

Destroying Educational Institutions or Using them for Military Purposes is a War Crime

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In-depth Report: [IRAQ REPORT](#)

“The Education system in Iraq, prior to 1991, was one of the best in the region; with over 100% Gross Enrolment Rate for primary schooling and high levels of literacy, both of men and women. The Higher Education, especially the scientific and technological institutions, were of an international standard, staffed by high quality personnel”. (UNESCO Fact Sheet, March 28, 2003)[1].

As a result of U.S. ongoing Occupation of Iraq, today Iraq is more illiterate than it was five or a twenty-five years ago, because the U.S. Administration and U.S. forces occupying Iraq began to root and destroy every aspect of Iraq’s education.

Iraqi educational system was the target of U.S. military action, because education is the backbone of any society. Without an efficient education system, no society can function, writes Ghali Hassan in May 2005.[2]

Facts have proven him right. This is also one of the conclusions of the book Cultural Cleansing in Iraq.[3]

Random facts

A recent 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.”[4] The destruction of Iraq’s education is ongoing.

Let’s present a few random facts that give an idea of the scale of the destruction of Iraq’s education sector under occupation.

The director[5] of the United Nations University International Leadership Institute published a report[6] 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[7].

Like most higher education institutions across Iraq, Baghdad University escaped almost unscathed from the bombing. In the subsequent looting and burning, 20 of the capital’s colleges were destroyed. No institution escaped: the faculty of education in Waziriyya was raided daily for two weeks; the veterinary college in Abu Ghraib lost all its equipment; two buildings in the faculty of fine arts stand smoke-blackened against the skyline. In every college, in every classroom, you could write “education” in the dust on the tables. [8]

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.[9]

Between March 2003 and October 2008, 31,598 violent attacks against educational institutions were reported in Iraq, according to the Ministry of Education (MoE)[10]

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.[11]

Education under Attack (2007) reported that 296 people serving as education staff were killed in 2005; and 180 teachers were killed between February and November 2006.[12]

These are just a few examples to highlight the level of cultural genocide in Iraq. The list is endless, the real number of casualties much higher. More information can be found in the book *Cultural Cleansing in Iraq* and in the BRussells Tribunal archives on Iraqi education under occupation, perhaps the most comprehensive database on the Internet about the assassination of Iraqi academics and the destruction of Iraq's education.[13] Our campaign to protect Iraqi academics[14] is still ongoing, because the tragedy continues. The UNESCO report "Education Under Attack 2010 - Iraq" 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? Is it because it's US design?

The petition we issued, containing also a call for action, is still valid today and can still be signed: <http://www.petitiononline.com/Iraqacad/petition.html>. An excerpt:

1. We appeal to organisations which work to enforce or defend international humanitarian law to put these crimes on the agenda.
2. We request that an independent international investigation be launched immediately to probe these extrajudicial killings. This investigation should also examine the issue of responsibility to clearly identify who is accountable for this state of affairs. We appeal to the special rapporteur on summary executions at UNHCHR in Geneva.

We urge that educators mobilise colleagues and concerned citizens to take up the cause of the salvation of Iraq's intellectual wealth, by organising seminars, teach-ins and forums on the plight of Iraq's academics.

Occupying schools

When writing "Killing the Intellectual Class" for the book *Cultural Cleansing in Iraq*, I added a short story about occupation of schools by the MNF-I.

"it certainly is our policy to not establish military headquarters or other operations in protected areas under the Geneva Convention," said Lt. Col. Gary Keck, a spokesman for the Department of Defense in Washington, when a journalist asked why the US army occupied a girls' and boys' school of a town in northern Iraq.[15]

At a UN press briefings in Amman on 30 April 2003, the question was asked: "Do you know of any other schools that are still occupied & would you ask them

of making a point to stay away from the schools, so they can be rehabilitated?"

Answer: S. Ingram: I am not aware of any other places that this situation holds. I remember the incident you referred to, there was a school in the north & some contacts were necessary to persuade the US troops there to leave the premises, which they subsequently did. I am not aware of any other places where schools are being occupied.[16]

"I'm not aware". A pack of lies. Because occupying schools is exactly what the US Army did (and still does) on a regular basis. I heard and read numerous eyewitness accounts about Iraqi protests after US Forces occupied schools and educational institutions.

The origins of armed resistance in Fallujah f.i. can be traced almost precisely to April 28, 2003, when U.S. troops, who had arrived in the city five days earlier, massacred 17 apparently unarmed protesters. The April 28 protest had demanded an end to Fallujah's occupation and, more specifically, that U.S. troops vacate the al Qaid primary school, where classes had been scheduled to resume on April 29.[17]

And it continued. On the 29th of February 2008, the Association of Muslim Scholars (AMSI) published a press release condemning the American occupation forces for the seizure of an Islamic Secondary School in Baghdad. [18]

On the 1st of May 2008, the Iraqi News Agency "Voices of Iraq", reported that: "The U.S. military withdrew from a building of the education department in Sadr City in eastern Baghdad, which they used it as a barrack last month." [19]

This was basically all the hard information I had found about the occupation of educational institutions by the occupation forces and I thought the evidence was a little thin to make a decent case, so I decided not to use it for the book.

But now I read in the UNESCO report 2010:

"MNF-I, the Iraqi Army and Iraqi police units occupied more than 70 school buildings for military purposes in the Diyala governorate alone." [20]

This is only in one province. There's no information at my disposal about the other regions, but we can almost certainly conclude that occupying schools by occupation forces was/is a general phenomenon throughout Iraq. Where else would you station a one million strong army and security forces?

On the 11th of April 2003, a number of Iraqi scientists and university professors sent an SOS e-mail complaining American occupation forces were threatening their lives.[21]

The appeal message said that looting and robberies were being taken place under the watchful eye of the occupation soldiers.

The occupation soldiers, the e-mail added, were transporting mobs to the scientific institutions, such as Mosul University and different educational institutions, to destroy scientific research centres and confiscate all papers and documents to nip in the bud any Iraqi scientific renaissance.[22]

John Agresto, in charge of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in 2003-2004, initially believed that the looting of Iraq's universities was a positive act in that it would allow such institutions to begin again with a clean slate, with the newest equipment as well as a brand new curriculum.[23]

The Hague IV Conventions[24] on Laws and Customs of War on Land, 1917, make explicit, in Article 56, that educational institutions are to be regarded as private property, and thus must not be pillaged or destroyed, that occupying forces in war are bound to protect such property and that proceedings should follow their intentional damage, seizure or destruction. Article 55 reinforces this duty relative to all public buildings and capital. Further, an occupying power is obliged, according to Articles 43 and 46, to protect life and take all steps in its power to re-establish and ensure "public order and safety".

In addition, The Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict[25] (ratified by the Republic of Iraq in 1967) creates a clear obligation to protect museums, libraries and archives, and other sites of cultural property. Paragraph 1 of Article 4 notes: "The High Contracting Parties undertake to respect cultural property situated within their own territory as well as within the territory of other High Contracting Parties by refraining from any use of the property and its immediate surroundings or of the appliances in use for its protection for purposes which are likely to expose it to destruction or damage in the event of armed conflict; and by refraining from any act of hostility, directed against such property."

Using schools and universities for military purposes, destroying educational institutions and assisting in looting, criminal neglect when educational staff is being harassed and assassinated, dismantling the Iraqi education system and active involvement in training, funding and arming murderous militia's upon war crime. When will there be justice for Iraq? When will there be a serious investigation into these crimes by official International Human Rights Bodies? And who will charge the successive Anglo-American Administrations for War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity?

Notes

[1]

http://portal.unesco.org/es/ev.php-URL_ID=11216&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

[2] <http://www.globalresearch.ca/articles/HAS505B.html>

[3] <http://www.plutobooks.com/display.asp?K=9780745328126&CID=BRUSSELLS>

[4] <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4b7aa9df5.html>

[5] http://www.la.unu.edu/about_staff_reddy.asp

[6] <http://www.unu.edu/news/ili/Iraq.doc>

[7] <http://www.brusselstribunal.org/Academicspetition.htm>

[8] <http://www.brusselstribunal.org/academicsArticles.htm#weed-out>

[9] <http://www.islamic-relief.com/ecamp/orphans-iraq/education-iraq.htm>

- [10] <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4b7aa9df5.html>
- [11] <http://www.ohio.edu/outlook/2009-10/March/Iraq-professor-409.cfm>
- [12] <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4b7aa9df5.html>
- [13] <http://www.brusselstribunal.org/AcademicsResources.htm>
- [14] <http://www.brusselstribunal.org/Academics.htm>
- [15] <http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/0404/p07s01-woiq.html>
- [16] <http://www.un.org/apps/news/infocus/iraq/infocusnews.asp?NewsID=509&slD=9>
- [17] <http://www.worldpress.org/Mideast/2183.cfm> and
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2004/mar/17/iraq.rorymccarthy>
- [18] <http://heyetnet.org/en/content/view/2670/33/>
- [19] http://www.iraqupdates.com/p_articles.php?refid=DH-S-01-05-2008&article=30525
- [20] <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4b7aa9df5.html>
- [21] <http://www.islamonline.net/english/news/2003-04/12/article02.shtml>
- [22] Dirk Adriaensens in "Cultural Cleansing in Iraq" p 119,
<http://www.plutobooks.com/display.asp?K=9780745328126&>
- [23] Nabil al-Tikriti in "Cultural Cleansing in Iraq" p 98,
<http://www.plutobooks.com/display.asp?K=9780745328126&>
- [24] <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/lawofwar/hague04.htm>
- [2 5]
http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13637&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

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