

Iraq 2003-2011: The Losers

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IT TOOK ABOUT twenty minutes after the last official U.S. combat troops crossed the border from Iraq into Kuwait for the Potemkin village of “Iraqi stability and democracy” carefully constructed by the American occupation to fall apart. The regime of prime minister Nouri al-Maliki has brought a terrorism indictment against the vice-president Tariq al-Hashimi, who promptly headed north to autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan where the central government’s hand doesn’t reach. Purges of university professors and arrests of political figures not favored by the al-Maliki regime are underway.

Sunni and independent Shia political figures now accuse al-Maliki of organizing a new dictatorship, with the support of the United States which is shipping billions of dollars in advanced weaponry to Iraq – ostensibly to defend against a possible Iranian threat, which may be slightly incongruous since al-Maliki’s adversaries accuse him of acting as Teheran’s agent.

In possibly related developments, suicide and car bombings resumed – signaling that some of the “Sunni Awakening” tribal leaders may be pulling their “al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia” hats out of mothballs. With this kind of democratic stability, who needs chaos?

Whether Iraq’s fragile political system will collapse entirely is hard to predict, but the people of that “liberated” country are probably pretty realistic about what they’re facing. After some hundreds of thousands of civilian deaths, the devastation of war and the humiliation of an eight-year occupation, the hideous tyranny of Saddam Hussein has been replaced by the prospect of endless sectarian war in which, among other ruinous developments, Iraq becomes a proxy battleground between Iran and Saudi Arabia. That’s a long way from the hopes that the Arab Spring has brought to other countries in the region.

Among the war’s other losers, however, are those from whom the truth is being systematically hidden – the people of the United States. Although we obviously haven’t suffered anything resembling the physical destruction and the mass death that imperialism inflicted on Iraq, the deaths of over 4000 troops and the horrific lifelong injuries suffered by more than 30,000 are a sickening enough waste.

But it goes beyond that. One of the worst things that can happen after a losing war is for the people to be told it was a victory. That prevents the necessary conclusions from being drawn and paves the way for even worse debacles. So it’s necessary for the antiwar movement to state the truth clearly: This was a criminal war, which the United States lost.

To see the truth of this, it’s only necessary to compare the results with what the Bush-Cheney gang promised at the outset: a liberated democratic Iraq, allied with the United States and its war partners, whose reconstruction would be self-financed by its oil money.

And perhaps the biggest lie of all wasn’t the Weapons of Mass Destruction fraud – after all, imperialist adventures of the past have also been launched on lying pretexts from “Remember the Maine” (1898) to the mythical Gulf of Tonkin incident (1964) – but telling the U.S. population that it didn’t have to be paid for, that in fact we could have a tax cut in wartime.

We've paid for it, all right – and we'll be paying for decades to come, up to four trillion dollars by some estimates. But neither the Bush-Cheney and neoconservative gangsters who launched the war, or the Barack Obama administration which inherited it, are going to tell the population the truth about this defeat, let alone the war's criminal nature.

In fact, the war was lost not in 2011 but much earlier, between 2004 when U.S. forces destroyed the city of Fallujah and 2006, by which point the reality of civil war among Iraqi factions couldn't be denied. Juan Cole looks back to another turning point:

"It turns out that the day on which the US military lost Iraq once and for all was September 16, 2007, when Blackwater private security guards, all decorated ex-military, opened fire in Nisoor Square under the mistaken impression that they were under attack by the ordinary civilian motorists there. 17 were killed, dozens wounded, and the incident became a cause celebre for Iraqis eager to see an end to a foreign military presence in their country. That the US courts declined to punish the perpetrators of the massacre was a nail in the coffin for extraterritoriality. The Iraqis wouldn't grant it after all that."

"... The US will receive no benefit from its illegal war of aggression, no permanent bases, no bulwark against Iran, no new Arab friend to Israel, no \$14 a barrel petroleum- all thing things Washington had dreamed of. Dreams that turned out to be flimsy and unsubstantial and tragic." [\[1\]](#)

Along then came "the surge," which was billed as the new strategy for victory – in reality, a salvage operation to halt the slide toward the complete disintegration of Iraq. And it worked, in the sense that "al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia" was suppressed (before the U.S. invasion, of course, it had never existed) and the cooperation of Sunni forces was purchased.

U.S. political-military strategy essentially switched gears, away from the post-invasion scheme of forcing massive "de-Baathification" and dissolving the Iraqi army that plunged the country into chaos, toward a more classic "colonial" mode of buying the support of the indigenous (so-called tribal) elites. That strategy brought about a rough political compromise – the coalition government that is currently disintegrating.

So who won? The only clear winner was the regime in Iran, which saw its main enemy Saddam Hussein disappear from the map. The Iranian regime, we now know, quietly offered back in 2003 to deal with the United States for a comprehensive regional bargain. The Bush-Cheney regime, which intended to make Iran next on its hit list, contemptuously refused – and that opens another chapter and a road to an even greater tragedy and imperial disaster.

In the coming year, president Obama – who was elected in part because he had opposed the Iraq war, and once in office embraced it – will take the Republicans' heat for "losing Iraq." Is this a crock, or what? Of course it is – but that was president Obama's deal with the devil. And this at the time when U.S. imperialism's dysfunctional mutual co-dependent relationship with the military and intelligence apparatus of Pakistan has made Afghanistan the next inevitable losing war.

Most dangerous of all, perhaps – because the truth of the U.S. defeat in Iraq is hidden by the bipartisan agreement of the Republicans and Democrats, and because the entire destructive record of intervention in Afghanistan is conveniently all but forgotten, there is far too little public understanding today of Washington's slide toward confrontation with Iran.

The pretext for sanctions and a threatened embargo of Iranian oil, of course, is the Iranian regime's alleged drive for nuclear weapons [