

What You Will Not Hear About Iraq

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Iraq has between 25 and 50 percent unemployment, a dysfunctional parliament, rampant disease, an [epidemic](#) of mental illness, and sprawling slums. The killing of innocent people has become part of daily life. What a havoc the United States has wreaked in Iraq.

UN-HABITAT, an agency of the United Nations, recently published a 218-page report entitled [State of the World's Cities, 2010-2011](#). The report is full of statistics on the status of cities around the world and their demographics. It defines slum dwellers as those living in urban centers without one of the following: durable structures to protect them from climate, sufficient living area, sufficient access to water, access to sanitation facilities, and freedom from eviction.

Almost intentionally hidden in these statistics is one shocking fact about urban Iraqi populations. For the past few decades, prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, the percentage of the urban population living in slums in Iraq hovered just below 20 percent. Today, that percentage has risen to 53 percent: 11 million of the 19 million total urban dwellers. In the past decade, most countries have made progress toward reducing slum dwellers. But Iraq has gone rapidly and dangerously in the opposite direction.

[According to the U.S. Census of 2000](#), 80 percent of the 285 million people living in the United States are urban dwellers. Those living in slums are well below 5 percent. If we translate the Iraqi statistic into the U.S. context, 121 million people in the United States would be living in slums.

If the United States had an unemployment rate of 25-50 percent and 121 million people living in slums, riots would ensue, the military would take over, and democracy would evaporate. So why are people in the United States not concerned and saddened by the conditions in Iraq? Because most people in the United States do not know what happened in Iraq and what is happening there now. Our government, including the current administration, looks the other way and perpetuates the myth that life has improved in post-invasion Iraq. Our major news media reinforces this message.

I had high hopes that the new administration would tell the truth to its citizens about why we invaded Iraq and what we are doing currently in the country. President Obama promised to move forward and not look to the past. However problematic this refusal to examine on the past — particularly for historians — the president should at least inform the U.S. public of the current conditions in Iraq. How else can we expect our government to formulate appropriate policy?

More extensive congressional hearings on Iraq might have allowed us to learn about the

myths propagated about Iraq prior to the invasion and the extent of the damage and destruction our invasion brought on Iraq. We would have learned about the tremendous increase in urban poverty and the expansion of city slums. Such facts about the current conditions of Iraq would help U.S. citizens to better understand the impact of the quick U.S. withdraw and what are our moral responsibilities in Iraq should be.

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