

Desecration of Living Too Readily Accepted

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Without doubt the incinerating of human beings and the subsequent abuse of their charred bodies is a moral outrage regardless of whether those bodies belonged to soldiers, true civilian noncombatants, or the "civilian" former Special Forces mercenaries killed last week in Iraq. The universal condemnation of this assault by Americans, our press and our politicians is correct and to be expected. But one has to ask what brought a mob of Iraqi's to execute such a capricious act?

The morning following the attack a journalist from NPR reported that in interviewing Iraqis in Baghdad roughly half said they could support the assault in Fallujah, while half said that even though they oppose the occupation they condemned the attack. Perhaps the most important information from this journalist is what he didn't report but can be deduced from what he said: none of the Iraqi's he spoke with voiced support for the American occupation of Iraq. While there are certainly Iraqis who support the occupation (most Kurds, and returning exiles in particular) the vast majority of Iraqis are humiliated by the occupation and desire its' end. The level of anger being expressed toward America by the Iraqi public is unprecedented.

The liberated Iraq I visited this past January was a country different than the one I have visited 8 times previously since 1998. The initial jubilation of the downfall of Hussein quickly gave away to resentment when it became clear to Iraqis that little had improved in their living conditions. After the first Gulf War and 12 years of sanctions little in the country worked. The people expected that the seemingly omnipotent American empire would quickly restore phone service, electricity, clean water, sufficient food, and safe schools. Instead the second war further limited the availability of

telephone and electrical service, more bridges have been destroyed and yet to be repaired, and the water is still a biological health hazard. After 12 years of such conditions the people were tired of this existence but at least under the previous regime they had some modicum of street level security. I am not apologizing for the Hussein regime! The security had in Iraq was bought with political oppression and state

executions. But with even personal safety now taken from them many can longer contain their rage.

During my many trips to



Iraq I have made dozens of friends some who now email me pleading for me to get them out of the country. I always felt safe in Iraq and was welcome in every home, shop, office or mosque I visited. Today, I am afraid to go back. As an American I am now a target for assassination. Some in the Fallujah mob promised a fate similar to the 4 murdered "civilian" mercenaries to all Americans who enter Iraq. These are not the Iraqis whom I remember as watching pirated American movies, listening to American music and reminiscing about their college days in American universities.

The actions of the Fallujah mob are unjustifiable; their rage is not. Just as every American was enraged by what the Courant reported on Friday: "They barely looked like bodies. Twisted, ripped and charred, they dangled from the bridge like ruined scarecrows." So too every Iraqi has been enraged from similar acts. For example on February 13, 1991 a civilian bomb shelter in the Baghdad neighborhood of Amariyah was hit with two precision guided American missiles. 400 bodies were recovered. Americans were shown heavily edited images of the shelter which was described by the Pentagon as a "command and control center". In Iraq and the rest of the Arab world people saw unedited CNN footage thus described by the *Columbia Journalism*

Review:

"This reporter viewed the unedited Baghdad feeds... They showed scenes of incredible carnage. Nearly all the bodies were charred into blackness; in some case the heat had been so great that entire limbs were burned off. Among the corpses were those of at least 6 babies and ten children, most of them so severely burned that their gender could not be determined. Rescue workers collapsed in grief, dropping corpses; some rescuers vomited from the stench of the still-smoldering bodies."

American friends of mine who stayed in Iraq through the latest war shared with me photos and stories of horrific deaths and injuries resulting from American attacks. I saw a photo of a man holding his daughter with her leg blown off at the knee, another photo showed the lifeless body of a young boy, his head crushed like an apple run over by a car.

Iraqi or American, civilian or soldier the mounting carnage is an inexcusable assault on all our dignity. With each new victim another family, another neighborhood, another nation is enraged. The headline on Friday read: Desecration Of The Dead Beyond Our Comprehension. What is beyond my comprehension is the continued desecration of the living. America is clearly no longer welcomed in Iraq. De-escalation of the conflict will not begin until the U.S. leaves. I propose an immediate withdrawal of all foreign militaries and paramilitaries currently operating in Iraq. In their place I suggest an unarmed coalition of Iraqi approved N.G.O.s (egs. ICRC, WHO, UNDP) who could get to business fixing the country. The projected \$100 billion dollar cost of reconstruction should not be used to "economically occupy" Iraq. Talks with the World Bank and I.M.F. should cease. The cost of reconstruction above and beyond the income Iraq can expect to generate through oil revenues should be paid for by member states of the "Coalition of the Willing", principally the United States. Furthermore, the multi-billion dollar no bid contracts awarded to American firms Bechtel and Haliburton should be cancelled and replaced wherever possible by

contracts with Iraqi or Arab firms, unless, of course, the Iraqis choose otherwise. Regardless, the reconstruction of Iraq should employ the millions of unemployed Iraqis and not profit the thousands of Haliburton and Bechtel shareholders.

Concurrent to reconstruction there must be a concerted effort to heal victims of trauma and reconcile the internal divisions of Iraq. I urge the formation of some sort of national truth and reconciliation commission led by Iraqi approved religious or moral leaders (e.g.. Desmond Tutu, Jesse Jackson) to facilitate the repatriation of exiles and resolve the conflicting demands of the various segments of Iraqi society. Until and unless we put aside our weapons and initiate a nonviolent process of healing and rebuilding in Iraq the outrageous attacks in Fallujah and Amariyah will surely be repeated.



Learn, Discern and Act

Read: *The Fire This Time* by Ramsey Clark or *The Scourging of Iraq* by Geoff Simons

Go to: www.antiwar.com and www.vitw.org to learn more

Discern: pray, fast, meditate or otherwise discern if you support bombings and occupation or money for education, reconstruction and health care.

Act: *Call, Visit and Write your Senator and Congressperson, write letters to the editor, fast and vigil outside your local Federal Building or military recruiting office, ask your priest to repeat the pope's denunciation of the war from the pulpit,*