thousand years, the fertile land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, where modern Iraq exists, has been inhabited from as early as 10,000BC. For many, Iraq is known as the "Cradle of Civilizations," a name that is proudly held on to by Iraqis to this day.

The legacy of Iraq as a center of scientific and cultural activity continued into the middle ages. From the 8th to the 13th centuries, Baghdad was regarded as an international center of learning and science. Scholars from around the Abbasid empire came to Baghdad to revel in the magic of places such as the House of Wisdom (Bayt Al Hikma) to learn from texts that were being translated from different languages into Arabic. At one

point, Baghdad was the largest metropolis in the world, with a population of over 1.2 million people. Even much later on, in the nineteen sixties and seventies, Baghdad would recapture the hearts of Arabs with waves of cultural production that shaped the region's literature, poetry, and art.

Like honey on a hungry day, Baghdad's wealth also attracted invaders. Most notably, the city was sacked and plundered by the Mongols in 1258, and eventually came under the rule of the Ottomans for almost 400 years (1533-1918).

Throughout the Ottoman period, Iraq was a battle ground for rival powers which brought with it an entrenchment of tribalism and sectarianism, a reality that continues to haunt its people to this day.

As well, the Ottomans, an empire that was rapidly expanding throughout the so-called Middle East, put into place a set of reforms that aimed to tie Iraq into the global market place. This had a series of effects on the socio-political make up of the country.

Western commercial interests began taking root in the cities of Iraq, and the master worker relationship began to take root, Iraq being the latter.

The Ottomans eventually were defeated by the British at the end of the First World War, and a new empire took control; Iraq was declared a British mandate, and a monarchy was installed to rule the country on behalf of their British masters.

However, the arrogant aspirations of British colonialism in Iraq would suffer an immediate blow. As news of the mandate reached the cities and villages of Iraq in May of 1920, the streets erupted in a mass revolt against the impending British occupation.

The declaration that Iraq was under British control, and the installation of King Faisal I to rule as a British administrator angered Iraqis who were increasingly seeing themselves as a sovereign people, an identity that began shaping itself more clearly towards the end of the Ottoman Empire.

The Great Iraqi Revolution would ensue, and it would not only form an ominous thorn in the side of the empire, but it would act as a critical moment in the formation of Iraqi national identity, shaping the building blocks that would form modern Iraq.

The integration of the country's major religious sects into the political process and the closing of gaps between city dwellers and agrarian tribes over resource allocation were a watershed moment in the country's inception.

For the British, an aging empire and a feverish anti colonial sentiment made Iraq ever more difficult to rule. Despite having put a client monarch in place to rule Iraq as a British mandate, the social, political and economic costs was still too high.

The status of Iraq needed to change, and a new relationship in which the British would assume less direct responsibility, yet maintain a similar level of influence needed to emerge. As such, the British granted Iraq its independence in 1932, and the Kingdom of Iraq was born.

WHO WERE THE KINGS OF IRAQ? 1932 – 1958

The end of British rule in Iraq came as a result of Iraqis increasing the social and economic cost of direct colonialism. The revolution in Iraq, coupled with growing anti colonial sentiment in many other places in the world forced the British to reexamine the way in which they were administering their empire. Instead of a direct form of rule that was expensive and easy to attack, the British set up a monarchy with a strong illusion of independence, but with little autonomy beyond that.

In 1921, King Faisal I was installed as a pro-British client ruler, and became Iraq's first sovereign leader after the country was given its new territorial title in 1932. The King came from a royal dynasty that called itself the Hashemites, leaning on the family name of the prophet Mohammed to gain legitimacy and exude a sense of Arab and Muslim authenticity.

The Hashemites claimed to be from Hejaz, from modern Saudi Arabia, and in addition to being the Kings of Iraq, they were the Kings of Jordan, the Sharif of Mecca, the Kings of Syria, and the Imams of Yemen. They played a critical part in the formation of the modern Arab world by closely aligning themselves with European powers.

The Hashemites facilitated colonialism and signed several agreements and decisions that entrenched imperialism in the Arab world. This included the Balfour Declaration, which gave birth to Apartheid Israel.

The Hashemites attempted to position themselves as sophisticated tribal leaders of an "independent" Arab world, but this was widely rejected by the people of the region, who wanted to form societies that were involved in the development of their nations, where resources were shared and used to develop infrastructure and not palatial wealth.

The majority of Iraqis considered King Faisal I and his successors to be foreigners, and an extension of British control in their country. The Iraqis would never allow it. As such, the monarchy in Iraq was rocked with continuous uprisings from different sectors and groups in Iraq.

The Monarchy's greatest challenge came with the outbreak of the Second World War which saw the resurgence of inter-imperial rivalry on the soil of Iraq. Nazi Germany and the British fought a proxy war in Iraq, and a coup d'état took place within the royal courts in favor of the Germans. Eventually the Nazis were defeated, and the British, bolstered by the victory, effectively reoccupied Iraq.

This reenergized British dominance of Iraq and culminated in the Baghdad Pact of 1955. It was a military alliance that was modeled after NATO between Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom. Opposition to this agreement was fierce and would later provide to be a critical instigator of a series of changes that would eventually bring down the Kings of Iraq.

The Iraqi monarchy's close alliance with the British government was in complete contradiction to the Arab Nationalist aspirations of the people of Iraq, part of a regional fire that was eating away at the seat of colonialism.

The Israeli-European aggression on Egypt of 1956, economic depression throughout Iraq, and an epidemic of social marginalization eventually led to the Iraqi revolution of 1958, bringing about the death of King Faisal II and the end of the monarchy in Iraq.

WHY WAS THE OVERTHROW OF THE IRAQI MONARCHY IMPORTANT? 1958- 1963

Like all revolutions, the overthrow of the monarchy in Iraq, didn't form itself overnight. It came from a long process of radicalization that was coming to life within different sectors of Iraqi society. Classrooms were alight with a revolutionary spirit, inspired by the dignified sense of self determination that was sweeping the entire region. The formation of the United Arab States between Egypt, Syria and North Yemen (1958), the European-Israeli attack on the Suez Canal (1956), and the strengthening of anti colonial struggle around the world all fed fire into domestic grievances.

At home, economic conditions were depressed, and Iraqis felt that they were not receiving a fair percentage from the development of their oil fields by foreign companies. Decisions on the building of the country's infrastructure were made in cahoots with British consultants like the prominent British industrialist Lord Salter, and young Iraqis felt increasingly sidelined in any nation building process that was taking place.

On 14 July 1958, a group of young officers in the Iraqi military, led a unit of the Iraqi army into Baghdad, took over the radio and television building, and attacked the royal palaces. They called themselves the Free Officers, inspired by a group of the same name

in Egypt, which was led by Jamal Abdul Nasser, and overthrew the Cairo monarchy six years earlier.

King Faisal II and his family were killed, and the monarchy was replaced by a Revolutionary Council that brought representation from different sects of Iraq, and was headed by Brigadier General Abdul Kareem Qasim, who was to be Iraq's new Prime Minister and Minister of Defense. On the airwaves, and throughout cities and villages, Iraq was announced as a republic, and the people were promised elections and representative democracy. A nation rejoiced.

Abdul Kareem Qasim was a school teacher that joined the military, and rose through its ranks. He fought against Israel in the wake of the Palestinian Nakba, and emerged as an underground leader of opposition groups that formed within the Iraqi army.

During the five years that he ruled, Qasim would live true to his simple working class background, and change many of the legal and political institutions that were put in place by kings and empires for hundreds of years.

He set out to reverse the effects of a feudal system of land distribution, so that peasants would be more fairly compensated for their work on the farms of Iraq. Qasim also made fundamental changes to the legal status of women in the country, outlawing polygamy, protecting women during divorce proceedings, establishing a minimum age for marriage, and giving women equal rights in matters of inheritance.

Other social reforms included the development of the educational system, housing, and healthcare. He also sought to diversify the agrarian based economy to include industrial activity. Most notably, Qasim's government nationalized the Iraqi oil industry, directing the majority of profits from the sale of this critical natural resource to the people of Iraq themselves.

This does not mean that there were not many difficulties that were associated with Qasim's rule. Despite a very successful relationship between Qasim and the Kurdish community, in which Qasim recognized Kurdistan as a distinct nation within Iraq, an armed uprising was carried out by the Kurds in 1961 over demands for greater autonomy.

Qasim's refusal to join the United Arab Republic with Jamal Abdul Nasser of Egypt also fueled unrest and led to mass rioting by Arab nationalists in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul. This led to many rifts within the Iraqi political landscape on the question of pan Arabism and the extent of Iraq's involvement in this ambitious project.

The most ardent opposition to Qasim and the revolution would come from the United States, who was alarmed by the emergence of a progressive national government that

was closely allied with the Soviet Union, America's arch nemesis throughout the Cold War, which was shaping the world, and even Iraq itself.

America saw a revolutionary Iraq as a direct threat to its interests in the region. The USA and the West loathed the idea of people in the global south trying to determine their own fate, and distribute their own resources.

As such, America would not sit idle. From Cuba to Vietnam, America put into place a violent strategy to bring self determined people, whom it considered disobedient slaves, well within the sphere of their influence.

In Iraq, this resulted in a CIA backed coup that saw the murder of Abdul Kareem Qasim, and the imposition of the Ba'athists and Saddam. The colonization of Iraq would enter in to a new stage.

HOW DID THE BA'ATHISTS AND SADDAM HUSSEIN TAKE CONTROL? 1963 – 1979

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the American government was engaged in a policy of supporting undemocratic coups to undermine the legitimate aspirations of people in the global south. For the large part, this policy was tied to the Cold War in which the United States wanted to target Soviet influence through a policy of containment.

America's war on democracy was also in response to the emergence of many anti colonial movements throughout the world that aimed to dismantle the system of exploitation and racism that the West and their agents had deployed against the majority of the world's population.

From the coup in Iran of 1953 (the British named it Operation Boot) which deposed a democratically elected parliament that decided to nationalize Iranian oil to the murder of Congolese independence leader Patrice Lumumba who helped the Republic of Congo gain independence from genocidal Belgian colonization in 1960, the Americans and the West were on a mission to reestablish colonial dominance throughout the world. This policy is documented by the American government itself, and is an undeniable matter of fact.

Within this context of American terror, it is easy to understand why the violent overthrow of the Qasim regime was something that America wanted to pursue. It was a necessary step to dash the hopes of Iraqis in having a direct say in the direction taken by their own country. America saw Iraq as a resource wealthy country with tremendous strategic value in the Middle East.

Before the coup of 1963, and the eventual assassination of Qasim, America was keeping a close eye on internal political rifts, entertaining the possibility of direct assassination several years before, including a failed attempt carried out by Saddam Hussein himself.

On February 9, 1963, the bodies of Abdul Karim Qasim and his fellows were displayed on television for millions of Iraqis to see. This followed a mock trial on Iraqi radio and a subsequent death sentence that was carried out the same day. The coup which put into place the Ba'ath party, lasted between February 8 and 10, and cost the lives of more than 5,000 people, almost all of whom were communist activists in the country. The names of many these activists were provided to the Ba'ath controlled Iraqi National Guardsmen by America themselves.

The Ba'ath party had, in fact, been working closely with the Americans to fight against progressive elements in Iraq, for a considerable amount of time. Throughout the late fifties, they had kept the Americans abreast of details about their membership and activity in the country. There was documented cooperation on several details of the coup, laying the ground for a relationship that would determine Iraq's future for the next several decades.

For five years, the Ba'ath party ruled Iraq with little vision and experience, giving way to the emergence of a more centralized strong man approach of ruling the party and the country. In 1968, a coup took place within the Ba'ath party itself; a reflection of the widening rifts between left and right pan-Arabists in the country, with almost ten thousands communists still rotting in Iraqi jails. After 1968, the Ba'ath party operated like a true dictatorship, with Saddam Hussein as vice President running a violent security apparatus that cleansed the Iraqi political scene of any opposition to the party line.

The growth of Saddam's power came at the blessing of the United States, who enjoyed a close relationship with the leader after courting him extensively in the early sixties. After the initial failed assassination attempt on Qasim's life, Saddam had to flee Iraq, and it was during this time that the Americans took him under their wings in Cairo. This relationship between Saddam and America would form the cornerstone of Saddam's rise to the presidency in 1979, and his first exercise in foreign policy: the war with Iran.

WHY DID THE IRAQ IRAN WAR TAKE PLACE? 1979 – 1988

Saddam officially became president of Iraq five months after the Iranian revolution of 1979, where religious clerics replaced the Iranian monarchy to create the Islamic Republic of Iran. Poor economic conditions, an absence of civil liberties, and a corrupt and opulent monarchy all led to a populist and nationalist uprising which was taken over by religious leaders in Iran.

The new Iranian government was staunchly anti American and wanted to position itself as a regional power that would play a direct role in undermining American influence in the Middle East, and throughout the world. These tensions culminated in incidents such as the taking of American hostages in the US embassy in 1979, an act that was fully exploited by the racist public relations machinations of the American government.

The Americans sounded the alarm to its allies in the region that Iran was a threat that wanted to dominate and spread its religious revolution to neighboring countries. In response, the oil rich states of the Gulf agreed to sponsor an Iraqi war with Iran to counter this threat.

The Iranian Revolution of 1979, and America's orchestrated response, allowed the United States to turn a region that had organized a boycott of oil sales in protest of American support of Israel six years earlier into a collective of eager supporters for an American proxy war with Iran.

Saddam played a critical part in facilitating this, by leasing out the blood and soul of his country for the war, and was rewarded with celebrity status in the region, emerging as a savior of Arabic pride. It was a tragic travesty that bankrupted Iraq of its people, a price they are still paying to this day.

For almost eight years, the Iraqis and Iranians fought America's war leading to the death of almost a million people, mostly young men from both sides. The United States, despite its explicit support for Iraq, sold weapons to both sides. Chemical weapons were used, and the war provided a great platform for a genocidal campaign against the Kurdish people of Iraq.

The Iran – Iraq war was a glaring example of how local dictators, empowered by American military might, and propped by aspirations of grandeur could bring so much destruction to their people. It was a model that embodied America's relationship with Saddam, and Saddam's relationship with Iraq. For the Iranians, the war with Iraq entrenched the new government's rule over its people, leaving very little room for organic growth and development in their country.

Saddam allowed America to extend its dominance on the back of Iraqis, and set the stage for an era of super dominance in the decades to come.

WHY DID IRAQ OCCUPY KUWAIT? 1988 – 1990

The two years following the end of the Iraq – Iran War are always fondly remembered as a golden period. The death of hundreds of thousands of young men meant that each

home in Iraq was destroyed by the loss of a brother, son, father, or husbands. Despite that, thousands of people took to the streets to celebrate the end of the war on 8/8/88. A new sense of relief and optimism was being molded out from the rubble of broken dreams.

For America and Saddam, each perceived the war as setting the stage for a campaign to achieve even greater gains. America was in search of a way to strengthen its presence in the oil rich Gulf, strengthened by the fall of the Soviet Union and driven by the Washington Consensus, a new economic policy undertaken by the US government, the World Bank, and the IMF to accelerate the process of corporate exploitation throughout the world. Saddam, on the other hand wanted to act out on his self image of the great leader of the Arab world, a delusion strengthened by unequivocal American and Western support to his war with Iran. Once again, using Iraq, its wealth, the might of its people to fulfill America's and Saddam's dreams would unfortunately make perfect sense.

Within a year of the end of the Iraq-Iran war, Saddam started accusing Kuwait and Saudi Arabia of price fixing in the oil market, an activity that he considered to be an act of war. He made no secret of the fact that he felt incensed by the lack of gratitude shown by the two countries, and the Gulf in general, for the eight year war he fought with Iran to protect them.

Saddam's ego coupled with America's greed created the perfect conditions for Saddam to send the Iraqi military over the southern border into Kuwait on August 2, 1990. Although Saddam was given the green light to settle Arab-Arab issues by the United States, president Bush Sr. immediately declared the invasion as an attack on the free world and put in motion one of the world's largest military operations.

Saddam's celebrity status elevated through the roof as his face was plastered on television screens throughout the world, with round the clock news networks such as CNN covering nothing other than the impending war against the people of Iraq. Although Saddam was portrayed as an international villain, his move to invade oil rich Kuwait, was seen by millions of people around the world as a heroic act of resistance against the empire. Both Saddam's ego and America's aspirations were satisfied. The plot was written, the stage was set, and the performance received rave reviews.

For the Americans, Saddam's invasion of Kuwait allowed them to place more than 950,000 troops on the ground in the Gulf along with the most advanced arsenal of weapons known to humankind. It was an exhibition of power like no American military official could have imagined.

It was the end of the Cold War, and the United States needed to celebrate its uncontested dominance in the world, building and leading a coalition of more than 35 countries, including France and the United Kingdom. So the Americans threw a party for

the military industrial complex, ideologically motivated war mongers, oil companies, and intelligence agencies, and it was all on the expense of the people of Iraq.

Neither Saddam's illusions of grandeur nor America's appetite for dominance would be satisfied without the largest use of firepower in the world, targeting an unarmed civilian population and a beaten down ill prepared group of conscripted young men, known as the Iraqi Army.

WHAT WAS OPERATION DESERT STORM? 1991

The name Operation Desert Storm was thought up by some public relations office in or near the Pentagon: America's Ministry of Defense. It was emblazoned on t-shirts and hats across the United States. It was America's new moment as a great nation, characterized by its endless need for war, enemies, and states of emergency, key to drumming up money and nationalist craze.

For Iraqis, the days leading up to the deadline of January 15, 1991 were filled with terror and uncertainty. Most knew that Saddam would not withdraw, and this mass buildup of firepower would eventually erupt in their skies, on their heads, and through their windows.

International news agencies covered the war like cheerleaders celebrating the buildup to a sporting event. Press releases from American officials constructed a discourse that was familiar, but for the first time, would be consumed with little or no resistance. Iraq was sketched out as the enemy, and America was marketed as the superhero, ready to protect the world from this new scourge. A dichotomy fuelled by racism and violence, the two cornerstones of American foreign policy.

Under the spotlights of cameras and at the behest of an adrenalin-pumped army equipped with the most advanced arsenal of arms known to mankind, the deadline for Saddam to withdraw from Kuwait conveniently passed, and on January 16, 1991, Operation Desert Storm would erupt. America led a coalition, authorized by the United Nations, in a military campaign that would kill over a hundred thousand Iraqis in just over a month.

For the first time in history, a mass murder of this scale was televised to global audiences around the clock. Bombs were outfitted with cameras, military officials took over the airwaves, and reporters were put into tanks and on battleships like never before. For people sitting at home, it was a new form of entertainment that would reshape the news industry and the way we consume information in a fundamental way. Viewers would no longer be sufficed with short summaries of the daily news, nor did they care about any form of analysis, they wanted to watch the war like a reality TV

show broadcast 24 hours a day with all the engineered emotions and reactions that came with it.

For Iraqis, Operation Desert Storm, or the Gulf War as it was known by cheeky pundits, was the most violent campaign of terrorism they had yet to endure. Jet fighters from around the world didn't give the Baghdad sky a rest, and dropped bombs on homes, water treatment plants, power stations, cement plants, medicine factories, refineries, radio and telephone networks, airports, railways and bridges.

On February 13, 1991, the United States Air Force dropped two laser guided "smart bombs" into the Amiriyah Bomb Shelter, a large bunker used by civilians in a western neighborhood of Baghdad. That night, 408 civilians, mostly women and children, were burned to death in a calculated attack that was intended to break the people of Iraq. America would claim that the bunker was being used by Saddam's military intelligence, and Saddam would deny this, and this was an embodiment of how everyday Iraqis were paying the price for a military production co-produced by the Pentagon and Saddam.

More firepower was used against Iraq in 44 days than throughout the entire Second World War, and that was a war that lasted four years and included the use of two nuclear bombs in the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Everything that was vital to a dignified life was destroyed. The Gulf War specifically targeted civilians.

The campaign was not limited to Baghdad. It was felt throughout Iraq, and it was meant to fulfill the promise of the American Secretary of State at the time, James Baker, which was to reduce Iraq to the pre-industrial age. Although the destruction in Iraq was quantifiable in blood and stone, the political ramifications that the war had on the region was very tangible as well.

In the words of America's president at the time, George Bush Sr., the Gulf War ushered in a "New World Order." The United States would build a series of permanent military bases throughout the oil rich states of the Gulf, and the use of military power would solidify itself in the lexicon of world politics alongside terms such as "Liberation," and "Humanitarian Intervention." America would emerge from the Gulf War as the new emperor of the world, and Iraq would be forever doomed to live at the mercy of its rulers.

Whereas the people of Iraq were busy trying to glue their lives together in the aftermath of the war, Saddam emerged as a strengthened despotic ruler of the country, and, in his mind, comfortably claimed the status of defender of the Global South in the eyes of millions of oppressed peoples around the world desperately seeking dignity and a hero. During the war, Americans had theatrically urged Iraqis to rise up, and they did, only to be crushed by Iraqi helicopters that were permitted to fly by the United States themselves.

In a finale fit for horror films, the American Air Force obliterated retreating Iraqi troops from Kuwait along what would be forever known as the Highway of Death. Tens of thousands of young Iraqi men, forced into military service, were murdered in a mass act of sacrifice to the gods of war and violence. They were hungry, tired, and ill-prepared soldiers, many of whom were walking back to their homes across different cities in Iraq. With this final act of terror, the “liberation” of Kuwait was complete, and Iraq would enter into a new era of genocide, under the United Nations imposed sanctions that would haunt its people throughout the Nineties.

HOW WAS THE KURDISH AUTONOMOUS REGION FORMED? 1991

One of the most important developments of the Gulf War would be a military and political act that still has an impact on Iraq to this day. In an act reminiscent of old style colonialism, the American-British-French victors of the Gulf War decided to effectively divide up Iraq into three areas, where the north and south of the country would be outside the sovereignty of Iraq, as they would be declared no-fly zones. From 1991 to 2003, foreign jet fighters would lay claim to Iraqi skies, regularly dropping bombs and firing ammunition on military installations on the ground. The war had never really ended. In fact, in 1998, the Americans would launch Operation Desert Fox, killing civilians, but little mention of that is ever made.

In the public eye, the no-fly zones were presented as necessary measures taken to protect the predominantly Kurdish population in the North of Iraq, and the predominantly Shiite population of the South. This was the first time that the Shiites of Iraq were being explicitly referred to by the United States as a distinctly separate part of the population. Although there have been decades of genuine grievances by different sects of Iraq, the clear and distinct way in which a particular religious sect was publicly being referred to by foreign powers would put in motion a sectarian language that would come back to haunt Iraqis when America occupies the country twelve years later.

The establishment of the no fly zones meant very little to Iraq’s south, with cities and towns well within the reach of Saddam, and his state of terror. However, in the North, it established a *de facto* autonomous region for the Kurds of Iraq. From 1991 onward, Saddam would no longer have any say over matters in the Iraqi North. Historically, the Kurdish population of Iraq has violently been oppressed by Saddam, including the use of chemical weapons against villages and cities in the North.

The right of Kurds to self determination is widely supported by progressive movements around the world, and rightfully so. However, the establishment of a semi independent enclave governed by corrupt officials to further the agenda of imperialism in the region is not a fulfillment of the rights and aspirations of the Kurds in any way shape or form.

The establishment of a Kurdish Regional Government would ensue, and the presence of this political bloc would play a critical role in the way Iraq was perceived as a nation by its own citizens, and what role Kurds, as a people, would play in its future. Kurdish political powers would prove to be nepotistic, corrupt, and ineffective, much like their counterparts in Baghdad. However, relative calm and prosperity made the Kurdish Regional Government look like saviors to the untrained eyes of onlookers.

The reality for the Kurdish peoples of Iraq is that their struggle for self determination which is deeply rooted in progressive and internationalist roots was hijacked by American aspirations for the region. A neo-liberal project would ensue, with historical colonizers Turkey sharing in the wealth of development projects, and the Kurdish people would be ruled by a feudal system, where two parties, dominated by familial rule, would masquerade in parliamentarian attire.

For the rest of Iraq, the Kurdish Regional Government would continue to play a role of trying to take advantage of the destruction besetting Iraq to lay further claims to geography, resources, and political power throughout the Nineties and beyond. The establishment of an autonomous Kurdish region on the backs of the petrodollar funded Gulf War massacre of 1991 was an insult to the dignified legacy of freedom fighters that had embodied the struggle for Kurdish independence.

Criticism of the Kurdish Regional Government must not be conflated with bigoted attacks against the Kurdish people. However, the hijacking of a legitimate struggle for dignity and respect by a government built on the back of war and occupation is a devastating byproduct of American intervention in Iraq that must be noted and discussed.

WHAT HAPPENED DURING THE UN IMPOSED SANCTIONS ON IRAQ? 1991 – 2003

It is hard to believe that the aftermath of the Gulf War, a violent massacre that deliberately targeted civilians with modern weaponry, would actually be more destructive than the war itself. However, the Sanctions would prove this to be the case.

Shortly after Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, the United Nations Security Council passed resolution 661 which put a stringent trade ban on Iraq. The sanctions were designed to strip Iraq of its import and export capabilities and persuade it to withdraw from Kuwait to internationally-recognized borders, months after America gave a green light to Saddam to deal with Kuwait in the way which he saw fit.

In February 1991, Operation Desert Storm ousted the Iraqi army from Kuwait but the sanctions were to continue until the Americans occupied Iraq in 2003. However, as early

as 1996, the UN sanctions were beginning to erode Iraq's once-thriving middle class and debilitate the country's health care system. Despite several warnings by UN observers, the Sanctions remained to be a widely supported initiative by Western governments.

The UN estimated that up to 1.7 million Iraqis may have died as a result of the sanctions; 500,000 of them who were children under the age of 5, by 2003. That is a staggering figure and a measure of a haunting genocide, but only a fleeting moment in the continuing destruction of Iraq.

Many of them perished as a result of simple medical conditions, such as dehydration, infection, and diarrhea that could have been easily treated by most over-the-counter medicines found anywhere else in the world. In Iraq, children became victims of a genocidal policy that was meant to deeply entrench American dominance in the region, and prepare Iraq for the next step in its colonization: the American occupation.

Iraqi doctors were forced to treat patients without basic necessities such as painkillers, antibiotics and rubber gloves. These items and others including crutches, heart medicine, pencils, and water treatment supplies were banned for more than a decade. The UN sanctions regimen dictated that these items could have been potentially used by Saddam in pursuit of weapons of mass destruction. They labeled them as items of "dual use," and banned their entry into Iraq for the entirety of the embargo. The people of Iraq were being punished by the same governments who were profiting off selling all sorts of weapons to Saddam throughout the eighties. It was a tragic irony of epic proportions.

By the mid nineties, the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) warned that Iraqi children faced massive starvation. Three years later, Dennis Halliday resigned from his post as the UN humanitarian coordinator in Iraq, because he "refused to continue to take Security Council orders ... that had imposed and sustained genocidal sanctions on the innocent of Iraq". Despite that, the sanctions continued.

By 2001, Iraqi doctors began to report staggering increases in child cancer rates, as high as three or four times in cities like Basra, and urged the international community to lift the sanctions. Hospitals were waiting areas for death, and the country's infrastructure in all sectors began to crumble. Sewage treatment facilities, power stations, water distribution centers, and everything that was needed for sustenance was destroyed, again, after being deliberately targeted in the Gulf War. The absence of spare parts and much needed maintenance meant that these facilities would merely rot away.

Throughout the Sanctions, the people of Iraq might as well have lived on another planet. An entire population was cut off from the rest of the world, imprisoned, and forced to search for crumbs on the streets. The middle class virtually collapsed and as a result, many professionals left the country as they could not survive with very meager incomes.

It drove so many children to the street and the job market as families no longer afforded to keep their children in school, so large sections of the population became illiterate.

In 1996, as its own agencies began to warn of an impending humanitarian disaster, the UN Security Council passed resolution 986, which instituted the oil-for-food program to allow Iraq to sell oil and procure funds to buy food and medicines. However, a UN sanctions committee monitored how the money was spent and directed which food and medicines contracts were permissible.

Food and sustenance was rationed. Every month, mothers would stand in long line ups to get their hands on small amounts of rice, sugar, vegetable oil and other necessities. The human value of every Iraqi was measured and handed out to them in grams and liters. Iraqi doctors continued to say that the program fell far short of meeting the basic nutritional needs of many people.

By 1997, UNICEF found that nearly 1,000,000 children in central and southern Iraq were chronically malnourished. Iraq was starving to death.

The Oil for Food program was also known for its widespread corruption, allowing UN bureaucrats, Iraqi businessmen, and foreign companies to get rich off Iraqi government contracts. The corruption of the sanctions regime became so endemic that it became the norm for government conduct in the country, a mindset that would define the Iraqi public sector for years to come.

The Sanctions against Iraq were nothing short of genocide: a government policy intended to wipe out a particular people. Any analysis of contemporary Iraq must take these years into account. They are regularly glossed over by analysts as part of times gone by, but the reality is that the sanctions destroyed Iraq and Iraqis in a way that will be felt for many generations to come.

WHY DID THE UNITED STATES MILITARY CARRY OUT OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM? 2003

By the time, American jet fighters took to the skies over Iraq, for yet another time, in 2003, Iraq was already destroyed. The notion that America was attacking Iraq to rid the world of a violent threat, armed with Weapons of Mass Destruction, was laughable to anyone that knew the decrepit state of the Iraqi military, and the long history of Western arms sales to Saddam. The other excuse for the occupation, the liberation of Iraq, invoked an even greater sense of comedy amongst anyone who knew the level of collusion that existed for over thirty years between America and Saddam.

America's occupation of Iraq was nothing more than the execution of a new stage of war against the people of Iraq. What began in the late fifties with the overthrow of

progressive elements in Iraq, and continued in continued in the eighties with the use of Iraq to fight a bloody war against its neighbors Iran, to the American design of Saddam's occupation of Kuwait in nineteen ninety, and the subsequent genocidal sanctions for thirteen years, was now being continued with a full scale occupation of the country.

The reasons for America to go to war were driven by the geopolitical gains that could be made by the complete eradication of a nation state like Iraq, an oil rich country armed with the potential of its people to overthrow a dictator and govern their country and resources independently. America also had its eyes on the enormous financial gain that would come from the plunder of the country's wealth.

The occupation of Iraq was a new phase in the "war on terror," in which international law would be sidelined for the interest of one country's "national security." It would reify America's role as a leading military superpower. It was a highly sought after decision for the ideologically motivated right wing in America, armed with a religious interpretation of their role as saviors of the uncivilized South. Economically, a powerful military industrial complex and fears of instability within the capitalist castles of the richest nations in the world saw the occupation of Iraq as offering a great economic opportunity to countries whose outlook on the world has also been determined by profit above anything else.

The occupation of Iraq also provided powerful nations, and their corporate rulers, a tremendous opportunity to deal a powerful blow to civil society spaces around the world that organized so vehemently against the war. Millions of people took to the streets around the world in an unprecedented outpouring of dissent against a single foreign policy issue, only to be forced to helplessly watch the destruction of Iraq on their television sets.

On March 20, 2003, just after the break of dawn in Baghdad, the American Air Force began dropping millions of tons of ammunition on a city, already beaten by war and siege. It was a military operation that made a mockery of democracy and human rights, and had only one purpose in mind: the complete destruction of Iraq.

WEREN'T THE IRAQIS HAPPY TO GET RID OF SADDAM HUSSEIN? 2003

For more than thirty years, the people of Iraq lived under a dictatorship, where thugs ran a wealthy country through fear and violence. Countless Iraqis were imprisoned, executed, and deported as Saddam's obsession with himself manifested itself in a system where the slightest forms of dissent would be met with sadistic acts of terror.

Under Saddam, Iraq's human and natural wealth would be steadily siphoned into the pockets of his friends and family, international arms dealers, and into a maniacal project

to develop and maintain a flailing military machine. By design, Iraq's potential would be squandered systematically until it would no longer be able to sustain itself.

There is no doubt that the people of Iraq, who paid the heaviest price for Saddam's reign, wanted to see Saddam go. It is their country that was hijacked by his rule, it was their children who fought wars on his behalf, and it was their future that was buried under the rubble of destruction which he orchestrated to the benefit of everyone but Iraq.

However, for a people with a revolutionary past, the Iraqis themselves wanted to be the ones to transform their society from a corrupt and terrifying democracy into a country that respects human rights and the rule of law. For millions of Iraqis who buried their families during the Iraq – Iran war, or the Gulf War, or the Sanctions, the role of America in destroying Iraq was clear. No one in Iraq mistook the war and occupation as an act driven by American concern for their freedom.

Not only had the United States help thrust Saddam down the collective throat of Iraqis, but it was their foreign policy that destroyed any chance for the people of Iraq to rise up and bring down his regime like they did when they challenged British colonialism and monarchy in the past. America's support of genocidal practice against the people of Iraq that killed millions and destroyed the lives of millions more was the best way for the United States to ensure that the people of Iraq would never be able to forge a path to self determination on their own.

Ten years after the American occupation of Iraq, billed as an act of liberation, named perversely as "Operation Iraqi Freedom," the people of Iraq have nothing to be happy about. The current Iraqi government operates with the same disregard to human rights and the rule of law. The people of Iraq are in no way shape or form living in conditions that can be considered democratic or safe.

The main difference between the current Iraqi government and that of Saddam, is that the Saddam regime was better at terrorizing its population. Saddam was able to imprison, torture, and execute Iraqis in a much more systematic way. He was America's dictator. He was the jail warden for a nation during the Sanctions. The new government is intent on the same form of oppression, but is still competing for total dominance, and the ability to terrorize its people with greater efficiency.

From the onset of the American occupation, the United States military worked closely with and funded sectarian militias and killing squads, who would later form the security backbone of the current Iraqi government to setup torture chambers and underground prisons. These efforts were established by the American government under the rubric of counterinsurgency, intended to quell any form of resistance to the occupation, and were reminiscent of the tactics they used for the same purpose throughout the eighties in Latin America.

As a result of the occupation and its aftermath, the dream of every Iraqi to overthrow Saddam turned into yet another nightmare.

WHO GOVERNED IRAQ RIGHT AFTER THE AMERICANS OCCUPIED IT? 2003 – 2005

On April 9, 2003, a large statue of Saddam was toppled by American soldiers in a famous Baghdad square as part of a made-for-the-camera act to thank foreign correspondents of major news agencies who were active participants of the military operation to occupy Iraq. On that day, the United States took control of Baghdad, ushering in a regime of direct American military rule.

For almost two years, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) was the supreme executive, legislative, and judicial authority in Iraq. The CPA would be headed by the new Governor of Iraq, Paul Bremer III, who issued 100 orders that fundamentally changed the laws of the land, having an impact on every single facet of life in Iraq.

Order #2 dissolved the Iraqi military, putting millions of young Iraqi men out of work, and paved the way for the complete dissolution of the Iraqi state, and the privatization of all state enterprises in the country. Order #39 allowed for complete foreign ownership of Iraqi businesses, tax free profits for foreign investors, and the, “transition from a non-transparent centrally planned economy to a market economy.”

Others orders passed by Governor Bremer III gave foreign contractors full immunity from Iraqi law, a decree that was celebrated in the head offices of private security companies in the United States, the same companies that would later be responsible for many massacres of innocent Iraqi civilians.

The corporate tax rate would be slashed, and foreign banks would be allowed to be major owners in Iraqi banks. Bremer’s Orders put American appointed auditors in every government ministry for the next five years, with sweeping powers to dish out contracts, and hire and fire as they please.

Iraq was officially open for business.

One of the most iconic Orders passed by Paul Bremer III was order #81: “Patent, Industrial Design, Undisclosed Information, Integrated Circuits and Plant Variety Law.” Under this new decree, Iraqi farmers who have been cultivating wheat on that land for more than 10,000 years, were forced to stop using their own seeds and had to purchase patented seeds that were being sold by multinational corporations. It was the proverbial slap in the face.

Even the safety standards of a car horn were outlined in these Orders. When Paul Bremer III officially handed over authorities to the Iraqi Governing Council, and Ayad Allawi, a former Saddam henchman and CIA agent, the law of the land was already laid.

There was very little to do except administer the destruction of Iraq. What would follow would be one of the largest systematic thefts of a nation's wealth. America and the West could once again invoke their fond memories of the plunder of Africa and the New World. In the first two years alone, billions of Dollars of Iraqi money would go missing. It was the heist of a century.

ISN'T THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT IN IRAQ CONSTITUTIONAL AND DEMOCRATICALLY ELECTED? 2005 – PRESENT

One of the most fundamental changes that was imposed during the regime of Paul Bremer III was the establishment of the Iraqi Governing Council. More specifically, it was the establishment of ethnic and sectarian divisions through a puppet governing body.

The Iraqi Governing Council, mostly made up of political figures with absolutely no connection to contemporary Iraq, many with close ties to American and British intelligence services, was divided into two major religious sects, and different ethnic groups.

On the surface, this looks like a noble act on behalf of the Americans who wanted to ensure that all groups were represented in the governance of the "New Iraq." But, in reality, this was a deliberate move to superimpose sectarian identities over national ones, and by that, set the scene for a divided Iraq that would be easy to control.

It is through this sectarian mantra, where the President must be Kurdish, and the Prime Minister must be Shiite, and the Speaker of the Parliament must be Sunni, that so called democracy in Iraq would be built. Militias armed with this sectarian mandate, given to them by Uncle Sam, would terrorize the people of Iraq, culminating in a civil war that would see the death of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis.

It is within this poisonous atmosphere, that a transitional government was elected in January 2005, only days after the United States military armed with white phosphorous and other internationally banned weaponry, launched a second full scale attack on the city of Fallujah. It is within this divisive environment, that the government drafted and passed a constitution that codified American imposed sectarianism into the country's political fabric.

Sects and ethnicities had existed in Iraq long before Saddam and the Americans came, and grievances and violence had existed previously. With the tacit support of the United

States, Saddam exacerbated ideological and class disparities between one sect and another, making it easier for the American occupation to trigger a flood of sectarian killing that would be used to further destroy Iraq.

The new government in Iraq, and subsequent governments since, is sectarian, oppressive, corrupt, incompetent, and fundamentally undemocratic. The aspirations and potential of the Iraqi people are bigger than ballot boxes held up as trophies by champions of American occupation in Iraq.

Currently, the government in Iraq cannot impose the rule of law, nor can it provide the most fundamental requirements of basic sustenance. The political landscape is a who's who of thieves, thugs, and terrorists. Without any exception, the people of Iraq, despite their sect or ethnicity whole heartedly reject the notion that their government is representative and absolutely no one believes that they live in a democratic state.

HAVE LIVING CONDITIONS IMPROVED IN IRAQ SINCE IN THE LAST DECADE? 2003 – PRESENT

After enduring thirty five years of dictatorial rule, an eight year war with neighboring Iran, two major military attacks by the United States, twelve years of a complete trade embargo, and a military occupation that ushered in an era of corruption and theft, it is no surprise that living conditions in Iraq are horrible.

The quality of life has been attacked and continues to be targeted by a corrupt government that sees the rebuilding of the country's infrastructure as fertile grounds for making and handing out money to its allies and friends. With little or no oversight over government sponsored rebuilding efforts and with a complete absence of civil society to engage the government in the decision making process, the quality of life in Iraq is in continuous decline.

Instead of seeing advancements made in the infrastructure of the country, the people of Iraq have had to settle with the luxury afforded by a wider range of consumer choices. Satellite dishes, mobile telephones, Western Brands, and luxury cars were all non-existent throughout most of Saddam's rule. A combination of security obsessed policies and economic embargoes made them off limits to the people of Iraq. Unfortunately for the Iraqis, the post-Occupation prevalence of fast moving consumer goods has done nothing for the state of healthcare and education in the country.

Hospitals remain in the same dire condition that they were in during the Sanctions, where more than a million Iraqis died from undernourishment and easily treatable diseases. Today, going to a hospital in Iraq is a life endangering exercise. Most of the

country's qualified doctors have left, and medical supplies need to be purchased by the patient from external vendors.

The education system in Iraq is virtually non-existent. Decrepit classrooms form a wasteland of lost potential, as children in Iraq continue to be chronically underserved, paying the ultimate price for the destruction of their country. A large number of students aren't even able to afford going to school. Instead, they spend their days working on the streets and in make shift workshops.

The capital city of Iraq, Baghdad, sees only 4 hours a day of government supplied electricity. People depend on buying electricity from owners of large generators for the remaining twenty hours. Iraqis are now also dependent on buying bottled water, mostly from neighboring Kuwait, because drinking from the tap, something that Iraqis have been doing for most of their lives, is no longer safe. The magnitude of the environmental impacts of the war will never be completely accounted for, so large is their scale.

Despite all the indicators that Iraqi infrastructure is near extinct, international financial institutions, primarily the International Monetary Fund (IMF), have attached crippling conditions to any loans forced upon the country for the supposed purpose of reconstruction.

According to the IMF, which is obsessed with privatizing everything, the Iraqi government, for example, cannot subsidize breakfast for kids in school, nor can it seek alternative sources of energy. It must remain a slave to market dynamics, fully exposed to the greedy appetites of thieves, who have made billions off overpriced contracts, giving nothing back to the people of Iraq.

WHERE IS ALL THE MONEY FROM IRAQI OIL GOING?

There is no surprise that America's obsession with securing unfettered access to oil was a tremendous driver behind its occupation of Iraq. The country's own oil wealth, as well its close proximity to other oceans of the fossil fuel, made it a primary target for a military attack that would definitively bring it under direct American control.

Oil companies around the world salivated at the opportunities of rebuilding, developing, and selling Iraqi oil to the world market. In fact, their representatives worked tirelessly to use their power and influence to steer American foreign policy towards an occupation of Iraq. In many ways, it was their war.

The mission to steal Iraq's oil wealth, however, wouldn't end with the military occupation of the country, but would require a complete post-war restructuring of

Iraq's legal system to ensure long term contracts that would give oil companies the lion's share of the country's wealth. Western countries wanted to bring an end to Iraq's nationalized oil system, and put foreign companies back into the driving seat before Iraqis took control of their oil in the Sixties and Seventies.

In 2006, shortly after the "election" of the first post-occupation Iraqi government, the Bush administration began working with its minions in Baghdad to pass an Oil Law. The newly suggested legislation would protect the rights of multinational companies and place them above the interests of Iraq. It would also smash Iraq's ability to negotiate with these companies in a unified voice by allowing different levels of government to negotiate directly with large multinational corporations, tipping the balance of power in favor of the latter.

The most important element of the proposed Oil Law was ending a system of parliamentary approval, enabling oil contracts to be signed with no oversight whatsoever. The Oil Law, if passed, was designed to allow the Iraqi political elite to sign lucrative contracts directly with oil businessmen. It was the imagination a picture perfect embodiment of what America wanted out of the war.

In the end, the Oil Law's attempts to decentralize decision making power and overwhelming opposition to it amongst the Iraqi oil sector, primarily workers, led to its virtual defeat. The Kurdish Regional Government would squabble with the federal government in Baghdad over how much and who, creating an insurmountable impasse for its passage, unintentionally saving Iraq from the perils of such an exploitative legislation.

At the same time, there was tremendous opposition to the proposed Oil Law amongst labor unions, and even different parliamentarian blocs. It was an important victory for civil society in Iraq. But, it didn't come without a very heavy price. The Iraqi people's refusal and the puppet government's inability to sign the Oil Law, which still does not exist to this day, plunged the country in to a bloody civil war, where hundreds of thousands of Iraqis would die. If Iraq wasn't open for American business, then America wanted to make sure that the people of Iraq paid anyways.

Today, Iraq is the third largest oil producer in the world. Exports are at a 30-year high and oil accounts for almost all over the country's revenues. There is no Oil Law, but a corrupt government, riddled with theft and corruption has ensured that very little of this wealth is translated into better lives for Iraqis. The reality of the energy sector in Iraq is that more oil is being produced and companies and black markets are prospering, but the people of Iraq continue to live impoverished lives.

HASN'T THE OCCUPATION OF IRAQ ENDED? 2011

No. The American occupation of Iraq is multilayered and isn't only limited to the presence of troops on the ground. It is also political and economic. However, even if the occupation of Iraq was purely militaristic, then the impact of a diminished American troop presence is still considerable enough to be considered an occupation.

Many remember the signing of a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with a press conference that ended with a shoe being lobbed at George Bush and Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki. Although the agreement led to the end of a large scale military occupation in 2011, the agreement also allowed for the building of permanent military bases, the continuous training and management of the Iraqi military, and an endless supply of military contracts.

The SOFA also refused to definitively address the issue of immunity for American troops and military contractors. Although Nouri Al Maliki painted himself as a hero in the eyes of the Iraqi media by supposedly refusing to provide immunity, Paul Bremer's laws which say otherwise, are still the law of the land in the eyes of the Americans. Regardless of any law, the world's most powerful military is not going to be held responsible for their actions by a group of subservient politicians, in the form of the Iraqi government, anytime soon.

In addition to that, the Americans have built the world's largest embassy for them in Iraq. A sprawling complex in the heart of Baghdad, spanning more than 440,000 square meters, and employing more than 15,000 people; it is bigger than most Iraqi government ministries. It is a permanent diplomatic colony equipped with its own power station and well armed military protection.

Politically, most members of the Iraqi government, as well as the most popular opposition voices in the parliament, owe their political worth to the Americans themselves. Prior to the occupation, the CIA and other Western intelligence services gathered a group of relative nobodies to create a face of legitimacy to the process of democratization by force on which they were about to embark. For those not within the American camp, they were dutiful servants to someone, anyone, but not the people of Iraq.

Financially, the Iraqi economy was put into morbid shock by the occupation, a final act of violence after many years of abuse. International Financial Institutions like the IMF are now in charge of its demise, pushing forward an agenda of corruption, dependency and underdevelopment. Many would argue that this is the most powerful arm of the occupation, and there are no signs of this form attack letting up.

No matter how you define the occupation, one thing is for certain, American influence on Iraq and the region surrounding it is still significant. This influence might be competing with other aspiring economic empires, namely China, but it is still significant. The occupation of Iraq has always been multinational, with Iran, Turkey, and the Gulf all placing their feet firmly in Iraqi affairs, and their interest and involvement in Iraq only seems to be getting more intense.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE REGIONAL FORCES THAT ARE CURRENTLY AT PLAY IN IRAQ?

One cannot analyze the American occupation of Iraq without looking at regional and international factors that are connected to its growth and destruction. The attack on Iraq and its abilities to defend itself are intertwined with large structures of governance that affect the entire world. Primarily, the historic growth of capitalism in the West has led to those countries, whose governments are controlled by the business class, to violently pursue the building of greater empires of wealth.

The theft of natural resources from weakened countries by wealthier nations, armed with advanced militaries is nothing new. From the European colonization of Africa to the extermination of indigenous peoples in the Americas, the use of strength to acquire greater wealth by the elite is nothing new. When the United States embarked on a mission to occupy Iraq in 2003, it was a decision that was taken by an entire system of wealthy multinationals, their representatives in liberal democracies, and the armies which they control.

This system, in place long before Operation Iraqi Freedom, does not only target Iraq, but implements power dynamics and dividing lines and creates conflicts and imposes leaders everywhere in the world. Iraq, with its oil wealth, and strategic location, has emerged as an iconic target of the global elite's violent drive for more wealth. But, it is not alone, and as such, it is impossible to analyze what has happened and what the future holds for Iraq, without looking at these wider dynamics.

Currently, Iraq's future is dictated by developments in many countries within its proximity. To start off with, Iran, Turkey and the Gulf continue to be major contributors to the continuous subjugation of Iraq. Under the close supervision and orchestration of the United States, a proxy war is being fought between these blocs in the cities and streets of Iraq. The struggle to be regional empire cannot be won without control of Iraq. As such, Turkey's relationship with the European Union, Israeli colonization of Palestine, and Iranian expansionism in the Gulf all see Iraq as a natural place to settle their differences with their foes. It is the Lebanonization of Iraq.

The destruction of a powerful Iraq, which has historically been a thorn in the side of the empire, was always part of a wider attack on the people of the region. The imposition of

dictatorship in Iraq occurred simultaneously with the propping up of local bullies everywhere in the Arabic speaking world, and throughout the Global South. The siphoning off of Iraq's resources into the pockets of the West was not limited to Iraq, and is documented to have occurred globally.

Unless, Iraq is analyzed within a global and regional context, any study of the occupation will be flawed. This is not to say that the level of attack on Iraq has been record breaking, putting it in a doomed position for many years to come. But, it cannot be looked at as an individual quarrel between Saddam and Bush, or a one off push for more oil.

In the same way that the destruction of Iraq is part of an international crisis created by the international business class, so is the resilience of its people. Iraqis must stand side by side with their brothers and sisters in war ridden and impoverished societies around the world. It is only through the development of a global consciousness against racism, war, and capitalism that the people of Iraq will be able to take control of their own destinies.

Similarly, marginalized communities within wealthier societies must see their struggle for better working and living conditions as being closely interrelated to the struggle being waged by their fellow Iraqis, and all those living under war, Apartheid, and occupation.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES THAT FACE IRAQ IN THE NEXT TEN YEARS? 2013 – 2023

In Iraq, entire generations and millions upon millions of lives have been destroyed by decades of dictatorship, war, sanctions, and occupation. It will take many generations to rebuild what has been lost. Despite that, the country of 32 million people remains to boast a resilient population that is adamant on rebuilding its communities, and providing better lives for its children.

Most notably, the imposition of sectarian identities and the destruction of an entire country's infrastructure have been the most damning impacts of American intervention in Iraq. However, the greatest challenge to reversing these poisonous conditions is that many of the dynamics that are at play exist outside the borders of Iraq, and as such are largely beyond the direct control of its people. Regional developments will prove to have a tremendous impact on a country that is extremely susceptible to what happens in the wider Arabic speaking world and the so called Middle East.

On the outset, the challenges, both external and internal, seem to be too great to overcome. However, the emergence of a new national identity, supplemented with a national vision for reconstruction and development of civil society could turn the tide in

favor of the people of Iraq. They are a people who have withstood numerous attempts to eradicate them and their identities. However, they have always organized and resisted forces that were bent on their destruction.

For community organizers and activists who are motivated to show solidarity with Iraq, the best way to do so is to confront those who are politically and financially profiting from the continuous pillaging of Iraq and its resources. The next years must see a reinvigoration of direct action against war profiteers and racists in those communities, because it is in London, Washington DC, and other Western capitals that decisions shaping Iraqi future are being made. Building movements and connections with the struggles of other communities is a step towards ensuring that Iraq doesn't celebrate another decade of war and destruction.

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