

**THE IRAQ WAR WAS NOT WORTH THE SACRIFICE:
American and Iraqi Lives Lost; Iraqi Culture Destroyed**

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Iraqi War Widows: 5 of 740,000

It's the same picture of some person walking out of some building with a vase, and you see it twenty times, and you think, "My goodness, were there that many vases?" Is it possible that there were that many vases in the whole country?

Donald Rumsfeld, Former Secretary of Defense, April, 2003

As we approach the sixth anniversary of the Iraq War, there are a few positive signs. At the end of January, provincial elections were held with comparatively little violence and fraud. The best news is that Iraqis voters,

contrary to some predictions, supported secular parties much more than religiously affiliated ones.

On a scale of 1-10 for political freedom, Iraq now has a score of 5.02, tied with the Palestinian territories. Among the Muslims countries studied, only Lebanon (6.55) and Morocco (5.2) ranked higher. I must note that our good friend and ally Saudi Arabia was at the bottom with a score of 2.8. One could very well ask: why didn't Bush choose to free the Saudis from dictatorship?

American casualties are at their lowest since the beginning of the war, and the total number of trained Iraqi security forces has increased to 589,000. Although they still need U.S. air and ground support, these forces are proving to be more and more effective.

The negatives, however, far outweigh the positives. Oil production has still not returned to pre-war levels. Fuel supplies fell from 97 percent of a goal set by U.S. authorities in June 2005 to 63 percent in January 2009. While under Saddam the people of Baghdad could count on power 20 hours a day, they now have only an average of 15 hours a day.

Only 40 percent of Iraqis have clean water to drink, and most sanitation systems are still not functioning. Six million Iraqis live on UN food rations, and Oxfam estimates that 28 percent of the children are malnourished. In Basra 60 percent of children go to school, but it is far worse in Baghdad where only 30 percent do.

One of the greatest tragedies is the 740,000 war widows, only 120,000 of whom receive state aid. Rejected by their families and mostly ignored by the government, the widows have been reduced to begging, scavenging, and prostitution. Some of them have joined the growing ranks of female suicide

bombers, motivated by revenge for their husbands' deaths, most occurring in the cross-fire of this senseless war.

The *International Herald Tribune* (2/23/09) reports that "among Iraqi women aged 15 to 80, 1 in 11 are estimated to be widows. . . . A UN report estimated that during the height of sectarian violence here in 2006, 90 to 100 women were widowed each day."

The U.S. chose not to record Iraqi civilian casualties, so other agencies have taken on the task. The figures range widely from Iraq Body Count's 100,000 to well over 1 million in *The Lancet*, the highly respected British medical journal. The former group gathers data solely from news reports, but the latter claims to have death certificates from 92 percent of the households surveyed.

There are currently an estimated 2.8 million internally displaced Iraqis, and there are 2.2-2.4 million who have fled the country. Even though the government is offering \$800 per head, only 5 percent have returned home. Some returnees have left again after discovering that their homes had been taken over by Shiias or vice versa.

Iraq is now divided along sectarian lines much more than before the war. Before the war Baghdad's population was split evenly between Sunnis and Shiias, but, after the Surge, Middle East expert Juan Cole estimates that it is now a 75 Shiite city. Even more significant is that prior to 2003 Shiias and Sunnis were not killing one another.

The Iraqis who have fled tend to be more prosperous and better educated. The figure that stands out dramatically in the Brookings Institute's Iraq Index (www.brookings.com), from which I've drawn most of my data, is the number of doctors. Before the war there were 34,000 doctors in Iraq, but now there are only 12,000.

Taking the history of Palestinian refugees as a guide, Nir Rosen, author *In the Belly of the Green Bird: The Triumph of the Martyrs in Iraq*, predicts that many Iraqi refugees, especially the youth, in Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon will be radicalized by their experience and be tempted to join jihadists groups. The exodus of Iraqis is the largest population shift in the Middle East since the Palestinians were forced out of their homeland in 1948.

Although the numbers are down considerably, there are still 10-20 foreign jihadists crossing the borders every month, with 41 percent coming from Saudi Arabia. There are still monthly attacks on oil pipelines and related facilities, and suicide bomber attacks have increased since the January elections.

The invasion of Iraq has, much to our dismay, strengthened Iran's power in the region. Iranian businesses are moving into the country, and Iran is receiving \$5 million per month to supply electricity to Diyala province. As we withdraw our forces, Iran will always be there as friend or foe, or both.

Iraq's National Museum in Baghdad reopened last month with 9,000 of priceless Mesopotamian artifacts still missing. Despite a direct appeal to the Pentagon from archeologists three weeks before the war, the commanding general made sure there were troops at the oil ministry but none were sent to the museum.

Looters broke into the museum on April 10, 2003 and it was not secured by U.S. forces until April 22. In the interim hundreds of artifacts were carried off and sold on the black market. In 2007 Marine Col. Matthew Bogdanos, who was charged with investigating museum thefts, stated: "I know that millions of dollars' worth of antiquities flow out of the country

each year. And it would be naïve to think the insurgents aren't getting a major share of the loot."

Before the war Saddam Hussein's government posted guards at all the major archeological sites in Iraq. The guards of course fled during the invasion, and thousands of Iraqis took to the field and dug up anything they could find. In early November 2008 I visited an Oriental Institute exhibit at the University Chicago and aerial photographs of these sites revealed thousands of holes dug by these thieves.

In addition to artifacts, there are living cultural legacies in Iraq, who are now threatened with extinction. The Sabaeen Mandeans, a 2,000 year-old religious sect, lived peacefully in Iraq until the U. S. invasion unleashed Muslim fanaticism. Most of the Mandeans not killed have now fled the country and it will be difficult for the religion to survive in exile.

It is estimated that at least half of Iraq's Assyrian Christians, numbering about 800,000 before 2003, have fled the country. Churches have been burned and both parishioners and priests, including the Archbishop of Mosul, have been killed. For many years Hussein's foreign minister was the Christian Tariq Aziz.

On August 7, 2007, the Catholic News Service declared that Iraqi Christians were much safer under Hussein's rule, and an editorial from the Assyrian Christian International News Agency accuses the U.S. of destroying Christianity in Iraq.

Depending on what is included, veterans' costs and interest on the national debt, the total cost of the war will be \$1-3 trillion. These precious dollars could now be used to pull ourselves out of a deep recession and help rebuild our nation.

The greatest cost, however, has been the sacrifice of 4,256 American lives and 31,089 seriously wounded soldiers. The suicide rate among veterans in 2005 was twice that of the general population. There have been 600 active duty suicides during the war, and there were 21 self-inflicted deaths in the 101st Airborne Division in September 2008.

The general causes are the tremendous stresses of what has been called a "360 degree/24/7" war where the enemy could be any person, anywhere, and at any time. Reports from the September tragedy indicate that it might have caused by allegations that the unit had been involved in a massacre of Iraqi civilians.

Sixty percent of Americans polled last month by ABC-Washington Post agreed with me that the Iraq War "was not worth fighting." A March 2008 ABC/BBC poll conducted in Arabic and Kurdish revealed that 50 percent of those interviewed said that the war was a mistake: 27 percent saying that it was "absolutely wrong" and 23 percent saying that it was "somewhat wrong."

The other huge cost is the loss of our moral standing in the world. It will take decades for the U.S. to recover from Bush's reckless invasion of a Muslim country and his prosecution of a war on terror that alienated hundreds of moderate Muslims around the world.