**20 Years After Iraq**

**No accountability and no lessons learned**

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April 04, 2023

It’s tragic and deeply distress­ing that twenty years after the U.S. launched its disas­trous invasion of Iraq that the ig­norance, lies, and cruelty of that war have never been acknowledged.

The neocons in the Bush administration be­lieved that our enemies had attacked on 9/11 be­cause they perceived us as weak. Postulating that a quick and decisive victory would demonstrate US strength and re­solve, the neocons thought the war would ensure US hegemony for decades to come.

I had served on a think-tank sponsored task force with many leading proponents of this world­view and was astounded by their hubris born of ignorance. They did not know, or consider it im­portant to know, Iraq. They were guided by a one-size-fits-all Mani­chean ideology: forces of good and evil in combat across the globe; a clash between them inevitable; and in that confrontation good ul­timately prevailing. Those who is­sued cautions were demeaned as weak and lacking resolve.

[SBP governor, secretaries attend WB and IMF spring meetings today](https://www.nation.com.pk/10-Apr-2023/sbp-governor-secretaries-attend-wb-and-imf-spring-meetings-today)

These “experts” took to the air­waves preying on a still shell-shocked public that knew even less about Iraq or the broader Middle East. In testimonies be­fore Congress and on television the war’s proponents embel­lished their “good versus evil” portrait and deliberately misin­formed the Congress and public about the impending war.

The “big lie” about Iraq wasn’t about weapons of mass destruc­tion, but rather a preposterous deceit about the war’s costs and terms of engagement. Leading ad­ministration spokespersons testi­fied that: the war would be over in a few weeks; US forces would be greeted as liberators; it would cost no more than $1 or $2 billion; and in the end a new democracy in Iraq would be a “beacon for the new Middle East.”

Journalists and commentators echoed these fact-free claims making it the dominant narrative. Most politicians cowered, and be­cause the overwhelming majority of the public couldn’t find Iraq on a map (according to a survey con­ducted days before the invasion was to begin), they went along.

[ANP calls APC on May 3, confirms Hoti](https://www.nation.com.pk/10-Apr-2023/anp-calls-apc-on-may-3-confirms-hoti)

During the months leading up to the start of the war, my wife and I were in North Carolina where I was teaching at Davidson College. At one point, I flew back to Washington to debate a resolu­tion I had submitted to the Demo­cratic National Committee urging the party to oppose sending our young people into a war without knowing its costs, terms of en­gagement, and consequences, in a country whose history and cul­ture we did not know. The party leaders allowed me to present it but wouldn’t permit a vote.

At the time, I was hosting a weekly live television call-in pro­gram on Abu Dhabi TV and Di­rect TV in the US. ADTV arranged two live satellite shows connect­ing students at Davidson with stu­dents at Baghdad University. It opened my students’ eyes to Iraqi history, culture, and sensitivities. After the program one of the Da­vidson students told me that it was so hard to be speaking with the Iraqis knowing that we were going to bombing them.

[ECP proposes amendments to Election Act 2017](https://www.nation.com.pk/10-Apr-2023/ecp-proposes-amendments-to-election-act-2017)

Two decades later we’ve largely forgotten the lies, and no one has been held accountable.

President Barack Obama re­leased the Bush era torture mem­os, commissioned to provide a “legal” justification for and define allowable methods that could be used to torture prisoners cap­tured in Afghanistan and Iraq, raising hopes for accountability for war crimes. The memos were horrifyingly graphic in describ­ing permissible torture practic­es. But after releasing the mem­os, Obama announced that “we wouldn’t look backwards.”

And so here we are, two decades after the war with no accountabil­ity for the lies that left thousands of young Americans and hundreds of thousands of Iraqis dead. The same neocon hawks, still consid­ered “experts,” are now on the air­waves peddling their Manichean nonsense about other conflicts and enemies. And the American pub­lic remains uninformed not only about Iraq, and what we did there, but also about the entire Middle East and its history and culture.

[Imran sees people of Mianwali's role vital over 'keeping his politics alive'](https://www.nation.com.pk/10-Apr-2023/imran-sees-people-of-mianwali-s-role-vital-over-keeping-his-politics-alive)

We continue to operate blindly in a world that’s increasingly wary of our role precisely because of the lack of accountability and under­standing of history. The truth is that accountability wouldn’t make us weaker. It would make us smart, stronger, and more respected.

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