



History of US & Western intervention in Iraq - 1950 until the 2003 Iraq War

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David Swanson: Next we will hear from Vijay Prashad. He's an Indian historian, journalist, commentator and Marxist intellectual. He is the George and Martha Kellner chair in South Asian History, and professor of international studies at Trinity College.

In 2013/2014, he was the Edward Said chair of the American University of Beirut. Prashad is the author of 17 books, and his book *The Darker Nations – a Peoples History of the Third World*, from 2007, was chosen as the best non-fiction book by the Asian-American Writers Workshop in 2008, and won the Muzaffar Ahmed Book Award in 2009.

Prashad is also a journalist. He writes regularly for Frontline, The Hindu, Alternet and BirGun, and is a contributing editor for Himal Southasian. He usually writes on the Middle Eastern politics, development economics, North-South relations and current events.

In 2015, Prashad joined as the Chief Editor of the New Delhi-based publisher LeftWord Books. He is also an advisory board member of the US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, part of the global BDS movement.

Here is Vijay Prashad.

Vijay Prashad: The United States has been upset with Iraq since at least 1958. You know, the war that began in 2003 wasn't the beginning of American malfeasance against Iraq. In 1958 there was a nationalist coup, led by brigadier Qasim, backed by the Communists, and from 1958 onwards the Americans basically have been trying to destabilize Iraq.

In fact, in the 1960, at several junctures, the United States tried to overthrow the nationalist regime, and, in fact, when the Ba'ath come into power, the Ba'ath Party, which later is lead by Saddam Hussein, who governs Iraq from 1978 to 2003, he's almost fully backed by the Americans, by western powers, and by the Gulf Arab States, including Saudi Arabia.

So Saddam Hussein, when he takes power finally in 1978, start to crack down on people within Iraq, who don't actually adhere to his rule, his idea, his vision of what Iraq should be.

So one of the places, where Saddam puts a great deal of his effort, is to crush the Kurdish movement in the northern part of Iraq. Now the Kurdish movement in northern Iraq, was

heavily influenced by Communism and was backed fully by the Soviet Union. Saddam, at this time, was armed by western powers with chemical weapons. And in the war against the Kurds, again, armed by the west with the full knowledge of the west, used chemical weapons against the Kurds, in what was called the Anfal Campaign.

And during this campaign, in the town of Halabja, a town in the Kurdish region in the north of Iraq, the Iraqi government used chemical weapons, attacked that town, and really demolished the Kurdish community of Halabja. This was a great terrorist action, conducted by Saddam.

The machinery for the attack on the Kurds of Halabja, was provided by the United States, by the Federal Republic of Germany, by other western countries – they entirely backed this as a proxy war against the Soviet Union.

Later, one of the great lies of the 2003 Iraq war was, that the United States needed to go in to overthrow the Saddam regime because it had weapons of mass destruction, including chemical weapons. And it had used these chemical weapons against the Kurds.

Of course, the United States, the Germans and others had provided those weapons precisely for Saddam to use them against the Kurds.

The other great adversary of the Iraqi government led by Saddam Hussein was Iran. And, in fact, the Saudis, the Gulf Arabs, western Europeans, backed the Iraqis to attack Iran in 1980, after the Iranian revolution. And, once again, the west, the United States, the Germans and others, provided Iraq with chemical weapons, with mustard gas for instance, with nerve gas, which the Iraqis used against the Iranians in the battlefield.

And, you know, there are very sad stories of Iranian troops leaving the battlefield, coughing blood in trains. There are stories of train cars, going away from the battlefield, where the smell inside was of mustard gas, because they had it in their lungs, and as they were coughing, the gas was coming out.

At that time, Ayatollah Khomeini, who was the religious leader of Iran, released a Fatwa, saying that Iran will never produce weapons of mass destruction. What they have seen in the battlefield is too grotesque. It's not something to imagine.

So the second lie of the Iraq war, related to the first, is that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, which they used in the war against Iran. That's all true, but, of course, these were provided by the west, Saddam was egged on to attack Iran, and so the western complicity in the use of those weapons needs to be right there front and center.

Finally, the real lie of this war. You know, when Saddam Hussein and his army invaded Kuwait, in the period just before the Soviet Union had collapsed, that is in 1990, August 2nd 1990, the United States, it is said, through its ambassador April Glaspie, essentially gave the Iraqis the green light to invade Kuwait, or to do something, because they had a dispute with Kuwait about the Rumaila oil field. And so Saddam invades Kuwait, the United States suddenly comes in with heavy force, and removes the Iraqis from Kuwait, and sets up a sanctions regime.

Now, this lie is an important lie. This lie is the lie that Saddam is a brutal dictator, who kills his own people and therefore should be overthrown. Again, remember: Saddam Hussein essentially was part of a global, you know, network, which included the Saudis, Gulf Arabs, the western Europeans, the Americans etc. in a war against the Soviets and, later, in a war against Iran. So Saddam's brutality was part and parcel of this global network.

But the brutality of the sanctions regime against Iraq is to be kept in mind. You know, the death toll was so high. And there's no point speculating on numbers, but I'll just give you one statistic of some importance, because it shows you the morality of the west, vis-à-vis this part of the world: on a television program the US ambassador to the United Nations, Madeleine Albright, was asked about a Unicef report, which showed that 500,000, half a million Iraqi children had died as a consequence of the sanctions. And Madeleine Albright listened to this question about the 500,000 children. At no point did she contest the number or say that there are mitigating circumstances. At no point did she say that this is lies etc. What she said, I think, it really bears repeating, and it bears understanding. What she said was that, yes, 500,000 children have died, but it's a price worth paying.

In other words, the price for the United States to ??? Iraq, this is before 2003, the price for the United States to ??? Iraq, to throttle Iraq, strangle Iraq, is a price worth paying. And that price is, of course, 500,000 children killed because of the sanctions regime.

When the United States goes in in 2003 to finally overthrow the regime of Saddam Hussein, this was merely the icing on top of a very, very cruel and bitter cake, that has, again, been baked by the Gulf Arabs, western Europeans, United States and the regime of Saddam Hussein. They were part and parcel of creating a diabolical situation for the Iraqi people, who suffered greatly in this long period, and even more so after 2003, when the country was destroyed.

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