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## Iraq and the Persistence of American Hegemony

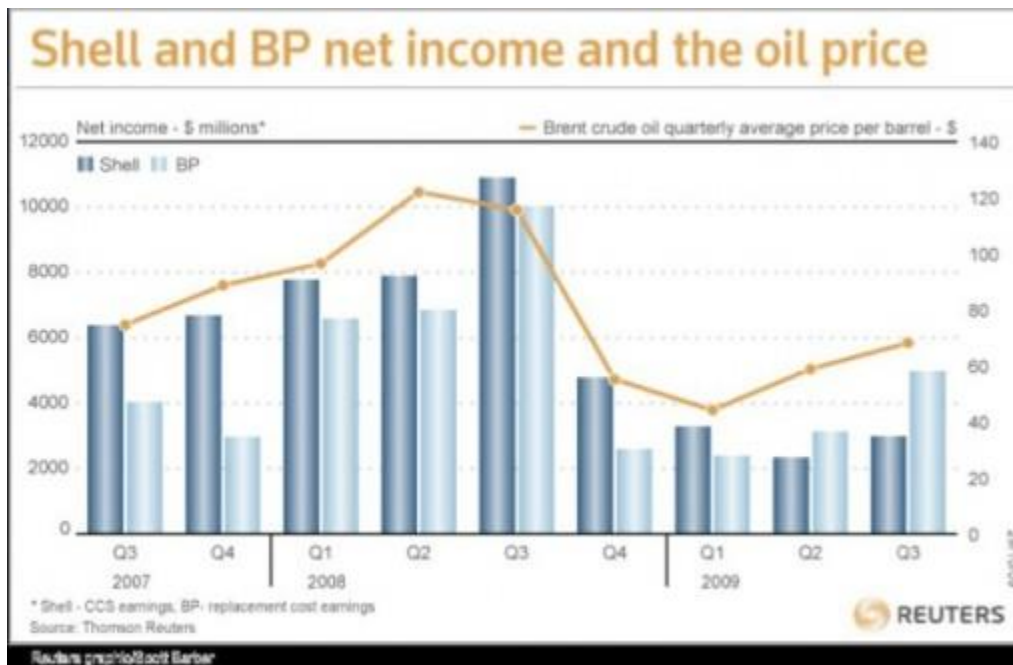
### *Imperial Looting*

by ROB URIE

JUNE 20-22, 2014

The most recent war on Iraq is widely considered to be George W. Bush's war but a majority of leading Democrats including Hillary Clinton and John Kerry voted to grant Mr. Bush authority for the war. As its moral, military and geopolitical catastrophes have emerged it is necessary to remember that a large majority of Americans also supported both Mr. Bush and the war on Iraq when it was undertaken. Left largely unsaid in discussion of the events currently unfolding, as the CIA has armed and 'trained' Syrian 'rebels', is that according to UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) America's war sent 1.2 million Iraqis fleeing to Syria to escape violence in Iraq. And a total of four million Iraqis were displaced. The question of precisely how many Iraqis were killed from the U.S. invasion and occupation ranges from the determined undercount of 191,000 on the low end to over one million on the high end. The most plausible count placed the number of 'excess' Iraqi deaths at 655,000 by 2006, five full years before U.S. troops left the country.

With ‘official’ America debating how to respond to what at present appears to be a Saudi-Iranian proxy war in Iraq the question both within and outside of the U.S. is: why do America and the Americans have any say in the matter? The last quarter century of U.S. engagement in Iraq has been a series of military and geopolitical blunders with catastrophic consequences across the Middle East. The answer of course, as it was with the mis-sold invasions of 1990 and 2003, is Operation Iraqi Liberation, oil. The dim hubris of Bush / Cheney / Rumsfeld / Rice that broke ‘Iraq’ into Sunni and Shi‘ite factions has been met by leading Democrats with claims that the war was ‘mismanaged’ and that Iraq remains of some vaguely specified ‘vital interest.’ The moral, ethical and societal sickness that has U.S. President Obama now sending murder robots (drones) and additional troops to force the will of ‘official’ Washington onto what remains of the national government of Iraq misses that it was this very same will that caused the social / political catastrophe now claimed to be in need of rectification.



*Graph (1) above: as experience has shown, Americans love a good fairy tale. In the case of U.S. involvement in Iraq we have been fed a long series of substantially unrelated rationales from political ‘liberation’ (1990-1991) to WMDs (weapons of mass destruction) and democratization (2003 – 2006) and now on to ‘re-stabilization.’ Left unstated are economic interests like oil company profits, munitions sales and contracts for rebuilding what the U.S. has destroyed. Graph (1) illustrates the relation of oil prices to oil company profits. Wars against oil-rich nations raise the price of oil to the benefit of international oil companies. What do one million*

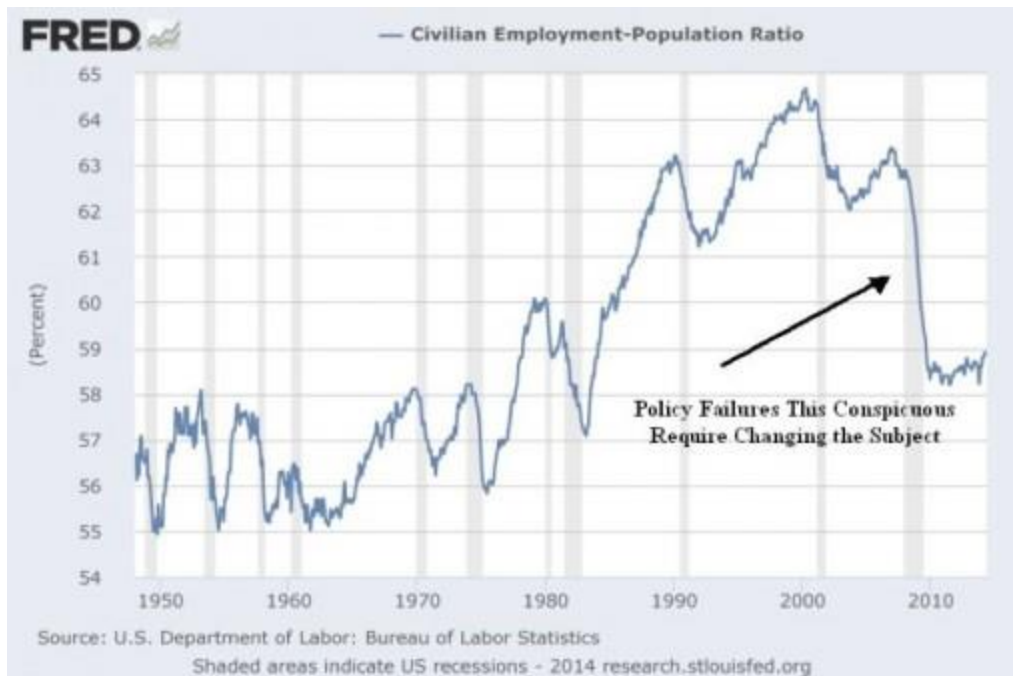
*dead and four million displaced human beings matter when profits are to be 'made?'* Source: Reuters.

The American farce now underway is to argue implausibly parsed Party politics when the whole of U.S. officialdom bears substantial responsibility for current circumstances in Iraq, to a large extent for the broader Middle East, and most certainly for what remains of America. The illumination-lite question of when U.S. history in Iraq began is being used to hide / ignore that this much is known: The CIA helped bring Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party to power in a CIA-orchestrated coup in the early 1960s. After overthrowing the democratically elected government of Iran in a CIA – MI5 orchestrated coup in 1953 the Reagan / (George H.W.) Bush administrations supported Iraq in the Iran-Iraq War in the early-mid 1980s. That war resulted in substantial casualties and Reagan / Bush went so far as to supply Iraq with chemical and biological weapons to use against Iran. George H.W. Bush hired PR (public relations) firms to sell the first Gulf War in 1990 – 1991 as a war of liberation while giving wholly fictional accounts of the geopolitical interests at stake. The U.S. propaganda effort for that war went so far as to have the Kuwaiti Ambassador's daughter pose as a witness to Iraqi atrocities that did not, in fact, occur. Estimates are of 60,000 – 200,000 Iraqi soldiers killed in the first Gulf War, mostly Iraqi conscripts (citizens drafted under threat of sanction) buried by bulldozers in the desert sand.

Toward the end of that war (1990 – 1991) a contingent of U.S. and Israeli neo-cons (neo-conservatives)— armchair 'warriors' sitting comfortably in plush chairs in Georgetown devising U.S. military 'strategy,' argued that the U.S. should occupy Iraq to project U.S. military power throughout the Middle East. Exploiting manufactured public bloodlust toward Iraq, U.S. President Bill Clinton then implemented devastating economic sanctions believed to be responsible for the deaths of between 350,000 – 500,000 Iraqi children. By the late 1990s the neo-cons had coalesced into the Project for the New American Century complete with fresh plans for world domination. When the Supreme Court appointed George W. Bush to the U.S. Presidency in 2001 the neo-con 'brain trust' was made the core of his foreign policy advisory staff. Mr. Bush proposed a series of wholly manufactured rationales for war against Iraq and in 2003 war was launched. Upon his election in 2008 current U.S. President Barack Obama declined to call for the prosecution of senior Bush administration officials for their crimes of aggressive war, torture and murder and extended the Bush / Cheney claim of 'unitary' executive power to assert the right to murder U.S. citizens without due process. Mr. Obama has since led covert U.S. wars in Pakistan, Sudan, Somalia, Yemen and dozens of other countries.

With history being but mere ‘opinion’ in U.S. political debate the aggressively misleading ‘division’ over whether it was the war on Iraq (2003) or the forced withdrawal of U.S. troops (2011) that is responsible for Iraq’s recent dissolution is so much chatter coming from a group that should rightly be in prison or already hung for their war crimes. Following from the SOFA (Status of Forces Agreement) penned by Mr. Bush that committed the U.S. to quit Iraq by 2011, and against his campaign promise to end the war there, Mr. Obama did everything in his power to persuade the Iraqi government to allow a large U.S. troop presence to remain after the date for withdrawal had passed. The central sticking point was the refusal of the Iraqi government to give blanket immunity to U.S. troops for crimes committed against the people of Iraq. In other words, Mr. Obama could have continued the U.S. war if he had been willing to let the Iraqis prosecute criminal acts committed by Americans in Iraq. Apparently unwilling to risk murder, rape and torture prosecutions against U.S. troops, Mr. Obama reluctantly settled for withdrawal of all but the tens of thousands of troops now ‘guarding’ the U.S. embassy in Iraq. Democrat partisans could rightly point to the rank hypocrisy of the central architects of the Iraq war blaming Mr. Obama’s reluctant withdrawal for current circumstance if there hadn’t existed a bi-partisan front in favor of war against Iraq for most of the last quarter-century.

The question of how a relatively small group of cloistered gangsters can so consistently destroy everything they touch (except the bank accounts of their benefactors) and still remain in power gets to the heart of the American conundrum. As with oil company profits, international finance and ‘outsourced’ environmental devastation, perpetual chaos and destruction is the American business model. Iraq was destroyed so that U.S. munitions manufacturers could sell their wares, so that U.S. infrastructure builders could ‘reconstruct’ the country, so that multi-national oil companies could profit from rising oil prices and so that the U.S. polity could be distracted from careful examination of who ‘their’ government actually works for. Lest this seem unduly conspiratorial, what precisely was the reason the U.S. attacked and occupied Iraq in the 2000s? Iraq had no relationship with Al-Qaeda prior to 2003, WMDs supplied by the U.S. had already been removed long before the start of the war, the idea of ‘democratization’ at the point of a gun is a non sequitur and elimination of the ‘madman’ Saddam Hussein requires overlooking the relationship senior U.S. leadership had with him from the early 1960s through prosecution of the war in the mid-2000s. As there were no ‘good’ reasons for war on Iraq perhaps it is time to look at the bad reasons for it.



Graph (2) above: With mid-term elections rapidly approaching in the U.S. changing the subject from the abject failure of American governance seems more promising than defending U.S. political economy. The graph above represents the proportion of the U.S. population that is employed both before and after the economic calamity of the mid-2000s. Unbeknownst to most in the modern era is that at the outset of the Great Depression American economists claimed that 25% of the U.S. workforce suddenly decided to quit their jobs to go on vacation. Similarly, today the economic mainstream claims that ‘demographics’ explain the sudden collapse in employment around 2008. The question for U.S. politicians running for office in 2014 is exactly how stupid they believe the American people to be? With war against Iraq back in the public ‘discussion’ the answer is in.

Political economy in the Middle East is no doubt complicated but American involvement has historically been relatively straightforward, even when covert. When George W. Bush told former Argentine President Nestor Kirchner that war would ‘grow the U.S. economy’ what on the surface might be understood to mean ‘military Keynesianism,’ the economic argument that government spending on munitions and equipment boosts economic growth, can more properly be understood as imperial prerogative. The gangster accounting that Mr. Bush was using put U.S. munitions sales, oil company profits and rebuilding contracts in the ‘plus’ column while failing to deduct the killing of hundreds of thousands of innocents in Iraq and Afghanistan, the displacement of four million more, the near total destruction of a modern nation-state and the setting in motion of historical forces that will continue to wreak havoc for decades, if not

centuries, to come. It is no accident that Mr. Bush also forced a developed, explicitly extractive, neo-liberal economic 'system' on Iraq after it was believed that military 'success' had been achieved. Were U.S. goals strictly political and 'democratization' one of them evolution of an economic order favored by the people of Iraq would have been in order. And lest this be lost on American 'patriots,' versions of this same 'bi-partisan' neo-liberal model have been hoisted onto American political economy for the last forty years.

The Bush administration's economic program imposed on Iraq was / is imperial looting, the imposition of asymmetrical economic relations at the point of a gun so that Western corporate interests could take what they want from the people of Iraq without recourse. What is now at risk with the fall of Mosul and Tikrit and the reported capture of a major oil field is the investment and past, present and future profits of the multi-national oil companies that are now operating in Iraq. Imperial chatter about Western interests in Iraq has correlation = 1 with oil assets, oil company profits and the role that oil plays in the engineered dependencies of Western political economy. Holding what is reported to be the largest Western oil company contract in Iraq, British Petroleum ties current machinations to the previously mentioned CIA – MI5 orchestrated coup in Iran to secure oil for this very same company. Democratic partisans 'confused' by the cover Mr. Obama provided BP for its Gulf of Mexico oil spill that continues to decimate the Gulf Coast might wish to study the corporate-state relations behind near unimaginable destruction in states that 'threaten' U.S. imperial prerogative.

From the 'official' U.S. perspective President Obama wanted to keep a U.S. military presence in Iraq in 2011 and by throwing Iraqi President Nouri al-Maliki overboard, as is apparently the plan, he most likely sees a new entry point to achieve this goal. Hillary Clinton, Jeb Bush and any of the apparent bottomless pit of guardians of the U.S. imperial line existing in / off of official Washington will likewise seek to maintain a U.S. presence in Iraq as long as multi-national oil companies need military cover for their imperial predations. The perceived danger at present is the seizure of 'Western' oil company assets— as graph (1) above illustrates, oil companies are fine with a rise in oil prices because it boosts their profits.

As commentator Glen Ford of *Black Agenda Report* has added, Mr. Obama's major 'innovation' to America's racist wars is to bring American blacks along with him. By Mr. Ford's analysis American blacks now support racist / religionist wars against brown Muslims in the Middle East for the first time in history. Possibly Hillary Clinton can follow George W. Bush's 'feminist' agenda by liberating Afghan women from their burqas at the point of a gun as she 'liberates' Iraqi oil from the Iraqis. As the Americanism apparently goes, 'freedom ain't free.'

