

Farewell to Arms: Jenny, Iraq and the Next War

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Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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Let's call her Jenny. Jenny was alone, and clearly confused. Her face was dotted with acne, and her short, blond hair was stiff at the ends. As the Skyline train sped towards the next destination, she stood 'at attention' in her military fatigue and boots staring aimlessly into the vastness of the Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport.

Jenny was not the only returnee from Iraq. The airport was bustling with men and women in uniform. There seemed to be little festivity awaiting them. The scene was marred with the same confusion and uncertainty that have accompanied this war from the start: unclear goals that kept on changing while its own advocates – in the media, the government and within right-wing think tanks – began slowly and shamelessly disowning it. They all changed their tune, and many of them redirected their venom at Iran. In the meanwhile, the soldiers continued to fight, kill and fall in droves. Following the recent reduction of troops in Iraq, thousands were expected to come home, while others headed to Afghanistan to battle on, carrying with them their inconceivably heavy gear and their continued bewilderment.

America's poor have always carried the burden of wars undertaken by America's rich, who barefacedly scurry for the spoils while soldiers give up their lives, or are otherwise left with medals and untold physical and psychological scars.

"As of Wednesday, Sept. 22, 2010, at least 4,421 members of the U.S. military had died in the Iraq war since it began in March 2003," reported the Associated Press. "Since the start of U.S. military operations in Iraq, 31,951 U.S. service members have been wounded in hostile action, according to the Defense Department's weekly tally." As for the Iraqi body count, the number fluctuates from hundreds of thousands to well over the one million mark. This doesn't include those who perished in the first Iraq war (1990-91) or as a result of the long-term sanctions that followed. But one cannot blame the Associated Press for not spitting out exact numbers. The rate of death among that shattered nation was happening at such an imaginable speed that the victims were lucky to even get a proper burial.

The Skyline high-speed train came to a stop at Terminal A and quickly resumed its circular journey. Passengers departed and newcomers embarked. Jenny remained in her place. She reminded me of Lynndie England, the army reservist famed for dragging a poor, tortured Iraqi prisoner with a leash in Abu Ghraib. The prisoner's face was a testament to all the pain an expression can possibly communicate. England's face was frozen, as she stared at her captive without a decipherable expression. She was later convicted with connection to the torture.

Abu Ghraib was only a microcosm of Iraq. No one was convicted for the much larger crime that has decimated the civilization that served as the cradle of all civilizations. Cheney,

Rumsfeld and Bush are enjoying retirement to the fullest. Those who fabricated the 'case for war' on Iraq are still as busy as ever, in their think-tanks, universities and media outlets. Now they are concocting a 'case for war' against Iran.

But Jenny might not be the Lynndie England type at all. Maybe she did some clerical work in the Green Zone. Maybe she developed an affinity to Iraq. Maybe she even befriended an Iraqi family or two. Maybe she is currently carrying in her handbag some photos of an Iraqi child named Hiyyat, meaning "life".

Jenny might never have committed even the most minor of crimes. She might have genuinely thought that her deployment to Iraq was going to better the world, to protect the US from the terrorists that she was misled to believe coordinated their attacks on America with Saddam Hussein. She may be too young to understand how the world works. She has the face of a teenager, because she is one. They gave her a gun and taught her how to shoot. They told her things about democracy, and how the Arabs think. They promised her tuition and a variety of other perks. Is Jenny at all responsible for what happened in Iraq?

Now at terminals B and C, Jenny doesn't seem to be paying the slightest attention to the robotic voice in English and Spanish informing passengers about the upcoming stop and when to get off the train.

When was Jenny even sent to Iraq? Were the disasters created by the war as clear then as they are now? Those who lead wars always promise that the world will be a better place – once the guns are silenced, the dead are buried and the 'collateral damage' is conveniently justified and forgotten. But in the case of this war at least, the world has certainly not emerged a better place. Neither the Middle East region nor the US are in any way safer. In fact, the whole world is much more dangerous now. The war was provoked on faulty premises, concocted evidence and forgery. It created chaos, enlivened sectarian divisions, pitted governments and people against each other. While the Iraqis, of course, have paid the heaviest price by far, the war is also a major component of the current crisis engulfing the United States: political division at home, loss of foreign policy direction (and leadership) abroad, economic recession, which struck first nationally, then internationally, among many other manifestations.

The war is not over, and an older war is being expediently reignited. Jenny, once home, will be told of how bad things have been. How difficult it is to find a job. Her chances of making a dignified living in America have dwindled significantly since she joined the army, regardless of when that was. The army, after all, might be her best chance at making a living.

Where will it be now, Jenny? Back to Iraq, maybe, but under a mission with a different title? Operation New Dawn?

At the last terminal, D, Jenny is still in her place. Now every last passenger will have to disembark, as the Skyline speed-train is about to restart its circular journey. Where will it be, Jenny? It is, after all, your choice.

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