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<http://rt.com/op-edge/us-iraq-state-terrorism-473/>

US built 'powerful organs of state terrorism' in Iraq

November 09, 2013

Iraq is still suffering from the US invasion because the apparatus of state oppression and terror is still in place, killing people every day. But few in the US seem to realize the scale of the war crimes committed in Iraq, an expert author told RT.

In an exclusive interview with RT, Nicolas J.S. Davies, author of “*Blood On Our Hands: The American Invasion and Destruction of Iraq*,” said that the world should learn the lessons from US invasions, such as respect for international law and the futility of military force.

For more on this topic, see RT’s Special Report dedicated to unprecedented **raise of violence** in Iraq in 2013.

Questionable US objectives in Iraq

RT: *Has America achieved any of the goals it had at the beginning of the invasion in 2003?*

Nicolas J.S. Davies: That depends how you define those goals. If the intention was to invade a foreign country and destroy its government and its society, then yes, it did.

If you take US officials at their word and accept that they had an intention of replacing that regime and that society with something better, then obviously they did not.

My friend was in Iraq a few months ago and he found very few people in Iraq today who would say that their lives are better now than under Saddam Hussein's regime. And that is not to say good in any way about Saddam Hussein, it is to say that the United States and its allies destroyed Iraq.

The invasion was not just some sort of mistake. The invasion and occupation were a serious crime, a crime of aggression under the UN Charter as (then-Secretary General) Kofi Annan acknowledged. And aggression was defined under the Nuremberg principles and by the judges at Nuremberg as the supreme international crime.



AFP Photo / Pool / Lucas Jackson
'US blown out UN Charter in the past 12 years'

The wisdom of renouncing aggression and war in the UN Charter is borne out by what we have seen in all the acts of aggression that the US has committed over the past 10-12 years. Not one of them has in fact managed to reduce terrorism, managed to establish a better form of government, or managed to make anybody safer.

So when we look at the absolute chaos today in Iraq, Libya and Syria, I think we have to ask who is responsible – and are these in fact crimes for which people should be held criminally responsible?

RT: *Many people blame the US for the current **unrest** in the country saying America has “stirred up a hornets' nest.” What do you think?*

ND: Well, except that Iraq was not a hornet's nest. And once again this bears out the wisdom of the UN Charter.

Let me read you a very short quote from Norwegian general Robert Mood, who oversaw the peacekeeping force that went into Syria in 2012 to oversee the failed ceasefire.

“It is fairly easy to use the military tool, because, when you launch the military tool in classical interventions, something will happen and there will be results. The problem is that the results are almost all the time different than the political results you were aiming for when you decided to launch it. So the other position, arguing that it is not the role of the international community, neither coalitions of the willing, nor the UN Security Council for that matter, to change governments inside a country, is also a position that should be respected.”

So I think it is a lesson for all of us, for the whole world, to learn from this experience. It is exactly what he just said.

We need a framework of international law respected by all – including the most powerful countries like the United States.



US soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 22nd Regiment of the 4th Infantry Division prepare to fire a mortar during training at their base in Tikrit, 180 Kilometers (110 miles) north of Iraqi capital Baghdad, 29 December 2003 (AFP Photo / Jewel Samad)

‘Every US military intervention since the WWII has been a complete disaster’

The use of military force cannot achieve any constructive goals, as our leaders claim.

You know, since World War II every US military intervention everywhere has been a complete disaster, whether you’re talking about Korea, Vietnam, Central America in the 1960s or all this entire history of the past 12 years.

You know, really, after Vietnam, I think most Americans understood this. Richard Barnet, who founded the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, wrote a book called “Roots of War” in 1972. He said in that book that the irony is that we’re at a point where the No. 1 country has

perfected the science of killing; that at the very moment that this has happened, it is no longer a practical means of political domination.

And as I say, this is the irony of our country, the United States, in world history: That at the point where we have these weapons powerful enough to destroy the entire world, we can no longer use them to any practical constructive purpose. And yet, we have virtually bankrupted this country.

Since Richard Barnet wrote these words in 1972, the US has spent at least \$17 trillion on its military, which happens to be exactly equal to our supposedly unsustainable national debt.

This is really now just a tragic history, but what we should do is to try and learn from that and recommit to the rule of international law. We just saw how effective it could be in Syria, by actually practicing working diplomacy within the rule of international law, bringing the chemical weapons of the regime to the UN to dismantle them – and how much better that works than launching missile strikes.



Iraqi children look at US soldiers from the 1st battalion, 22nd Regiment of the 4th Infantry Division conducting a foot-patrol along a street of former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's hometown Tikrit, 180 Kilometers (110 miles) north of Iraqi capital Baghdad, 27 December 2003 (AFP Photo / Jewel Samad)

‘US employed classic divide-and-rule strategy in Iraq’

RT: *This year has proved to be most deadliest in Iraq for the last five years. Why is the situation on the ground getting worse?*

ND: Well, because Iraq is still suffering from the destruction of its regime and its government and its society by the United States. The United States employed a classic divide-and-rule strategy, pitting people of different sects against each other, inciting violence that is completely

unprecedented in that country. And now has instilled a sectarian-based government that only represents people of only one sect. It is still receiving huge amounts of so-called security assistance from the United States.

The United States built powerful organs of state terrorism in Iraq. The CIA sent a retired colonel by the name of James Steele to Iraq in 2004. He eventually recruited 27 brigades of special police commandos who then waged a reign of terror that killed tens of thousands of mostly Sunni men and boys in Baghdad and around the country. They have since been rebranded, first as the National Police, when one of their torture centers was discovered back during that period, and now as the Federal Police. They are still effectively run by Adnan Al-Asadi, who has been the deputy interior minister there since 2005.

So that regime of state repression and terror that the United States installed in Iraq is still functioning, and still conducting extrajudicial executions, in addition to one of the largest numbers of supposedly legal executions in the world.

You know, in Iraq, you can be sentenced to death for property crimes; you can be sentenced to death on accusations of terrorism, in trials that only last, at best, an hour or two, with very little legal representation. Human rights officials from the UN have absolutely condemned the justice system – so-called justice system – that the US has established in Iraq, and have demanded – the UN Human Rights Council has demanded – that Iraq immediately cease these hangings.

Sometimes they hang more than 40 people in one day, including women as well. This is just a reign of terror. And in that sense, some of the worst aspects of the US occupation are still continuing today.



Two US soldiers from the 1st battalion, 22nd Regiment of the 4th Infantry Division secure the parameters during a foot-patrol along a street of former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's

hometown Tikrit, 180 Kilometers (110 miles) north of Iraqi capital Baghdad, 27 December 2003
(AFP Photo / Jewel Samad)

RT: *Can we expect the situation to change?*

ND: There has always been resistance in Iraq to this reign of terror, and to this highly illegitimate government. And most of that is political, non-violent resistance. Since 2011 when the Arab Spring began – you know, there were massive demonstrations all over Iraq in 2011 during the Arab Spring, they were not reported very much in the West, for political reasons. There is a great demand from the people of Iraq to change this situation.

But as long as the US continues to support this highly repressive government it is very difficult, and it is continuing to cause the sacrifice of thousands of lives. It is obviously exploited by extremists, by Islamists, Sunni groups supported by the Saudis and others on the other side. So you've got an extremist Shiite government and you've got extremist Sunni, right-wing fundamentalist terrorism and you've got millions of innocent civilians caught up in the middle. But their capacity for resistance was systematically broken down by the US occupation.

Hundreds and hundreds of academics were killed. Thousands of professionals fled the country during the US occupation. Almost anyone who could get out fled for their lives, amid the threat of death from various militias and factions in Iraq. It will take an awful lot for Iraq to recover from this.

'US never accounted for war crimes'

But for American viewers watching this, I think it's important to understand our responsibility and our government's responsibility for this. President Nixon promised \$3.3 billion in reparations to Vietnam, but not a penny of that was ever paid. We should be paying reparations to help the people of Iraq recover for what was done in our name to them. We should be pressing, pressing for our leaders to be held accountable for these crimes.

A couple of weeks ago, I went with a group of people here in Miami to the Canadian consulate and met with the political officer there, because Mr. Richard Cheney, the former vice president of the United States, was scheduled to speak at an economic forum in Toronto. So we along with human rights groups and lawyers in Canada and the United States were asking Canada to please do what we have failed to do, to honor its obligations under the convention against torture. To either bar Mr. Cheney from entering Canada, or if he was allowed into Canada, to please arrest him and investigate his alleged crimes. Unfortunately, the very conservative government in Canada failed – once again – to uphold its obligations under the convention against torture.



Iraqi women walk past a burnt-out vehicle on October 7, 2013 following a bombing attack in Baghdad's eastern al-Jadidah district the night before. (AFP Photo / Ahmad Al-Rubaye)

The US occupation of Iraq, as well as being an act of aggression, when you consider that probably about 10 percent of the Sunni population were killed, and probably 25 percent of them were driven from their homes, clearly meets the definition of genocide as it is defined in the genocide convention. The occupation included systematic, daily violations of the convention against torture and many, many articles of the Geneva Conventions.

So the US officials responsible for all of that really have many charges to answer. And we should understand, as Americans, that while there have been indictments in Spain, and Mr. Bush was prevented from traveling to Switzerland, Mr. Rumsfeld was almost prevented from traveling to Belgium at one point – the primary responsibility under all the international treaties that the United States has signed is on us. It is our responsibility to hold senior, major American war criminals responsible for their crimes.

And that continues. The Obama administration has not just failed to hold the officials of the previous administration accountable, but has continued many of these crimes. Aggression is aggression, whether it's a full-scale invasion or simply flying drones over another country and blowing up people's homes.

So the US crimes continue. After the US was convicted by the International Court of Justice in the 1980s of committing aggression against Nicaragua, it said it would simply no longer recognize the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice. It has never recognized the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court, which so far is functioning as an international African court because the only people that have been charged have been from Africa. And of course this is completely undermining the legitimacy of the court. Little by little, no one in

Africa is going to cooperate with it if they see it as simply targeting their own leaders while leaders of the United States and other countries just completely get off the hook.

So we have a collective responsibility, which we can fulfill by the payment of war reparations, and we have criminal accountability by which we need to charge civilian and military officials who were responsible for the horrors inflicted on the people of Iraq, under our own laws, under the United States War Crimes Act, for the crimes they committed.



A wounded man is carried away following a suicide bombing close to the home of MP Imad Yohana in the northern city of Kirkuk on September 22, 2013, in which some 47 people were wounded including the Christian MP. (AFP Photo / Marwan Ibrahim)

‘American viewers are not familiar with horrors of modern Iraq’

RT: *The mainstream media is often portraying terror attacks and deaths in Iraq as mundane. But the war doesn't seem to be over. Why do the Western media often turn a blind eye to the everyday struggle of Iraqis?*

ND: Some of your viewers may be surprised to hear some of the things I’m saying because the US media has simply never addressed this incredible human tragedy in Iraq in these kinds of terms. In fact, I think any reporter who talks to people in Iraq today can ascertain pretty quickly that very few people - only perhaps those affiliated with the government that was installed by the occupation, perhaps some of those people would feel they’re now better off – but for ordinary Iraqis probably very few would say they’re better off today.

And yet, this would come as a surprise to many Americans. Many Americans, because the media has reported in such a bias fashion in this entire catastrophe, many Americans are unaware. You mentioned in your invitation to me that the Iraq Body Count, which as some estimate of 100,000 or 200,000 Iraqis killed, but that is based on passive reporting. Actual epidemiological studies in Iraq have found anywhere from 400,000 to over 1 million Iraqis killed.

Les Roberts, who pioneered epidemiology in war zones, in Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, took part in one of those epidemiological studies in Iraq, and he found exactly the same pattern in Iraq as he found in Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo: that passive reporting of deaths in a war zone generally only capture between 5 percent and 20 percent of the actual deaths that emerge from more in-depth studies. So the Iraq Body Count is based on passive reporting, they're taking numbers from the Iraqi Health Ministry, numbers reported in the Western media and sort of adding those up. Again, Les Roberts found exactly the same thing in Iraq as he found in Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, that probably 5 to 20 times as many people as that were actually killed in Iraq.



Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki (AFP Photo / Mandel Ngan)
'The true numbers of victims in Iraq is much higher'

Yes, thousands of people are still being killed, and the exact numbers are probably very hard to know. It is less than during most of the US occupation. Most of the people killed during the US occupation were killed by US or allied forces, or by US-trained Iraqi forces. When the Iraqi Health Ministry reported in 2004 and 2005 that that was the case, that most of the deaths were not from resistance forces or insurgents, but from the occupying forces, that was reported even in The Miami Herald, actually, by McClatchy, by Nancy Youssef who did some very good reporting.

The BBC – but once the BBC got a hold of it and started reporting that, John Simpson reported that in preparing for a Panorama show in Britain for the BBC, but before the actual Panorama

show aired, he was contacted by the Iraqi Minister of Health saying, *“No, no, no, that’s not what the numbers show,”* that these were their own figures, he said, *“No, no, we really have no idea who killed all these people.”* On the web you can find sites like the Information Clearing House. You can find the original BBC report, and then you can find its retraction and the reedited report sort of apologizing for having reported what the occupation health ministry had told them.

So, really, when we look at Libya, when we look at Syria, we really need to understand. I think Americans deserve more credit than they usually get for grasping these issues, and I think that kind of explains why we saw this massive, massive outcry against the prospect of new US aggression against Syria.

If people want to know more about the US invasion and destruction of Iraq, please get a hold of a copy of my book, it’s called *“Blood on Our Hands: The American Invasion and Destruction of Iraq.”* People can also read my other work on Syria and on US militarism and war crimes.