

Iraq Report: The War Never Ended

by Sami Rasouli

Sami Rasouli, founder and director of the Muslim Peacemaker Teams dedicated to the principles of nonviolence, is a citizen of the U.S. and Iraq. After living in Minneapolis for many years, in 2004 he returned to the Iraqi city of Najaf, where he is from originally, hoping to bring reconciliation between his two countries. He returns to the U.S. each year to educate Americans about the Middle East and to help build people-to-people relationships. He provided this account of the situation in Iraq this year.

Many severe problems in Iraq begin with foreign intervention. Each government official in Iraq has an American or Israeli advisor attached to him and these officials are taking orders from out of the country.

Iraq has been weakened in stages. The U.S. created ISIS, who are foreign insurgents, to deplete Iraq of its natural resource—oil. The U.S. has also been working with Saudi Arabia to deplete Iraq of its younger generations by having them kill each other through fomenting terror with the creation of sectarian extremism and then ISIS.

Now the nation is in shambles. A rich country, historically ancient and technologically modern, became poor. Corrupt government offices keep stealing from and destroying the economy. Ordinary government employees may not receive their salaries at any time—although the Kurds [whose forces are fighting in Iraq and Syria with the U.S.] are still getting paid. Iraq was awarded some IMF funds but of course this plunges Iraq into debt.

Seven new bases are being built in Iraq. Bases from the U.S. 2003 war and subsequent occupation period are being renovated. One of them is near the Mosul dam. The purpose of the military bases is to welcome U.S. military boots on the ground and to surround Iran and Syria. A big airport is being constructed by contractor Kellogg, Brown and Root, renowned for war and occupation installations and as a subsidiary of Halliburton whose former CEO was Dick Cheney, a chief instigator of war on Iraq.

Iraq for Iraqis: the Nonviolent Unity Movement

There has been an Iraqi secular unity grassroots movement among people throughout Iraq demonstrating against corruption and demanding reform of the election process. It has intensified in the last year. The movement does not believe government should be dominated by powerful political powers at the expense of the smaller parties. They demand that government be replaced with a secular meritocracy managed by technocrats and professionals. Muqtada Al Sadr, the influential leader, a Shiite cleric who holds no official government position and has a history of resisting the U.S. occupation, has become active again and joined the movement. Muqtada believes that the political parties based on religious affiliation have failed and wants an end to the privatization of Iraq initiated by Paul Bremer after the U.S. invaded Iraq.

In Baghdad national demonstrations have been held every Friday in Tarir (Emancipation) Square. This is in central Baghdad outside the heavily fortified Green Zone which is the seat of

federal government power and the site of the U.S. embassy that, in sheer physical size, is the largest in the world. While the exclusive environment within the Green Zone is luxurious, ordinary people outside lack basic infrastructure and hold government corruption responsible. In February of 2017, Muqtada Al Sadar and Vice President Al Maliki, head of the Islamic Dawa Party, met in Beirut at the invitation of Hizb Allah leader Sayed Hassan Nasrallah to try to reach a reconciliation between the two rival Iraqi leaders, but it didn't work. While Muqtada was in Beirut, protesters advanced toward the Green Zone again continuing their demand for deep reforms. Muqtada called for the movement to be peaceful and for no government officials or property to be harmed. He urged supporters to disperse after several protesters and an embassy security person were killed.

The Iraqi people are angry about seeing the same old political faces and plan to boycott their elections nationwide as a form of protest and disobedience led by Muqtada Al Sadr until real change takes place. Many Iraqis think any change in the Iraq political arena would be impossible until the U.S. and Israel cease intervention and control. Iraq should be for Iraqis.

Mosul: Iraqi state army forces were sent to surround Mosul in October of 2016. Fighting in the urban environment of Mosul was especially dangerous. In the Old City, alleyways are narrow and houses are adjacent to one another. ISIS moved from house to house. Many young men from Najaf and the nine southern provinces of Iraq who had been fighting ISIS from the beginning up through the battle for Mosul were killed.

The Iraqi army was backed by other forces who fought with them to destroy ISIS [Kurdish Peshmerga, various Iraqi militia, and Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Units (They call themselves “public recruited fighters”, translation: Al Hashd Al Shabi)].

These forces had started to fight ISIS on the east side of Mosul and drove ISIS to the west side where the Old City is. On both sides of the city U.S. coalition (UK, France, and other European countries) and the Iraqi air force dropped bombs that destroyed homes, churches, government and commercial businesses, power and water treatment plants, factories, the Mosul University, and more.

Mosul's historic Old City was destroyed with this continuous bombing. In April of 2017, thousands of the city's inhabitants had already fled but 400,000 people were trapped there by ISIS, who wanted them as human shields. The civilians were suffering from hunger and thirst and lacked medicine. They begged not to be bombed from the air by Iraqi and U.S.-led coalition forces in their efforts to annihilate ISIS, but the bombs continued. Civilians trying to escape could be caught in the crossfire, or shot—either by ISIS who wanted to hold them hostage, or by their “rescuers” who suspected them of *being* ISIS.

During the last week of May, I went to the oil rich town of Qayyarah (now literally a ghost town) south of Mosul. There I met with members of my wife's family—a husband, wife, and their two young daughters—to escort them out of the area. ISIS had burned the oil field after defeat. We witnessed signs of the still-burning oil field and the destruction of most homes and government buildings.

War creates profound pain and intense agony and destroys the environment. My work with Muslim Peacemaker Teams is like a drop in the ocean, but we continue to maintain water filters and plant trees. Every green tree gives birth to life.