

Coverage of Iraq War. What the Media Misses: “The Barbarians are at the Gates”

By [Danny Schechter](#)

Global Research, June 27, 2014

Region: [Middle East & North Africa, USA](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation, Terrorism](#)

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So writes Patrick Cockburn, the veteran Middle East correspondent for the Independent in London. A fierce critic of the US-British War on Iraq he is now urging the US and Iran to collaborate in stopping the ISIS or ISIL forces that are sweeping through Iraq, a country he loves more than any of the despotic politicians who have run it now or then.

The American media has taken up the cry—not for cooperation with Iran that has heartily denounced the latest round of US intervention in the country it warred with for seven years—but with lurid coverage of the force at first labeled “terrorists,” and now “insurgents or just “militants.” The difference is that ISIS/ISIL seizes and holds territory operating like an army, not hit and run faction.

It is said to be connected to Al Qaeda but we don’t know how or if Qaeda still exists. Separating truth from propaganda has never been more difficult.

Even as ISIS portrays itself more as a corporation than a gang of brigands, all we see or hear about in our media are bloody killings and beheadings as if savagery is uniquely to be found in the Islamic world.

Never mind the reporting of the McClatchy newspapers explaining that

“The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria sprang from a largely self-funded, corporation-style prototype...The militant group Baghdadi inherited had in place a sophisticated bureaucracy that was almost obsessive about record-keeping. Its middle-managers detailed, for example, the number of wives and children each fighter had, to gauge compensation rates upon death or capture, and listed expenditures in neat Excel spreadsheets that noted payments to an “assassination platoon” and “Al Mustafa Explosives Company.”

Too bad, our corporations don’t disclose, much less quantify, the metrics of the negative social impacts they cause, and what that costs society or the world.

The more lurid the reporting on the butchery now underway, the more we forget the one million plus dead as a result of the 2003 US invasion and occupation or how state violence inevitably inspires a violence of resistance. It is a violence that anti-colonial theorists like Franz Fanon approved of in his “The Wretched of the Earth,” because of he believed it has a positive psychological impact on the oppressed.

Selective reporting on the atrocities of the other side always emboldens a sense of righteousness, even as our counter-violence assumes the form of less visible and far more

deadly 'shock and awful' airpower, or the use of weapons with nuclear materials like depleted uranium.

Throughout this war, there have been few reports on U.S. war crimes in our controlled media with its history of loyal embeds and patriotic correctness.

No one in the mainstream media here has reminded us of the US torturers of Abu Ghraib prison or the counter terror campaigns we waged against towns like Fallujah and the people we demonized as "bad guys."

It may also be time revisit our own baggage, by going deeper into our own history, the history before the imperial era and the U.S. invasions of The Philippines, Haiti and Vietnam.

Pick up a copy of the latest edition of the NY Review of Books to read about the unspeakable crimes that Americans imposed on each other during the civil war, supposedly the war for freedom against slavery.

Civil war expert James M. McPherson tells us about professional historian Michael C.C. Adams's new book, *Living Hell: The Dark Side of the Civil War* (Johns Hopkins University Press.) It is an American story of gore, not glory in which black soldiers who surrender are slaughtered and POWs on both sides perish in unspeakably horrific prison camps on both sides.

"The guerrilla warfare that wracked parts of the South and the border states," notes McPherson, "was especially vicious, sometimes featuring 'the burning alive of enemy civilians thrown into flaming buildings as well as random torturing and killing accompanied by grisly trophies including ears, genitals, scalps.'" Rape and plunder was pervasive, justified as the "spoils" of war. (Adams wrote an earlier book with similar evidence in a dissection of the myth of World War 11. See his, *The Best War Ever: America and World War 11*, 2004.)

The point here is not to rationalize ISIS brutality, but to take the luster off US hypocrisy, to make the old point about who is calling the kettle black? In our faith in American "exceptionalism," recently re-enunciated by President Obama, most of our media and educators ignore crimes committed but rarely acknowledged in our name.

Our failure to demand or take part in a truth and reconciliation process in Iraq not only makes us culpable, but assured the spectacle that we are seeing. In fact, according to journalist Dahr Jamail, US policymakers systematically pursued divide and conquer policies reinforcing a Sunni/Shia divide.

To complain now that Iraq President al Maliki is not representative of all communities there is a disgrace, especially after President Obama and his predecessor hailed our great victory in Iraq. Al Makiki was pushed into prominence by a former U.S. Ambassador.

Saddam Hussein and his era suddenly looks far better than the legacy of our war for "Iraqi Freedom."

Who helped create and fund ISIS? Is Rand Paul correct in suggesting the US played a role? What role was played by our "allies," the Kuwaitis, Saudis and Qataris? Shouldn't the media try to find out? Why are ordinary Iraqis telling reporters that they prefer ISIS to the brutal Iraqi Army, even welcoming them in some areas as liberators.

When did “we” know about ISIS attack plans? According the Telegraph in London as relayed by VICE news:

“...Kurdish sources tipped off US and UK intelligence agencies about ISIS plans five months ago. Apparently, a plan to seize northern Iraqi cities and move on Baghdad had been in the works for months. The Telegraph quotes a senior Kurdish intelligence official as saying “We had this information then, and we passed it on to your [British] government and the US government. We used our official liaisons. “We knew exactly what strategy they were going to use, we knew the military planners. It fell on deaf ears.”

Why are ISIS people saying they welcome US air strikes because they will once again demonstrate Washington’s complicity with the hated al-Maliki dictatorship? (Their forces are apparently well dispersed to neutralize the effectiveness of targeted bombing.)

Does anyone remember the media hype around “democratic elections” in Iraq with all those voters with purple inked fingers waving them aloft for the cameras? Were those elections free and fair? Apparently not!

Those fraudulent exercises only postponed the inevitable counter-push that may not prevail but will leave Iraq even more devastated, if not dismembered.

Israel is cheering on the country’s break-up now that Kurdish oil is flowing to Tel Aviv’s pipelines. Oil is once again at the center of this conflict everywhere but in the media.

Not surprisingly, Israeli commentators like Isi Leibler who writes in Israel Hayom (“This is Where We Stand”), “Our Adversaries are inhuman barbarians.”

He argues, “The major problem today is that the international community denies the barbaric nature of Islamic fundamentalism ... the whole region is a scorpions’ den of barbaric activity.”

Bear in mind that the term “barbarian” is commonly used to refer to the “uncivilized.” It is always a reference to “the others,” the never quite humans we demonize and stereotype before seeking to kill.

And now, the Iranians are said to be moving militarily to support Shia groups using drones they built on our designs, and shipping weapons to the border so this conflict promises to escalate into a regional war.

Significantly, at the same time, the organizers of a film festival in Iran are calling attention to an anniversary: the shooting down of the (civilian) Iran air flight 655 by the United States Navy guided missile cruiser USS Vincennes on July 3, 1988. The US never apologized for the incident and the ship’s commanders won recognition.

To recognize the anniversary The Ammar Popular Film Festival has prepared some posters with a brief summary of the crimes they say US governments have committed against humanity:

USA crimes Against American: <http://en.ammarfilm.ir/gall.php?id=36>

USA crimes against Iranian: <http://en.ammarfilm.ir/gall.php?id=37>

USA crimes in the world: <http://en.ammarfilm.ir/gall.php?id=38>

Once you see them, you realize how the past is never past, and that hatred of past crimes, in the absence of power sharing through negotiations and justice for war criminals, easily turns into fuel for future ones.

*News Dissector **Danny Schechter** blogs at Newsdissector.net and works on Mediachannel.org. He has directed a film and written two books on media complicity in the Iraq War. Comments to dissector at mediachannel.org.*

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Articles by: **[Danny Schechter](#)**

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