

US Imperialism and Corporate Profits: Making Iraq Safe for American Rice

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imperialism: noun - A policy of extending a country's power and influence through colonization, use of military force or other means.

— *Oxford Dictionary*

Betsy Ward, president and CEO of the USA Rice Federation, was fuming recently when the Iraqi Grain Board (IGB) neglected, once again, to purchase American rice from corporate behemoth Archer Daniels Midland and opted instead for more expensive varieties from Brazil, Uruguay and Thailand. It was the third consecutive strikeout for U.S. rice producers in Iraq.

“The results make no sense,” said Ward, according to *Politico*. “The U.S. is price competitive, the quality is excellent, the logistics are perfect, so why would the IGB want to pay significantly more than they have to?”

USA Rice spokesman Michael Klein told *Politico* that “Iraq paid \$1.4 million more than it needed to get the 170,000 tons of rice it was looking to buy.”

“Despite very competitive bids, the U.S. was shut out of the previous tender, which raises the question of where these decisions are being made, at the Iraqi Grain Board, or some higher political level within the Ministry [of Trade] itself,” Ward later [wrote](#).

USA Rice spoke with the USDA to enlist their help ascertaining what the problem was with the Iraqis, whose country had been the second largest importer of U.S.-grown rice back in 2005/2006, purchasing over 380,000 tons.

Louisiana Sen. Mary Landrieu wrote to Secretary of State John Kerry, asking him to press the Iraqis, as did Arkansas Sen. John Boozman and Rep. Rick Crawford. Arkansas and Louisiana are states number 1 and 3, respectively, in acres devoted to rice production in the United States.

USA Rice’s Betsy Ward thought the Iraqis needed a reminder of all that U.S. taxpayers have done for them:

Given that U.S. taxpayers have a significant investment in Iraq, I would hope the government there, from the Prime Minister on down, understands how important it is for American rice farmers to be fairly considered to win this business.

Some notable features of U.S. taxpayers' "investment" in Iraq in the early years of this century:

- Trillions of dollars spent on the Bush Administration's 2003 invasion, subsequent war and occupation.
- Hundreds of billions, perhaps trillions to be spent far into the future to pay for interest on the funds borrowed to pay for the Iraqi foray, plus the health care costs of U.S. soldiers.
- Regime change, societal collapse and possibly three quarters of a million Iraqis dead.
- A nation now, eleven years later, being ripped apart by continuing warfare with the Islamic State group. Reuters [reports](#) that the Iraqi army doesn't anticipate even the ability to *begin* a counter-offensive to dislodge the group from areas it controls until late in 2015.

It's likely that Betsy Ward would cite other aspects of the U.S. "investment" in Iraq if pressed for elaboration. Yet her comment illuminates a particularly ubiquitous feature of U.S. imperialism since we wrestled the Philippines from the Spaniards in 1898 — the lands which have been the recipient of U.S. benevolence and occupation are expected to provide a safe and stable environment for U.S. corporate profit.

Perhaps USA Rice's Ward need not have so quickly pushed the "You owe us" button.

Sen. Mary Landrieu (D-LA) — in a runoff election race to save her seat in the Senate and in dire need of good news — claimed credit on November 21 for scoring an Iraqi victory with the generous headline, "Senator Landrieu Delivers For Louisiana Rice Farmers By Securing Commitment From Iraq To Resume Buying Local Rice."

The press release announced an Iraqi agreement to purchase 120,000 tons of U.S. rice, after a series of meetings between U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, Stuart Jones, and Iraqi trade and agricultural ministers.

Said Betsy Ward in [response](#), "This is really great news for the entire U.S. rice industry," said USA Rice Federation President and CEO Betsy Ward. "We're sitting on a large, high quality crop, and with the Iraq Grain Board (IGB) placing the order for bulk and bagged rice, the whole southern region will win."

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