

Iraqis Are Not 'Abstractions'

Exclusive: U.S. policymakers have long behaved like spoiled, destructive children treating Iraq as if it were some meaningless plaything. The game has been about who “wins” or “loses” in Washington, not who lives or dies in Iraq, a moral failure that ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern addresses.

By Ray McGovern

When I saw the Washington Post’s banner headline, “U.S. sees risk in Iraq airstrikes,” I thought, “doesn’t that say it all.” The Post apparently didn’t deem it newsworthy to publish a story headlined: “Iraqis see risk in U.S. airstrikes.” Then, in an accompanying article, authors Gregg Jaffe and Kevin Maurer observed nonchalantly that “Iraq and the Iraqi people remain something of an abstraction,” a point that drove me to distraction.

Further putting me in a bad mood, the story’s first paragraph about the latest bloody debacle in Iraq declared: “The sudden collapse of Iraqi forces in the face of lightly armed insurgents has catalyzed an emotional debate within the U.S. military about a war that, just a few years ago, seemed on the brink of going down in history as a success.”

Fresh in my mind was Robert Parry’s article that same day (June 19) exposing the myth of the “successful surge” in Iraq. That, in turn, had prompted me to re-read my own retrospective on the celebrated “surge” of 2007, reconstructing the play-by-play on its genesis and how, with the help of media cheerleaders, that myth enabled President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney to ride off into the sunset on Jan. 20, 2009, to all appearances not having lost the war in Iraq.

In the wake of recent events, the corporate-owned-and-operated media appears determined to apply its most imaginative legerdemain to convince us of this past “success” while moving to the blame-game mode of faulting President Barack Obama for the current mess.

The mainstream U.S. media still shies away from pointing fingers at war criminals Bush/Cheney et al, whose “decent interval” for getting out of office without a “defeat” on their record was purchased with much blood, both American and Iraqi.

The hundreds of thousands of Iraqis killed or wounded during the politically motivated “surge” and in the carnage both before and afterwards can remain, for folks like the neocons at the Post, “something of an abstraction.” And the media can avoid mention of the 1,000 U.S. troops killed in 2007 protecting what often

amounted to sectarian Shia militias ethnically cleansing Baghdad of much of its Sunni population – as well as defending the Bush/Cheney legacy.

Yet, for the Post's Jaffe and Maurer, U.S. troops unlike Iraqis are no "abstraction." And so the writers indulge in the selective grieving over the cost of war. They quote a U.S. Army officer to whom they grant "anonymity so he could discuss his feelings" about the war: "My sadness is not for the Iraqis, but for the wasted effort so many of us gave and bought at so high a price."

American lives, apparently, are the ones that matter.

Remembering Tal Afar

Even before reading the Post's article, I had been getting more and more angry hearing reports that Tal Afar was "changing hands" again. Does Tal Afar ring any bells with you? This ancient city of a quarter-million people, strategically located in northwestern Iraq near the Syrian border, may jog your memory mostly for the many times it has "changed hands" over the past decade or so.

And here it goes again, you think to yourself. Last weekend it fell to jihadist insurgents of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria; on Friday, Iraqi armed forces won back most of Tal Afar, but a battle raged nearby for control of the huge Baiji oil refinery and the airport.

But I remember Tal Afar chiefly for the killing/wounding of an Iraqi family there by U.S. troops on Jan. 18, 2004. It was a small massacre, as massacres go in Iraq. However, for some reason perhaps the Post's casual reference to Iraqis being an "abstraction" I cannot get out of my head the desperate words of Linda, Willy Loman's wife in "Death of a Salesman":

"He's a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid. He's not to be allowed to fall in his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention must finally be paid to such a person."

In January 2005, photographer Chris Hondros was embedded with U.S. troops in Tal Afar, then the scene of frequent clashes between U.S. forces and insurgents. As the curfew was coming into force just after dusk, a red car rushed past the patrol, ignoring warning shots. Fearing a suicide attack, the soldiers opened fire.

Inside the car was an ethnic Turkoman family of eight. The parents, Camille and Hussein Hassan, were killed; the five children in the back wounded before the soldiers realized that it was a civilian car. They carried the traumatized children to the pavement and started binding their wounds.

Hondros's photographs of the incident revealed not only the tragedy inflicted upon so many civilians in Iraq, but also highlighted the life-or-death decisions soldiers face under duress. Especially haunting was the picture of the youngest girl, Samar Hassan, crying and spattered with the blood of her parents. The blood on the pavement, her hands, and her face makes this photo an instantly disturbing image.

The U.S. military, which had been hugely successful in keeping such troubling photos out of the public eye, was outraged. Hondros's embedded assignment was terminated. But the image of Samar Hassan made it through.

Interviewed by the New York Times six years later, she explained : "My brother was sick, and we were taking him to the hospital ... [and] this happened ... We just heard bullets. My mother and father were killed, just like that."

Moral Injury

Linda Loman, I am convinced, was absolutely correct in insisting, "Attention Must be Paid," and so I framed my remarks at the Veterans For Peace press conference at the National Press Club on June 19 around that photo of Samar Hassan and, by some unusual luck, the story was carried in the U.S. military newspaper *Stars and Stripes* on Friday.

If the photo of Samar Hassan does not stir us with compassion and determination to do whatever we can do to prevent such tragedies in the future, we have been hardened beyond human. Attention must also be paid, I suggested at the press conference, to the legs of the U.S. soldier with the flashlight, standing beside Samar.

Those legs are attached to one of the soldiers we sent off to "serve" in a war of aggression in Iraq. Some of our soldiers may occasionally be trigger-happy, but they are not monsters. Nor are they immune to the kind of moral injury that comes from being part of such killing, such blood, such pain. Those legs were part of a soldier with the 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry Stryker Brigade Combat Team of the 25th Infantry Division out of Ft. Lewis, Washington.

Four years ago, the *Stars and Stripes* labeled Fort Lewis now Fort Lewis-McChord "the most troubled base in the military" due to its inability to treat post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or address mental health problems. Fort Lewis-McChord consistently has had one of the highest suicide rates of army bases across the country. I find myself wondering if those legs are still part of a relatively normally functioning body and soul.

So, if another U.S. "surge" is needed, let it be a surge of compassion. And any finger-pointing has to include us, unless we wish to give up any pretense that

America is still a democracy.

It is we who allow our soldiers to be put in such circumstances. Camille Hassan is our sister; Hussein Hassan our brother; Samar and her brothers and sisters our children. For those of us who really believe this to be true, let us be challenged by the words of Rabbi Abraham Heschel, who spoke out so strongly against the war in Vietnam:

“Indifference to evil is more insidious than evil itself. ... Few are guilty, but all are responsible.”

As our policymakers plan next steps in Iraq, let us do all we can to prevent the Iraqi people from remaining “something of an abstraction.”

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A Half-Century Battle for Voting Rights

A half century ago, in summer 1964, brave Americans challenged the entrenched racism of white-ruled Mississippi and overcame bars against black voting. Now, those gains are under attack from right-wing efforts to restrict voting and reverse the legacy of Freedom Summer, writes Brian J. Trautman.

By Brian J. Trautman

In 1960, although black Mississippians comprised nearly 50 percent of the state's population, less than 7 percent of its eligible black constituency was registered to vote, representing the lowest percentage in the Union. In some counties, no blacks were registered to vote at all.

Despite ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment 90 years earlier guaranteeing the right of blacks to vote, terrorist tactics from fear and intimidation to beatings and lynchings had prevented blacks from exercising that right. Legislation in several states, including state constitutional amendments beginning in 1890, had severely restricted black voter participation through measures such as poll taxes, background checks and literacy tests. By 1960, the southern black population had been politically disenfranchised for almost a century.

To effect social and political change, civil rights leaders understood that they

needed to challenge the status quo of racial intolerance being advanced by groups like the Citizens' Councils, a national network of pro-segregationists formed in 1954 after the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Brown vs. Board of Education*, which began ending segregated schools. The mission of Citizens' Councils, representing the deep-rooted white-segregationist and white-supremacist establishment, was to preserve white power and block racial integration.

To challenge this power structure, the civil rights movement had to confront the denial of voting rights and other measures designed to keep African-Americans as second-class citizens. It was decided that there was no better place to embark on this monumental task than Mississippi, arguably the country's poorest, most violent and most segregated state.

In 1961, Robert (Bob) Moses, a local field secretary for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), became the head of SNCC's voter education and registration operations in the state. Building on the sacrifices of earlier civil rights workers who battled racial injustice,

Moses provided seminal leadership over the next couple of years. He was instrumental in the formation of strong coalitions among SNCC leaders and other civil rights figures as well as sympathetic whites.

In 1963, Moses and SNCC carried out a mock election called "Freedom Vote," with the intention of demonstrating both the will of black residents to vote and that in the absence of violence and unfair administrative red tape they would be participating in the electoral process.

To accommodate interested black Mississippians, organizers opened polling places in black churches and businesses all over the state, including in Jackson, the state capital and final stop of the "Freedom Rides" of 1961. For most, this was the first time in their lives they felt empowered to contribute to a free, democratic institution. Tens of thousands voted.

In January 1964, with media and law enforcement officials looking on, a former sharecropper turned civil rights activist named Fannie Lou Hamer helped lead a march of voting rights activists in front of the Forrest County courthouse in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. The demonstration was organized to protest discriminatory tactics of the County Registrar and his cronies which prevented blacks from registering to vote. It marked the state's first Freedom Day (of many to come) and the beginning of what would become a momentous and historic year for direct action, democracy and social justice in Mississippi.

On June 20, 1964 eight days after the first anniversary of the assassination of

civil rights leader Medgar Evers in Jackson, Mississippi a massive nonviolent campaign was launched with an ambitious agenda to challenge white domination and end segregation by registering black citizens to vote.

The ten-week voter registration drive known as the Mississippi Summer Project, or Freedom Summer, was organized by the Council of Federated Organizations. COFO was comprised of SNCC as well as the Mississippi branches of the three other major civil rights organizations: the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).

The heart and soul of the Project were the more than 700 out-of-state volunteers, most of whom were economically privileged young white student volunteers from Northern colleges. They were trained in nonviolent techniques and joined hundreds of local and regional activists who provided much-needed support and guidance.

The spirit and resolve of the Project was tested at the onset when three young volunteers (a black Mississippian, James Chaney, and two white northerners, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner) went missing near Meridian, Mississippi. Their bodies were discovered six weeks later in Philadelphia, Mississippi. They had been kidnapped and killed. It was later learned that members of the local police and Ku Klux Klan were responsible for the slayings.

The criminal act of terror, however, had the opposite effect intended. From the day the three youths went missing to the time their fate was learned to the end of Freedom Summer, the incident emboldened Project organizers and developed into a rallying cry for action, both in the state and across the nation.

Voter registration was the primary goal of Freedom Summer. Organizers recognized that the effort would require a set of strategic approaches, especially education. To address the racial inequalities in Mississippi's educational system and to assist communities pass the literacy requirement of the state's voter registration process, roughly 40 "Freedom Schools" were started in towns and cities throughout Mississippi.

School organizers and teachers, many of whom were white college students, held that a basic quality education gave individuals and communities the power and voice needed to be effective agents of social change. The curriculum included the three R's (reading, writing and arithmetic), as well as civics, black history, civil rights philosophy, and leadership skills.

At night, the schools became centers for political meetings where strategy was discussed. With approximately 3,000 students, the Freedom Schools drew more than

three times the expected enrollment. The success of the schools went beyond Freedom Summer, inspiring social programs like Head Start and giving credibility to the alternative education movement.

Under the leadership of Moses and others, Freedom Summer produced the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). The new party challenged the power structure and legitimacy of the state's all-white Mississippi Democratic Party (MDP). The MFDP emphasized that it was open to all citizens, regardless of race. Around 80,000 black and white Mississippians joined.

The integrated party sent 68 delegates (64 blacks and four whites) to the 1964 Democratic National Convention (DNC) in Atlantic City, New Jersey. They argued vehemently for their delegates to be seated rather than those of the segregated party. In an impassioned speech to the DNC credentials committee, MFDP delegate Fannie Lou Hamer spoke eloquently about how she was nearly killed on several occasions for showing interest in voting: "Is this America the Land of the Free and Home of Brave where we have to sleep with our telephones off of the hook because our lives be threatened daily because we want to live as decent human beings in America."

While they did not succeed in unseating the MDC, the MFDP worried President Lyndon Johnson and his advisers and rattled the foundation of the Democratic Party. It alerted them to the great energy and determination behind civil rights activism and black political activity in the Deep South.

From the early days of planning for Freedom Summer and all through the campaign the mentality and vision of the organizers and participants can best be described by the title of the folk song "Keep Your Eyes on the Prize (Hold On)," which became a civil rights anthem the prize being the end of white persecution of blacks.

The voter registration drives of Freedom Summer brought national attention to black marginalization in the voting process. They are credited with giving significant political momentum to this critical issue.

Freedom Summer was influential in highlighting the need for federal voting rights legislation and in pressuring Congress to pass the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which, among other things, outlawed the brutal tactics Southern states had depended on for decades to stop blacks from voting.

While Freedom Summer helped bring about radical social and political reforms in the state of Mississippi and across the South, much remains to be done in terms of securing voting rights. In June 2013, the Voter Rights Act of 1965 was essentially gutted by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Shelby County v. Holder*. The

Court's decision in this case struck down key protective provisions of the Act, permitting nine states to alter their election laws without advance federal approval.

Two of the most highly publicized voter suppression laws to be enacted in some of these states have been voter identification requirements and cutbacks on early voting, which affects minorities in particular. Initiatives are currently underway across the country to restore the voter protections for which activists of the Civil Rights-era worked tirelessly to attain.

One such effort is the Mississippi Freedom Summer 50th Anniversary Conference being held June 25-29 at Tougaloo College in Jackson, Mississippi, where the half-century anniversary of Freedom Summer will be commemorated and attendees will strategize on the future struggle for social justice.

Dozens of churches, homes and businesses were bombed or burned during Freedom Summer in 1964. More than a thousand activists were arrested. Hundreds were beaten. At least three were killed. But even in the face of such enormous adversity, courageous men and women persevered and eliminated long-standing barriers to voting while significantly improving the education and social and political awareness of generations of black Mississippians. In addition, they laid the foundation for black citizens to be elected to office in Mississippi, with over a thousand elected since 1964, more black elected officials than any other state.

Freedom Summer participants faced constant threats and harassment from white supremacist groups and racial hatred and abuse from white residents and authorities, yet they endured; overcame inhumanity; and accomplished feats many did not believe were possible. The campaign and its victories became an indelible part of American society and set a shining example for future nonviolent social change movements.

A new documentary titled "Freedom Summer," from award-winning veteran filmmaker Stanley Nelson ("Freedom Riders," "The Murder of Emmitt Till"), chronicles the organizational and operational efforts of the Mississippi Summer Project. The film shares the historical accounts and stories of Freedom Summer largely from the perspective of the people who lived it. It premieres on PBS American Experience on June 24.

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Iran Answers Questions on Explosives

To get elected chief of the International Atomic Energy Agency in 2009, Yukiya Amano agreed to carry water for the U.S. on the Iranian nuclear issue, a chore that he is continuing in a dispute over Iran's work on detonators, as Gareth Porter explains for Inter Press Service.

By Gareth Porter

The head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, Ali Akbar Salehi, says the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) should now close its investigation of the issue of Iran's development of high explosives detonators that the IAEA has said may have been part of a covert nuclear weapons program.

IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano has thus far refused to close the file on the issue, which is the first one that Iran and the IAEA had agreed to resolve as part of an agreement on the question of what the Agency calls "possible military dimensions" of the Iranian nuclear program.

In an interview with IPS in his office in Tehran, Salehi said the IAEA should have ended the investigation of the detonator issue in keeping with an understanding that he claimed had been reached between the two sides on procedures for carrying out the February 2014 "Framework for Cooperation" agreement.

Referring to IAEA officials, Salehi said, "To the best of my knowledge and the best of my information, they have come up with the conclusion that what Iran has said is consistent with their findings."

The use of the term "consistent with" the IAEA's information from all other sources would be identical to the formulation used by the IAEA in closing its inquiry into six "unresolved issues" that Iran and the IAEA agreed to resolve in an August 2007 "Work Program".

Salehi said the IAEA had agreed to do the same thing in regard to the issues included in the "Framework for Cooperation" agreement.

"We have agreed that once our explanations were enough to bring this to conclusion they would have to close that issue," said the U.S.-educated Salehi. "They should not keep the issue open."

The most recent IAEA report, dated May 23, confirmed that Iran had shown the Agency documents supporting the Iranian contention that it had carried out exploding bridge-wire (EBW) experiments for civilian applications rather than as

part of a nuclear weapons program.

Reuters had reported May 20 that the IAEA had requested that Iran provide "verification documents" to support Iran's claim that it had a valid reason for developing an EBW detonator program.

But a "senior official close to the Iran dossier" meaning a senior IAEA official was quoted by The Telegraph on May 23 as claiming it was "still too early" to say that the information was "credible."

The Agency was obviously capable of reaching an assessment of the credibility of the information within a relatively short time. But Amano declared in a June 2 press conference that the IAEA would provide an assessment of its investigation on the EBW issue "in due course, after a good understanding of the whole picture."

Unlike the August 2007 Work Plan, which resulted in the IAEA closing the files on six different issues that had been open nearly five years, the February 2014 "Framework" agreement has not been made public. So Salehi's claim could not be independently confirmed.

But when asked for the IAEA's response to Salehi's statements that the Agency had agreed to close the investigation of an issue once Iran had provided the needed information and had accepted the validity of Iran's explanation, Amano's spokesperson, Gill Tudor, did not address either of these statements directly.

In an email to IPS on Thursday, she said, "As the Director General has made clear, the Agency's approach is to consider each issue and then provide an assessment after we have a good understanding of the whole picture."

Amano's declaration was clearly intended to indicate that he has no intention of clearing Iran of the suspicion on the EBW program until the larger issue of "possible military dimensions" of Iran's nuclear program is resolved. The spokesperson's refusal to deny Salehi's assertions implies that they accurately reflect both the unpublished "Framework" agreement and what IAEA officials told the Iranians on May 20.

Amano appears to be holding back on his official acceptance of Iran's documentation on this and other issues until an agreement is reached between Iran and the P5+1. The "possible military dimensions" issue, which involves the authenticity of the large collection of documents said to have come from an alleged secret Iranian nuclear weapons research program from 2001 to 2003, is not likely to be resolved any time soon.

Amano had pledged to support the U.S. policy toward Iran in return for U.S.

support for his candidacy to replace then IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei in 2009, according to a diplomatic cable released by Wikileaks. Since taking over in November 2009, he has not deviated from the U.S and P5+1 position that Iran has had a nuclear weapons program in the past. [See Consortiumnews.com's ["Did Manning Help Avert War in Iran?"](#)]

Iran had denounced the documents as fraudulent from the beginning, and ElBaradei and other senior officials believed they were probably forged by a foreign intelligence service, according to published sources. A former IAEA official who asked not to be identified confirmed ElBaradei's belief to IPS. Nevertheless, under pressure from the George W. Bush administration (2001-2009), the IAEA endorsed the documents as "credible," starting with its May 2008 report.

Until Iran showed the documents to IAEA officials last month, the IAEA had taken the position in reports that Iran remains under suspicion because it had acknowledged having carried out a program of EBW research and development for civilian and conventional military applications but had not provided proof of those applications.

In its first reference to the issue, the May 2008 IAEA report said Iran had "acknowledged that it had conducted simultaneous testing with two to three EBW detonators with a time precision of about one microsecond" but that "this was intended for civil and conventional military applications." The report thus led the reader to infer that Iran had acknowledged the authenticity of parts or all of the documents on the EBW studies they had been asked to explain and had sought to describe them as having non-nuclear applications.

But the report failed to clarify that the experiments outlined in the document under investigation had involved EBW detonators firing at a rate of 130 nanoseconds eight times faster than the ones Iran had acknowledged, as had been revealed by then Deputy Director General Olli Heinonen in a February 2008 briefing for member states.

Based on the false premise that Iran had admitted to carrying out the experiments shown in the intelligence documents, the IAEA demanded that Iran provide the details of its EBW development program and allow visits to the site where Iran conducted testing of its EBW experiments.

The objective of that demand appears to have been to provoke a rejection by Iran which could then be cited as evidence of non-cooperation. When Iran refused to provide information on its conventional military applications of EBW technology, which were obviously secret, the Barack Obama administration and its allies used it to justify new international economic sanctions against Iran.

The idea that Iran was obliged to prove that it had a legitimate non-nuclear need for EBW technology was disingenuous. Iran's development of anti-ship missiles is well documented, as is the fact that such weapons use EBW technology for their firing mechanisms.

Iran apparently resolved the issue by providing documentary evidence of one or more civilian applications of EBW technology in Iran.

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