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A GREAT NATION DESERVES THE TRUTH

JOHN'S PHOTOS

MONDAY, AUGUST 08, 2005

## "Gloom is Deeper in Baghdad Now..."

by Michael in New York on [8/08/2005 11:31:00 PM](#)

An excellent [London Review of Books](#) article on Iraq from reporter Patrick Cockburn. Only available to subscribers, so here are some substantial highlights. In short: things are looking down.

Suicide bombs blow up with the regularity of an artillery barrage in Baghdad. I no longer always go up onto the roof of the al-Hamra Hotel, where I am living, to see the black smoke rising and to try to work out where the bomb went off. **On a single day recently 12 suicide bombs exploded in the city, killing at least 30 people....**

Gloom is deeper in Baghdad now than at any time since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003. **Even Iraqi officials in the relative safety of the Green Zone, once invariably optimistic, are beginning to despair. It is not only the increase in the number of suicide bombs. There is a water shortage in some parts of the city. Electricity supply is down to five hours a day....**

Hatred between Sunni and Shia Arabs has been intensifying over the past few months. Iraqis used to claim that sectarianism had been fomented or exacerbated by Saddam. In reality the tension between Sunni, Shia and Kurd has always shaped Iraqi politics....

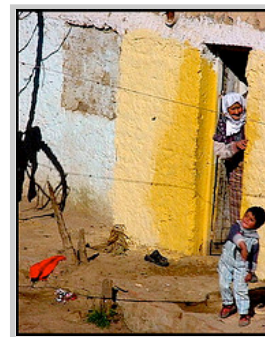
Defence procurement in the Middle East, as in much of the world, is corrupt. But in most countries usable equipment, however overpriced, does eventually turn up. In Iraq the corruption is on a different scale: often the money disappears entirely and nothing is received in return....

Nobody knows how many soldiers and policemen actually turn up for work. Mahmoud Othman, a veteran Kurdish political leader, says that an army unit supposedly numbering 2200 men was sent to Kirkuk. The Kurds counted them: there were just 300 men in the unit. Nobody knew what had happened to the other 1900. **"They say that there are 150,000 men in the army and police," Othman says, "but I believe the real figure is 40,000." The rest either appear only to draw their pay or never existed in the first place....**

The chances of a unitary Iraq emerging from the conflict are dwindling. The Kurds, triumphant after fighting for half a century, are not going to give up the oil city of Kirkuk or abandon a level of autonomy close to independence. The Shias want as much power as they can get. The Sunnis have shown by their armed resistance that they can destabilise Iraq for as long as they want. But the insurgents will not be able to spread resistance beyond the Sunni community because of the savage attacks by the suicide bombers on Shia mosques and children playing in the street in Shia districts. The appeal of Iraqi nationalism is ebbing....

And my favorite line:

**The looting of Baghdad which began in the days after Saddam's fall has never really ended.**



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