

Iraq had a Long Tradition as a Center of Higher Learning: How America's War Destroyed Iraq's Universities

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The political scientist Mark Duffield has observed that the effect of Western intervention in Iraq has actually been to “demodernize” that country.[2] This is ironic given that the military campaigns against Iraq and Afghanistan have been accompanied by narratives of the West’s obligation to modernize backward nations. Nowhere is the truth of Duffield’s observation clearer than in the story of what has happened to Iraq’s education system, especially its higher education system. Western intervention has ended up destroying Iraq’s universities, formerly among the best in the region, as functional institutions. “Up to the Early 1980s, Iraq’s educational system was considered one of the best in the Middle East. As a result of its drastic and prolonged decline since then, it is now one of the weakest,” concludes a 2008 official report.[3]

Iraq has a long and venerable tradition as a center of higher learning. As Eric Herring observes, “Iraqis tend to see themselves proudly as coming from a society that was the cradle of civilization in its ancient contributions to the development of writing, legal systems, libraries, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, technology and so on.”[4] Mosul houses the world’s oldest known library, which dates to the seventh century. And

In 832 the construction of the Byat al Hikma (house of Wisdom) established the new capital [Baghdad] as an unrivaled center of scholarship and intellectual exchange. The tradition of research there brought advances in astronomy, optics, physics and mathematics. The father of algebra, Al Khawarizmii, labored among its scrolls. It was here that many of the Greek and Latin texts we accept as the foundation of Western thought were translated, catalogued, and preserved. And it was from Baghdad that these works would eventually make their way to medieval Europe and help lift that continent from its benighted, post-Roman intellectual torpor.[5]

For all his other faults, Saddam Hussein made education a priority of his regime. He invested heavily, especially in the earlier years of his rule, in an education system that was expansive, well resourced, globally connected, secular, and open to women (who, by 1991, constituted 30% of all university faculty).[6] In the words of Business Week, Saddam Hussein “used Iraq’s oil revenues to turn his nation into what many consider as the most modern and industrialized country in the Middle East. Iraq’s universities and hospitals... became the envy of its neighbors.”[7] Under Saddam Hussein Iraqi literacy levels rose from 52% in 1977 to 80% in 1987 – about the same level as in Singapore.[8] Between 1968 and 1980 the number of Iraqis attending university doubled, and university education (often including study abroad) was free. Admittedly, Iraqi universities favored Baathist party

membership over academic excellence in their hiring decisions and the curriculum barred critical discussion of Baathist ideology, but the system cranked out large numbers of competent doctors, scientists and engineers who joined a burgeoning middle class and anchored development in Iraq. Iraq's universities had a good enough reputation in the region to attract many students from surrounding countries – the same countries that are now hosting the thousands of Iraqi professors who have fled the country. [9]

The Arc of Decline

The journalist Thomas Ricks argues that we should not see the U.S. wars against Iraq in 1991 and 2003 as separate, but as two bookends in a long war against Iraq that bounded the structural violence of a decade of sanctions with two intense eruptions of kinetic violence.[10] Taking this perspective, we see that the near collapse of Iraq's educational system after the 2003 invasion was the culmination of a process of long decline that began with the Iran-Iraq War and intensified under the international sanctions regime following the 1991 Gulf War. Under the oil-for-food program, Iraqis lived under conditions of extreme austerity and requests for imported materials, including educational materials, had to be approved by foreign bureaucrats who denied many of them. While food staple purchases were usually allowed, the education system was starved of resources. H.C. Von Sponeck, the former UN Humanitarian coordinator for Iraq, reports that the UN allocated \$11.20 per year for education of each of Iraq's nearly 5 million youths in the first phase of sanctions, increasing this to \$20.80 later. Explaining that Iraq was not allowed to build new schools or to replace equipment and supplies, he describes the situation this created for Iraq's elementary school children:

Class 'holes' would be a more apt description of the place where they spent their days. It was a world of stench from the poor sanitary conditions, overcrowded classrooms, broken furniture, and usually long walks from home to school and back. There was a lack of just about anything that primary school children in Europe and Iraqi children before 1990 would have taken for granted: not infrequently they had no pencils, no paper, no erasers, no textbooks, no schoolbags.... Most classrooms lacked blackboards; those which existed were in such poor shape that they could hardly be used. Chalk was not readily available unless parents gave it to their children for the teachers' use.[11]

In these circumstances literacy levels by 1998 had fallen from 80% to 50% — about the same as in New Guinea. Twice as many girls as boys dropped out of school in the 1990s, reversing Iraq's trend hitherto toward gender equality, and girls' literacy rates fell still lower, to 45%.[12]

The universities fared no better. It was illegal to mail Iraqis educational materials (even sheet music!) from abroad, and the UN sanctions committee denied over 70% of the requests for equipment and materials from Iraqi universities.[13] So Iraqi university journal and book collections stopped at the beginning of the 1990s, equipment was not replaced once it wore out, academic salaries declined precipitously, as did the number of Iraqis attending university. Study abroad was largely out of the question. The Christian Science Monitor reported that "lab supplies dwindled, broken equipment could not be replaced, and printing presses ceased operation. Entire classrooms of science students would gather around one piece of equipment... For select professors and administrators who supported the Baath Party, salaries rose. But the majority of professors had to take second jobs as tutors or start small businesses." [14]

The Christian Science Monitor profiled one professor who, seeing his monthly salary fall from two thousand dollars in the 1980s to fifty dollars in the 1990s, left for an academic job in Yemen so he could support his four children. In the meantime, “as more professors fled, Hussein cracked down. He prohibited foreign travel and refused to issue certificates of graduation, documents needed to apply for jobs abroad. Still, many professors escaped by bribing people in the passport office... A student would report yet another ghost lab – students sitting at desks with no professor. Weeks might pass, until someone drove to the professor’s home and discovered it empty. Rumors would start to spread about whether those missing had been detained by the Baath Party, or had escaped. Eventually, a letter with no return address would arrive, typically with news that the professor was teaching in Jordan or England.”[15]

According to Iraq’s Association of University Teachers, 10,000 professors left during the twelve years of sanctions.[16]

The faculty who left were often replaced with inexperienced faculty and PhD students or with those who owed their positions to party membership or kin relationships with Saddam Hussein. Standards fell as party membership increasingly became the prerequisite for advancement, and professors could even be beaten for failing the offspring of high-ranking party members.[17]

Over the Edge

One can imagine an alternative universe from the one we inhabit where the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 would have led to a felicitous reversal of fortune for Iraq’s universities. In this alternative universe Iraq’s universities would have been purged of ideological hacks from the Baath Party, especially in high administrative positions, but competent faculty would have been left in place regardless of past party membership; Iraqi faculty who had fled abroad over the previous two decades would have returned to rebuild the universities where they started their careers; decimated university libraries would have been repopulated with books, laboratories restocked, and the Iraqi academy would have been wired for the twenty-first century; Western universities would have stepped in with generous exchange programs and offers of mentorship; and genuine freedom of inquiry would have flourished.

According to at least one account,[18] in the months immediately following the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime some Iraqi intellectuals had high hopes of inhabiting such a world. Allowed to read and debate books that had been banned for decades, including Marxist and Shi’ite texts, free at last from the anti-intellectual bullying of the Baath Party, the sanctions regime over, they imagined a renaissance of the Iraqi academy.

It was not to be.

The first calamity was the looting. With U.S. troops guarding only the Ministry of Oil and the Ministry of the Interior, despite earlier pleas from the Pentagon’s Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA) to protect cultural heritage sites in Iraq from anticipated looting, a plague of human locusts descended unchecked to pick clean and destroy libraries, museums and university buildings. Some stole precious artefacts and documents for sale on the black market; others seemed to be systematically destroying documentary evidence of the Baathist regime’s excesses; still others were, for whatever reason, just burning to the ground the landmarks of the old Iraq. The result was wholesale destruction of a nation’s cultural patrimony in libraries and museums that was at least on a

par with the Serbian destruction of Bosnian cultural heritage in Sarajevo that the U.S. had condemned a decade earlier. When the same happened in Iraq, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld simply said that “stuff happens,” and “freedom is untidy.”[19]

Here is what happened to Iraq’s leading libraries in April 2003:

The Central al-Awqf Library, founded in 1920, contained 45,000 rare books and over 6000 Ottoman documents. When arsonists set fire to the building on April 13 or 14, 2003, frenzied staff members managed to save 5250 items, including a collection of Korans. Everything else was destroyed. Furthermore, all 175,000 books and manuscripts at the library of the University of Baghdad’s College of Arts were destroyed by the fire, the entire library at the University of Basra was reduced to ash, and the Central Public Library in Basra lost 100 percent of its collection. According to Fernando Baez, director of Venezuela’s National Library and author of *A Universal History of the Destruction of Books*, up to one million books and ten million unique documents have been destroyed, lost or stolen across Iraq since 2003.[20]

The same authors describe the fate of Iraq’s National Library and Archives (NLA): “The assault on the NLA wiped out roughly 25 percent of the book collection, about 60 percent of the Ottoman and royal Hashemite documents, and virtually all Baathist records... “In one word, it was a disaster on a national scale,” said Dr. Saad Eskander, director general of the NLA. “These losses cannot be compensated. They formed modern Iraq’s historical memory.””[21]

A similar fate befell Iraqi universities, which were stripped clean not only of cultural artefacts like books but also of the basic infrastructural items that enabled them to function at all. In the words of one observer, the Washington Post’s Rajiv Chandrasekaran, “Looters began ransacking Mustansiriya University on April 9, 2003, the day Hussein’s government collapsed. By April 12, the campus of yellow-brick buildings and grassy courtyards was stripped of its books, computers, lab equipment and desks. Even electrical wiring was pulled from the walls. What was not stolen was set ablaze, sending dark smoke billowing over the capital that day.”[22]

Shortly after this spasm of destruction the U.S. compounded the damage to Iraqi universities with its ill-conceived campaign of DeBaathification. On May 16, 2003, his fourth day in Iraq, President Bush’s viceroy in Iraq, Jerry Bremer, issued Coalition Provisional Authority Order number one on the DeBaathification of Iraqi society.[23] Overruling warnings from the CIA station chief and from General Jay Garner, the man he replaced as the President’s emissary, that the consequences for Iraqi society and for the occupation promised to be disastrous, Bremer’s order banned the Baath Party from public life in Iraq and stipulated that government employees who were members of the party would lose their jobs. This applied not only to the most senior Baath Party officials but to tens of thousands of lower ranking party members as well. Controversial exile Ahmed Chalabi, blamed by many for misleading U.S. leaders about Iraqis’ likely reaction to an American invasion, was put in charge of the Higher National de-Baathification Committee.

U.S. media coverage of this decision has focused on the chaos it caused in government ministries, suddenly bereft of many experienced administrators, and the way in which it instantly recruited some of the most powerful people in Iraq as sympathizers to the embryonic insurgency. Less well known is the havoc wreaked on universities, which

overnight lost their administrators as well as large swathes of their faculty. Many had joined the Baath Party not out of ideological conviction but because, like going to church in the American South, it was what you did to get along whether you were a true believer or not. An article on Iraq's universities in the Christian Science Monitor a few months after the DeBaathification edict referred to "at least 1,000 applications from Baathists seeking their jobs back... Some argue that they had to join to protect their family or advance careers. Professors who never joined the party are petitioning on behalf of colleagues. They fear that the nation can't afford to lose so many of its best scholars." [24]

The American with final authority over their appeals, Andrew Erdmann, a 36 year-old who had earned his PhD in history three years earlier, had almost no experience as a professor, none at all as a university administrator, and spoke no Arabic. He was officially U.S. Senior advisor to the Ministry of Education but, since the Minister of Education was under arrest, was effectively Minister of Education in the early days of the occupation. The freelance journalist Christina Asquith invites us to take in that situation:

Let's pause for a minute. Sit yourself down at the mahogany table with the 22 Iraqi university presidents. Men in there [sic] 50s and 60s, who all have PhD's from top universities in England, Scotland and America; erudite, accomplished intellectual men. Due to the US invasion, they had just lost their offices, libraries and research equipment. The textbooks were burned and stolen. US soldiers occupied the dormitories. The Ministry building itself was burned to the ground, along with every file, computer and desk. In May, Amb. Paul Bremer instituted the DeBaathification Policy, which forced the firing of all the top university administrators and professors because they were Baath Party members. Half of the intellectual leadership in academia was gone. Now, in a haphazard selection process, they were given 36-year old Drew Erdmann. He controlled the budgets, the staffing, the curriculum, and the physical renovation. [25]

It took the U.S. government until September 2003 to appoint a more senior educationalist as senior advisor to the Ministry of Education. They picked John Agresto, a friend of the Rumsfeld family who had worked for Lynne Cheney at the National Endowment of the Humanities, was a notable right wing partisan in the American "culture wars" of the 1980s, and had gone on to become President of St. Johns College, a small college in New Mexico known for its conservative great books approach to education. Like Erdmann, he spoke no Arabic. In a pattern Rajiv Chandrasekaran [26] documented for other top jobs in the Coalition Provisional Authority, he lacked the obvious experience and skills for the job and was selected for his connections in the Republican Party. When a Washington Post reporter asked him what books he had read to prepare for his job, he said none. The man now in charge of education in Iraq said, "I wanted to come here with as open a mind as I could have. I'd much rather learn firsthand than have it filtered to me by an author." [27] Arriving in Iraq with no expertise on the regional society and culture, he told colleagues that he planned to create a modern university system with the latest electronic technology. He also hoped to establish comparative religion programs where the bible would be taught. [28]

One of Agresto's first tasks was to assemble a wish list and budget. The UN and World Bank had estimated it would cost almost \$2 billion to "ensure minimal quality standards of teaching and learning." [29] Having done his own evaluation of the situation, Agresto requested \$1.2 billion to rejuvenate Iraq's 22 major universities and 43 technical institutes and colleges with a combined enrolment of 240,000 students. [30] He hoped that this would also enable the establishment of sixteen Centers for Advanced Study in fields such as

biotechnology, information science and conflict resolution. Given that the U.S. Congress appropriated over \$90 billion for FY2004 in two supplemental funding bills to finance military operations and reconstruction in Iraq, and the UN/ World Bank team suggested a target of \$36 billion for Iraqi reconstruction in 2003, Agresto's \$1.2 billion was not a large request. To put it in further perspective, it is not much more than the \$900 million annual budget of one American university, George Mason, where I teach.

In the end Congress gave Agresto less than 1% of what he asked for. He requested \$1.2 billion and got \$8 million, of which he had to surrender \$500,000 for administrative overhead. He was told the remaining \$7.5 million would have to go through federal procurement channels. When he left Iraq in June 2004, by which time he was describing himself as "a neoconservative who's been mugged by reality,"[31] these funds had still not been released for use. Before he left, hearing that Paul Bremer was assembling a supplemental request for another \$20 billion for reconstruction in Iraq, Agresto asked Bremer to include \$37 million for Iraq's collapsing universities. Without explanation, Bremer refused to give the universities a single cent.[32]

In the end the largest capital resource for Iraqi higher education was \$25 million that had been set aside through USAID for American universities (yes, AMERICAN universities) that wanted to partner with Iraqi universities. Rajiv Chandrasekaran gives the following account of two of the partnerships that had been approved under this program:

The University of Hawaii's College of Tropical Agriculture had been selected to partner with the University of Mosul's College of Agriculture to provide advice on "academic programs and extension training." Not only was Mosul's near-alpine climate far from tropical, but the college had been burned to the ground by looters. What it needed was a new building...

A team from the State University of New York at Stony Brook won a \$4 million grant to "modernize curricula in archaeology" at four of Iraq's largest universities - schools where students were sitting on the floor because they lacked desks and chairs.

Chandrasekaran quotes Agresto as saying of this partnership program, "it was like going into a war zone and saying, Oh let's cure halitosis." [33]

Into the Abyss

From 2004 onwards Iraq was increasingly enveloped in sectarian violence as Sunnis and Shi'ites engaged, often with the tacit collusion of the Americans, in campaigns of sectarian cleansing. In this process of sectarian mobilization and terror urban neighborhoods where Sunnis and Shi'ites had formerly lived cheek by jowl with one another became increasingly monochromatic, as Sunnis chased Shi'ite families out of "their" neighborhoods, killing those who remained, and vice versa.[34]

Increasingly, universities were among the few spaces where sectarian mixing continued to take place. In a situation where the Baathist regime's restrictions on political activity on campus had recently been lifted, where administrative structures at universities were collapsing, and the surrounding society was being engulfed in sectarian violence, the co-presence on campus of Sunnis and Shi'ites (and a few Christians) was a recipe for violence. Moreover, the principled commitment of some in university communities to cosmopolitanism and interfaith tolerance made universities themselves targets for fundamentalists. Female students, especially if they were not wearing the "hijab," were also targets for intimidation

and threats by fundamentalist militias on campus, and female students became disproportionately likely to drop out of university.[35] (Thus one consequence of an invasion imagined by many liberals in the West as, partly, an errand to rescue oppressed Muslim women was to force young women to drop out of college and don traditional Islamic attire). One student at Baghdad's Mustansiriyah University told a British journalist that "in lectures, students even start chants with the party they support and the lecture turns to chaos." [36] And an American visiting professor told this story: "'One Iraqi professor told me how one day, a group of thugs — young men with guns — showed up in her office, demanding that she add certain things to her curriculum... She was teaching a very traditional humanities syllabus, with Heidegger and Kant, and they demanded she include writing of some radical Shia cleric. Needless to say, she complied.'" [37] Nor were such threats unusual: "Scores of professors throughout Iraq have encountered bullets sent through internal mail, death threats tacked to their office doors, or anonymous voices on the phone suggesting they not show up for work anymore. The situation has become so grave that the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research recently announced that university researchers may come to campuses just twice a week to reduce the risk of being attacked." [38]

Then there were the killings. Muhammad al-Rawi, the President of Baghdad University. Abdul-Latif al-Mayah, a political science professor and human rights advocate. Isam al-Rawi, a geology professor and head of the Association of Iraqi lecturers who was compiling statistics on assassinated Iraqi academics when he himself was assassinated. Khalid Nasir al-Miyahi, a professor of neurosurgery at Basra University. Youssef Salman, a Sunni who chaired the engineering department at the predominantly Shi'a Basra University, shot in his car. Amal Maamlaji, a Shi'a IT professor and women's rights advocate at the predominantly Sunni al-Mansour University, killed with 163 bullets. Two bombings at Mustansiriya University, one by a female suicide bomber, which killed seventy and forty people respectively. And so on.[39] Exact numbers of the dead are hard to know with certainty. In 2006 the Washington Post estimated that 160 professors had been killed and 1500 had fled the country.[40] A few months later the Washington Times was reporting that 280 professors had died and 3,250 had fled the country, while the New York Times put the number of dead at 200 and USA Today put it at 300.[41] France24 put the number of faculty murdered between 2003 and 2006 at 380.[42] But the Chronicle of Higher Education put the number of dead faculty higher, at "250 to 1,000," saying that 78 had been killed at the University of Baghdad alone.[43]

In such a situation, anything approximating normal teaching and research became impossible. The British journalist Peter Beaumont reported that "Professors and parents have told the Guardian they no longer feel safe to attend their educational institutions. In some schools and colleges, up to half the staff have fled abroad, resigned or applied to go on prolonged vacation." For those who remained, standards were relaxed to risible levels. Beaumont quoted a science professor as saying, "Education here is a complete shambles. Professors are leaving, and the situation - the closed roads and bridges - means that both students and teachers find it difficult to get in for classes. In some departments in my institute attendance is down to a third. In others we have instances of no students turning up at all." [44]

Those faculty who could became part of the great middle class exodus from Iraq under American occupation. The Iraqi Ministry of Displacement and Migration estimated that over 30 percent of Iraq's professors, doctors, pharmacists and engineers emigrated between 2003 and 2007.[45] Most went to Syria and Jordan. In the words of Newsweek, there has

been “a veritable exodus of white-collar professionals who, along with their riches, are the vertebrae of any stable society. Totalling well over 2 million–10 percent of Iraq’s population and the largest displacement of Arabs since the Palestinian-refugee crisis after the Arab-Israeli wars of 1948 through 1967–it ranks alongside the great human dislocations of Africa and the Indian Subcontinent.”[46]

In just two decades, then, Iraq’s universities, formerly among the best in the Islamic world, were put through the shredder. Completely unmade. Sitting in air-conditioned offices, surrounded by books, the fiber-optic canyons of the web just a mouse-click away, it is hard for American academics to grasp.

Coda: American Universities and the “war on terror.”

And what of American universities? What relationship, if any, did they have to these processes? Were there costs, or benefits, to them in all this?

As has been well documented, war has often been good for the bottom line of American universities. They have benefited from an influx of research funds but, being far removed from the battlefields of actual wars, have not been physically damaged in war. In the cold war in particular three universities – MIT, Stanford, and Johns Hopkins – rose to greatness largely on the back of defense funding. This funding underwrote the construction of expensive new research facilities, the hiring of new faculty, and the expansion of graduate training in fields such as physics, engineering, computer science, psychology and area studies. It also redirected intellectual development within those fields in directions favored by the military – toward nuclear and particle physics, inertial guidance research, cybernetics, mind control, and peasant insurgency, for example.[47] Thus, while war has unbuilt Iraq’s universities, it has built up American universities.

After the attacks of September 11, 2001, in the context of a newly declared “global war on terror,” large quantities of money became available for universities working on initiatives of interest to the Department of Defense and the newly established Department of Homeland Security. The table below shows the sharp increase in the dollar amount within the Defense Department’s budget allocated for research and development after 9/11. While we must remember that the Defense Department is not the only federal agency that supports military research and development, it is the third largest source of funding for university research after NIH and NSF, distributing about \$1 billion of research money every year.[48] In 2010 another \$49 million in research and development money went to universities from the Department of Homeland Security. This military funding went to about 350 universities in the U.S..

Much of the Department of Homeland Security’s funding allocated to universities went to support “Centers of Excellence.”[49] These included the Center for Risk and Economic Analysis of Terrorism Events at the University of Southern California,[50] the Center for Advancing Microbial Risk Assessment at Michigan State and Drexel Universities,[51] the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism led by the University of Maryland,[52] the National Center for the Study of Preparedness and Catastrophic event Response at Johns Hopkins University,[53] the Center of Excellence for Awareness and Location of Explosives-Related Threats led by Northeastern University and the University of Rhode Island,[54] the National Center for Border Security and Immigration at the University of Arizona,[55] and the Center for Command, Control and Interoperability at Purdue University and Rutgers University.[56]

In parallel, the intelligence agencies began to establish Intelligence Community Centers of Academic Excellence (ICCAEs) at various universities. These ICCAEs offered the intelligence community a way to outsource analysis of emergent global trends to cheaper academic labor, often graduate students, and to establish networked relationships with students who could be recruited for long term intelligence careers on graduation. Participating institutions were also required to “conduct pre-collegiate outreach in their geographic regions,” and ICCAE sponsors what USA Today calls “summer ‘spy camps’ aimed at attracting high school students to study intelligence.” In other words the intelligence community is using its university partners to do outreach into high schools on its behalf as well. [57]

Whereas cold war military funding largely went to elite private universities, the new centers aimed at assisting in the “war on terror” have mainly been established at state universities, often not highly ranked state universities, that are hungry for resources to replace the funding cut by state legislatures over the last decade.

In 2004-5, the first ICCAE centers were established at California State University in San Bernardino, Clark Atlanta University, Florida International University, Norfolk State University, Tennessee State University, Trinity Washington University, University of Texas El Paso, University of Texas-PanAmerican, University of Washington, and Wayne State University. Three of these are historically black universities. Between 2008-2010 more ICCAE centers were created at Carnegie Mellon, Clemson, North Carolina A&T State, University of North Carolina-Wilmington, Florida A&M, Miles College, the University of Maryland, University of Nebraska, University of New Mexico, Pennsylvania State University, and Virginia Polytechnic Institute.

The U.S. government has also, following the anthrax scare of 2001, appropriated large sums of money for bioterrorism preparedness, some of which has gone to establish or rebrand university centers. These include the Institute for Biosecurity at St. Louis University; the South Central Center for Public Health Wareness at Tulane University; the Center for Advancing Microbial Risk Assessment at Michigan State and Drexel Universities; the Center for Biosecurity at the University of Pittsburg; the Bioterrorism and Disaster Preparedness Center at Thomas Jefferson University; the National Agricultural Biosecurity Center at Kansas State University; and the National Center for Biodefense at George Mason University. George Mason now awards graduate degrees in biodefense, and it has built a level 3 biosafety lab that is off-limits to foreign citizens and, indeed, to anyone whose name is not on an approved list.

The U.S. national security state has also established funding competitions, such as PRISP and Minerva, for individual faculty and students seeking financial support for research or programs of study. PRISP (the Pat Roberts Intelligence Scholars Program) is a sort of ROTC for spies.[58] First established in 2004 with \$4 million as a pilot program, it is said to have funded 100-150 students in its first two years. The Obama Administration has made it a permanent program. Undergraduates and graduates can get funding for up to two years of study provided they agree to work for the intelligence agency that sponsored them for one and a half years for each year of study. If they drop out or have second thoughts about the program, they must repay their tuition fees and stipend at a very high rate of interest.[59] The intelligence agencies refuse to make available a list of students who have received PRISP scholarships, the universities they have attended, or the subjects they have studied. In most cases PRISP students are instructed not to tell faculty and other students that they are funded through PRISP.

The Minerva Initiative, funded at \$50 million over five years, was announced in 2008. It funds academic research on projects relevant to U.S. national security and the “war on terror.” While expressing particular interest in projects on either Chinese military policy or the relationship between Islam and terror, the call for proposals also invited researchers to propose out-of-the-box projects that Pentagon program officers might not have anticipated. Grantees are publicly named, and they are free to publish their findings in the open literature, but they are expected to attend summer seminars with other grantees in Washington DC, where they would be available to the Pentagon. The latter was designed to help “social science capacity-building” within the Department of Defense.

The contrast between the fate of Iraqi and American universities over the last decade could not be starker. Occupying different structural relationships to the same war, the one has been starved of resources, many of its buildings destroyed, and its faculty fired, assassinated, or forced into exile while the other has seen an influx of resources for new buildings, new research programs, and new hires. But it would be a mistake to conclude from this that all the costs were born by Iraqi universities while all the benefits accrued to American universities. There have been costs to American universities too, but they have not been so much financial as existential. They are therefore harder to perceive, but they are no less real for this.

Many of these costs are opportunity costs. These are inherently counterfactual and are hard to quantify. They require a little imagination if they are to come into focus. Take the example of public health. The public health community saw an opportunity in the post-9/11 concern with bioterrorism, and they secured a considerable infusion of resources into public health. Yet the result has been a partial militarization of public health that has done nothing to make the public more healthy. While the U.S. ranks 36th among nations in life expectancy,[60] and has considerable public health problems with diabetes, heart disease, neonatal disease and food-borne disease, problems that kill large numbers of Americans every year, the preoccupation with bioterrorism (which has so far killed five Americans) has skewed resources toward preparedness for attacks with plague, anthrax, tularemia, and smallpox. The U.S. is funding research into and preparedness for the threat that excites Hollywood scriptwriters while ignoring the mundane threats that are killing Americans every day.[61] Universities have become conduits for a funding choice that is killing Americans by default.

Then there are the costs for students who indenture their futures to funding agencies at a young age, before they have had the opportunity, traditionally at the core of the college experience, to explore different fields and decide upon a vocation. Betrothed by debt to a career for an intelligence agency, they may discover too late that they find cryptography dull and have little aptitude for it – or that, following the anthropology or political science class that turned their world view upside down, they no longer believe in what the CIA is doing in Afghanistan.

So, alongside the heart-rending stories from Iraq, a country that has been catastrophically de-modernized by the shortsightedness of the “best and brightest” Americans, I count as the more subtle and hidden costs of war scenarios such as these: the student who majors in homeland security though she would have preferred to become a teacher; the nanotechnology researcher at MIT who dreamed of working on nanotechnology for green energy, but ends up having to work for MIT’s \$50 million Institute for Soldier Nanotechnology[62] because that is where the nanotechnology funding is; the anthropologist who would have written an important book on Islamists’ use of technology in

Egypt, but lost his funding opportunity to NSF budget cuts and was uncomfortable applying for money from the Pentagon's Minerva (in part because his human subjects in Egypt would not have talked to someone funded by the Pentagon); a laboratory that could have done good work preventing a food-borne illness outbreak that killed 10 children, but ended up working on anthrax instead; and the history department that decided not to hire the best person for the job, despite their teaching charisma and stellar publication record, because she had publicly criticized the American attack on Afghanistan and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, and the chair feared getting on the wrong side of organizations like Campus Watch that have thrived in the atmosphere of ideological orthodoxy following 9/11.

Two countries, several universities, one war. The costs have been disproportionately born by the Iraqis, whose suffering demands acknowledgement. But war damages its victors too, albeit in ways that are harder to see. A final accounting of the costs of the war in Iraq is not yet possible but, when the day comes, it will include the military instrumentalization and deformation of the best university system in the world as well as the criminal destruction of maybe the best in the Middle East.

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Notes

[1] In writing this piece I have been indebted to my fellow members of the Eisenhower Project and to Eric Herring and Mark Duffield, two key members of the Bristol School of International Security Studies. My thanks also to Haifa Zangana for her insights into life in occupied Iraq.

[2] Mark Duffield, "The Fortified Aid Compound: The Exhaustion of the Liberal Project?" Paper presented at workshop, "After Intervention," Bristol University June 21, 2011. See also Mark Duffield, "Risk Management and the Fortified Aid Compound: Everyday Life in Post-Interventionary Society" *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 4(4):453-74 (2010).

[3] Ministry of Planning and Development, Iraq National Report on the Status of Human Development (2008) available at http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Iraq/Iraq_HDR_English.pdf.

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- [9] Keith Watenpaugh, "Between Saddam and the Occupation: Iraq's Academic Community Struggles for Autonomy," Academe September/October 2004; James DeFronzo, The Iraq War: Origins and Consequences (Westview Press, 2010), 77.
- [10] Thomas Ricks, Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq (Penguin, 2006). On structural violence – the slow death or underdevelopment of populations by the opportunity structure they are forced to inhabit – see Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and peace Research," Journal of Peace Research No. 6 (1969):167-191.
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- [12] Von Sponeck, 166. Famously, Lesley Stahl, interviewing Secretary of State Madeleine Albright on CBS's Sixty Minutes on May 12, 1996, said that sanctions had led to the deaths of half a million children in Iraq and asked if that was tolerable. "We think the price is worth it," replied Albright, not contesting the number. (A video clip of the interview can be found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x4PgpBQfxgo> [accessed July 29, 2011]).
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- [14] Christina Asquith, "Students Say, 'Welcome Back, Professor,'" Christian Science Monitor December 9, 2003. See also Christina Asquith, "Righting Iraq's Universities," Christian Science Monitor August 3, 2003.
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- [20] Otterman et al, Erasing Iraq, .189
- [21] Otterman et al, Erasing Iraq,.189-90. A comprehensive list of the damage inflicted by looters on Iraq's libraries can be found at <http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/IRAQ/zan.html>.
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[50] <http://create.usc.edu/>

[51] <http://www.camra.msu.edu/>

[52] <http://www.start.umd.edu/start/>

[53] <http://www.pacercenter.org/>

[54] <http://www.northeastern.edu/alert/>, <http://energetics.chm.uri.edu/>

[55] <http://www.borders.arizona.edu/>

[56] <https://engineering.purdue.edu/PURVAC/>, <http://dydan.rutgers.edu/>

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