

Blood, oil, and sand

The US colonisation of Iraq



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Last month, Iraqi militia groups opposing the Israeli genocide of Palestinians attacked US troops stationed in Iraq, and the US retaliated with drone strikes. Recently, talks have resumed about withdrawing all US troops from Iraq. But what are US troops doing in Iraq in the first place? And do they have a right to be there?

US officials have proffered “a show of commitment to the region” as a reason, among others, for the ongoing occupation of Iraq. However, the only “commitment” the US has shown to the Iraqi region has been a commitment to violence and oil monopolies. US troops in Iraq remain a minority of foreign invaders in a relationship of domination with the indigenous Iraqi majority. This type of relationship of domination is exactly what constitutes colonialism.

The US Department of Defense has not disclosed the exact number of US troops currently stationed in Iraq, but in 2021 they did state that about 2,500 personnel are stationed there. The US government claims that they are there firstly in a non-combat advisory role to train and advise Iraqi Armed Forces in their ongoing war against ISIS, and secondly to decrease Iran’s influence in the region.

But the rise of ISIS was only made possible by the US’ destabilisation of the region in the first place, and the US executed Saddam Hussein in 2003, whom they had initially backed to decrease Iran’s influence in the region before his invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

According to the World Food Programme (WFP), Iraq currently has a population of 44 million, out of which 1.2 million are internally displaced by conflict and 2.5 million

are in acute need of food and livelihood assistance. There are also about 247,000 Syrian refugees in Iraq. Moreover, secondary displacement is common due to security and livelihood issues. The national poverty rate is 31.7 percent, with many suffering from hunger being children.

According to Save the Children, nearly 60 percent of Iraq’s population is below 25 years old, about 56 percent of children between two and four years cannot access early childhood education, and merely 44 percent are able to complete upper secondary education. Moreover, most children who are able to complete school cannot find rewarding employment or livelihood opportunities due to the country’s extreme poverty.

WFP also wrote that “decades of sanctions, conflicts, political instability, and social unrest have eroded governance structures and diminished the institutional capacities of various ministries.”

A look at recent history reveals that humanitarian and development needs have been high in Iraq because of a US-engineered United Nations Security Council (UNSC) sanctions regime (which began in 1990), a comprehensive US-led bombing campaign in 1991, the 2003 US invasion, and the ongoing US occupation.

Anupama Rao Singh, Unicef’s former senior representative in Iraq, said in 2000 that from 1989 to 1999, Iraq suffered an unparalleled decline in the standard of living: “In 1989, the literacy rate was 95 percent, and 93 percent of the population had free access to modern health facilities. Parents were fined for failing to

send their children to school. The phenomenon of street children or children begging was unheard of.”

The wellbeing of Iraqis came to an abrupt end in 1991 with Operation Desert Storm, a US-led six-week military campaign during which 88,000 tons of bombs, the equivalent of approximately seven Hiroshima-size atom bombs, were dropped on Iraq. The bombing

level it was in 1920.

The UNSC imposed a sanctions regime on Iraq in 1990, shortly following Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait. However, the UNSC sanctions regime remained in place even after the widespread devastation wreaked on Iraq, and would not be lifted until the 2003 US invasion of Iraq began.

According to the authors of *Sanctions As War: Anti-Imperialist*

for medicine as well as food. Thus, the sanctions regime cut off Iraq’s main sources of income and food.

The destruction caused by the US-led bombing campaign combined with the scarcity imposed by the UNSC sanctions regime led to mass death of genocidal proportions, which may be described as ethnic cleansing. Food insecurity and the decimation of the healthcare system

violence. Out of a population of about 27 million, about two million fled and another two million were internally displaced.

In 2007, the peak of the US occupation, there were about 170,000 US troops stationed in Iraq. According to a report put together by 80 aid agencies in 2007, about a third of Iraqis were in need of emergency aid, 70 percent had inadequate access to water, 80 percent were without effective sanitation, more than 800,000 children had discontinued their education, and there was rampant malnutrition among children (Cook, 2008, p. 6).

Under these conditions in 2007, the US government, aided by the IMF, coerced the Iraqi government to privatise the previously nationalised Iraqi oil industry and thereby open up Iraq’s oil fields to foreign oil monopolies, also known as multinational corporations. According to the World Bank, another US-dominated international financial instrument, Iraq is among the most oil-dependent countries in the world, with oil revenues accounting for more than 99 percent of exports, 85 percent of the government’s budget, and 42 percent of GDP in the last decade.

Political theorist Achille Mbembe has described the foundational element of US global power as the generalisation “of forms of power and modes of sovereignty whose key characteristic is to produce death on a large scale.” The forms of power and modes of sovereignty the US generalised to Iraq include siege warfare, hybrid warfare, total war, and colonial occupation.

The US’ colonial warfare on Iraq produced death on a massive scale in order to clear a path for oil monopolies to expropriate Iraq’s oil. The obscene profits of oil monopolies form the basis of the US’ colonial forms of power and modes of sovereignty in Iraq. The ongoing occupation of Iraq is a method of pure force and coercion that reproduces the social conditions which enable oil monopolies to continue expropriating Iraqi oil.



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FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

campaign intentionally and extensively destroyed Iraq’s civilian infrastructure, including health and education facilities, electric power stations, water treatment plants, sewage and sanitation facilities, industrial and agricultural facilities, communication and transport infrastructure, and oil facilities. The destruction set back Iraq’s healthcare system at least 50 years. About four months after the war, Iraq’s national power generation was reduced to about 20-25 percent of its pre-war total, which is about the

Perspectives on American Geo-Economic Strategy, sanctions regimes are the modern form of siege warfare since these deprive a target population of essential goods and services, thereby producing poverty, disease, famine, and social unrest and coercing the government of the targeted population to surrender.

Before the UNSC sanctions regime, Iraq’s main source of foreign exchange earnings was oil exports, about 70 percent of Iraq’s food requirements were imported, and the country was almost totally dependent on imports

and basic infrastructure, as well as the long-lasting ecological and health effects of illegal uranium-depleted weapons used by the US-led coalition, led to rising illness and high mortality rates, including the doubling of under-5 child mortality between 1994 and 1999.

Approximately half a million children died due to the US-engineered UNSC sanctions regime.

According to a 2006 article in *The Lancet*, about 655,000 civilians died in Iraq from 2003 to 2006, out of which about 601,000 died from

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‘Russia has my blood’

Alexei Navalny—a fierce foe of Russian President Vladimir Putin—died in jail on February 19. In light of his untimely death, The Daily Star is publishing Navalny’s interview with Tikhon Dzyadko, editor-in-chief of Dozhd, in October 2020, two months after the late opposition leader was poisoned with a Novichok nerve agent.

The European Union recently voted to sanction six Russian citizens and one entity in connection with your poisoning in August. Those affected are representatives of the presidential administration, the special services, and the institutions where it is believed that Novichok was created. Do you think these sanctions are sufficient?

I am primarily interested in what happens in Russia; Europe’s reaction is of secondary concern here. I understand that the indignation in many countries is not entirely connected to me. They are more concerned with the use of a chemical weapon. What I want is an investigation conducted on Russian territory—or at least the semblance of an investigation. Because what is happening now seems to be another signal that no one can count on any justice in our country.

As for sanctions or blacklists, my position has always been that if developed countries want to help Russia and its citizens and themselves, they should put a roadblock in the path of dirty money leaving Russia.

The killers and those who gave them the order must be criminally prosecuted. But what is really needed is to kick all the oligarchs out of Europe—the Usmanovs, the Abramovichs, the Shuvalovs, the Peskovs, and all these propagandists who enrich themselves and send money to Europe while Russians are kept in poverty and degradation. These are the people who must be fought. I do not know what measures European countries will take in response to my poisoning, but I would like them to focus on punishing not just the flunkies who execute orders, but the high-profile villains who hide their stolen money in Berlin, London, and Paris.

But surely some European officials have consulted you about who should be punished. Have you helped compile any lists of persons who will be sanctioned?

No, I do not need to make another list. You can consult any of our Anti-Corruption Foundation investigations, most of which are concerned with just that: how some people, claiming to be patriots, plunder enormous sums and buy themselves luxury real estate in Manhattan or Mayfair. My list is in my YouTube blog. Anyone can tune in there, take the names, and add them to any anti-corruption list.

In fact, I am not communicating with any officials here in Berlin or elsewhere in Europe. The only people I talk to are doctors. I don’t think that Europe and its officials need my help. Again, they are imposing sanctions not because of me, but because the use of chemical weapons is a violation of international laws and conventions. That is why the formal investigation and statements about the use of Novichok in my case were made not by European countries, but by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, which Russia helped create.

Whether it is Navalny or whoever, the punishment for using such a weapon should be the same.

When you were in the hospital, there were media reports that Russian consular officers requested access to you. Did you eventually meet with them?

This was a funny situation. As far as I understand it, they requested access to me when, probably, I was still in a coma, or had just started to come out of a coma. It was such a bizarre discussion. They may as well have been trying to talk to a stone in the forest! The consulate had said, “We demand access to Navalny!” The international provisions on consular access require that consular assistance be provided to people who need it. I do not need it; I need just one thing: for Russia to have a proper investigation into this attempt to murder me. There is every reason to assume that the Novichok was applied to my clothes, which remained behind in the hospital in Omsk. I would like to be given my own



People gather outside the Russian embassy, following the death of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, reported by prison authorities in Russia’s Yamalo-Nenets region where he had been serving his sentence, in Warsaw, Poland on February 16, 2024.

PHOTO: REUTERS

medical records, too. And I would very much like to see the video recordings seized by interior ministry officers from the hotel in Tomsk, where the poisoning likely happened. We don’t know where these recordings are. If there is no criminal case, where are the videos? I want to see who entered my hotel room.

What the Russian foreign ministry is currently doing is just a distraction. For some reason, they are demanding evidence from Germany. Why? Russia has my clothes, which should be examined. Russia has my blood, which should be tested. The hospital in Omsk is where my medical records and everything needed for a proper investigation can be found. But, for some reason, we do not see it. Instead, we see some kind of skirmish

between Russia and Germany.

Do you think there will be some form of investigation?

I assumed they would at least pretend to have an investigation. But, so far, there is not even a sham investigation. That, for me, is further confirmation that Russian President Vladimir Putin issued the order. Otherwise, we would have seen something similar to the investigation into the murder of Boris Nemtsov. According to the French press, Putin, in conversations with leaders of other countries, denied the use of chemical weapons, then claimed that I poisoned myself.

You have one of the best investigative structures in Russia. If there is no official investigation in the Russian Federation, will the Anti-Corruption Foundation

carry out some kind of inquiry of its own?

To be honest, our possibilities are limited now that the security videos from the hotel are gone. We can’t take them back from the FSB (Federal Security Service) by storm. Everything has been confiscated. The case should have been very easy to solve. The video footage would make everything very clear. But we cannot obtain that evidence. From what I understand, there was a strangely detailed account of my movements before I left Tomsk, apparently prepared by a section of the FSB that was responsible for monitoring me. I was being watched constantly and consistently. The entire hotel was covered with video cameras. This is the most important piece of evidence,

but all of it has been seized.

We are of course trying to figure out what happened, but we are not naive. There will be no sensational discovery. We won’t be able to publish photographs of the people who committed this crime any time soon. That’s how power operates. We’re talking about representatives of the special services. That whole machine is now engaged in hiding and destroying the evidence.

Will you now change your strategy and that of the Anti-Corruption Foundation? Obviously, the stakes have increased. Until August 20, the day you were poisoned, you were conducting ongoing investigations, pursuing a strategy of “smart voting” (encouraging people always to vote for whichever candidate opposes the ruling party, United Russia), and holding rallies. Now that the situation has changed, how will you change your activities?

The stakes have risen in the sense that we are seeing the regime decay. We understood before that we were dealing with scoundrels who are obsessed with power and money, and who apparently will stop at nothing. But we now understand that the toolbox includes political assassinations and intimidation through extraordinarily dangerous methods. Chemical weapons are chemical weapons, after all. The only remaining question is just how widely they are willing to apply such methods.

The stakes are indeed higher in that sense. But, as before, the basic strategy remains the same. We must appeal to the people. We must demand the right to participate freely in elections as candidates. We will continue to organise rallies. What happened is very relevant, of course, not least for me personally. But, in general, I do not think that our approach or activities will change dramatically.