**The Iraq invasion**

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How did we get here? 20 years after the US-led invasion of the sovereign nation of Iraq, we still refuse to reckon with the last decades of war as yet another decade of violence unfolds. Since the invasion, tens of thousands if not over a million lives have been lost. Millions of Iraqis are still displaced, while tens of millions have endured relentless violence ever since the destabilization of their country beginning in the 1990s through bombing, sanctions, multiple military invasions, and the occupation that began in 2003.

We share these reflections as two antimilitarist organizers in the US who met years after the invasion through our shared work with About Face Veterans Against War (formerly known as Iraq Veterans Against the War). Twenty years ago this weekend, one of us was deployed as a communications technician and heard nothing about the massive protests the other participated in. One of us was organizing with Direct Action to Stop the War, coordinating twenty thousand people to shut down San Francisco's financial district, in an attempt to raise the financial and social cost of invasion that was being steamrolled through despite the largest global street protests in the history of the world.

We know the war on Iraq – like the war on Afghanistan – was a calculated grift for money and power. We can't allow the truth to be manipulated or forgotten. George W. Bush is being reanimated as a folksy painter instead of brought to account for his administration’s war crimes. His creation of the so-called ‘Endless Wars’ after 9/11 has so far cost incalculable damage to peoples' lives and over $14 trillion in Pentagon spending. Up to half of that massive amount has piped directly into the pockets of private military contractors.

Those who seek profit from wars rely on our consent, our confusion about what's really happening, and our willingness to submit to historical amnesia. The only voices allowed to speak on large platforms about this 20-year milestone are the ones attempting to rewrite history in favor of the architects and beneficiaries of war. A former speechwriter for Bush wants you to buy that the US “went to war to build a democracy in Iraq,” but listen instead to Iraqis like Riverbend (the pen name of a young Baghdadi woman writing during the early years of the occupation) who told us the truth at the time:

“You lost the day your tanks rolled into Baghdad to the cheers of your imported, American-trained monkeys. You lost every single family whose home your soldiers violated. You lost every sane, red-blooded Iraqi when the Abu Ghraib pictures came out and verified your atrocities behind prison walls as well as the ones we see in our streets. You lost when you brought murderers, looters, gangsters and militia heads to power and hailed them as Iraq's first democratic government. You lost when a gruesome execution was dubbed your biggest accomplishment. You lost the respect and reputation you once had. You lost more than 3000 troops. That is what you lost America. I hope the oil, at least, made it worthwhile.”

Even now in Iraq, everyday people still struggle daily for the bare minimum. As the nonpartisan Iraqi diaspora group Collective Action for Iraq recently described, “People have continued taking to the streets across Iraq to protest corruption, for basic services and to live their lives in dignity – from Kurdistan, to Najaf, and Dhi Qar. State and local security forces continue to respond with violence and the suppression of dissident voices.” These are only a few effects of the cascade of violence triggered by the US occupation.

The silence here about the devastation caused by US wars abroad is by design. Obama came to office on a platform of ‘change’ nodding strongly towards the populist antiwar sentiment of the late 2000s, and yet here we are, still prioritizing war. Under this ongoing ‘Global War on Terror’ framework – under Bush and Obama and Trump and now Biden – the lead-up to each consecutive war utilizes tailored rhetoric but the patterns remain the same, even while weapons evolve. Now the contractors are the same corporations providing the software we use every day. Google and Microsoft work alongside Raytheon and Northrop Grumman to produce and operate weapons of mass destruction. The war machine is becoming more secretive, more connected, and more ubiquitous. None of us can afford to remain silent or apathetic about the devastation we continue to cause to innocent civilians. The money being spent on war must be redirected to those most impacted by US aggression.

Instead of reparations to Iraq and Afghanistan, the US has stolen billions from the Afghan Central Bank; drained Iraq of people, its resources, and undermined civil society creating regional instability. If we allow ourselves to be lied to yet again about these wars, we are more easily manipulated to go along with the next iteration of the US war. Obama’s so-called "Pacific Pivot" initiated a shift back to China, yet again, as the leading rationale for continued military buildup. The fear-mongering is the same, yet the tactics of war-making are being implemented with evermore secrecy by intelligence officials and contractors preventing public discourse and effective oversight.

Our misleadingly named ‘defense’ spending, the money earmarked for expanding US control overseas, has doubled since the invasion of Iraq. Nothing stops the growth of war profiteering: not exposures of war crimes, not the inarguable destabilization of multiple countries with increased violence and displacement, not the epidemics of veteran suicide and war trauma coming home, not the avoidance of auditing or accountability for the use of such funds. Last Monday, Pentagon Comptroller Mike McCord told reporters that a $1 trillion defense budget is coming soon.

What will the world look like 20 years from today? If this country cannot relinquish its death grip on empire-building, we will have only continued to impoverish and incarcerate our own population while spreading unimaginable destruction abroad. The US military is also the biggest polluter on the planet; in order to address the dangers of climate change, we must shrink this footprint immediately.

If we want a brighter future, we can and must divest from wars abroad and the increased domestic militarization that both pose serious threats to democracy.

Excerpted: ‘The Illegal Invasion of Iraq: Never Forget’.

Courtesy: Commondreams.org