

Persisting questions two years after Iraq's 'liberation'

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The conflict with Iraq is about weapons of mass destruction. It has nothing to do with oil, literally nothing to do with oil. It has nothing to do with the religion — Defence Minister Donald Rumsfeld. (CBS News, Nov 14, 2002) Five falsehoods were shaped to justify Bush's crusade in Babylon. Two years on, all five lies stand exposed.

Iraq has weapons of mass destruction (WMDs): Bush claimed to have 'solid proof' that Iraq possessed such weapons. A year later, Colin Powell told 60 Minutes: "But long before the war started, there was plenty of doubt among intelligence analysts about Saddam's weapons".

Earlier, Paul Wolfowitz had more candidly presented 'solid proof' to Vanity Fair (June 2003): "For reasons that have a lot to do with the US government bureaucracy, we settled on one issue everyone could agree, which was weapons of mass destruction..."

Despite a lapse of two years, US hounds remain unsuccessful in finding any WMDs in Iraq. Fascinating, that Bush can have 100 per cent certainty about the existence of these weapons, but none about their whereabouts. Those WMDs found so far were detected by Dr Khalid ash-Shakhli, an official at Iraq's health ministry. Assigned by the ministry to assess health conditions in Fallujah following the November assault to crush the Iraqi intifada, Dr Khalid found that US occupation forces had used internationally prohibited substances, including mustard gas and nerve gas.

Iraq's al-Qaeda connection: The US defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, claimed that he had 'bullet proof evidence' that Iraq was behind 9/11. The 'bullet proof evidence' was never made public. In the first place, the avowedly religious puritan al-Qaeda could never have established links with Saddam Hussain's 'atheist' Baath regime. In a taped message broadcast by Al Jazeera prior to the US invasion, Osama bin Laden regretted that 'socialist' infidels of Baath party ruled Iraq yet he clearly pointed out that Iraq should be defended despite it. In this 16-minute recording, Osama clearly disassociated himself from Iraqi regime on the basis of his puritan vision of Islam. Saddam, on the other hand, no doubt was ruthless but no idiot. He would not risk inviting al-Qaeda troublemakers that no Muslim country was ready to host. Not even Pakistan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia who were instrumental in organising al-Qaeda.

Saddam's threat to the USA: Ralph Nader, aptly exposes the lie, noting that "Until the 1991 Gulf War, Saddam Hussain was our government's anti-Communist ally in Middle East. We also used him to keep Iran at bay. In so doing, in the 1980s under Reagan and first Bush, corporations were licensed by the Department of Commerce to export the material for chemical and biological weapons that President George W Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney later accused him of having."

Saddam's threat to neighbouring countries: Iran? But it was the USA itself that unleashed Saddam on Iran. Kuwait? Again, it was the US ambassador in Baghdad, April Glaspie, who

laid the trap. "We have no opinion on Arab-Arab conflict, like your border disagreement with Kuwait," she told Saddam on 25 July, a week before the Kuwait invasion.

President Bush, she assured Saddam, wanted better and deeper relations with Iraq. "President Bush is an intelligent man," she said. 'He is not going to declare an economic war against Iraq'. Should one entirely blame Saddam for his invasion after these 'assurances'? His other neighbours (Turkey, Syria, and Saudi Arabia) were too strong to be attacked by an Iraq crippled by sanctions.

'Liberation' of the Iraqi people: The people in Iraq have refused this 'liberation' both by armed resistance and by ballot. In response to these five lies, two years of Iraq war has shaped five truths:

The Iraq war, from the beginning, has been a war for oil: This objective was set long ago by Dick Cheney's Defence Policy Guidance report presented back in 1992: "Our overall objective is to remain the predominant outside power in the [Middle East] region and preserve U.S. and Western access to the region's oil."

No surprise therefore that in the hours and days before the United States and Britain invaded Iraq, a team of British Petroleum (BP) engineers in Kuwait was teaching combat troops from the 516 Specialist Team Royal Engineers how to run the oil fields in southern Iraq. No surprise either that, during the initial assault on Baghdad, soldiers set up forward bases named Camp Shell and Camp Exxon.

The invaders tolerated the widespread ransacking of private and public property, but moved swiftly to

secure the country's oil facilities. In Baghdad, they protected the oil ministry, which was thus spared the fate of other Iraqi ministries that went up in flames.

The Guardian made an interesting slip in its June 4, 2003 edition, which it later retracted (freedom of press!): "Asked why a nuclear power such as North Korea was being treated differently from Iraq, where hardly any weapons of mass destruction had been found, the (US) deputy defence minister (Paul Wolfowitz) said: 'Let's look at it simply. The most important difference between North Korea and Iraq is that economically, we just had no choice in Iraq. The country swims on a sea of oil'."

Building the \$9.6 billion Halliburton empire: Halliburton, the world's second biggest oilfield services company, became the sixth largest US military contractor in 2004. The company, formerly headed (1995-2000) by Dick Cheney, moved up the list for the second straight year. It was seventh in 2003 with \$3.9 billion in contracts, breaking into the top ten for the first time.

"Halliburton could get \$1.5 billion more Iraq work," reported Reuters (Feb 26, 2005). Halliburton's logistics contract with the US Army in Iraq has been worth at least \$9.6 billion since the start of the war and is mounting at a cost of about \$6 billion a year (United Press International, Feb 25, 2005).

Biggest cultural disaster since 1258: "One million books, 10 million documents, and 14,000 archaeological artefacts have been lost in the US-led invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq — the biggest cultural disaster

since the descendants of Genghis Khan destroyed Baghdad in 1258. Laments Venezuelan writer Fernán B-ez.

"US and Polish soldiers are still stealing treasures today and selling them across the borders with Jordan and Kuwait, where art merchants paid up to \$57,000 for a Sumerian tablet, B-ez told IPS a couple of months ago. No wonder B-ez was refused a visa to enter the United States for a conference. And no wonder either that he has been barred from returning to Iraq.

The death toll: "We don't do body counts," said General Tommy Franks, claimed. And when the Iraqi Health Ministry attempted to count civilian deaths, the US occupation authorities summarily ordered them to stop. So we have to depend on the British medical journal, Lancet, which published findings (reported in the mainstream media in Oct 2004) by a team of public health researchers from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, the Columbia University School of Nursing, and the College of Medicine at Al-Mustansiriyah University in Baghdad, who had undertaken an epidemiologic survey of "excess Iraqi" deaths since the March 2003 invasion. The researchers estimated that there were 98,000 more deaths in the first 18 months after the invasion than there would have been if Iraqis had died at the same rate as during the 15 months prior to invasion.

There are still ethnic and religious divides in Iraq, but for the first time since the 1958 Revolution, all Iraq is united on one point: End the US occupation. Not just Iraq, masses on all continents across the globe are united on this one agenda: USA out of Iraq!!