

## Stuck in a Quagmire

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Article

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FOUR years ago this week, bombs began to rain on Baghdad marking the start of a bloody pre-emptive strike. The US president promised to "shock and awe" Saddam's Iraq but managed more than that when he sanctioned an illegal invasion of the sovereign nation.

This time around, on the fourth anniversary, tens of thousands of people from around the world will be protesting against the "failed" strategy which caused untold devastation to Iraq and its citizens.

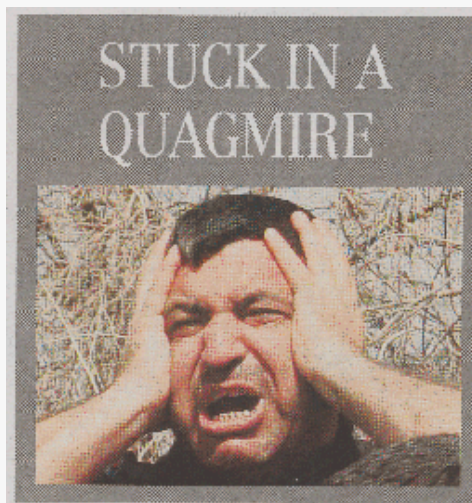
In the US alone, there have been protest marches demanding that the US get out of Iraq.

This time, it has a special significance given that 40 years ago, in 1967, a similar historic anti-war march was held to protest against the Vietnam War.

The metaphor of "From Protest to Resistance" still rings familiar. It turned the tide around then and eventually stopped an unjust war.

Already, by the end of last month, the number of US military deaths was reported to have exceeded the 3,000 mark since March 2003.

This is said to be about six times higher than the official US Defence Department's tally.



The United States invaded Iraq on the pretext of rescuing the people of the world and Iraqis from a sadistic dictator but instead, have caused untold misery due to its inability to stop the spiralling violence and civil war. But this is any time smaller than the number of civilians reported killed during the same period.

Between March 2005 and 2006 alone, more than 12,000 lost their lives as quoted by the Iraq Body Count project {[www.iraq-bodycount.org](http://www.iraq-bodycount.org)}.

As the war continues, more and more bodies are piling up in the morgues as Iraq disintegrates by the day, what with the so-called "sectarian violence" and increasing number of reported extra-judicial executions.

To the invaders, these are less important, of course, as evident by the number of Iraqis who have been killed since the invasion.

Last year, the US president quoted a figure of "30,000, more or less", as reported by Robert Fisk of *The Independent* (March 20, 2006).

That "more or less" could well be in excess of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis; not counting the many more thousands grievously injured or maimed.

That is not all. There are, of course, others — the British military suffered at British military suffered at least 130 deaths; Italy 33; Ukraine 18; Poland 19; Bulgaria 13; Spain 11; Denmark six; El Salvador five; Slovakia four; Latvia three; Estonia, Netherlands, Thailand, two each; and Australia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Romania, one death each. And still counting.

Invariably, the anniversary of the "war" cannot be separated from the anniversary of "lies" preceding it.

A few weeks before the invasion, on Feb 5, 2003, the UN was misled into believing that Iraq's insistence that it did not have weapons of mass destruction (WMD) was itself proof of its defiance, even though the UN

inspectors had failed to find anything.

The US Secretary of State then said: "This council placed the burden on Iraq to comply and disarm and not on the inspectors to find that which Iraq has gone out of its way to conceal for so long."

He then laid out the case using satellite photographs and dubious evidence, including allegedly embellished documents, as well as the purported links between Saddam and the Sept 11, 2001 terrorists to make the case against the Iraqis.

Unfortunately, Colin Powell's "story" worked wonders with the US-biased news media. One editorial of a widely read US daily judged that the case presented by Powell was "irrefutable", adding "it is hard to imagine how anyone could doubt that Iraq possesses weapons of mass destruction".

Overall, the impact could not have been more convincing when a pack of "lies" was cleverly disguised as "facts and conclusions based on solid intelligence".

In September 2004, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan came out to declare that the Iraq war was illegal since it violated the UN charter.

Not surprisingly, a year later, the fictitious US testimony at the UN was termed as "a blot" that was to haunt the reputation of America's military hero in his speech to the UN. "It was painful. It's painful now," he was quoted as saying.

Indeed, it is the same pain that is now felt all over Iraq and beyond. It is even more painful to learn that it all seemed to be a deliberate attempt to deceive the world. Not to mention the loss of lives and torture that ensued.

Worse, the world is no more any safer, not least given the tensions currently building between the same invading country and other neighbouring countries of Iraq.

The tension is bound to worsen if recent assessment by the authoritative Hans Blix proves accurate, that is on the approach in handling the nuclear situation in Iran.

Blix, the chief UN inspector for Iraq at the height of the controversy over WMD, and the former head of the UN nuclear watchdog, reckons that insisting Teheran stop its nuclear research without giving any security guarantees is humiliating.

He was briefing reporters at the start of a conference on international security, organised by The Century Foundation, a Washington-based research institute held on Feb 28.

Meanwhile, Iran is openly defying demands to halt enrichment, a process it insists is directed at making fuel for nuclear power plants. Refusing to recognise Iran's right to nuclear power, the US issued a veiled threat saying that "all options" are on the table.

By then aircraft carriers had been sent to the Gulf, amid speculation that a military option to thwart Iran's nuclear stalemate was in the offing.

So on the fourth anniversary of the "failed" war in Iraq, nothing seems to have changed or learnt.

As long as the country is at odds with the US and belongs to the so-called "axis of evil", it is not difficult to imagine how "lies" and a "fictitious" testimony could be used once again to trigger another unnecessary military action.

If it sounds familiar, it is because the helpless world is by now ready to be "shocked and awed" once again!

What is certain, however, is that Iraq is worse off and more volatile today with no clear end in sight. The invading forces have much to answer for turning Iraq into a hell on earth instead.

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