

# Iraq : Destroying a Country: War Crimes and Atrocities

## Part II

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

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#)

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“The abused are only Iraqis”, a US General to General Antonio Taguba.

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of the latest, vast cache of documents from Wikileaks, is that anyone was surprised at the revelations. For Iraqis, Afghans and the region, and Iraq and Afghanistan watchers across the globe, countless millions of words have been written and eye witness reports sent since day one of the highly questionable legality of the Afghan invasion the absolute illegality of that of Iraq.

Soldiers have put “trophy” photographs of the dead, mutilated, tortured on the internet. In August the BBC’s documentary: “The Wounded Platoon”, aired interviews with soldiers who admitted shooting Iraqi civilians and “keeping scores.” (1) Abu Ghraib’s particular testimony to freedom, democracy and liberation’s bounties, will likely remain the mental monument to the U.S., military in Iraq, which will ring down the generations.

Former Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Tareq Aziz and his colleagues await an Inquistitional, mediaeval end on a hangman’s noose, under America’s watch (with the U.K., since still in coalition.) Charges include crimes against humanity. Yet the perpetrators of nearly seven years of near indescribable crimes against humanity in Iraq - and near a decade in Afghanistan, return home to heroes’ welcomes.

Reaction in Iraq to the woeful litany of crimes documented in some 400,000 U.S., files is encapsulated by Baghdad Political Science Professor Saadi Kareem, who commented: “Iraqis know all about the findings in these documents. The brutality of American and Iraqi forces was hidden from Americans and Europeans, but not for Iraqis ... Iraqis are totally aware of what happened to them.”

President of the London-based Arab Law Association, Sabah al-Mukhtar, told Al Jazeera that: “Frankly there is no surprise ..” The Middle East knew from day one.

The Independent’s Robert Fisk (“The Shaming of America”, 24th October 2010) commented: “As usual, the Arabs knew. They knew all about the mass torture, the promiscuous shooting of civilians, the outrageous use of air power against family homes, the vicious American and British mercenaries, the cemeteries of the innocent dead. All of Iraq knew. Because they were the victims.”

The U.S., soldiers knew too of the illegalities they were committing, at every level. These

were not aberrations that needed a crash course in international law, or the laws of war, they were crimes, which would have been just that, anywhere on earth.

Former Private Ross Caputi, formerly of the U.S., Marines, has offered testimony on some of these crimes, to the 15th Session of the Human Rights Council of the U.N., (13th., September - 1st., October 2010.) He was in the second assault on Fallujah, in November 2004. The city's residents had been ordered to leave. Seemingly about two thirds fled, allowed to take little or nothing, leaving a lot of unguarded homes. The soldiers went: "from house to house" through the city. "... there were often possessions left behind ... looting became very commonplace (of) anything that seemed valuable - silverware, teapots, knives and clothing."

"People in my Unit were searching the pockets of the dead ... for money." The Platoon Commanders and Company Commander: "... were aware of what was happening ..." Why Caputi stole a "black winter ski mask", is unexplained. Daylight robbery, likely being emulated across Iraq, a country where, until the embargo's strangulation took grip, and with it desperation, even in cities, people left their doors unlocked, when out.

Theft was seemingly a way of life for soldiers from early on, recorded in a litany of reports and numerous documents.

So far, this publication has not found records of moneys and goods being ordered returned, by senior officers. With looting and the collapse of the banks, money, by virtually all, was kept at home.

One report to the Human Rights Council is of the raid on the home of, and arrest of, Mohammed Khamis Saleh Ali al-Halbusi, in Fallujah, during the night of 2nd November 2003. Beaten in front of his family, he alleges that thirty seven thousand U.S., dollars were stolen, with a quantity of gold - an important cultural possession, passed down from generation to generation.

Caputi also recounts that during November 2004, a tactic known as "reconnaissance by fire", was used. Areas and buildings are fired into: "If you hear silence after your firing, then there are no people in the area or building ..." Surely dead by "reconnaissance", is also a likely possibility? The tactic is "always indiscriminate."

He also confirms the use of white phosphorous. (The use of depleted uranium with its residual genetic, carcinogenic and toxic implications, is now undisputed.)

Another indiscriminate tactic was using: "... bulldozers to clear houses. If there were suspected resistance fighters in a house, we would bulldoze it, in case ... I watched a battalion bulldozing an entire neighbourhood ..." Another instance involved three people in a house including: "a young boy, roughly ten years old." Grenades were fired in to the house until it: "collapsed on top of all three of them", killing them. "In every instance .. (of killings) I am unaware of any action taken to report their deaths. We always just moved on." Thus, it seems, even the upper estimates of Iraqi deaths may well be underestimated.

Disfiguring burns, attacks and torture leading to blindness, deformities and limb loss, become a sickening norm in this town, where at least - in spite of all efforts to prevent them - such extensive records of its brutalization do exist.

Mr Caputi had considerable courage to come forward. But, it has to be asked, did he and his colleagues, rifling through family homes, momentos, most personal belongings, inheritance, helping themselves and stealing cash, question: "What are we doing? Can this be right?"

One Iraqi who "knew" only too well what happened in Fallujah, was Dr Salam Ismael. He had worked as a doctor in Fallujah during the April 2004 siege. He finally gained entry with aid in January 2005, two months after the November assault. (2) He records:

"It was the smell that first hit me, a smell that is difficult to describe, and one that will never leave me. It was the smell of death. Hundreds of corpses were decomposing in the houses, gardens and streets of Fallujah. Bodies were rotting where they had fallen, bodies of men, women and children, many half-eaten by wild dogs.

"A wave of hate had wiped out two-thirds of the town, destroying houses and mosques, schools and clinics. This was the terrible and frightening power of the US military assault. The accounts I heard over the next few days will live with me forever. You may think you know what happened in Fallujah. But the truth is worse than you could possibly have imagined."

Dr Ismael found Hudda Issawi (17) in a nearby makeshift refugee camp. She said that on 9th., November, American marines came to her home. Her father and a neighbour went to the door: "We were not fighters, we had nothing to fear", she ran to the kitchen to cover her hair. She and her brother (13) heard the shots that killed her father and his friend - they hid behind the fridge. Her older sister was caught, beaten and shot. Troops left with the two undiscovered, but: "(they) destroyed our furniture and stole the money from my father's pocket."

Trapped, Hudda tried to comfort her gravely wounded sister, who died a few hours later. For three days she and her brother stayed in the house with their dead father, sister and friend.

Fearing discovery, they finally decided to try to escape. A sniper shot her in the leg, she recounted. When her little brother ran, he was shot in the back, dying instantly. In a seemingly rare act of human decency, a female U.S., soldier found her and took her to hospital. It is possible to speculate that her bleak, near emotionless recounting, indicated a young person still in near catatonic shock.

On the same day, it transpired, in the same district, people had been ordered to leave their homes, carrying white flags, bringing only essential belongings with them, and gather near the Jamah al Furkan Mosque in the town centre of the famed, ancient "City of Mosques."

Eyad Latif described how, with eight member of his family, including a baby of six months, they walked in single file, to the Mosque: "U.S., soldiers appeared on the roofs of surrounding houses and opened fire." Eyad's father and mother "died instantly." Two brothers were hit, one in the head and one in the neck, one woman in the hand, one in the leg.

The wife of one brother was killed: "When she fell, her five year old son ran and stood over her body. They shot him dead too."

Dr Ismael recounts : "Survivors made desperate appeals to the troops to stop firing. But Eyad told me that whenever one of them tried to raise a white flag they were shot. After

several hours he tried to raise his arm with the flag. But they shot him in the arm. Finally he tried to raise his hand. So they shot him in the hand.” (Emphasis mine.)

The five survivors, including the six-month-old child, and the brother shot in the neck, after hours lying injured, finally crawled to the nearest home, which was empty, to find shelter. They survived there for eight days: “... living on roots and with just one cup of water for the baby”, said Eyad.

They were finally found by members of the Iraq National Guard and taken to hospital, again fleeing, sick and wounded, when they heard the U.S., forces were arresting all men. It is unclear what happened to the others assembled, on instruction by the Mosque, but Eyad described : “the street awash with blood.”

Dr Ismael: ” ... heard the accounts of families killed in their houses, of wounded people dragged into the streets and run over by tanks, of a container with the bodies of 481 civilians inside, of premeditated murder, looting and acts of savagery and cruelty that beggar belief.

“We found people wandering like ghosts through the ruins ... looking for the bodies of relatives .. trying to recover some of their possessions from destroyed homes ... We moved from house to house, discovering families dead in their beds, or cut down in living rooms or in the kitchen ... It became clear that we were witnessing the aftermath of a massacre, the cold-blooded butchery of helpless and defenceless civilians.”

He concluded: “Nobody knows how many died. The occupation forces are now bulldozing the neighbourhoods to cover up their crime.(See also \*) What happened in Fallujah was an act of barbarity. The whole world must be told the truth.”

Such accounts might be dismissed as “fog of war” propaganda, were they not so consistent across Iraq, from the day of the invasion, the majority from totally unconnected families or individuals – corroborated, little by little, by coalition soldiers.

Numerous survivors were swept up to be tortured in a U.S., base camp which had been set up in a former tourist village, bound, bags over their heads and out in small “cages”, with now familiar stories of being stripped, made to hold stress positions for hours and deprived of sleep water and food. Others were incarcerated under Abu Ghraib’s specialist form of horror.

In the tranquil setting of the White House Rose Garden, on 30th., April 2004, President Bush, had stated that due to U.S., intervention: “There are no longer torture chambers or rape rooms or mass graves in Iraq.” This was said as images from Abu Ghraib were being beamed around the world.

Four days later, General Taguba released his minutely detailed and referenced seventy two page Report on the realities, which belied President Bush’s sunny over-view of the benefits the invasion had bestowed upon Iraq. In Abu Ghraib alone, they included:

“...that the intentional abuse of detainees by military police personnel included the following acts:a. (S) Punching, slapping, and kicking detainees; jumping on their naked feet;b. (S) Videotaping and photographing naked male and female

detainees;c. (S) Forcibly arranging detainees in various sexually explicit positions for photographing;d. (S) Forcing detainees to remove their clothing and keeping them naked for several days at a time;e. (S) Forcing naked male detainees to wear women's underwear;f. (S) Forcing groups of male detainees to masturbate themselves while being photographed and videotaped;g. (S) Arranging naked male detainees in a pile and then jumping on them;h. (S) Positioning a naked detainee on a MRE Box, with a sandbag on his head, and attaching wires to his fingers, toes, and penis to simulate electric torture;i. (S) Writing "I am a Rapest" (sic) on the leg of a detainee alleged to have forcibly raped a 15-year old fellow detainee, and then photographing him naked;j. (S) Placing a dog chain or strap around a naked detainee's neck and having a female Soldier pose for a picture;k. (S) A male MP guard having sex with a female detainee;l. (S) Using military working dogs (without muzzles) to intimidate and frighten detainees, and in at least one case biting and severely injuring a detainee;m. (S) Taking photographs of dead Iraqi detainees. (ANNEXES 25 and 26)"

General Taquba also accused the Bush administration of war crimes, calling for the prosecution of those responsible. He wrote: "There is no longer any doubt that the current Administration committed war crimes. The only question is whether those who ordered torture will be held to account."

Between Wikileaks, Bush's memoirs, and mounting swathes of documentation, legal accountability is looking to be increasingly possible. (Ironically, Bush's memoirs are to be released on November 9th., the anniversary of a chillingly historically parallel crime to Fallujah, and across Iraq, Kristellnacht, in 1938. The terrorising, rounding up of, and destruction and theft of property and places of worship of swathes of the Jewish population of Germany and Austria.)

William Hague, Britain's newish, follicly-challenged Foreign Secretary, is seeking to withdraw the U.K., from its obligations towards prosecuting war crimes under Universal Jurisdiction. It is an embarrassment, he says, that various Israeli political figures have cancelled visits, should they be arrested.

Such a sleight of hand, would also extend the welcome mat to George W. Bush, recently alleged another kind of U.S., embarrassment, seemingly reluctant to travel for the same reason. Of course, it would also mean that Tony Blair, the co-conspirator in the invasion, would be free to visit any of his seven U.K., homes, without fear of the hand of the law - or that of a concerned citizen - on his collar.

In spite of Hague's efforts, there may be many countries and air carriers, that they and former colleagues may soon be considering avoiding.

## Notes

\* Part I of this article at <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=21545>

1. <http://www.abolishwar.org.uk>
2. <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article8093>.

Re: Depleted uranium, see also:

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/Apps2/business/motions/Default.aspx?motionid=20127>  
<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/Apps2/business/motions/Default.aspx?motionid=19813>

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