

Grand Theft Iraq

Privatizing and Carving up an Entire National Economy

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"We live under a system by which the many are exploited by the few - and war is the ultimate sanction of that exploitation." Harold Laski, 1945.

At the end of August, in Dubai and the beginning of September, in London, conferences were held in order to privatize and carve up contracts for every essential service and infrastructure in Iraq. There was not a mega-corporate pig anywhere on earth, seemingly, who did not have its trotters in the trough. As Iraqis flee in an exodus of biblical proportions and die in a genocidal one, US/UK government backed corporate priority is a smash and grab raid of every asset and facility in the "land between two rivers".

Meetings were organised by the Iraq Development Programme, under the auspices of the Arab-British Chamber of Commerce ("Arab" clearly secondary, as since Arabic is written from right to left, Britain comes first and the Arabic version, last) ninety five percent of "tendered" ("assumed" seems more apt) contracts are US giants. The UK was thrown minimal bones, with Egypt, Netherlands and Spain getting one each, according the IDP website (<http://www.iraqdevelopmentprogramme.org>)

The "best-in-breed" technology is to be brought to Iraq, as it is milked dry.

Trough facilitators include: the misnamed United States Aid and International Development (USAID), U.S. Embassy Iraq, Department of Defence Army Corps of Engineers, (U.S.) Defence Procurement and Acquisition Police, U.S. Government Iraq Infrastructure and Reconstruction Programme (NB: <http://www.bechtel.com/iraq>) the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, U.S. Government Iraq Reconstruction Projects - and on and on. To mix metaphors, potential cash cows don't come bigger than this.

The carpetbaggers had a little bit of help from their quisling friends in their illegitimate and illegal carve up. Dr Adel Abdul Mehdi, Iraq's "Vice President", said: "Iraq's new investment law will facilitate investment for both Iraqi and non-Iraqi businesses by providing a secure investment environment." Referring to Iraq's resources, he said the conference presented opportunities across a wide range of industries: oil, gas, agriculture, infrastructure.

Indeed. Up for grabs are: hospital and security equipment, medicines, road and rail machinery, oil production tools, finance and telecommunication systems. Rebuilding of roads, rail, hospitals, government buildings, schools, water purification plants and electricity, information technology, telecommunications, all to move from state owned to the "free market economy".

If Iraqis are down to near no electricity now, due to the liberators' inability to provide what

Saddam Hussein's government did within just months after the 1991 decimation, they won't be able to afford it in the future anyway. "Yes we have plans for fully privatising", Iraq's electricity "Minister" Karem Waheed Hassan, told UPI.

Ali Al Dabbagh, for the Electricity Company, was concerned only for assurances "for the investor", Iraq's population did not come into the equation. Contracts will be granted; \$Billions will be spent; contractors paid their massive profits - and the lights will go out all over Iraq (except the Green Zone, and the Vatican City sized U.S. embassy, if the resistance haven't blown them up.)

In the country which brought the world writing, the first written records, Algebra, Astronomy, the wheel, the first time piece, Irrigation, the first pharmaceutical college, the "Epic of Gilgamesh", and it is thought, the first university, the Universities of Florida and Oklahoma are being drafted in as education "curricular consultants" to take advantage of the "key opportunities in ICT and education".

It would be interesting to know what the Universities of Florida and Oklahoma can offer to a country which, as with Palestine, prior to the invasion, had the most PhD's per capita, in the world. Whose educational system was so exemplary, that UNESCO devised a unique award for Iraq, commenting that it was the only country, in their experience, where a child could be born in abject poverty, of illiterate parents and complete his education to become an architect, engineer, surgeon, or whatever he or she aspired to. Education was free from kindergarten through university and post graduate studies abroad.

"Panel sessions at the conferences covered the legal environment for conducting business in Iraq, financing private sector business, trade and commerce and private sector banking."

You bet. American lawyers seemingly are on hand at every ministry to draft laws legitimising one of the biggest ram raids in history.

Electricity, of course, is also needed to pump oil. Some of those representing the oil industry - which, after nationalisation in 1971, saw the Iraqi government pour money into all that is now being privatised, thereby creating a near "first world country", according to the U.N. - were: Chevron, B.P., Conoco Phillips, Marathon Oil, Total, Exxon, Lukoil, Statoil, General Electric, Dana Gas, Raytheon, Crescent Petroleum and Hawker Beechcroft.

Ahmed Janabi (Al Jazeera, 4th May 2006) reminds us of Douglas Feith, then US Under-Secretary of Defence, who said on February 11, 2003:

"Only someone ignorant of the easy-to-ascertain realities could think that the United States would profit from such a war, even if we were willing to steal Iraq's oil which we emphatically are not going to do."

He was either economical with the truth, or very forgetful of President George H.W. Bush's statement after 1991, Janabi reminds, who said he would not let one country control twenty percent of the world's oil resources. Further, at a conference in London on 20th June 2003, just a month after the fall of Baghdad, writes Janabi, Israel's Binyamin Netanyahu told a group of investors that Iraqi oil would be flowing through Israel's Jaffa pipeline "sooner or later".

"Iraq has the capacity to become the biggest revenue generating country in the Middle

East”, states I.D.P., with one delegate shown on BBC Newsnight, nearly salivating, as he talked of opportunities unheard of anywhere on the globe. “A follow up summit is expected to take place in 2008, by which time the hydro-carbon law will have been approved.” The “Iraqi people are going to become part of the international community”, said another I.D.P. delegate.

Indeed, stripped of all and sold down Mesopotamia’s two great rivers. Coincidentally, the U.S. is to build another vast base in Wasit Province, to protect Iraq from “insurgents” coming in from Iran. As the gimlet eyed analyst Sarah Meyer points out coincidentally, another vast oilfield, it seems, has just been discovered there.

(<http://www.indexresearch.blogspot.com>);

In an article worth revisiting, (U.S.) Major General Smedley Butler, in Common Sense Magazine, in November 1935 wrote:

“There isn’t a trick in the racketeering bag that the military gang is blind to. It has its ‘finger men’ (to point out enemies) its ‘muscle men’ (to destroy enemies) its ‘brain guys’ (to plan war preparations) and a ‘Big Boss’ (supernationalistic capitalism.)

“It may seem odd, for me, a military man, to adopt such a comparison. Truthfulness compels me to do so. I spent thirty three years and four months in active service in one of our country’s most agile forces – the Marine Corps. I served in all commissioned ranks from Second Lieutenant to Major General. During that period I spent most of my time being a high class muscle man for Big Business and Wall Street and for the bankers. In short, I was a racketeer; a gangster for capitalism.

“I suspected I was just a part of a racket at the time. Now I am sure of it.... My mental faculties remained in suspended animation while I obeyed the orders of the higher ups. This is typical with everyone in military service.

“Thus, I helped make Mexico and especially Tampico safe for American oil interests in 1914. I made Haiti and Cuba a decent place for National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefit of Wall Street. The record of racketeering is long. I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers in 1909-12. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. In China, in 1927, I helped see to it that Standard Oil went its way unmolested.

“During those years, I had, as the boys in the backroom would say, a swell racket. I was rewarded with honors, medals and promotion. Looking back on it, I feel I might have been able to give Al Capone a few hints. The best he could do was to operate his racket in three city districts. I operated on three continents.”

Mesopotamia is a racket so gargantuan, that it surely would have stunned even General Butler. Not, however, it seems, General Colin Powell, who told U.S. Commander in Chief, President George W. Bush, in the summer of 2002, that in the event of an invasion of Iraq: “You are going to be the proud owner of twenty five million people ... You’ll own it all.”

(<http://www.harpers.org/PrivateProperty/SubjectOf/Event>)

The writer is indebted to Mrs Elizabeth Rowland Hughes, a lifelong inspiration for peace, for General Butler's article, from her archives, which inspired this piece.

Felicity Arbuthnot is a journalist and activist who has visited the Arab and Muslim world on numerous occasions. She has written and broadcast on Iraq, her coverage of which was nominated for several awards. She was also senior researcher for John Pilger's award-winning documentary, "[Paying the Price: Killing the Children of Iraq](#)". and author, with Nikki van der Gaag, of "[Baghdad](#)" in the "Great Cities" series, for World Almanac Books (2006.)

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