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“Ending States that Sponsor Terrorism”: Dismantling the Iraqi State, Destroying an Entire Country

The United Nation's Human Rights Council in Geneva reviews the human rights record of the United States on the 5th of November 2010, on the occasion of the Ninth Session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), 1 to 12 November 2010. The following is a presentation given by Dirk Adriaensens in Geneva on 3 November.

Destroying Iraqi culture, erasing collective memory

Just days after the devastating attacks of 9/11 Deputy Defense secretary Paul Wolfowitz declared that a major focus of US foreign policy would be: “*ending states that sponsor terrorism*”. Iraq was labelled a “terrorist state” and targeted for ending.

President Bush went on to declare Iraq the major front of the global war on terror. US forces invaded illegally with the express aim to dismantling the Iraqi state. After WWII focus of social sciences was on state-building and development model. Little has been written on state-destruction and de-development. We can now, after 7 years of war and occupation, state for certain that state-ending was a deliberate policy objective.

The consequences in human and cultural terms of the destruction of the Iraqi state have been

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enormous: notably the death of over 1,3 million civilians; the degradation in social infrastructure, including electricity, potable water and sewage systems; over eight million Iraqis are in need of humanitarian assistance; abject poverty: the UN Human rights report for the 1st quarter of 2007 found that 54% of Iraqis were living on less than \$1 a day; the displacement of minimum 2.5 million refugees and 2.764.000 internally displaced people as to end 2009. One in six Iraqis is displaced. Ethnic & religious minorities are on the verge of extinction. UN-HABITAT, an agency of the United Nations, published a 218-page report entitled State of the World's Cities, 2010-2011. Prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, the percentage of the urban population living in slums in Iraq hovered just below 20 percent. Today, that percentage has risen to 53 percent: 11 million of the 19 million total urban dwellers.

Destroying Iraqi education

The UNESCO report “Education Under Attack 2010 – Iraq”, dated 10 February 2010, concludes that “Although overall security in Iraq had improved, the situation faced by schools, students, teachers and academics remained dangerous”. The director of the United Nations University International Leadership Institute published a report on 27 April 2005 detailing that since the start of the war of 2003 some 84% of Iraq's higher education institutions have been burnt, looted or destroyed. Ongoing violence has destroyed school buildings and around a quarter of all Iraq's primary schools need major rehabilitation. Since March 2003, more than 700 primary schools have been bombed, 200 have been burnt and over 3,000 looted. Populations of teachers in Baghdad have fallen by 80%. Between March 2003 and October 2008, 31,598 violent attacks against educational institutions were reported in Iraq, according to the Ministry of Education (MoE). Since 2007 bombings at Al Mustansiriya University in Baghdad have killed or maimed more than 335 students and staff members, according to a 19 Oct 2009 NYT article, and a 12-foot-high blast wall has been built around the campus. MNF-I, the Iraqi Army and Iraqi police units occupied more than 70 school buildings for military purposes in the Diyala governorate alone, in clear violation of The Hague Conventions. The UNESCO report is very clear: “Attacks on education targets continued throughout 2007 and 2008 at a lower rate – but one that would cause serious concern in any other country.” Why didn't it cause serious concern when it comes to Iraq? And the attacks are on the rise again, an increase of 50%, as these statistics show:

Murdered Academics (source: BRussells Tribunal)

Date unknown

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115

killed in 2003-2005

2003

16

2004

36

2005

65

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2006

113

2007

63

2008

19

2009

10

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2010

16

(Until 15 October 2010)

Murdered Media-professionals (source: B

Russell

2003

26

6 Iraqis

2004

59

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53 Iraqis

2005

59

58 Iraqis

2006

90

88 Iraqis

2007

82

81 Iraqis

2008

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19

19 Iraqis

2009

8

8 Iraqis

2010

12

12 Iraqis (Until 15 October 2010)

(On the 20th of March 2008, Reporters Without Borders reported that hundreds of journalists were forced into exile since the start of US-led invasion.)



Eliminating the Iraqi middle class

Running parallel with the destruction of Iraq's educational infrastructure, this repression led to the mass forced displacement of the bulk of Iraq's educated middle class — the main engine of progress and development in modern states. Iraq's intellectual and technical class has been subject to a systematic and ongoing campaign of intimidation, abduction, extortion, random killings and targeted assassinations. The decimation of professional ranks took place in the context of a generalized assault on Iraq's professional middle class, including doctors, engineers, lawyers, judges as well as political and religious leaders. Roughly 40 percent of Iraq's middle class is believed to have fled by the end of 2006. Few have returned. Up to 75 percent of Iraq's doctors, pharmacists and nurses have left their jobs since the U.S.-led invasion in 2003. More than half of those have emigrated. Twenty thousand of Iraq's 34,000 registered physicians left Iraq after the U.S. invasion. As of April 2009, fewer than 2,000 returned, the same as the number who were killed during the course of the war.

To this date, there has been no systematic investigation of this phenomenon by the occupation authorities. Not a single arrest has been reported in regard to this terrorization of the intellectuals. The inclination to treat this systematic assault on Iraqi professionals as somehow inconsequential is consistent with the occupation powers' more general role in the decapitation of Iraqi society.

Destroying the Iraqi culture and erasing collective memory

All these terrible losses are compounded by unprecedented levels of cultural devastation, attacks on national archives and monuments that represent the historical identity of the Iraqi people. On America's watch we now know that thousands of cultural artefacts disappeared during "Operation Iraqi Freedom". These objects included no less than 15.000 invaluable Mesopotamian artefacts from the National Museum in Baghdad, and many others from the 12.000 archaeological sites that the occupation forces left unguarded. While the Museum was robbed of its historical collection, the National Library that preserved the continuity and pride of Iraqi history was deliberately destroyed. Occupation authorities took no effective measures to protect important cultural sites, despite warnings of international specialists. According to a recent update on the number of stolen artefacts by Francis Deblauwe, an expert archaeologist on Iraq, it appears that no less than 8.500 objects are still truly missing, in addition to 4.000 artefacts said to be recovered abroad but not yet returned to Iraq. The smuggling and trade of Iraqi antiquities has become one of the most profitable businesses in contemporary Iraq.

The attitude of the US-led forces to this pillage has been, at best, indifference and worse. The

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failure of the US to carry out its responsibilities under international law to take positive and protective actions was compounded by egregious direct actions taken that severely damaged the Iraqi cultural heritage. Since the invasion in March 2003, the US-led forces have transformed at least seven historical sites into bases or camps for the military, including UR, one of the most ancient cities of the world and birthplace of Abraham, including the mythical Babylon where a US military camp has irreparably damaged the ancient city.



Destroying the Iraqi state

Rampant chaos and violence hamper efforts at reconstruction, leaving the foundations of the Iraqi state in ruins. The majority of Western journalists, academics and political figures have refused to recognise the loss of life on such a massive scale and the cultural destruction that accompanied it as the fully predictable consequences of American occupation policy. The very idea is considered unthinkable, despite the openness with which this objective was pursued.

It is time to think the unthinkable. The American-led assault on Iraq forces us to consider the meaning and consequences of state-destruction as a policy objective. The architects of the Iraq policy never made explicit what deconstructing and reconstructing the Iraqi state would entail; their actions, however, make the meaning clear. From those actions in Iraq, a fairly precise definition of state-ending can be read. The campaign to destroy the state of Iraq involved first the removal and execution of the legal head of state Saddam Hussein and the capture and expulsion of Baath figures. However, state destruction went beyond regime change. It also entailed the purposeful dismantling of major state institutions and the launching of a prolonged process of political reshaping.

Bremer's 100 orders turned Iraq into a giant free-market paradise, but a hellish nightmare for Iraqis. They colonized the country for capital - pillage on the grandest scale. New economic laws instituted low taxes, 100% foreign investor ownership of Iraqi assets, the right to expropriate all profits, unrestricted imports, and long-term 30-40 year deals and leases, dispossessing Iraqis of their own resources.

This desecration of the past and undermining of contemporary social gains is now giving way in occupied Iraq to the destruction of a meaningful future. Iraq is being handed over to the

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disintegrative forces of sectarianism and regionalism. Iraqis, stripped of their shared heritage and living today in the ruins of contemporary social institutions that sustained a coherent and unified society, are now bombarded by the forces of civil war, social and religious atavism and widespread criminality. Iraqi nationalism that had emerged through a prolonged process of state-building and social interaction is now routinely disparaged. The regime installed by occupation forces in Iraq reshaped the country along divisive sectarian lines, dissolving the hard-won unity of a long state-building project. Dominant narratives now falsely claim that sectarianism and ethnic chauvinism have always been the basis of Iraqi society, recycling yet again the persistent and destructive myth of age-old conflicts with no resolution and for which the conquerors bear no responsibility. Contemporary Iraq represents a fragmented pastiche of sectarian forces with the formal trappings of liberal democracy and neo-liberal economic structures. We call this the divide and rule technique, used to fracture and subdue culturally cohesive regions. This reshaping of the Iraqi state resulted in a policy of ethnic cleansing, partially revealed by the Wikileaks files.



The Wikileaks documents

The Wikileaks documents, first made public on 22 October 2010, show how the US military gave a secret order not to investigate torture by Iraqi authorities discovered by American troops.

The data also reveal how hundreds of civilians were killed by coalition forces in unreported events, how hundreds of Iraqi civilians: pregnant women, elderly people and children, were shot at checkpoints.

There are numerous claims of prison abuse by coalition forces even after the Abu Ghraib scandal. The files also paint a grim picture of widespread torture in Iraqi detention facilities. Two revelations await the reader of the Wikileaks section dealing with civilian deaths in the Iraq War: Iraqis are responsible for most of these deaths, and the number of total civilian casualties is substantially higher than has been previously reported.

The documents record a descent into chaos and horror as the country plunged into so-called "civil war". The logs also record thousands of bodies, many brutally tortured, dumped on the

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streets of Iraq.

Through the Wikileaks files we can see the impact the war had on Iraqi men, women and children. The sheer scale of the deaths, detentions and violence is here officially acknowledged for the first time.

A thorough research of these documents will give us a further insight into the atrocities committed in Iraq. The Wikileaks logs can serve as evidence in courts. They are important material for lawyers to file charges against the US for negligence and responsibility for the killing of thousands. A fair compensation for the families of the victims and the recognition of their suffering can help to heal the wounds. In the first official US State Department response to the massive WikiLeaks release of these classified Iraq War documents, spokesman P.J. Crowley shrugged off the evidence that US troops were ordered to cover up detainee abuse by the Iraqi government, insisting the abuse wasn't America's problem. This response is infuriating. The perpetrators of this violence and those who ordered the soldiers to turn a blind eye when being confronted with torture and extra-judicial killings should be convicted for war crimes. The US and UK forces and Governments clearly refused to fulfil their obligations under international law as a de facto occupying power.

However, these logs reveal only the 'SIGACT's or Significant Actions in the war "as told by soldiers in the United States Army": the reports of the "regular" US troops. The logs contain nothing new, they merely confirm and officialize what the Iraqis and un-embedded Western observers have been trying to convey to the public for years. While all of the press is now reporting the Wikileaks story, few media outlets are going back to their own coverage and acknowledging how they have failed to honestly report about the crimes.

What these 400.000 documents do not reveal is the US involvement of "irregular troops" in Special Operations, counter-insurgency war and death squads activities. When will the documents of the "dirty war" be revealed? The BRussells Tribunal, monitoring this horrendous invasion and occupation since 2003, is convinced that the leaked logs only scratch the surface of the catastrophic war in Iraq. What we can extract from the Wikileaks documents is only the tip of the iceberg. It is time to take a dive into the troubled waters of the Iraq war and try to explore the hidden part of the iceberg.

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<http://www.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/9148119.stm>