

# The US Invasion of Iraq: The Most Cowardly War ever Fought in History

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*Contained in our old archives (2001-2004), this article by Arundati Roy was first published by GR on June 3, 2014. In the context of recent events, the word "cowardly" is most probably an understatement. (M.Ch., GR Editor)*

*Transcript of talk by Arundhati Roy, United For Peace and Justice teach-in, Washington, DC, 31 May 2003.*

Mesopotamia. Babylon. The Tigris and Euphrates. How many children, in how many classrooms, over how many centuries, have hang-glided through the past, transported on the wings of these words?

And now the bombs have fallen, incinerating and humiliating that ancient civilization. On the steel torsos of their missiles, adolescent American soldiers scrawled colorful messages in childish handwriting: For Saddam, from the Fat Boy Posse.

A building went down. A marketplace. A home. A girl who loved a boy. A child who only ever wanted to play with his older brother's marbles.

On March 21 – the day after American and British troops began their illegal invasion and occupation of Iraq – an “embedded” CNN correspondent interviewed an American soldier. “I wanna get in there and get my nose dirty,” Private A.J. said. “I wanna take revenge for 9/11.”

To be fair to the correspondent, even though he was “embedded” he did sort of weakly suggest that so far there was no real evidence that linked the Iraqi government to the September 11, 2001, attacks. Private A.J. stuck his teenage tongue out all the way down to the end of his chin. “Yeah, well that stuff’s way over my head,” he said.

## Lies Instead of Evidence

When the United States invaded Iraq, a New York Times/CBS News survey estimated that 42 percent of the American public believed that Saddam Hussein was directly responsible for the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. And an ABC news poll said that 55 percent of Americans believed that Saddam Hussein directly supported Al-Qaeda. None of this opinion is based on evidence (because there isn't any). All of it is based on insinuation, auto-suggestion and outright lies circulated by the US corporate media.

Public support in the US for the war against Iraq was founded on a multi-tiered edifice of falsehood and deceit coordinated by the US government and faithfully amplified by the press. We had the invented links between Iraq and Al Qaeda. We had the manufactured frenzy about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. No weapons of mass destruction have been found. Not even a little one.

Now, after the war has been fought and won, and the contracts for reconstruction have been signed and sealed, the New York Times reports that, "The Central Intelligence Agency has begun a review to try to determine whether the American intelligence community erred in its prewar assessments of Saddam Hussein's government and Iraq's weapons programs."

Meanwhile, in passing, an ancient civilization has been casually decimated by a very recent, casually brutal nation.

Throughout more than a decade of war and sanctions, American and British forces fired thousands of missiles and bombs on Iraq. Iraq's fields and farmlands were shelled with 300 tons of depleted uranium.

In their bombing sorties, the Allies targeted and destroyed water treatment plants, aware of the fact that they could not be repaired without foreign assistance. In southern Iraq there was a fourfold increase in cancer among children. In the decade of economic sanctions that followed the war, Iraqi civilians were denied medicine, hospital equipment, ambulances, clean water - the basic essentials.

About half a million Iraqi children died as a result of the sanctions. The corporate media played a sterling role in keeping news of the devastation of Iraq and its people away from the American public. It has now begun preparing the ground with the same routine of lies and hysteria for a war against Syria and Iran - and, who knows, perhaps even Saudi Arabia. Perhaps the next war will be the jewel in the crown of George Bush's 2004 election campaign. Though he may not need to go to such great lengths, since the Democrats have announced that their strategy for the 2004 election is to charge that the Republicans are weak on national security. It's like a small-town teenage bully telling the Mafia it has too many scruples.

America's presidential elections sound as though they will be a complete waste of everybody's time. Although that's not exactly breaking news.

### Most Cowardly War Ever Fought

The US invasion of Iraq was perhaps the most cowardly war ever fought in history.

After using the "good offices" of UN diplomacy (economic sanctions and weapons inspections) to ensure that Iraq was brought to its knees, after making sure that most of its weapons had been destroyed, the "Coalition of the Willing" - better known as the Coalition of the Bullied and Bought - sent in an invading army.

Then the corporate media gloated that the United States had won a just and astonishing victory!

TV watchers witnessed the joy that the US army brought to ordinary Iraqis. All those newly liberated people waving American flags, which they must have somehow hoarded during the

years of sanctions.

Never mind that the toppling of the statue of Saddam Hussein in Firdos Square (shown over and over on TV) turned out to be a carefully choreographed charade played out by a handful of hired extras coordinated by the US marines. Robert Fisk called it the “most staged photo-op since Iwo Jima.”

Never mind that in the days that followed American soldiers fired into a crowd of peaceful, unarmed Iraqi demonstrators who were demanding that US troops leave their country. Fifteen people were shot dead.

Never mind that a few days later US soldiers killed two more and injured several people who were protesting the fact that peaceful demonstrators were being killed. Never mind that they murdered 17 more people in Mosul. Never mind that in the days to come the killing will continue. (But it won't be on TV.)

Never mind that a secular country is being driven to religious sectarianism. Never mind that the US government helped Saddam Hussein's rise to power and supported him through his worst excesses, including the eight-year war against Iran and the 1988 gassing of Kurdish people in Halabja, crimes which 14 years later were re-heated and served up as reasons to justify going to war against Iraq.

Never mind that, after the first Gulf War, the Allies fomented an uprising of Shias in Basra and then looked away while Saddam Hussein crushed the revolt and slaughtered thousands in an act of vengeful reprisal.

After the invasion of Iraq, Western TV channels' ghoulish interest in the mass graves they discovered evaporated quickly when they realized that the bodies were of Iraqis who had been killed in the war against Iran and the Shia uprising. The search for an appropriate mass grave continues.

Never mind that US and British troops had orders to kill people, but not to protect them. Their priorities were clear. The safety and security of Iraqi people was not their business.

The security of whatever little remained of Iraq's infrastructure was not their business. But the security and safety of Iraq's oil fields was. The oil fields were “secured” almost before the invasion began.

It's worth noting that the reconstruction of Afghanistan, which is in far worse condition than Iraq, hasn't merited the same evangelical enthusiasm in reconstruction that Iraq has. Even the money that was so publicly promised to Afghanistan has not for the most part been handed over. Could it be because Afghanistan has no oil? It has a route for a pipeline, true, but no oil. So there isn't much money to be extracted from that vanquished country.

On the other hand, we were told that contracts for the reconstruction of Iraq could jump-start the world economy. It's funny how the interests of American corporations are so often, so successfully, and so deliberately confused with the interests of the world economy.

## Occupation Government

The talk about Iraq's oil for Iraqis and a war of liberation and democracy and representative government had its time and place. It had its uses. But things have changed now....

Having escorted a 7,000-year-old civilization into anarchy, George Bush has announced that the US is in Iraq to stay “indefinitely.” The US, in effect, has said that Iraq can only have a representative government if it represents the interests of Anglo-American oil companies. In other words, you can have free speech as long as you say what I want you to say.

On May 17, the New York Times said, “In an abrupt reversal, the United States and Britain have indefinitely put off their plan to allow Iraqi opposition forces to form a national assembly and an interim government by the end of the month. Instead, top American and British diplomats leading reconstruction efforts here told exile leaders in a meeting tonight that allied officials would remain in charge of Iraq for an indefinite period.”

### Jackals Feeding Frenzy

Long before the invasion began, the world’s business community was tingling with excitement about the scale of money that the reconstruction of Iraq would involve. It has been billed as “the biggest reconstruction effort since the Marshall Plan rebuilt Europe after World War Two.”

Bechtel Corporation, based in San Francisco, is leading the pack of jackals moving into Iraq.

Coincidentally, former Secretary of State George Schultz is on the Board of Directors of the Bechtel Group, and happens also to have served as the chairman of the advisory board of the Committee for the Liberation of Iraq. When asked by the New York Times whether he was concerned about the appearance of a conflict of interest, Shultz said, “I don’t know that Bechtel would particularly benefit from it. But if there’s work to be done, Bechtel is the type of company that could do it. But nobody looks at it as something you benefit from.”

Bechtel already has a contract for \$680 million dollars, but, according to the New York Times, “Independent estimates are that the final cost for the reconstruction effort of the extent outlined in Bechtel’s contract with USAID would be \$20 billion.”

In an article appropriately headlined “Feeding Frenzy Under Way, as Companies From All Over Seek a Piece of the Action,” the Times notes (without irony) that “governments around the world and the companies whose causes they support have besieged Washington in a campaign to win a piece of the reconstruction action in Iraq.”

“The British,” the article notes, “though their appeals are understated, offer what some Bush administration officials argue is the most convincing case: that they shed blood in Iraq.”

Whose blood was shed has not been clarified. Surely they didn’t mean British blood, or American blood. They must have meant the British helped the Americans to shed Iraqi blood.

So “the most convincing case” for reconstruction contracts is when a country can argue that it is a co-murderer of Iraqis.

Lady Simmons, the deputy leader of the UK House of Lords, recently traveled to America with four leaders of British industry. Apart from staking their claim to contracts based on their status as co-murderers, the British delegation also invoked their colonial past, again without irony, making the case that British companies “had a long and close relationship with Iraq and Iraqi business from the imperial days in the early 20th century

until international sanctions were imposed in the 1990s.” Glossing over, of course, that this meant Britain had supported Saddam Hussein through the 1970s and 1980s.

“Relax and Enjoy It”

Those of us who belong to former colonies think of imperialism as rape. So you rape. Then you kill. Then you demand the right to rape the corpse. That’s usually known as necrophilia.

Extending this horrible analogy, Richard Perle said recently, “Iraqis are freer today and we are safer. Relax and enjoy it.”

A few days into the war, the news anchor Tom Brokaw said: “One of the things we don’t want to do ... is to destroy the infrastructure of Iraq because in a few days we’re going to own that country.”

Now the ownership deeds are being signed. Iraq is no longer a country. It’s an asset.

It’s no longer ruled. It’s owned.

And it is owned for the most part by Bechtel. Maybe Halliburton and a British company or two will get a few bones.

Our battle has to be against both the occupiers and the new owners of Iraq.

*Arundhati Roy lives in New Delhi. She is the author of “The God of Small Things” and “Power Politics” (South End Press). Copyright Arundhati Roy 2003.*

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