

Dying Education in the “Blossoming” Iraqi Democracy

25th of February: Iraqi youth declare “Day of Rage for Change and Freedom in Iraq”

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

International Seminar: “Defending Education in Times of War and Occupation”

(Dirk Adriaensens, member of the BRussells Tribunal Executive Committee, 16 February 2011)

While Anglo Saxon universities are boasting of their so-called “glorious role” in the reconstruction of Iraqi academia (See f.i. U of A helping create an education revolution in Iraq)[1], Iraq’s education is dying. From August 1990 onwards, UN sanctions excluded Iraqi education from international scientific developments and banned import of essential educational material such as books and even..... pencils. Many Iraqi professors and scientists left the country during that period.

Then came the 2003 invasion....

First the US/UK invaders and their Iraqi stooges transported mobs of looters in 2003 to the educational institutions to destroy scientific education research centers, confiscate all papers and documents to stop any Iraqi scientific renaissance before it had a chance to begin[2].

Second they burnt, looted or destroyed 84% of Iraq’s higher education institutions.[3] 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.[4] John Agresto knew next to nothing about Iraq’s educational system. Even after he was proposed and selected by Donald Rumsfeldt, he did not pore through a reading list. “I wanted to come here with as open a mind as I could have,” he said. “I’d much rather learn firsthand than have it filtered to me by an author.” He did a Google search on the Internet. The result? “Not much,” he said. This ignorant man, neocon republican, was assigned as the CPA’s senior adviser to the Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education.[5] Currently he works full-time with the (private) American University of Iraq – Sulaimani as its Interim Provost and Chancellor. He is also a member of the University’s Board of Trustees and Chair of the Academic Affairs Committee, in the company of Kanan Makiya, a “close friend” of Ahmed Chalabi, and an influential proponent of the 2003 Iraq War[6].

Third they sacked, threatened, kidnapped, drove into exile and assassinated Iraq’s best and

brightest educators. This destructive process is ongoing. On 26 January 2011, Iraqi security forces arrested more than 100 intellectuals from the Province of Diyala of which Baaquba is the capital. Among those arrested are four top medical professors teaching at the Diyala University's Medical College, professors Mazen Razzouqi, Adel al-Hussaini, Ali al-Husaini and Bahaa Abed. It is not clear why Iraqi security forces arrested the intellectuals at a time the Diyala University suffers from severe faculty shortages.[7]

Fourth they attacked educational institutions to intimidate, frighten, kidnap, arrest and kill students. As a consequence school attendance decreased dramatically. And apparently school attendance is still considered too high by the Iraqi government as the army now prevents students from going to school. On 3 February a source in the Directorate of Education in Abu Ghraib told news agencies that the Muthanna Brigade of the Iraqi army prevented students of the Isra school for boys and from the Ascension High School for Girls in Haswa area of the district of Abu Ghraib, west of Baghdad, from going to school to perform their mid-term exams. He also noted that "the army used force to prevent teachers and also the observers from the exams to reach their schools and ordered them to return to their homes." The source added that "the army struck terror into the hearts of students and citizens alike, amid the apparent absence of human rights and law."

Fifth they changed the history books. Contemporary Iraq history is taught in sixth, ninth and 12th grades. Now, in all three text books history suddenly comes to an end after the 1958 revolution. Fifty years are being erased from Iraq's memory. "History is always affected by politics – and the winner gets his version into the text books", said Ms Nadia, an Iraqi history teacher. What's more, even the old glorious past of Iraq is being erased from the collective memory. "Seventh graders studied ancient civilizations, focusing on Mesopotamia. It was a rich study that caught the imagination of the pupils and inspired them. Now the focus on Mesopotamia is very little – Hamurabi is just another king who wrote the law on an obelisk – and greater focus is given to neighbouring civilizations".[8] The Iraqi history books no longer mention the occupation of Palestine.

Sixth they appointed academics, loyal to the US occupation authorities and the Iraqi Quisling government. These appointments were made on a sectarian basis. Some even with falsified curricula and purchased fake diplomas. Corruption in higher education is rampant.

Seventh the Iraqi government shows no desire to rebuild Iraqi education, neither the destroyed infrastructure, nor the quality of education. Instead, the Iraqi government has committed to fully fund \$1 billion a year to a program that will send over 50.000 students abroad over the next 5 years, selected on sectarian grounds.[9] The students are studying in the U.S. and London[10] and pay for tuition and fees, as well as room and board, meaning that Iraq is sponsoring US and UK universities. All this while only few funds are allocated to reconstruct the educational sector inside Iraq: schools, universities and research.

Some "revolution" in education! Quite an achievement!

Nouri al-Maliki has asked the diaspora elite and academics in exile to return to Iraq to help rebuild the country. But the BRussells Tribunal warned on 26 April 2009 already that "those academics who return are finding jobs few and the welcome far from warm"[11]. The statement further alarmed the academics who are invited or forced to return, to be aware of criminal acts like kidnappings or assassinations.[12]

Iraq's Universities now the worst in the Arab World.

The results of these policies are disastrous. Iraq's universities, once the showcase of the Arab region, are now probably the worst in the Arab region, Asia and the world. The Ranking Web of World Universities is published twice a year (January and July), covering more than 20,000 Higher Education Institutions worldwide.[13]

On the Arab level only 3 Iraqi universities are in the top 100 of Arab universities in the latest ranking of January 2011:

The University of Kufa ranks 77th, the University of Technology ranks 86th and the University of Sulaymaniyah ranks 91th.[14]

On the global level only 8 Iraqi universities figure in the top 12.000:

[Kufa University](#)

6097

[University of Technology Iraq *](#)

6503

[University of Sulaimani](#)

6664

[University of Dohuk](#)

8781

[University of Mustansiriyah](#)

10264

[Foundation of Technical Education](#)

10327

[University of Mosul](#)

10738

[Kurdistan University](#)

11240

[College of Medicine Basrah University](#)

11338

[University of Basrah](#)

11406

[American University of Iraq Sulaimani](#)

11591

The show-piece of Iraq: Baghdad University, doesn't even figure in the top 12.000.

That's the fantastic revolution in education, predicted by some unworldly Western academics and mala fide US politicians.

The facts on the ground in Iraq show that there is no "revolution" whatsoever in Iraq's education system, no reconstruction worthy of the name. There is only destruction, corruption and decline.

How can there possible be progress when sectarian militia's still roam the campuses, when there's no serious investigation into the assassinations of Iraqi academics, when attacks on educational institutions are assigned to "insurgents" while it is well known that the destruction of the Iraqi education system is part of the plan to culturally and ethnically cleanse Iraq, to "end the state" as Paul Wolfowitz declared in 2003.

25th of February: Iraqi youth declare "Day of Rage for Change and Freedom in Iraq"

Following the example of their Tunesian and Egyptian fellow Arabs, Iraqi youth declare the 25th Feb a day of rage and they call for demonstrations in Baghdad. Their slogans:

- * Enough with our silence, our patience has ran out.
- * We are like camels, we eat weeds and transport gold
- * Our annual income from oil is \$100 billion, yet we cannot find bread to eat.
- * Death to democracy that takes us from bad to worse
- * Death to democracy that does not recognise impeccable qualifications
- * Death to democracy that has made people strangers in their own homeland
- * Death to democracy that looks the other way while the ministers steal and embezzle billions and facilitate their escaping justice (reference to the minister for electricity, commerce..etc.)
- * Death to democracy that robs the bank in daylight (reference to the robbing of the bank of Rafidain in Zuwiya)
- * Death to democracy that has promised transparency but created foggy atmosphere.
- * Death to democracy that has turned into a religion of worshiping positions of power
- * Death to the democracy of assassinations with silenced guns
- * Death to the democracy that assassinated our best academics and scientists and is replacing them with ignorant people who can hardly read and write.

- * Death to the democracy of death and beheading
- * Death to the democracy of poverty, backwardness and murder
- * Death to the democracy that arrests the murderers, then set them free and claims they escaped!
- * Death to the democracy that assassinated the opposition writers and those who stand by the truth
- * Death to the democracy of the ethnic and sectarian quotas
- * Death to the democracy that brought us a cancer of separation walls in our beloved Baghdad.

As you can read, some of these slogans are related to the dreadful state of Iraq's Higher Education and the killings of academics. Others are directed against the poor quality of public services and rampant unemployment. Iraq's capital, Baghdad, home to more than six million people, hardly gets one hour of non-interrupted electricity supplies every 24 hours.[15] Iraq has run out of money to pay for widows' benefits, farm crops and other programs for the poor, the parliament leader told lawmakers who have collected nearly \$180,000 the past 9 months in one of the world's most oil-rich nations.[16]

Every day there are demonstrations and protests in many Iraqi towns, not covered by the mainstream press. Police shot randomly at hundreds of protesters in al-Hamza district in Iraq's southern province of al-Diwaniya on the 4th of February, killing one person and injuring four. The incident came after a statement released on 3 February by the Iraqi parliament condemning the use of violence against demonstrators in Egypt and urged for the respect of human rights. The protesters who followed up with their demands from a previous demonstration on Thursday called for the removal of al-Hamza head official and for the Iraqi government to provide basic services. In addition to demanding employment, the protesters carried lamps and small sacks of sugar to symbolize their demands for food and electricity.[17]

Richard Falk's comments on the International Seminar: "Defending Education in Times of War and Occupation".

"The shocking portrait of what occupation has meant for academicians and students is depicted by the Ghent Charter that has been endorsed by prominent educators in Europe and elsewhere, including the Rector of the University of Ghent. The BRussels Tribunal has played a leading part in exposing these realities afflicting Iraqi universities, and has organized a seminar to take place in Ghent, Belgium, March 9-11, 2011, with the title "Defending education in times of war and occupation."

"It is important that all of us, especially those paying taxes in the United States to pay for this occupation, understand that our silence is complicity. Especially those of us associated with teaching and research in American universities bear an additional responsibility to exhibit even now our solidarity with those who have suffered and are suffering in Iraqi academic communities. We know that many faculty members have been murdered since 2003 (over 500 confirmed cases), particularly those who spoke out and acted against the occupation, and many more have fled the country permanently. The departure of university personnel is part of a wider exodus of middle class Iraqis, estimates are over two million,

leaving the country deprived of the sort of national social fabric essential to avoid predatory forms of foreign economic exploitation of the country.”

“We who devote our lives to higher education realize the importance of educated and dedicated young people for the wellbeing of a country. If Iraq’s future is to be restored to some semblance of decency, its institutions of higher learning will need to become safe and hospitable for students and faculty.”[18]

In the meantime, read the Ghent Charter in Defense of Iraqi Academia and weep![19]

Objectives of the Ghent international seminar on Iraqi academics

While the mainstream media continues to ignore or conceal information vital to any reasoned understanding of why the United States and its allies attacked Iraq, occupied it, and continue to occupy it, the urgent task of the proposed seminar is not only to give reasons for the destruction of Iraqi academia, but also to propose ways of saving it, highlighting the duty of international organisations to respond, and the moral responsibility of non-Iraqi educators to stand in solidarity with their Iraqi counterparts.

Thus in Ghent, in cooperation with other Belgian universities and international organisations, the aim is to alert the international academic community to the ongoing nature of the crimes against Iraqi academics and to propose and explore practical remedies.

The introductory content of the seminar would cover a number of elements:

- Introduction to the results of “state-ending”: the killing of academics and destruction of Iraqi academia as exemplary of a strategy of cultural and political destruction;
- Testimony on the killing of Iraqi academics and the destruction of the educational system in Iraq and its current status under occupation and a client government;
- Special attention to the situation of the forcibly displaced: the challenges faced by Iraqi refugees in securing their rights to education, financing their education, and the right to work for displaced Iraqi academics;
- An assessment of the practical challenges to education in Iraq today, spanning facilities and the loss of persons, as well as the general deterioration of social culture and public safety amid the collapse of the state and the reign of violent militias and associated leaders.
- An analysis of the extent of discrimination, corruption and oppression in Iraqi universities and the educational system and how these might be stopped.

The objectives — and main content — of the seminar would be:

- To provide the international academic community, wider public and relevant institutions with an opportunity to hear the truth about the destruction of Iraq, and the plight of Iraqi academia and academics in particular;
- To provide, within the framework of an accurate, non-partisan understanding of the destruction of Iraqi academia and the killing of academics, an opportunity for those who stand in solidarity with Iraqi academics and promote education in general to propose and discuss practical means of helping Iraqis recover their rights to education, and defending

Iraqi academics;

- To provide, in particular, a forum for educational leaders — whether deans, professors, department heads or administrators — to establish a practical network of opportunities for displaced Iraqi academics, thus helping to save what remains of Iraqi academia outside Iraq;
- To formulate, alongside the practical initiatives discussed or adopted, the insistence that politicians, governments, civil servants and associated institutions, at national and international levels, take immediate steps to uphold international law, the rights of education embraced by the United Nations, and to stop the ruthless repression and killing of Iraqi academics.

The main objective of the seminar should be to make a solid step towards relieving the suffering of the Iraqi people. They are the ultimate targets of the destruction of Iraqi academia.

One of the best means of bringing closer an end to their suffering is to participate in efforts to propose, map, plan and outline the steps necessary for rehabilitating Iraq's educational system. Saving Iraqi academics is a keystone in stemming any further destruction of Iraq and its people, and to rebuilding what remains.

Only Iraqis can rebuild Iraq, and for Iraq to be sovereign these Iraqis should be skilled, capable and independent, so the destruction wrought can be repaired. Iraq's educators are vital to Iraq's future.

The time is long past for speeches and assurances from those in positions of power. Practical action must be demanded, of those in power and from ourselves.

More information and possibilities to register: <http://www.brussellstribunal.org/Seminar>

Notes

[1]

<http://www.education.ualberta.ca/en/FacultyOfEducationNews/2010/11/UofAhelpingcreateaneducationrevolutioninIraq.aspx>

[2] See "Cultural Cleansing in Iraq", Dirk Adriaenssens, page 119, Pluto Press, ISBN 9780745328126

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

[4] Nabil al-Tikriti in "Cultural Cleansing in Iraq" p 98, <http://www.plutobooks.com/display.asp?K=9780745328126&>

[5] http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A56414-2004Jun20_2.html

[6] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kanan_Makiya

[7] <http://www.azzaman.com/english/index.asp?fname=news%5C2011-01-26%5Ckurd.htm>

[8] <http://blogs.mcclatchydc.com/iraq/2010/12/as-if-saddam-never-was.html>

[9] <http://www.brussellstribunal.org/AcademicsFraud140909.htm>

[10]

<http://www.al-jamiat.com/admissions-and-applications/iraq-education-initiative-sending-500-00-students-across-the-globe/>

[11] <http://www.brusselstribunal.org/Al-Tikriti.htm>

[12] See the list of 451 assassinated academics:
<http://www.brusselstribunal.org/academicsList.htm>

[13] <http://www.webometrics.info/index.html>

[14] http://www.webometrics.info/top100_continent.asp?cont=aw

[15] <http://www.azzaman.com/english/index.asp?fname=news%5C2011-01-15%5Ckurd.htm>

[16] <http://www.commondreams.org/headline/2010/11/21-0>

[17] www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/02/04/136241.html

[18] <http://richardfalk.wordpress.com/2011/01/04/244/>

[19] <http://www.brusselstribunal.org/pdf/ghent-charter-in-defense-of-iraqi-academia.pdf>

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