

Iraq and I\$I\$: Today is Better Than Tomorrow

Based on a public talk sponsored by WAMM End War Committee, and an interview with Sami Rasouli, a citizen of Iraq and the United States who lives in Iraq. Summarized by Mary Beaudoin with supplemental end notes.

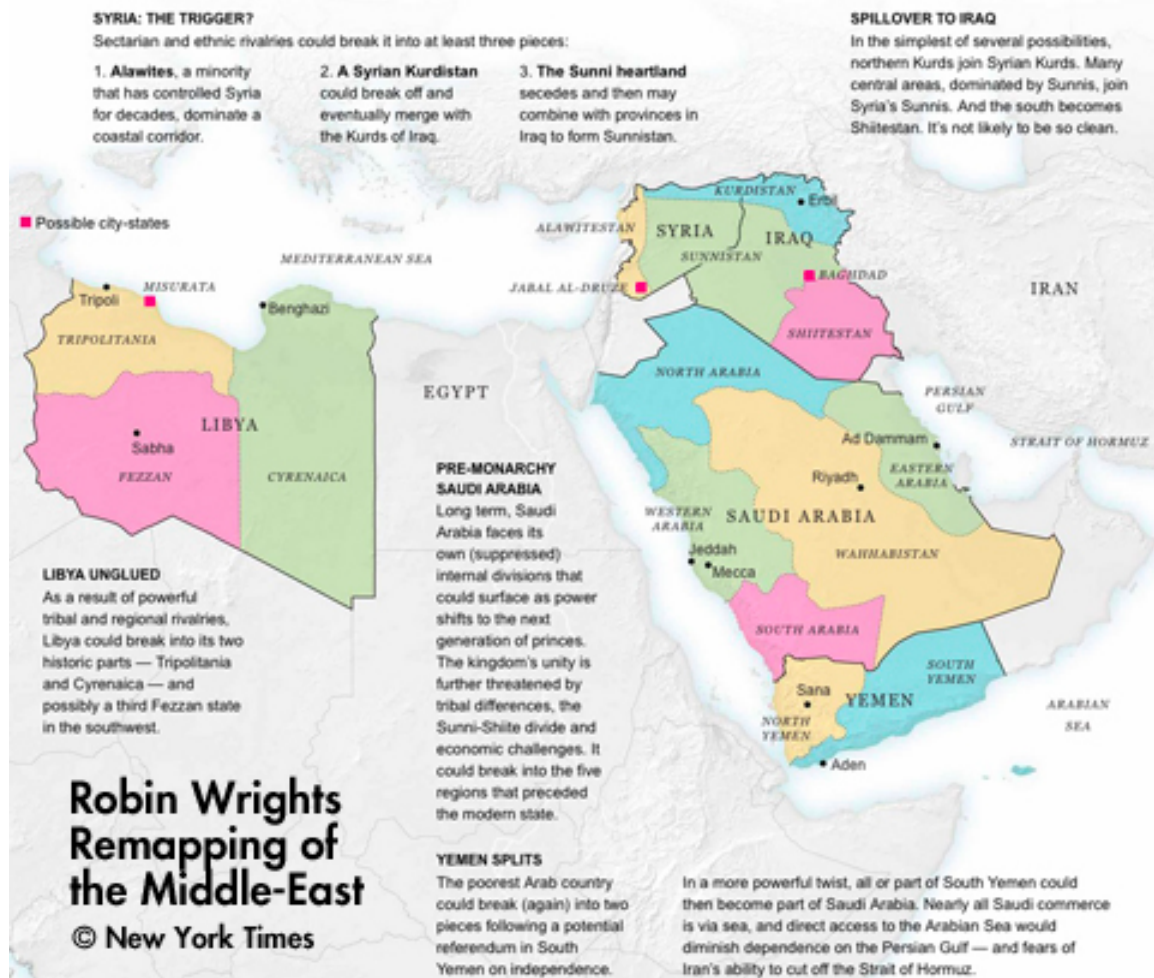
Oil began to flow out of Iraq unmetered after the U.S. invasion in 2003. It is unknown how much has been and is being taken. Foreign companies have had control of Iraq's oil under lucrative contracts vastly favorable to them.(1) And now ISIS is also freely helping itself to Iraqi oil and making \$4 million a week by moving it from four major oil fields.

Peshmerga, the Iraqi Kurdish military, is fighting and sometimes killing ISIS, but in the bizarre environment of war, they are also major customers of the oil that ISIS takes. Some of the Peshmerga are corrupt and act as middlemen buying the oil from ISIS and smuggling it out of Iraq in trucks. They pay \$4,200 for a truckload of 30,000 liters (7,925 gallons) and sell it to Turkey, Iran, and Jordan, making a profit of \$10,800 on each load. These facts are known through Iraqi officials on the ground observing, and an Iraqi ministry that interviews citizens internally displaced by ISIS. The situation is well known among local Iraqi journalists and international journalists, according to Sami Rasouli. As he speaks, Rasouli draws dollar signs for the "S"s in "ISIS" to illustrate the point.

Iraq is now one of the most corrupt countries in the world, ranking among the top five.(2)

The semi-independent, Kurdish region in the north exports oil, but the profits are the subject of dispute as they are not believed to be shared with the rest of Iraq.(3)

The current prime minister of Iraq, Haidi al-Abadi, is liked better than his predecessor Al Malaki was, but he does not have control. Contrary to popular belief, Americans are still on the ground in Iraq. There is an American advisor in the office of every Iraqi government official.(4)



This map, envisioned by ubiquitous journalist/U.S. Institute of Peace fellow Robin Wright, was published in The New York Times, Opinion pages on September 28, 2013. Wright divided five Middle Eastern countries into 14 religiously/ethnically-exclusive areas; parts of Syria and Iraq are broken off to become “Sunnistan.” On June 17, 2015, in a House Armed Service Committee meeting, Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter suggested it’s possible that “there will not be a single state of Iraq.”

“In Iraq, we say today will be better than tomorrow.” This is the dire pessimism with which the people of Iraq now view their circumstances, Sami Rasouli said in June when he was in Minneapolis, the city in which he had lived for so many years before returning to found the Muslim Peacemaker Teams,(5) a nonprofit organization based in Najaf that works on peace building and responding to human needs. He reported that the situation for Iraqis only continues to decline in livability and increase in danger and disaster.

The city of Najaf where he grew up, where his family lives, and to which he returned in the aftermath of 2003 U.S. war on Iraq, is located 100 miles south of Baghdad, and is safer so far than in the area where ISIS operates. That is why a thousand refugees

from other parts of Iraq have come to Najaf. They are staying in mosques and schools, but there is no money to feed them.

One hundred to one hundred-fifty body bags are delivered to Najaf every day from families whose sons have gone to fight against ISIS. Every day five to ten people approach the Muslim Peacemaker Teams asking how they can leave Iraq. Life has become unbearable. There is no light at the end of the tunnel. "Iraq is, itself, a tunnel," says Rasouli.

In Najaf there has been an improvement in electricity, but when the weather is mild, it is hard to know just how much of that is due to reduced use. Iraq still lacks supplies of clean water, 24 years after two U.S. wars and brutal sanctions destroyed Iraq's infrastructure. One small bright spot is that the Muslim Peacemaker Teams are able to maintain the water filtration systems they installed in 100 schools so that at least children at these schools have safe water to drink while in school.

However, life is not easy for children in Iraq. Rasouli says his own children have come to feel imprisoned in their own home. The street outside is dangerous. His children became endangered when a doctor evicted his next door neighbor, opened a medical clinic in the house, and now disposes of bloody lab results and other medical waste in one of the attractive trash receptacles that Rasouli and other community-minded citizens had installed on Najaf streets in an effort to restore cleanliness to the city.

As in other Iraqi cities, Najaf's streets are dangerous for many reasons. If a crime is committed, common criminals are never found and held to account in the chaos of today's Iraq. Law and order are a thing of the past. As a result drivers are unlicensed and some drive recklessly and at high speed. Rasouli, himself, was badly injured a few years ago when a teenage driver crashed into the taxi he was riding in; he sustained permanent damage to one leg.

There is no real professional army in Iraq despite various U.S. attempts to reconstitute a new national army after it originally disbanded it in 2003. There are only groups of fighters banded together in militias. The government of Iraq created its own militia to protect its political interests and people—most of the militia are Shia.(6) Iraqi militia, backed by Iran, asked the U.S. not to bomb. Iraqi officials believe that the U.S. is hitting Iraqi forces. The U.S. apologizes and says it's accidental. Then there is this: Sometimes food and other supplies are dropped in areas where ISIS exists. It is not known who is dropping it.

Who is ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria)?(7) As it appears to expand, it is the question which everyone wants the answer to. Rasouli writes ISIS by replacing the "S"s with dollar signs to show its relationship to monetary profit. [Note: It has been credibly reported that the U.S. has been working with Gulf Arab allies and Turkey to arm and support groups to destabilize and destroy the Syrian government.(8) In addition, a recently declassified U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency 2012 document

reveals that the U.S. welcomed the idea of jihadists who had the objective of overthrowing Syrian President Assad and anticipated the rise of ISIS/ISIL as a “Salafist principality” in Syria and northern Iraq.(9)]

Some of the Sunni generals who were removed when the Iraqi Army was disbanded have been working with ISIS, though they have different motives. Young fighters come from outside Iraq: Central Asia, India, the Middle East, parts of Europe, Africa and Oceania. And inside Iraq: from among Sunni youth.

That recruitment for ISIS exists within Iraq, once a secular state, can be traced to the disastrous U.S. occupation that began when American L. Paul Bremer III, as the chief administrator, flew into Baghdad and announced, “I now have sovereignty over Iraq.” On behalf of Washington, he issued 100 orders from May 16, 2003, to the time he left in June of 2004. The first Order Bremer issued was the firing of 120,000 employees in civil positions who were responsible for maintaining the infrastructure of Iraq and belonged to the Ba’ath Party; membership was a requirement for working in the government so many professionals and skilled laborers were members. Order No. 2, which disbanded the Iraqi Army, caused half a million men to lose their employment.(10)

A new system of government, that is still in place, was formed on the Lebanese model, along religious/ethnic lines (divided among Sunni, Shiia, Kurd); the intent was to segment the population, weaken the central government, and guarantee permanent fealty to the U.S.

The situation was further exacerbated by Article 4 of the Anti-Terrorism Law passed in 2005; it is similar to the U.S.A. Patriot Act in its use of secret evidence against the accused. Those found guilty are sentenced to life in prison or death. During 2012 and 2013, nonviolent demonstrators in cities throughout Iraq including Fallujah, Ramadi, Takrit, Mosul, and Hawijah demanded that Article 4 be abolished and that prisoners held for years without charges be released. Among their demands was also employment—they wanted to be able to work. Many of those who were suffering from oppression and had participated in demonstrations were Sunni and young men.

But, instead of listening to them, Al Malaki, then president of Iraq, designated peaceful demonstrators “terrorists” and “trouble makers” and, in 2012 and 2013, ordered Iraqi forces to kill the unarmed civilian protesters in cold blood. He did not take into account the fact that Shiia like him were in the minority and that Sunni worldwide make up 1.7 billion, the majority, of the Muslims around the world,(12) and would be empathetic to young Iraqi Sunnis and aroused to come to their rescue.

Youth in the nearby U.S./Western allied Gulf kingdoms of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, Kuwait, UAE, and also in Turkey are among the Sunnis who were angered by what was happening to Iraqi Sunni.



In Iraq, it is said that there is a spider in the web waiting to catch victims.

And this is where the Spider comes in—to catch them in his web of war, as they come from near and far to Iraq and Syria where they will act as foot soldiers in the bloody chaos and assist in weakening and dividing the Middle East for plunder, though that may not be their intent. The Spider is the jihadist, who goes by the nom de guerre, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. He is said to have made a meteoric rise to command the caliphate and acts behind-the-scenes recruiter. Mystery and suspicion surround his identity.

Rasouli eschews the U.S. taboo about discussing Israel's role in the region. He says it is impossible to discuss the Middle East truthfully without talking about the role of Israel. The neo-cons (in both major U.S. political parties) who are very powerful in Washington and in the Israeli and U.S. governments, are acting on one another's behalf following a plan of expanding Israel at the expense of native populations, and further securing the U.S. foothold in the Middle East. This has led to the violence and bloodshed, referred to by U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in Tel Aviv in 2006, as "the birth pangs of the New Middle East."

Rice was articulating what an Israeli strategist, Oded Yinon, had put into writing in 1982:

Every kind of inter-Arab confrontation will assist us in the short run and will shorten the way to the more important aim of breaking up Iraq into denominations as in Syria and in Lebanon. In Iraq, a division into provinces along ethnic/religious lines as in Syria during Ottoman times is possible.(13)

Rasouli has always worked for peace, nonviolence, and ecumenicalism in regard to Sunni Muslim, Shiia Muslim, Christian, Jew, and all religions, and he emphasizes that it is important to distinguish between what he calls the beauty of the Jewish religion, which he greatly respects, and the Israeli government's expansion in the Middle East. The city of Najaf, where he lives, is considered a holy Shiite city, but he emphasizes that Sunnis are an important part of Iraqi society and says that the people attracted to ISIS, claiming to be Sunni, are tragically misguided extremists.

Rasouli believes that there may be no way to prove exactly who is doing exactly what in Iraq now. The questions he says to ask are: Who benefits and what will they gain? When people are forced to leave their land either through death or desperation, it will be easier for interested parties to gain control of it and the resources that lie within—throughout the Middle East, the most coveted resources are gas and oil. Routes to move it out are all important.(14) The West is also motivated to keep market competitors Russia and China out of the region. And the weapons business, as always, profits from militarized conflict(15) while the people, whether they are youth manipulated to kill and destroy or innocent civilians caught in the crossfire, are the ones who inevitably suffer.

Endnotes:

1. OpenOil Online Curriculum: Companies and Markets: Geopolitics: Energy Security in Iraq wiki.openoil.net/index.php?title=Oil_theft; "An audit of Iraq's oil revenue management and accounting system found the plan to fully install and calibrate a full crude oil and products metering system by 2012 is only 39% complete, according to newly released documents." platts.com. May 10, 2011; "Why the war in Iraq was Fought for Big Oil," Juhasz, Antonia, April 15, 2013. Special to CNN, cnn.com; "Iraq is suffocating under an oil slick of corruption." Al-Adhami, Mundher, Alaraby News.alaraby.co.uk. April 24, 2015
2. Iraq ranks 170 out of 175 countries. 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index. Transparency International. transparency.org/cpi2014
3. Iraqi Finance Minister Hoshyar Zebari, who is a Kurd, is working on negotiations between Iraq's federal government in Baghdad and the Kurdish Regional Government in order to resolve the dispute over control of oil export and revenue. platts.com. June 5, 2015; Iraq Oil Report. iraqoilreport.com. June 8, 2015

4. There are currently about 3,050 U.S. forces in Iraq. 2,250 support Iraqi security forces, 450 train Iraqi troops, 200 more act in advising and assisting roles.” Bradner, Eric and Starr, Barbara and Accosta, Jim. “White House Authorizes Up to 450 Additional Troops in Iraq.” CNN Politics. cnn.com. June 10, 2015

5. Muslim Peacemaker Teams: <http://reconciliationproject.org/2012/muslim-peacemaker-teams>

6. “How is it that Shiite militias must be called upon to liberate Ramadi? If the Iraqi Army has evaporated or perhaps more accurately deteriorated into a collection of local militias and palace guards, then the U.S. ‘retraining’ mission in Iraq is vastly more difficult than we have been led to believe.” Posen, Barry. “Iraq’s Army No Longer Exists.” Defense One. June 7, 2015

7. This article refers to ISIS, or “I\$I\$” as it is a more recognizable name in the U.S. at present, but with dollar signs replacing the “S”s. (U.S. and French officials and media have begun to use the Arabic name “Daesh” for the group, in reference to “crush under foot.”) Apparently to legitimize itself as an actual nation-state, in addition to ISIS, it calls itself ISIL for the Islamic State of Syria and the Levant—or Al Sham, or IS for Islamic State. <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/islamic-state-group-name-raises-objection>)

8. On May 1, 2015, FP (Foreign Policy Magazine online) reported that “5th Special Forces Group is ramping up efforts in the Middle East aimed at training more than 5,000 Syrian rebels a year in Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and, perhaps, Jordan.” Naylor, Sean D. foreignpolicy.com; On April 30, 2013, the Washington Post had reported: “President Obama is preparing to send lethal weaponry to the Syrian opposition and has taken steps to assert more aggressive U.S. leadership among allies and partners seeking the ouster of President Bashar al-Assad, according to senior administration officials.” DeYoung, Karen, “Obama Moving Toward Sending Lethal Arms to Syrian Rebels.” washingtonpost.com. April 30, 2013; In the prior month, The New York Times reported: “With help from the C.I.A., Arab governments and Turkey have sharply increased their military aid to Syria’s opposition fighters in recent months, expanding a secret airlift of arms and equipment for the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad, according to air traffic data, interviews with officials in several countries and the accounts of rebel commanders.” Chivers, C. J. and Schmitt, Eric. “Arms Airlift to Syria Expands, with Aid from CIA.”

9. In May 2015, the right-wing Judicial Watch organization obtained a declassified DIA document revealing that “the West, Gulf countries and Turkey support the opposition [to the government of Syria.]” For brief highlights with analysis, see: “Newly Declassified U.S. Government Documents: The West Supported the Creation of ISIS,” [WashingtonsBlog](http://WashingtonsBlog.com), washingtonsblog.com. Full document, see: judicialwatch.org.

10. Coalition Provisional Authority Order Number 1: De-Ba'athification of Iraqi Society May 16, 2003; Coalition Provisional Authority Order No. 2 Dissolution of Entities. May 23, 2003. National Security Archives, George Washington University. nsarchive.gwu.edu. The orders reflect a plan devised by a private contractor for the Bush Administration prior to the March 2003 U.S. war on Iraq: "Bremer's Blueprint by Bearing Point, Inc.," pp. 193-196. For a longer discussion, see also: "The Bremer Orders." pp. 200-201, 214. *The Bush Agenda, Invading the World One Economy at a Time*. Juhasz, Antonia. ReganBooks. 2006.

11. Regarding Article 4 of Anti-Terrorism Law 13: "Pillay [The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights] condemns rampant use of death penalty in Iraq." April 19, 2013. United Nations: Iraq. uniraq.org

12. According to Pew Research Center Sunnis are 87-90% of the world's Muslims, Shia are 10-13%. pewforum.org

13. See also: "Divide et Impera: Iraq and ISIS." Beaudoin, Mary. Women Against Military Madness Newsletter. Fall 2014; "Plans for Redrawing the Middle East: the Project for a New Middle East." Nazemroaya, Mahdi Darius. Global Research. globalresearch.ca. re-published May 19, 2015 (first published 2006)

14. See: "Syria: the Mediterranean Piece." Beaudoin, Mary. Women Against Military Madness Newsletter. July 2013. womenagainstmilitarymadness.org/newsletter/archive/2013/0713/syria.html

15. On April 18, 2015, The New York Times reported: "To wage war in Yemen, Saudi Arabia is using F-15 fighter jets bought from Boeing. Pilots from the United Arab Emirates are flying Lockheed Martin's F-16 to bomb both Yemen and Syria. Soon, the Emirates are expected to complete a deal with General Atomics for a fleet of Predator drones to run spying missions in their neighborhood. As the Middle East descends into proxy wars, sectarian conflicts and battles against terrorist networks, countries in the region that have stockpiled American military hardware are now actually using it and wanting more. The result is a boom for American defense contractors..." Mazzetti, Mark and Cooper, Helen. "Sale of U.S. Arms Fuels the Wars of Arab States"; According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, the United States has taken a firm lead as the major global arms exporter, and Saudi Arabia is a major importer. March 16, 2015, sipri.org