



REBRANDING THE IRAQ WAR

By Rana Odeh

Although there remain 56,000 troops and over 100,000 private contractors in Iraq, the mainstream media has reported the withdrawal of the last U.S. combat units in Iraq as if it means the end of the Iraq War. What this announcement signifies is the rebranding of a war, but not the end of the occupation. The government is privatizing the war by putting it into the hands of tens of thousands of

corporate paramilitary forces many of which are highly trained dangerous mercenaries that will get away with human rights violations with little to no accountability. The new disguise of the war will push it further away from the public eye which will make it more secretive and less transparent. This will also give the illusion that taxpayers are relieved from the burden of the war spending, when in fact, the cost of the Iraq War may increase under this privatized occupation.

The financial cost of the Iraq War is reported to exceed \$900 billion. However, the human cost of the war is even more unbearable. The official number of U.S. military casualties is 4,416, and the number of wounded soldiers is 31,911, which excludes a significant number of soldiers with severe mental illnesses. The death toll on the Iraqi side, to which little attention is given, has exceeded 55,000 insurgent casualties, and is estimated to range between 50,000 and 600,000 Iraqi civilian casualties. This wide range estimate is worrisome. The lives of Iraqi civilians are taken so lightly that those who are killed are not accounted for. Imagine a 550,000 body count margin of error; that would never happen had human life been truly valued in this war.

Far and few ignorant people, however, still think that the U.S. invaded Iraq to liberate its citizens and to improve their quality of life, yet nothing has improved for the Iraqi people. There is increased violence, physical health problems, mental illness, displacement, sky-rocketing unemployment rates, limited daily electricity, and limited access to adequate water supplies. This is a country that sits on an ocean of oil resources, but now has ruined cities that look like ghost towns, and a U.S. embassy the size of 80 football fields. Planting the world's largest embassy in Iraq does not improve the situation of that country, which seven years later still does not have a functional democracy. I thought that is what the U.S. went to Iraq for, to liberate the people and to give them democracy, to show them a "better" way of life: the American Way. Instead, what America has brought to Iraq is death, destruction and record-higher cancer rates.

A new medical study conducted by a group of British and Iraqi doctors found dramatic increases in infant mortality, cancer, and leukemia in the Iraqi city of Fallujah, which was bombed by U.S. Marines in 2004. The rates of infant mortality and cancer exceed those reported by survivors of the atomic bombs dropped on

Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. There has been a four-fold increase in all cancers and a twelve-fold increase in cancer in children under the age of 14. Infant mortality in Fallujah is more than four times higher than in neighboring Jordan, and eight times higher than in Kuwait. Just like in Hiroshima, the cancer, infant mortality, and birth defects are likely to pass through several

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generations. Just because the government and the media have announced the 'exit' of the troops, it does not mean their imprint will not haunt the people of Iraq for decades to come.

We can see now, with increased mental illness in Iraq War veterans, that the war has left a devastating impact on them as well. It is vital to make sure that the returning soldiers get the attention and help they need so they can safely and healthily reintegrate into society. With record-high suicide rates among Iraq War veterans, it is absolutely necessary for the government to have a stronger commitment to the Veterans Affairs to provide better VA medical services to the returning soldiers, and to provide the appropriate care for post traumatic stress disorder and other illnesses that soldiers suffer from. While the number of soldiers who were discharged solely due to mental illness has increased by 64 percent from 2005 to 2009, many soldiers who should have been discharged were put on physically and mentally impairing medications to help their anxiety, depression, insomnia, and pain, then sent back to war, despite the fact that the labels warn against operating a vehicle or heavy machinery under the influence of the drug. We need to make sure the returning soldiers receive long term care, not just medication, for their illnesses which have shown to have delayed onset.

Seven years later, Iraq is in a more unstable situation than before the 2003 invasion, and high rates of U.S. soldiers are developing mental illnesses. Billions of taxpayers' dollars spent, the U.S. is in a depressing economic situation, and there has been no apparent benefit to the Iraqi people or to U.S. soldiers. So who did benefit from the Iraq War? That's a good question to think about and consider regarding Afghanistan, because I doubt that corporate America will give the answer anytime soon.

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THANKS MR. PRESIDENT, BUT WHERE WERE YOU WHEN WE NEEDED YOU?

By David H. Landon



While none of the 2008 crop of Democratic Presidential candidates could be considered "pro-Iraq War," Barack Obama attempted to stake out his especially strong anti-war position in order to separate himself from the others and especially from his chief rival, Hillary Clinton. While Hillary suggested a more moderate position of ending the war based upon conditions on the ground, Barack won the left wingnuts and "Code Pink" fringe of the Democratic Party by promising that his first act as president would be to begin to bring the troops home. Now after 19 months in office, President Obama is doing exactly what Hillary said she would have done. Under his present plan, the last troops to leave Iraq will depart at the end of 2011.

On August 31, President Obama addressed the nation and in an effort to establish his "bona fides" in foreign policy, he sought credit for "ending the combat mission" in Iraq. Following the plan that the President, as our Commander in Chief, has laid out for our military, on August 31 the U.S. mission in Iraq will shift from one of combat troops to a "training and advisory"

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mission in support of the Iraqi government and its security forces. Perhaps a quick review of how we've come to a point where we are even able to consider transforming our military role in Iraq is in order.

In the latter part of 2006 and into 2007, the war in Iraq was going badly. Sectarian violence instigated by al-Qaeda insurgents had led to indiscriminate torture, kidnappings and killings. Here at home, the constant barrage of negative stories from the mainstream media had soured the American public on the war. Determined to turn Iraq into President Bush's Vietnam, every Democrat in Washington took great delight in predicting that the war was being lost. As a result of the war going poorly and an embarrassing lack of spending discipline by the Republicans in Congress, the Democratic Party regained control of Congress.

In early 2007, and after a review of the Iraq war plan, President Bush, supported by John McCain and other Republicans, announced that the situation required more U.S. combat forces taking the fight to the insurgents and unveiled what became known as the "surge" strategy with General David Petraeus leading the effort. At the Senate confirmation hearing for Petraeus, then Senator Barack Obama declared that the troop surge would not work, stating "I am not persuaded that 20,000 additional troops in Iraq is going to solve the sectarian violence there. In fact, I think it will do the reverse." Sadly, even to this day, Obama has never admitted that he was wrong. And of course we remember the prophetic words of that monumental military genius, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV), who declared in April 2007 that "this war is lost."

In fact, whether or not the Democrats can bring themselves to accept it, the surge worked. By late summer General Petraeus reported back to the Congress that the military objectives of the surge were being met. He reported that Coalition and Iraqi Forces had dealt significant blows to al-Qaeda

and had disrupted Shia militias, that ethno-sectarian violence had been reduced, and that the tribal rejection of al-Qaeda had spread from Anbar Province to numerous other locations across Iraq. By fall 2007, the picture in Iraq had changed. After the number of troops reached its peak in fall 2007, U.S. deaths were at their lowest levels since the 2003 invasion, civilian casualties were down, and street life was resuming in Baghdad.

By the early part of 2008, and based upon his observations of the progress, Petraeus recommended drawing down the surge forces from Iraq and gradually transitioning increased responsibilities to Iraqi Forces. The reduction of U.S. forces was predetermined by the changing conditions on the ground. While Barack Obama ran around the country as the presidential candidate who would immediately upon his election "get us out of Iraq," the U.S. military was working the plan that was designed to do that very thing. As the conditions on the ground improved and the Iraqi security forces came of age, our military set the stage for the latest transition for which Obama is trying to claim credit: ending the U.S. combat role in Iraq.

I shouldn't be too hard on the President. This type of understanding of the how the U.S. military works isn't something that even the most ardently trained community organizers have the opportunity to experience and learn.

All Americans should be proud of our troops who performed remarkably and heroically under extremely difficult circumstances. On August 31 their mission changed. All is not perfect in Iraq as the Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds are still working out the details of how to share power. But remember, it took the newly formed U.S. government from 1781 until 1789 to abandon the Articles of Confederation and establish the limited government model of the U.S. constitution. And while the differences between the Quakers and the Presbyterians were significant, they pale compared to the range of issue facing the various factions in Iraq. Be patient. Watch freedom take hold.

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