

War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity: The Story of U.S. Exceptionalism in Iraq

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This month marks the tenth anniversary of the U.S. attack on Iraq, one of the most egregious expressions of naked power and imperial ambition since the Second World War.

The attack defied both an outraged world opinion — expressed by global mass demonstrations — and the United Nations charter. It also marked a change from the previous veiled decorum of supposed adherence to international law that defined post-war international relations. The Bush administration, armed with the ultimate expression of the arrogance of U.S. exceptionalism — legislation passed by the U.S. Congress — unleashed a murderous assault on the people of Iraq dubbed “Operation Shock and Awe.”

Ten years later, the awesome consequences of that criminal assault are clear. More than a trillion dollars spent, almost five thousand American lives lost, more than 32,000 Americans wounded, estimates of a million dead Iraqis and almost five million displaced, an epidemic of Iraqi birth defects from “depleted” uranium, daily bombings, devastated public services and the dismemberment of the country. Yet, ten years later, no one, not one government official, has been held accountable. The obvious question is: how is it that, in light of one of the most heinous crimes ever committed by a State, there have been no investigations, prosecutions or convictions of the officials responsible for this assault?

The lack of accountability is even more incomprehensible in light of the fact that it is now widely acknowledged that the real reason for the Western invasion of Iraq had little to do with its concern about weapons of mass destruction and everything to do with its desire to steal Iraq’s oil.

American officials have long-since broken their silence on the phony excuses proffered to the American people to sucker them into supporting a war of choice against an Iraqi regime softened-up by a decade of crippling sanctions. Antonia Juhasz, in an [article](#) written for CNN’s website, pointed out that the historical record is now unambiguously replete with evidence that the real motivation to attack Iraq was control of Iraq’s oil and that plans were being made as soon as ten days after the Bush Administration took power to figure out how to accomplish that objective.

But that was not the reason presented to the U.S. and the global public. What was presented was the argument that Iraq possesses weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and that President Saddam Hussein and his government, therefore, posed a threat to the world (meaning the U.S.). The “threat argument” was concocted to respond to any questions regarding the justification for waging war against a sovereign nation and was the basis for

the ridiculous assertions by the Bush Administration that there was some operational cooperation between the government of Iraq and Ansar al-Islam, at the time loosely identified with the Al-Qaeda network.

Anyone with an even cursory understanding of the relationship between the Iraqi government and Al-Qaeda knew the assertion to be a laughable one, as Saddam Hussein was universally hated by the radical Islamic movement. However, with a compliant U.S. mainstream press and a U.S. public notorious for being one of the most unsophisticated in the world, it was relatively easy to not only make the argument that Iraqi WMDs posed a threat to the U.S. but also that Iraq was somehow connected to the attacks on 9/11. The government was so successful in planting this notion in American minds that even after an avalanche of evidence to the contrary was revealed, in 2004 over 60 percent of those who voted for the re-election of Pres. George Bush believed that Iraq was somehow connected to 9/11.

So if it is clear that the concern for WMDs was an elaborate hoax and that the attack on Iraq not only violated international law but even violated U.S. law, where is the investigation by the International Criminal Court? Why don't we see the likes of Condoleezza Rice, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld and their boss George Bush in the dock at a Special Tribunal on Iraq? And why has there been no accountability even under U.S. law?

Why the continued impunity, when the facts indicate that a crime of epic proportions was committed? At a very minimum, there is enough evidence to justify an investigation into the attempts to evade, manipulate and distort U.S. law to further the narrow economic interests of powerful interests in the Bush Administration. Don't "we, the people" deserve to know the details and role of the National Energy Policy Development Group, chaired by Dick Cheney, that was formed right after the Administration took power?

Who pays the price for impunity?

The Iraqi Government nationalized its oil sector more than 30 years ago. But Western oil companies are now back. Riding in under the gun of the coalition of the willing, Western companies have now taken over the Iraqi oil sector, with 80 percent of production being exported out of the country while Iraqis struggle to meet basic energy consumption needs. So Western oil is doing fine.

Did the U.S. media learn anything from the Iraqi war? It should have been clear that something had gone horribly wrong with a media culture that could allow itself to be reduced to a mouthpiece and propaganda machine for the U.S. Government. Sadly, it does not appear that any lessons were learned. What this episode has revealed is that by the early 2000s, a corporate media culture had emerged in the U.S. that embraced an ideological orthodoxy that framed its perception of the world in terms that did not diverge substantially from the positions and views of the economic and political elites in the country. The result is a mainstream media culture today that is more than willing to parrot the government's line on the "big questions of war," almost without question.

The latest example of this role is the hysteria being whipped up by the corporate media to push the Obama Administration to attack Syria because of unconfirmed "reports" that its military has used chemical weapons in the civil war that the U.S. orchestrated in the country. Here again, we see that the media still passes on information from unnamed

governmental sources and when it takes editorial positions that find it on the same side as the government, NATO and A-Qaeda in places like Libya or Syria it is seen as just an odd circumstance of history.

So neither government representatives nor associated institutions like the media and corporations pay the price for their role in crimes perpetrated internationally. The lawlessness and impunity of the West is paid for by the people of whichever nation finds itself in the crosshairs of U.S. and Western interests. It is paid for by the families of the hundreds of thousands of Iraqis killed, the working class families of the troops killed or injured, and the troops who returned home suffering from post-traumatic stress. A price has also been exacted from all us who believe in the possibility of cooperative, global human progress

What the U.S. war on Iraq demonstrated is that in order to maintain their fantasies of continued global dominance, the U.S. and its colonialist allies will resort to naked piracy. But it is not gold trinkets and slaves that are the contemporary booty – it is whole nations. And while the undermining of the rule of law, the normalization of war to advance national interests and the hollowing out of the human rights idea in order to justify “humanitarian interventions” might seem to be beneficial in the short term, the people of the world who have been slowly liberating themselves from the conceptual myopia of colonization see very clearly the hypocrisy of the West’s supposed commitment to universal human rights, democracy and the rule of law when international crimes like the attack on Iraq go unpunished.

The result is that many are not moved by the West’s expressions of concerns for the people of Syria, when the U.S. and the West continue to support the occupation and dehumanization of the Palestinian people, kill innocents with drone strikes, and train and provide weapons to repressive states and terrorists groups. Many understand that if there was a real commitment to the equal application of international law and accountability, U.S. and British officials would be held to account for the crimes committed in Iraq. But we all know that is not going to happen anytime soon.

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