

Mesopotamia - Now an Endangered Species - Official.

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A year on from the 'handover' to a US handpicked 'independent Iraqi administration' - few of whose leaders have Iraqi passports or allegiance - and the skulking departure of US 'Viceroy' Paul Bremer, who said few farewells, gave no press conference and slunk out at dawn, surreally, reportedly, to 'take cookery lessons'- a little noticed and truly terrible Report has been released.

The World Monument Fund has, for the first time, named an entire country -Iraq - on its list of endangered sites. The Fund, which publishes every two years, an inventory of the world's most endangered historical and archeological sites and monuments, lists the 'cradle of civilisation' as, effectively, in danger of extinction. The illegal invasion, built on monumental lies, from Whitehall to Washington, has not alone 'destroyed the village in order to save it', it has destroyed the country, the land of the biblical Tigris and Euphrates - described by Gertude Bell, writer, colonialist - never the less captivated by this 'land between two rivers' - in the 1920's -'... great twin rivers gloriously named, The huge Babylonian plains, now desert, Which were once the garden of the world...'

We have destroyed humanity's history.

The enormity of this historic wickedness has achieved what no other invader in the millenia of chronicles of Mesopotamia has done. An evocative snapshot of some of the major invasions which George Bush and his coalition of the deluded have dwarfed, make salutary reading. Iraqi poet, Sinan Antoun lists some who also marauded through Baghdad, 'the Paris of the ninth century.' 1.

'945 Buwayhids; 1055 Seljuks; 1258 Mongols led by Hulagu; 1340 Jalayrs; 1393 & 1401 Mongols led by Tamerlane; 1411 Turkoman Black Sheep; 1469 Turkoman White Sheep ; 1508 Safavids; 1534 Ottomans under Sultan Sulayman the Magnificent; 1623 Safavids; 1638 Ottomans under Sultan Murad IV; 1917 British; 1941 British again to depose pro-German government - 2003 Anglo-American invasion.'

The latter, he wrote, in an agonised column, the week of the April 2003's destruction and declaration of 'liberation', as the world's most ancient history was trashed by troops of a nation that has none, betrayed ' ... like never before all of the accolades bestowed upon Baghdad by its numerous rulers, chroniclers and lovers. It is no longer now the "Abode of Peace, Mother of the World, Abode of Beauty, Gift of the Gods, Triumph of the Gods, Round City" '.

Antoun tiptoes through his memories.

'I must tread warily, for the streets are still littered with bodies, books and blood. Even the safe, labyrinthine streets of my own memory are not free from the ghosts of wars, but at least they cannot be destroyed, or looted and pillaged, except by amnesia.'

He draws a shaming comparison between the contemporary marauders, barbarians and their historic predecessors. In earlier 'missions accomplished', the '... caliphs and sultans were also patrons of art and knowledge, connoisseurs, and sometimes composers, of the most beautiful poetry to have survived in the collective memory of the Arabs.'

'Now, it is Baghdad's ironic fate to have been subjugated by a would-be emperor, who has yet to master his mother tongue. While he is fully aware of the geo-strategic importance of Baghdad, Bush is probably the one least aware, in the history of the city's conquerors, of the precious symbolism ..' and richest history of civilisation's fragile cultural and historic treasure. 'Does it matter to him?'

Baghdad - formerly Dar Es Salaam (City of Peace) was, for the first twelve hundred years of its existence, regarded as one of the most refined, civilised and festive cities on earth. Now, as with the mongols, it is sullied, degraded, humiliated, rubble strewn. It's living spirit which carries a golden legacy of beauty and learning to subsequent generations, the all time gift of those gone before, lying trampled, mortally wounded, in need of life support, under the jack boots of illegal invaders, who for the most, despise the people, culture, language, and the learning which is the largesse of Mesopotamia to the world.

In a further irony, the laws protecting cultural property, archeological sites, history, libraries, scientific legacy, date back to the American civil war. That carnage led to the 1863 Lieber Code and applied to American troops and influenced the 1954 and 1977 additional protocols to the Geneva Convention protecting 'the cultural or spiritual heritage of peoples.' The Nuremburg trials after World War II was the first time individuals were held to account for cultural war crimes and several Nazi officials were sentenced to death for violations, including the desecration of cultural property. 2.

The World Monument Fund describes the looting at the archeological sites around the country; direct conflict as with the Malwiya - 'the spiral' minaret of Samarra built probably before 852 A.D. Conceived from love of beauty, reverence, bricks and clay - that was bombed resultant from American snipers using the site. Babylon, which has also been occupied by military forces, had a military helicopter pad built, destroying history's undiscovered legacies - and site of a wonder of the world, the Hanging Gardens - from as far as estimates of forty thousand years ago.

Looting of the remains at Nineveh, the great Assyrian capital, glorious until now - from seven hundred years before Christ. Whether the site of the Garden of Eden too is destroyed; the place from which Noah is believed to have sent the dove which brought back the olive leaf, showing the flood had subsided, is unknown. Does Ur remain, where Abraham, Father of Christianity, Judaism and Islam, for believers was born, suckled, legend has it, on one finger which brought forth milk and the other honey. We have, it seems, destroyed the land of milk and honey, maybe burial places of St Matthew and the Prophet Jonah. The Tigris is poisoned with sewage, the detritus of war - and dead bodies, slung there by American

troops and who knows what other formerly non-existent forces. Destruction has a broader geographic illegal canvas to draw on than even the horrors inflicted on another holy, fragile, antique site, Palestine. Many of the methods, however, are chillingly similar.

Two professed Christian leaders have robbed the world of the continuity of our collective past, whatever colour, creed or nationality. They have destroyed the revered; sites that travellers and pilgrims of all that is history have gazed on in awe since time immemorial. The contemporary Crusaders have, in exchange, left their own historic legacy to Iraq and its neighbours. In place of beauty, our collective past, the heritage of the world, napalm, phosphorous bombs, landmines and a land poisoned by depleted uranium waste, radioactive and chemically toxic, condemning ground, the gracious Iraqi people and indeed the coalition of the coerced and their illegally installed puppet government, for four and a half billion years, to cancers, offspring with foetal deformities, tumours, and the unimaginable. 'We do not inherit the earth, we are it's custodians for future generations,' is a sacred pledge - except to a born again barbarian in Washington or Whitehall. Some 'Christians' give God a bad name.

Now, "Snipers hunt people in the streets. People attempting to go to health centers are shot at," testified Eman Khammas, at the World Tribunal on Iraq in Istanbul. "There are many crippled children. There are thousands of widows and orphans. There are no police for security and there are no courts. Even hospitals are occupied and bombed and burned."

At the Tribunal, Former US Air Force combat veteran Tim Goodrich stunned the jury by revealing his role in the "softening up" of Iraq months before the US declaration of war. "We were dropping bombs then, and I saw bombing intensify," Goodrich explained to a hushed room. "All the documents coming out now, the Downing Street memo and others, confirm what I had witnessed in Iraq. The war had already begun while our leaders were telling us that they were going to try all diplomatic options first." 3. In fact, the destruction of Mesopotamia had been embarked upon in 1991 and the starvation, deprivation, bombing of the place of our collective consciousness had continued and continues ever since.

Falluja, Najav, Samarra, Kufa, Kerbala, Al Qa'em, Ramadi, Mosul, Al Talafar, Iraq's towns and villages, ancient, sacred and simply home for generations, north, south, east west, are being raised to the ground. Guernica, My Lai, a silent Hiroshima and Nagasaki, rolled together in silent screams - silenced by isolation, journalists too fearful to travel, a cowering, compliant UN betrayal of all it stands for under a spineless Secretary General seemingly more concerned by salary than slaughter, pension than principle. And for braver journalists, 'accidental' execution by US forces at worst, or censorship frequently by corporate masters in media boardrooms who, or whose pals, also sit on many Boards of the multinationals attempting to plunder Iraq. At least a glimmer of truth emerged recently with the renaming of the Iraq debacle 'Operation Iraqi Liberation' - OIL. Like the US forces, the British too were instructed that as soon as they entered Iraq from Kuwait, their first mission was to secure the oil installations. 4. Not for nothing did the Iraqis near- immediately dub Vice President Dick Cheney's giant former employer and ongoing generous benefactor 'Halli-baba.'

Whilst Bush blathers and brags about 'freedom' -dictionary definition 'the state of being free, especially to ... enjoy civil liberties..' - at Fort Bragg, mothers, fathers and baby 'insurgents' are shot and slaughtered in their homes, cars, in family groups, in dozens and hundreds - unaccountable, precious lives, loves. Call those lives 'insurgants' and mass murder becomes no more than a daily routine. Those who have become addicted to it will return to their home towns and States one day to live out the addiction there, or live for all

time with their nightmares. 'The sacrifice' is worth it, bragged the bragger, who makes none, attends no funerals and directs that coffins of America's fallen not be photographed, their passing unmarked, unhonoured, except by their own. Their final departure is as invisible as Iraq's sons and daughters. In death they are both joined in solidarity by the lies and betrayal of the world's most powerful nation and the 'coalition' of the coerced.

As Americans celebrate Independence Day, it may be apt to reflect how that independence was won. It was from defeating occupying forces, fighting for freedom, for 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness', just as Iraqis are doing. Were those who won America 'terrorists', 'insurgents'. There are, however, 160,000 of the latter on Iraqi soil. Iraqis fighters are largely resistance fighters who want their country and its assets back and as Americas two hundred years ago, are prepared to die for that end. Soldiers of the 'coalition' have no need - or right - to be in Iraq now that the Secretary General of the UN has said the invasion was illegal and a mounting pile of documents are potent witness to the lies on which it was built. In fact, just by being there, state a mounting body of legal experts, they could return to their countries not alone to live with their demons, but to find themselves charged with war crimes.

Troops are being sold a further lie - that Iraq's army, police, people, are too backward, primitive, stupid, inept, to manage their own affairs and thus troops must remain. Two years ago the world was told Iraq's people were so sophisticated that their military and their expertise threatened the entire planet. Prior to the invasion Iraq was a functioning - though battered by two decades of war and thirteen years of uniquely punitive and murderous sanctions - largely secular, sovereign and legally independent state. It had no problems with leaky borders, suicide bombers, terrorists - apart from CIA funded ones who occasionally, but rarely slipped through - streets were safe to walk, night and day and the structures of a normal, structured society, functioned within the constraints of the embargo.

Certainly political dissent was not an option, as with many of Britain and America's allies across the globe. With an estimated sixty thousand prisoners now in Iraq's jails - 5 - most at unknown sites and charged with nothing, with state torture, rape, murder and infanticide a norm, disease and hunger rampant, the occupation for most of the Iraqi population is a daily nightmare endured in a vast gulag. Iraq, as Donald Rumsfeld rightly claims, is not a 'quagmire', that is 'a soft wet area of land which gives away under the feet', not much of that in Iraq. If troops stay, Iraq will make Viet Nam look like a stroll in the park. 'Let them come, we Iraqis are used to sacrifice ... we have been defeating invaders for centuries' similar refrains were heard across Iraq, in the months before the invasion. As US officials crowed of a 'cakewalk' in April 2003 and the Iraqi army 'fighting like demons with weapons which should have been in a military museum' - as a military friend remarked - they simply faded away to join the population in fighting the invaders guerilla style, a tactic used throughout history to defeat a mightier military.

In Jordan, days before the invasion, I joined a group of Jordanians in a local cafe. The talk, fear for and anger about the now inevitable attack, was of Iraq. 'There is something the Americans don't realise', said one of the group. 'No matter what numbers, what weapons, how long they stay, they will not conquer Iraq unless they kill every last man, woman and child.' The medical journal Lancet upper estimate is of one hundred thousand Iraqi civilian dead to January this year. Nearly two and a half '9/11's' every two months - in a country that had nothing to do with that tragedy. The estimate is surely on the low side. Those not killed in towns raised to the ground, shot pursuing daily normalities, die of untreated illnesses, water which is a biological weapon. Mesopotamia's mass graves are ever

spreading under falling tears. 'They have left my sweet Afghanistan a poisoned burial ground', said Dr Mohammed Daud Miraki, 6, whose seemingly forgotten country has suffered a similar fate. Its most ancient mosque is also on the World Monument Fund's publication. He could be also speaking of Iraq.

As Prime Minister Blair's son Euan, having just majored in ancient history – a gift to the world his father has largely helped destroy – heads to Washington to work his Dad's pal's Administration, that Administration needs to make a rapid and major decision. Is their outcome for Iraq to leave and return the country's sovereignty, or will Iraq become another 'final solution.'

1. They came to Baghdad, Sinan Antoun, Al Ahram Weekly, April 17-23rd 2003.
2. Crimes of War, by Roy Gutman and David Rieff, pub. W.W. Norton and Company.
3. www.brusselstribunal.org
4. Last Round by Mark Nicholl, pub. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2005.
5. Dahr Jamail, Testimony, World Tribunal on Iraq www.brusselstribunal.org
6. Author interview. Dr Miraki's website – www.afghandufund.org

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