

# **The Cost of War: Psychological and Cross-Cultural Experiences in Iraq**

## **Introduction**

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Iraq did not exist as a nation state before 1921. After the first world war, Great Britain and France drew the map of the country we now know as Iraq by combining the Ottoman provinces of Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul. At its inception, the newly created state incorporated three distinct groups—Sunnis and Shi'ites, and Kurds. All three groups were Muslim. However, while the the Sunnis and Shi'ites considered themselves to be Arabs, they belonged to two distinct—and sometimes antagonistic—sects within Islam. An approximate analogy might be the Roman Catholic-Protestant divide in Christianity. The Kurds, on the other hand, though also belonging to the Sunni religious tradition, had a distinct cultural, national, and linguistic identification. The nation that was thus artificially created had built into it many of the tensions that we have come to know from the headlines of the past several years.

After the British installed monarchy was overthrown by the bloody coup of 1958, a series of authoritarian governments, of which the Saddam Hussein regime was the last and most brutal, ruled the country. However, until the invasion of Kuwait, Saddam Hussein was considered to be our ally. Under the theory that “the enemy of my enemy is my friend” the United States government supplied his government with intelligence and other forms of material aid in the war with Iran—a war that Saddam Hussein initiated, just as he did the war against Kuwait. When his forces used poison gas against Iranian soldiers and, within Iraq itself, against the Kurds, our government was silent. It was against this historical panorama that the United States in 2003 launched the invasion that was to free Iraq from the grip of the dictator who was our former ally and to create a democratic, united, and modern nation state.

Regardless of whether one agrees with the motives or justification for the war, it has imposed suffering on the just as well as the unjust. The possession of great power has its own dynamic—it begs to be used. Baghdad was founded in the 8<sup>th</sup> century as the capital of the Abassid dynasty, in the golden age of Islam. Although there were no significant military targets there it was bombed anyway in the first nights of “shock and awe.” The picture below shows Baghdad burning.



### **Baghad burning.**

Aerial bombardment, more accurate than ever in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, has not ruled out a terrifying element randomness in who lives and who dies. John Robertson, in this Special Focus Section, speaks at length of the cost of war to children. The next picture is that of a four-year old girl whose parents and sibling were killed when their car was hit in an aerial bombardment by our forces.



Photograph by David Leeson/The Dallas Morning News

**Four-year-old girl burned in aerial attack of parents' car. She later died.**

Another kind of accidental casualty of the war results from the firing upon civilian vehicles that are perceived to be a threat to our troops, sometime but not always, when they fail to stop in time in response to warnings. Sometimes these warnings are not understood as in the case of the parents of this little girl, in the picture below, whose car was fired upon. She was the only survivor. Though not injured herself, the psychological scars will last a lifetime.

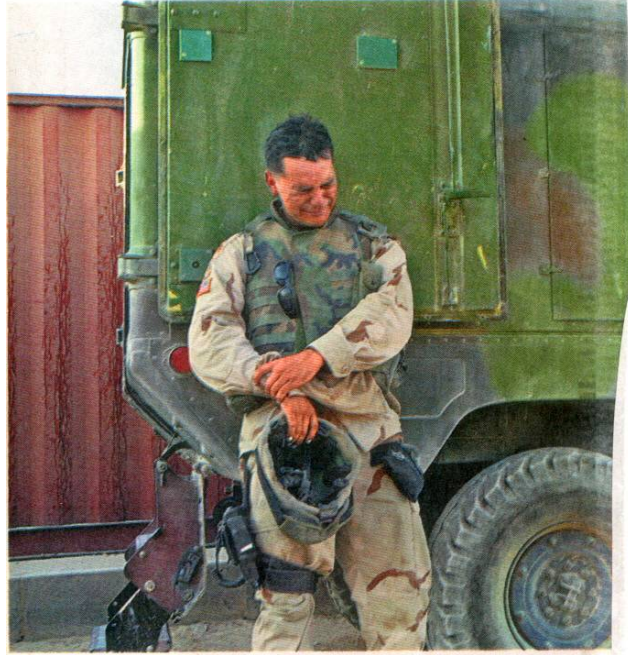


Chris Hondros/Getty Images

An Iraqi girl screamed yesterday after her parents were killed when American soldiers fired on their car when it failed to stop, despite warning shots, in Tal Afar, Iraq. The military is investigating the incident.

**A little Iraqi girl screamed after parents were killed.**

Our soldiers, though in the most technologically advanced military force in the world, are still made of flesh and blood vulnerable to home-made explosive devices. Corey Habben, in this Section, speaks of Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome in soldiers returning from Iraq, In the picture below, a soldier grieves for comrades killed in an insurgent attack.



**A soldier grieves for comrades killed.**

While the Iraqi army quickly collapsed after the initial invasion and the march to Baghdad, a powerful and persistent insurgency soon emerged. One part of this insurgency targets American forces; another part appears to be composed primarily of Sunni fighters, abetted by suicide bombers, who target Shi'ites, Kurds, and other Sunnis who are seen as collaborators with the conquerors. In turn, Sunnis themselves have sometimes been targeted by Shi'ites. The picture below shows a father tending the body of his only son, who was killed by an insurgent car bomb.



**A father tends the body of his only son, killed by a car bomb.**

This Special Focus Section proposes to look at the cost that the enterprise of war—which is still being waged at this writing—has imposed on American soldiers, their families, and on the people of Iraq. Jill Bloom will examine issues of gender and the ways—some traditional and some new—in which this war has affected both men and women as they have played out the roles that have fallen to them. I will undertake to look at the troubling issue of torture by our military forces, in this conflict. Throughout, this Section will consider the perceptions and consequences—including the potential for mutual misunderstanding—when two sides in enforced cultural contact differ radically in history, language, religion, political traditions, and social customs.

## **When Children are Caught by War: Notes from Iraq and Kansas**

**John M. Robertson, Ph.D., Private Practice, Lawrence, Kansas**

Two facts define the scope of the problem. More war-related deaths occurred during the 20<sup>th</sup> century than during all previous centuries combined. And ninety percent of the war casualties in the last hundred years have been civilians, *half of them children* (Sivard, 1996).

Many international organizations (e.g., United Nations, World Health Organization, International Committee of the Red Cross) have catalogued the impact of war on children. When war strikes, children:

- may become refugees;
- may face rape, sexual humiliation, and prostitution;
- may pick up landmines shaped like toys, pineapples, or butterflies;
- may be coerced into becoming combatants as early as age 8;
- may be burned or maimed in ways that affect them for a lifetime;
- may see their families disintegrate;
- may be psychologically harmed in settings without any available treatment.

This essay has two purposes: first, to report on some of the observations being made about ways in which the current war in Iraq is affecting the children in that country; and second, to illustrate the secondary impact of this war on some children in Kansas, where I practice.

### **Reports from Iraq**

Before the current war in Iraq began, two child psychology experts went to Iraq, and found that Iraqi children were already suffering significant psychological harm due to the threat of war hanging over their heads. Theirs may be the first ever pre-war psychological field research with children. They talked with more than 300 children to determine their mental health condition. Children as young as four and five had clear concepts of war. Here's what some of the children said:

"They have guns and bombs, and the air will be hot and we will burn very much," said five-year-old Assem.

"Every hour, I think something bad will happen to me," 13-year-old Hadeel.

Said Sheima, age 5, "They will come from above, from the air, and will kill us and destroy us. We fear this very much."

These investigators found that 40 per cent of the surveyed children did not believe that life was worth living anymore. (Radhika & Al-Tamimi, 2003)

These were thoughts expressed *before* the war. And then, the war came.

The children of Iraq are caught up in war for the third time in 20 years: the 8-year war with Iran in the 1980's; the Gulf War in 1991, followed by 12 years of sanctions (which many Iraqis regard as a form of war); and the American-led invasion in 2003. *Almost half of the population of Iraq is under the age of 18.* This means that half the country has grown up under war or war-like conditions. In terms of actual numbers, at the time the Iraq war began, there were about 24 million people living in Iraq; so about 12 million of them are children.

What is happening to these children? That is a very difficult question to answer. The war continues at this writing, so gathering complete and reliable data on various questions is not possible. But reports from Iraq do give some information.

**1. Diarrhea.** A study called *Iraq Living Conditions Survey 2004*, was organized by the UN Development Program in collaboration with the Iraqi Ministry of Planning and Development Cooperation. It was conducted by a Norwegian-trained team from the Central Organization for Statistics and Information Technology in Baghdad. It drew its conclusions from interviews carried out from April-August last year (2004) with members of 21,688 households in Iraq's 18 provinces.

Some of the findings help explain the very high rates of diarrhea among the children. Seven of every 10 children suffer from it, and the average length is 14 days a month. Here are some of related findings they may help to explain this:

Nearly a quarter of Iraq's children suffer from chronic malnutrition.

Forty percent of families in urban areas live in neighborhoods where sewage can be seen in the streets.

More than 722,000 Iraqi families have no access to either safe or stable drinking water.

Three out of four Iraqi families report an unstable supply of electricity.

**2. Malnutrition.** "Acute malnutrition" means that a child literally is wasting away. Rates of acute malnutrition have doubled to just under 8% of all children in the country, since the war began. That estimate is made by Jean Ziegler of the UN Human Rights Commission. Ziegler is a Swiss sociology professor. He says that overall, more than one-quarter of Iraqi children don't have enough to eat (Carroll, 2005).

This finding is very similar to one announced by the Norwegian-based Fafo Institute for Applied Social Science. They released a report that found malnutrition had reached 7.7 per cent among Iraqi children between the ages of six months and five years (Fowler, 2005). The study was conducted with the help of the UN Development Program and Iraq's Central office for Statistics and Information Technology. These rates, by the way, are very similar to the level in some African countries hit by famine.

These reports on malnutrition in the British medical journal *Lancet* were prepared by researchers from Johns Hopkins University, Columbia University and the Al-Mustansiriya University in Baghdad. They noted that their data were of "limited precision," because they depended on the accuracy of household interviews used for the study. The interviewers were Iraqi, most of them doctors (Fowler, 2005).

**3. Problems related to ammunition.** The al-Eskan Children's Hospital in Baghdad reports numerous cases of injuries due to children playing with unexploded war ammunition. This report is from Mu'een Qasses, spokesperson for the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) in Amman, Jordan.

In addition to the direct injuries, doctors are blaming sharply increasing rates of birth defects and cancer on problems related to munitions—especially on the widespread use of depleted uranium (DU) munitions by the coalition forces in southern Iraq during the 1991 Gulf War, and the even greater use of DU during the 2003 invasion.

In 1989, the rate of birth defects in Iraq was 11 per 100,000 births. At the time the current war began, the rate had gone up 1,000%, to 116 per 100,000. And it is still going up. Dr. Nawar Ali, a medical researcher into birth deformities at Baghdad University, told the UN's Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) this last summer: "There have been 650 cases [birth deformities] in total since August 2003 reported in government hospitals." (Cogan, 2005).

Further, he reported that the rate of children under 15 becoming ill with cancer in Iraq has increased to 22.4 cases per 100,000. That's up from 3.98 cases in 1990.

Dr. Janan Hassan of the Basra Maternity and Children's Hospital agrees. He told IRIN in November 2004 that as many as 56 percent of all cancer patients in Iraq were now children under 5, compared with just 13 percent 15 years earlier.

The statistics suggest the possibility that Iraqi children are facing long-term consequences of depleted uranium contamination. Munitions containing an estimated 300 tons of DU were used by coalition forces in southern Iraq in 1991. A decade after the war, DU shell holes are still 1,000 times more radioactive than

the normal level of background radiation. The surrounding areas are still 100 times more radioactive. Experts surmise that fine uranium dust has been spread by the wind to surrounding regions, including Basra, which is some 125 miles away from sites where large numbers of DU shells were fired.

**4. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.** Estimates from those inside Iraq indicate that at least 40% of all children in the country are suffering some level of PTSD symptoms. This is only an estimate, because it's not possible to get accurate numbers in the middle of an on-going war.

That number, however, does not seem outlandish, because it is similar to findings from studies in other war settings. Joaquin Flores (1999) studied Salvadorian children who grew up during that country's 12 year civil war, and found that 44% of children exposed to violence developed PTSD.

A 2004 study in the Canadian Journal of Psychiatry found that about 40% of the children living in the West Bank suffer from PTSD (Zakrison, Shahen, Mortaja, & Hamel, 2004). And another study found 70% of Gaza Strip children showing at least mild symptoms of PTSD (Thabet & Vostanis, 1998). These latter two studies used the reliable and valid Rutter A2 scale, which is completed by the mother.

So the 40% estimates from Iraq do seem reasonable.

PTSD symptoms vary, but are quite disabling for children. The National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (an arm of the Department of Veteran's affairs) has collected findings from various researchers on the impact of war and terrorism on children, such as Dewolfe (2001) and Pynoos & Nader (1993).

Here are some of the common reactions that children and adolescents display.

PTSD symptoms in children up to 6 years of age:

- Helplessness and passivity
- Generalized fear
- Heightened arousal and confusion
- Cognitive confusion
- Difficulty talking about the event; lack of talking at all
- Difficulty identifying any feelings
- Nightmares
- Separation fears, and clinging
- Anxieties about death
- Somatic symptoms
- Startle response
- Freezing, a sudden immobility of the body
- Avoidance of any trauma reminders

In children 6-11:

- Feelings of responsibility and guilt
- Repetitious dramatic play, and retelling
- Feeling disturbed by reminders
- Nightmares
- Concerns about safety, preoccupation with danger
- Aggressive behavior and angry outbursts
- Fear of feelings and trauma reactions
- Close attention to parents' anxieties
- Worry and concern for others
- Changes in behavior, mood, and personality
- Somatic symptoms
- Obvious anxiety and fearfulness
- Withdrawal
- Regression to younger age behavior
- Separation anxiety
- Loss of interests in activities
- Unclear understanding of death
- Magical explanations to fill in gaps in understanding
- Spacey or distractible behavior

Among adolescents:

- Self-consciousness
- Life-threatening reenactment
- Rebellion at home or school
- Abrupt shift in relationships
- Depression and social withdrawal
- Acting out
- Distancing from shame, guilt, humiliation
- Excessive activity to avoid inner turmoil
- Accident proneness
- Wishes for revenge
- Increased self-focusing
- Vegetative disturbances

**5. Death.** We do not know how many Iraqis have been killed. The Pentagon stopped reporting counts of the people killed by its soldiers after the Vietnam War. Estimates vary widely, and a fully accurate number is not possible. The Iraqi health ministry says it's less than 10,000. Hopkins Center for International Emergency, Disaster and Refugee Studies says it's more than 100,000. [iraqbodycount.net](http://iraqbodycount.net) tries to keep an independent number current, and they say the number has now exceed 25,000. Many of these, of course, are children:

coalition forces are responsible for 37% of the deaths; criminal killings for another 36%; the insurgency for about 10%, unclear sources of death (suicide bombers, for example) another 11%; and the rest from miscellaneous causes.

The UN study conducted by the Norwegian group cited earlier estimates that the probability of dying before the age of 40 for Iraqi children born between 2000 and 2004 is approximately three times the level in neighboring countries.

What can we do with this information? It can be overwhelming. Just too much to take in. Too much to process. The stories in Baghdad and other cities in Iraq have been preceded in recent years by stories from other cities: Sarajevo, Kabul, Waco, Okalahoma City, Moscow, Grozny, Dublin, Jerusalem. And so it can become easy to set aside these news stories about the effects of war on children, or to interpret them in a political context.

And it is so far away—from where I live, Baghdad is 9 hours ahead of me in time, and the proverbial crow would be in the air a long time to get there; the straight line is 6,819 miles long.

### **Observations from Kansas**

The cost of this war is not restricted to children in Iraq. From my vantage point in the middle of the country, I can tell you other children are paying the cost of this war, as well, though in different ways. I have a front row seat for some of this, as I practice near a military base in Kansas. I am going to report briefly on some cases. I have taken great care to make enough changes in these stories to prevent any possibility of identification. But the substance of the stories—the actual issues presented for therapy—are genuine.

#### **The first case illustrates how war can affect a family, even though no member is directly involved in it.**

Susan was 27 years old when she called and asked for an appointment. She was struggling with depression, she said on the phone. And she was. A severe depression, affecting particularly her motivation to care for her 5 year old son Mitchell.

She reported very low energy, a depressed mood, an inability to keep herself focused on her parenting tasks, a loss of interest in much of the rest of her life. During the intake, she noted that she spent several hours a day watching the news. When I asked which news items got her attention, she simply said, Iraq.

Over time, it became clear that the war was reminding her of her own childhood. Her father had gone to Vietnam, and had returned badly damaged. He would leave the family home every February, and nobody seemed to know where he went. He would be gone for about a month, and then return.

She remembered seeing him line the 3 children up in a row in the kitchen at attention, and then call out the Orders of the Day, with each child being given a list of chores to do. If things weren't done properly, they would be punished in some way—walking on their bare knees across the kitchen floor covered with rice, slapped with raw meat, or something similar. He wore fatigues most of the time, and often carried his guns around the house.

Susan reported having flashbacks to these experiences, which had occurred long ago. She couldn't get the images out of her mind. And her son, 5 year old Mitchell suffered, as a result.

This particular story reminds me of a presenting issue in the early 1990's that I heard several times from college students, when I was practicing in a university counseling center. Some students were contemplating marriage, and they were feeling hesitant because they did not want to become parents. They had too many memories of being parented ineffectively by a Vietnam war veteran with PTSD, and they weren't sure they knew *how* to be parents. Or they were afraid they'd become violent, even though they didn't want to. This is a cost of war that is more subtle, and not often reported in a public way.

Susan's experiences will be repeated among family members of the current war. The military is doing a much improved job along these lines—making mental health services available. At the time they leave the theater, 3-5% are reporting significant mental health concerns. But 4 months later, according to Lt. Gen. Kevin Kiley and other military medical officials, 30% are reporting diagnosable consequences after they return home, including depression, anxiety, nightmares, anger, and an inability to concentrate. About 4% have PTSD.

Many of these soldiers will find that their abilities to parent their children have been affected in ways that they have not expected.

**The second case is about what can happen to a pre-adolescent boy who has learned the part of the boy code that says, Don't talk about your fears.**

Parker was 11 years old and acting out in school. He had taken a cigarette lighter to school; he had pulled the fire alarm at school; he had intervened in two fights at school, trying to protect a weaker child. His mother reported that he had been a good kid until his father was deployed to Iraq. And, indeed, the school staff agreed. His behavior had changed suddenly.

It took several sessions before Parker finally told what was really bothering him. Yes, it was because his father had left; but it was more than that. While he was gone, his mother had started an affair with another man, and had not tried very hard to keep in secret. So Parker had two worries: one, that his father might die and not return; and two, that his father might *not* die, and return—only to come

home and live someplace else because of what his mother had been doing. And so Parker found himself wanting to burn things.

This scenario is not an isolated one. **The Department of Defense reported in July of this year that the divorce rate for Army personnel has jumped 80% since the start of hostilities in Afghanistan and Iraq.** Fully 6% of all Army officers were involved in divorce proceedings during 2004.

Again, children are paying an indirect, but highly significant part of the cost of war.

**A third example is about the economic damage that has occurred to families, and the impact of that damage on children.**

Many members of the National Guard had no idea they would ever be called to serve for an extended period of time. Many of them have left jobs they've had for many years, or small businesses they've developed, and left their spouses or co-parents behind to become single parents. For their children, the consequences have been very direct:

Jeremy was 14 years old when I first met him. He had been an A & B student, but he had stopped doing any school work, and all his grades had dropped to D or F—mostly F. It took several sessions for him to begin talking about his fears. He felt pressure, enormous pressure, to provide for the family. His father had been gone for 8 months, and was due for a brief visit in a few weeks. But then he'd have to return.

His father had run a small lawn mower repair business, and it had been quite successful. It was continuing with his former associate running the place, but business was slumping. Jeremy was worried that his mother wouldn't be able to pay the bills. He was thinking about dropping out of school and working in the shop until his father could return. Then he'd go back to school. He was embarrassed that his mother had to ask for free food from the community Bread Basket program. He was embarrassed that he couldn't repair the kitchen faucet like his father could. And so he was depressed.

**The fourth example is a 5 year old with night terrors.**

Kaitlin's mother reported that her daughter was waking up at night describing dreams of explosions and bombs that had killed her Daddy. Her mother had become sleep deprived, and nearly frantic trying to find ways for the daughter to sleep, to be less afraid. The daughter did not want to go to day care while her mother worked. She wanted to go to work with Mom, and she wanted to go with her on every trip outside the house. Once a child has gotten the idea of threat in the form of a clear and vivid picture, it can be difficult to address.

As Kaitlin put it, “I’m scared to sleep, because Daddy might die.” Kaitlin is young, she is far away from the streets of Bagdad. But her suffering appears to be a consequence of war. Before deployment, she’d had no sleeping difficulties at all, according to her mother. No problematic anxieties. She was shy, but not clinging. But somehow, a fear had developed. Her mother wondered if it might be related to her own reactions to watching the War Channel, as she put it—24 hour news coverage, with the war mentioned in every 30 minute segment.

Well, that’s a brief report on some of the presenting issues children have brought to one private practice in one city, out in the middle of the country. When we multiply that by a rather large number of other private practices and public service agencies who are facing the same set of issues and demands, it becomes clear that we will have a sizeable mental health problem to address in this country for many years to come..

The cost of war on children...is high. And the ripple effect can be felt across generations for many years.

This essay has focused on some of the costs. But that is not necessarily the end of the story. Children can be helped. Below are some ideas that have proved useful to me in working with children in Kansas.

### **What helps children when a family member goes to war?**

- Make home feel safe. Keep routines familiar, regular, predictable. Keep comforting people in their lives.
- Ask questions. Give reassuring answers. Ask what they’ve heard about the war, what they think about it, how they’re doing. Remind them that you will not abandon them. Remember that being reassuring does not mean being dishonest, or unrealistic.
- Give information. If they ask a direct question, then they’ve thought about the issue. Don’t brush them off. They will only worry more. Make sure the information is appropriate to their developmental level. Very young children may be protected because they are not old enough to be aware of the details of the prisoner abuse scandals, for example. For adolescents, it may be OK to watch the news with them, and then talk about the stories just presented.
- Remember that when parents get anxious, children usually get anxious. So monitor and address your own worries and fears on your own, and don’t ask children for support.
- The deployment may present a temptation to stereotype groups of people by race, nationality or religion. This can be an opportunity to talk about your values of tolerance, or what you think about prejudice.

## When a child has PTSD, what helps?

Monohon (1997) has offered a number of suggestions for parents of children suffering from PTSD. Here's an adaptation of those suggestions:

Birth to Age 2 ½ years:

- Maintain child's routines around sleeping and eating.
- Avoid unnecessary separations from important caretakers.
- Provide additional soothing activities.
- Maintain calm atmosphere in child's presence.
- Avoid exposing child to reminders of trauma.
- Expect child's temporary regression; don't panic.
- Help verbal child to give simple names to big feelings; talk about event in simple terms during brief chats.
- Give simple play props related to the actual trauma to a child who is trying to play out the frightening situation (e.g., a doctor's kit, a toy ambulance).

Age 2 ½ to 6 years:

- Listen to and tolerate child's retelling of the event.
- Respect child's fears; give child time to cope with fears.
- Protect child from re-exposure to frightening situations and reminders of trauma, including scary TV programs, movies, stories, and physical or locational reminders of trauma.
- Accept and help the child to name strong feelings during brief conversations (the child cannot talk about these feelings or the experience for long).
- Expect and understand child's regression while maintaining basic household rules.
- Expect some difficult or uncharacteristic behavior.
- Set firm limits on hurtful or scary play and behavior.
- If child is fearful, avoid unnecessary separations from important caretakers.
- Maintain household and family routines that comfort child.
- Avoid introducing experiences that are new and challenging for child.
- Provide additional nighttime comforts when possible such as night-lights, stuffed animals, and physical comfort after nightmares.
- Explain to child that nightmares come from the fears a child has inside, that they aren't real, and that they will occur less frequently over time.
- Provide opportunities and props for trauma-related play.
- Try to discover what triggers sudden fearfulness or regression.
- Monitor child's coping in school and daycare by expressing concerns and communicating with teaching staff.

Ages 6 to 11 years:

- Listen to and tolerate child's retelling of the event.
- Respect child's fears; give child time to cope with fears.
- Increase monitoring and awareness of child's play which may involve secretive reenactments of trauma with peers and siblings; set limits on scary or hurtful play
- Permit child to try out new ways of coping with fearfulness at bedtime: extra reading time, leaving the radio on, or listening to a tape in the middle of the night to erase the residue of fear from a nightmare.
- Reassure the older child that feelings of fear and behaviors that feel out of control or babyish (e.g., bed wetting) are normal after a frightening experience and that he or she will feel better with time.

Ages 11 to 18:

- Encourage adolescents of all ages to talk about the traumatic event with family members.
- Provide opportunities for the young person to spend time with friends who are supportive.
- Reassure the young person that strong feelings-guilt, shame, embarrassment, or a wish for revenge-are normal following a trauma.
- Help the young person find activities that offer opportunities to experience mastery, control, and self-esteem.
- Encourage pleasurable physical activities such as sports and dancing.

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Suburban Library System Reference Service. This organization offers a nice collection of materials for children of various ages, materials readily available from local libraries, or obtainable through inter-library loan.

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### **Helpful websites**

American Psychological Association: <http://www.apa.org/practice/ptindex.html>

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry:  
<http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/87.htm>

Educators for Social Responsibility: <http://www.esrnational.org/guide.htm>

National Institute of Mental Health: <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/violence.cfm>

New York University Child Study Center:  
[http://www.aboutourkids.org/aboutour/articles/war\\_iraq.html](http://www.aboutourkids.org/aboutour/articles/war_iraq.html)

Public Broadcasting System: <http://www.pbs.org/parents/talkingwithkids/war/>

Sesame Street:  
<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/parents/advice/article.php?contentId=49560>

Talking with Kids about War: Pointers for Parents  
Alvin Poussaint, M.D. and Susan Linn, Ed.D.  
<http://www.familyeducation.com/article/0,1120,1-4412,00.html>

**Abu Ghraib: Psychological and Cross-Cultural Issues in Sexuality,  
Individual Conscience, and Torture**

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In Algiers, in 1957, Henri Alleg was arrested by French military authorities. Alleg was a leftist journalist and a supporter of Algerian independence. "The Question" was the book he secretly wrote in prison after the elite paratrooper unit in charge of his interrogation had finished torturing him. It was smuggled out of prison and published in France. Even though it was banned and confiscated within two weeks, it sold 150,000 copies. The introduction to the book was by philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre. The passages below are from Sartre's introduction:

"In 1943, in the Rue Lauriston (that was the Gestapo headquarters in Paris), Frenchmen were screaming in agony and pain; all France could hear them. In those days the outcome of the war was uncertain and we did not want to think about the future. Only one thing seemed impossible in any circumstances: that one day men should be made to scream by those acting in our name.

"During the war, when the English radio and the clandestine Press spoke of the massacre of Oradour, we watched the German soldiers walking inoffensively down the street, and would say to ourselves: 'They look like us. How can they act as they do? And we were proud of ourselves for not understanding.'

"Today we know that there was nothing to understand....now when we raise our heads and look into the mirror we see an unfamiliar and hideous reflection: ourselves.

"Appalled, the French are discovering this terrible truth: that if nothing can protect a nation against itself, neither its traditions nor its loyalties nor its laws, and if fifteen years are enough to transform victims into executioners, then its behavior is no more than a matter of opportunity and occasion. Anybody, at any time, may equally find himself victim or executioner."

Alleg's book showed that what Freud called the superego—the conscience—was not set in stone—it could be influenced by both authority and the group. WW II, of course, had shown that on a ghastly scale. Later, psychological experiments by Stanley Milgram and Philip Zimbardo were to show the same thing with good, law-abiding American citizens.

### **Background to Torture**

Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the American Civil Liberties Union, Physicians for Human Rights, and the International Committee of the Red Cross have all condemned our treatment of prisoners in Afghanistan, Iraq and

Guantanamo. All these organizations agree that these abuses are NOT accidental or random acts by a few sadistic individuals. Rather, they're the outcome of a systematic policy approved by the President and put into place by the Secretary of Defense. (The American Psychological Association, in contrast, has remained silent.)

A few months ago Amnesty International referred to Guantanamo as "America's Gulag." The President said: "IT'S ABSURD. AMERICA IS PROMOTING FREEDOM AROUND THE WORLD."

Like the French in the fifties, we Americans don't want to see the face of the torturer looking back at us from the mirror. It bothers our conscience. How, then do we deal with the fact that people are looking at what we are doing to prisoners and calling it torture? In "The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense" Anna Freud talked about the mechanism of denial. The president DENIES that we're torturing people because WE can't do that—we're Americans. But the VICE-PRESIDENT doesn't have as much trouble with matters of conscience. Sometimes, he said, you have to go the "dark side." And why do you have to do that? Because these people are "bad"—that's what he said about EVERYONE who was being held at Guantanamo. As for the Geneva Convention, it doesn't apply here. Its provisions were called "quaint" and "obsolete" by the man who is now Attorney General of the United States. The result of the suspension of these provisions is illustrated in this and other images in this document.



**When the Geneva Convention is suspended.**



**Iraqi father and his little son.**

However, the president said, even if they don't deserve the Geneva Convention, people will be treated humanely. But further down the chain of command, the "DARK SIDE" of the government's double message was getting through. As one intelligence officer at Abu Ghraib said in an e-mail message he sent in August 2003: "The gloves are coming off, gentlemen, regarding these detainees. Col. X has made it clear that we want these individuals broken."

In the first quarter of the 13<sup>th</sup> century the Inquisition was put in place by Pope Gregory IX. In 1252, it was authorized to use torture by Pope Innocent III. Torture in the name of God. (Al Qaeda's atrocities are also committed in the name of God.) Torture is always justified by ends of which the superego—the conscience—approves. It's okay to torture someone for a good cause—to root out heresy, to save lives, to SAVE THE COUNTRY.

As a species, we're not all that nice—we DO have a dark side—the vice president got THAT part right. Freud called it the "Death Instinct." Wilhelm Stekel, a psychoanalyst and a contemporary of Freud, said: "In the human breast, cruelty crouches like a savage beast, chained, but ready to spring." Permission to torture, like war itself, slips the chain and lets the beast out of the cage. What you then have is a supremely dangerous combination: The superego—the part of the self that civilization counts on to keeps the instinct to violence in check—teams up with the worst in the human personality and justifies, maybe demands—violence. This is a pretty deadly alliance—worlds can be destroyed. But let's scale it back to the individual level, and see what happens when "the gloves

come off.” In fact, something truly sinister happens: what began as a means to an end.....becomes the end in itself. TORTURE FOR IT’S OWN SAKE. Here is an example.

### **The Beginning of Torture**

In Afghanistan in 2002, there had been a rocket attack on an American military camp and a 22 year old Afghan—he was a farmer and taxi driver, and the father of a 3 year old girl—was turned over to our troops by a local Afghan guerilla commander. It later turned out that the guerilla commander had probably organized the attack himself and that the taxi driver was certainly innocent.

The scene I want to describe took place at Bagram Air Base, about an hour’s fast drive from Kabul.

In 2002 anyone brought in for interrogation to Bagram—whether innocent or guilty—was routinely kept hooded and shackled for the first 24 hours. So, this young man—whose name was Dilawar—was hooded, and chained by his wrists to the ceiling. The other person in the scenario was Specialist Corey Jones of the First Platoon MP’s, probably also quite young.

**As Specialist Jones tells it, he took the hood off the prisoner’s head to give him water and Dilawar spit at him. Specialist Jones responded with a couple of knee strikes to his leg just above the knee.**

**This knee strike to the upper leg is very painful and also disabling; it has a special name: the common peroneal strike.**

Here are Specialist Jones’own words:

**“He screamed out Allah! Allah! Allah! And my first reaction was that he was crying out to his god. Everybody heard him cry out and thought it was funny. Other Third Platoon MP’s later came by to see for themselves....It became a running joke, and people kept showing up to give this detainee a common peroneal strike, just to hear him scream out, “Allah.” It went on over a 24-hour period, and I would think that it was over 100 strikes.”**

### **PERMISSION TO TORTURE HAD TRANSFORMED THESE YOUNG AMERICANS INTO SADISTS.**

After something like four days shackled to the ceiling, during which time he was beaten about the legs, alternating with being taken down for questioning and abuse by interrogators of both sexes, Dilawar died. The coroner said that the tissue in this boy’s legs had “basically been pulpified.” She said, “I’ve seen similar injuries in an individual run over by a bus.”

**CROSS-CULTURAL NOTE: SPECIALIST JONES APPARENTLY DIDN'T REALIZE THAT "ALLAH" SIMPLY MEANS GOD IN ARABIC AND WAS THE SAME GOD THAT SPECIALIST JONES HIMSELF PROBABLY BELIEVED IN.**

In Bagram, as at Abu Ghraib, when these abuses were exposed, the only people so far held to account have been at the lowest level in the hierarchy.

Apart from one female reserve general, none of the officers in the middle or upper reaches of the hierarchy have been reprimanded and none will be prosecuted. How could they be? The policy that led to these abuses lead right up the chain of command to the Secretary of Defense and the President. Let's look at how responsibility was distributed along the chain of command in Afghanistan when the abuses at Bagram were exposed.

**At the top of the chain:**

**Gen. Daniel K. McNeil, commander of allied forces in Afghanistan:** "No people were chained to ceilings; all methods of interrogation used were in accordance with generally accepted interrogation techniques."

**Col Theodore C. Nicholas II, Director of Intelligence, Amer. Task Force in Afghanistan:** "I did not pressure the interrogation cell to violate standards to gain information. I would rather not receive the information than to harm an individual to receive it."

**Moving further down the chain:**

**Capt. Britton T. Hopper, Company Commander 519<sup>th</sup> Military Intelligence Battalion, Bagram, Aug. 2002-Jan. 2003:** "There was a lot of pressure to get more intelligence...coming from top down, and probably the perception, on occasion was that we weren't being as aggressive as we should have been."

**Capt. Carolyn A. Wood, Operations officer in charge of interrogations at Bagram Control Point, July 2002-Jan, 2003:** "Would like to get additional legal guidance. We would like to know what our left and right limits are in respect to stress positions and sleep adjustment, for instance." (She apparently needed clearer guidelines for abuse. Apparently, it was not forthcoming so we have.....)

**Former Sgt. James A. (Alex) Leahy, interrogation team leader** saying "Due to lack of clear policy concerning the legality of safety positions and the sleep adjustment schedules, we did not keep records of it." (In other words, if in doubt, put nothing in writing. )

If General McNeill and Col. Nicholas truly didn't know what was going on—and I don't believe for a minute that they did not—it was because they didn't want to inquire too closely into what their underlings further down the chain were doing, because they wanted to give them carte blanche to do whatever it takes.

(Captain Carolyn Wood and some of her team of interrogators later departed for Iraq and Abu Ghraib where, an army inquiry said, she applied techniques “remarkably similar” to those used at Bagram. Incidentally, she arrived at Bagram a lieutenant and left a captain. Apparently her work earned her a promotion.)

The evidence that upper echelons either turned a blind eye toward abuse of prisoners or actively encouraged it keeps on mounting. Captain Ian Fishback of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division took the extraordinary step of meeting with Senator John McCain about the persistent abuse of prisoners by members of the First Battalion, 504<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry of that division. These abuses included beatings, subjecting men to extremes of hot and cold and stacking them in human pyramids. For seventeen months, he failed to get his superiors to intervene to stop these abuses or even issue clear guidelines for the treatment of prisoners. James Yee, the Muslim chaplain at Guantanamo, against whom charges of espionage were first made and then dropped, tells of how Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Miller, the camp’s commander regularly incited anger toward the prisoners by emotional slogans delivered to the troops. Guards responded, Yee said, by retaliating against prisoners both physically and psychologically.

### **Experiments on Obedience to Authority**

In the now famous experiments done by Stanley Milgram in the sixties an ordinary person was put into a situation where an authority figure—a Yale professor directing a so-called “learning” experiment—was telling him he had to give higher and higher levels of shock to someone—actually Milgram’s confederate—for giving the wrong answers—or even no answer—to questions. (Not a bad paradigm for torture.)

There were signs of anxiety and conflict—sweating, trembling, nervous laughter. Still, a majority of the subjects went on giving shocks to the very end of the scale, which was marked by triple XXX’s in red. But a minority did not. Instead of obeying the authority, they obeyed the INDIVIDUAL voice of conscience and refused to go on.

### **The Stanford Experiment**

In Philip Zimbardo’s experiment at Stanford young men were recruited through an ad in a Palo Alto newspaper to take part in an experiment. They were randomly divided into two groups—guards and prisoners. The prisoners were made to wear smocks as their only article of clothing and stockings were put on their heads to make it look like their heads were shaved. The guards wore uniforms and mirrored sunglasses. The guards called prisoners by their numbers while the prisoners had to address the guards as “Mr. Correctional Officer.”

Zimbardo stopped the experiment after six days. A group dynamic very quickly developed among the guards where rebelliousness among the prisoners was met by escalation of ever stricter and more arbitrary deprivations and

humiliations. No actual physical abuse took place, but psychological abuse did. And sexual abuse too—in the form of making the prisoners simulate various forms of sex with each other—remarkably like what happened at Abu Ghraib.

### **Abu Ghraib**

After the Abu Ghraib scandal broke, there was much soul-searching about what the rules for interrogation were and the clarity with which they had been communicated down the chain of command. Seymour Hersh described the rules very concisely at a symposium in New York in 2004: “Do whatever you want short of killing him and if you kill him, put him on ice.” That is exactly what was done, as we can see this picture taken at Abu Ghraib.



**“Thumbs up” over body of a prisoner.**

While the hierarchy dithered about what gradations of abuse were permissible, advancing and then revising what could and could not be done—stripping, isolation, sleep deprivation, stress positions, dogs—those in charge of the hands-on treatment of prisoners were free to improvise, as in the picture below.



**Man bleeding and abused after being bitten by a military dog.**

What we had then was a situation that was similar to the Stanford experiment: guards had near absolute authority over prisoners in a situation where what could and could not be done to them was fluid, uncertain, and ambiguous. They had authority but there was no authority FIGURE standing over THEM, directing them—as in the Milgram experiment—to turn up the current in precise stages. What then happened was what William Bion, the father of group psychoanalysis in the 1950's at the Tavistock Institute in London talked about. As the psychiatrist in the group, Bion refused to play the traditional directive role that the members of the group expected. With this vacuum in leadership, Bion said that the most pathological member of the group inevitably put himself forward as a candidate to fill the role.

ENTER Charles Graner, the former civilian corrections officer. He stepped in to take the lead as the ringmaster. And it wasn't just a question of the ends justifying the means. As at Bagram, it seems that the MEANS—torture, and in this case, sexual sadism—had become the END in itself.

As de facto leadership of the group fell to Graner and a few others, a group dynamic coalesced and a group superego formed that declared the abuse of prisoners to be acceptable. People took pictures, shared CD's. In one of the photographs that was circulated people are shown standing around in groups chatting while naked men are being shackled to each other on the floor of a

corridor. Those higher up in the hierarchy were demanding that pressure be put on people to talk and those down below were trying to deliver what they thought was needed.

### **The Prisoners**

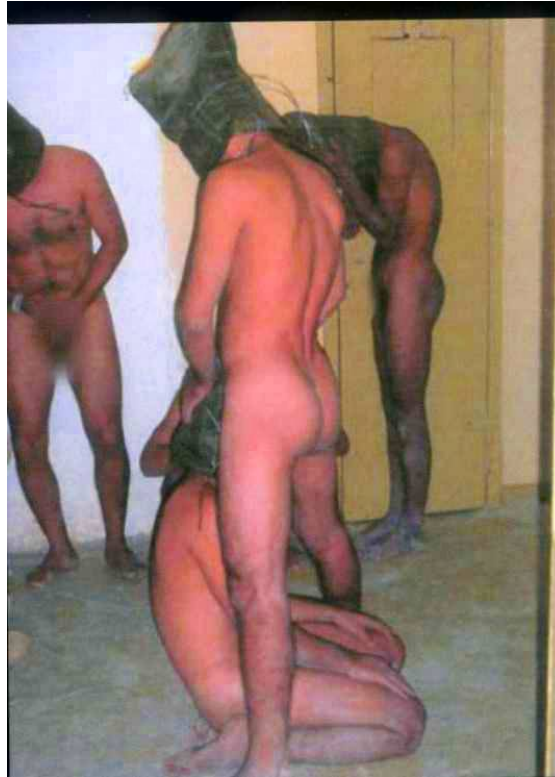
Our treatment of prisoners in Iraq has been replete with the racism of a conquering power. Who were the prisoners at Abu Ghraib? Why were they there? According to the Red Cross, a great many were caught up in sweeps in which whole areas were cordoned off and everybody within range scooped up and deposited there. Military intelligence estimated that 70%-90% of those held at Abu Ghraib were innocent of any wrongdoing. The Red Cross estimate was 90%. General Taguba estimated low at 60%. So, of those tortured at Abu Ghraib we can say that the chances that the victim was innocent were pretty high—anywhere from 6 to 9 chances out of 10. Is it not racist to throw thousands of innocent citizens into prison in their own country and subject them to torture and sexual abuse?

### **Sexual Abuse**

In what must be something of a first in the modern annals of war—at Abu Ghraib we had MEN sexually abusing other MEN. And in what must be something of a first at any period of history, WOMEN were doing it too.

CROSS-CULTURAL NOTE: One of the explanations was that these things were done because they were thought, psychologically, to be especially humiliating to Arab men's sense of masculinity, for which homosexuality and being naked in the presence of other men (not to mention women) were presumably shameful. If so, these are ideas that reflect simplistic stereotypes about Arab culture. There are wide cultural variations among Arab and Muslim countries. Iraq under Saddam had been a secular state. Homosexuality wasn't illegal. I don't think that it was a big deal in Iraq, but I know that it is in the American military and—with the religious right riding high in congress and many parts of the country—the home front as well.

When I was traveling in Syria and Jordan some years ago, I was struck by the easy physical intimacy between men in both countries. Men walking on the street arm in arm or hand in hand, kissing in greeting were routine, things that even today many American men would be afraid to do. So, it was supremely ironic that Iraqi men, as in the picture below, were forced to be in intimate contact with each other's naked bodies and to simulate having sex with each other—things that the AMERICAN MILITARY would kick soldiers out of the army for if they were caught doing them with each other.



### **Sexual abuse of Iraqi prisoners by United States military.**

Research shows that many men whose identity is heterosexual can feel some degree of sexual attraction for their own sex. In my own research, it was just over 40%. Concerns about masculinity, fears about touching each other, shame and ambivalence about unspoken sexual feelings about other men—these are things that contemporary AMERICANS are worried about. Half-baked theories about Arab male psychology and a lack of comprehension of Iraqi culture rationalized using the bodies of Iraqi men as a screen on which American men projected the conflicts of OUR culture, not theirs.

### **Pornography as Protest**

But there was something else going on, I think. By late 2003 many people sensed that the war had been launched on false if not fraudulent premises. Especially for the reservists and National Guard, they had been plucked out of their lives, taken from their families, had their plans for the future disrupted and dropped in the hell-hole that was Saddam Hussein's former prison to work exhausting 12-hour shifts under uncomfortable and dangerous conditions. The place was overflowing with people—something like 10, 000 or more prisoners, and in turmoil. Outside roadside bombs and rocket propelled grenades were picking off their comrades who were being sent out in inadequately armored

vehicles in a strategy that made them—AND STILL MAKES THEM—sitting ducks in what Senator Kennedy called a “shooting gallery.”

Those who wrap themselves in the flag of patriotism like to talk about “the sacrifices of our brave men and women.” There is no question that they are brave. But there is a difference between “making a sacrifice” yourself and being sacrificed by someone else—and many of them knew that. In today’s polarized America, sexual images are a battleground in the culture wars. For some people Janet Jackson’s “wardrobe malfunction” at the Superbowl shook the foundations of the republic and threatened the future of America’s youth. At some level, I think it was understood—though maybe not consciously—that just taking the pictures—creating do-it-yourself pornographic images—nudity, masturbation, male-to-male sex, female-to-male sex—PHOTOGRAPHING IT—were blowing all the taboos that the religious right and the President’s party hold so dear. IT WAS PORNOGRAPHY AS PROTEST—one of the few ways in which those stuck in the nightmare of the war and Abu Ghraib could register their protest and thumb their noses at the people who had sent them there.

### Postscript

With the widespread evidence of deliberate psychological abuse and torture of prisoners held by United States military forces, questions have been raised about the role of psychologists in those abuses. Although the Presidential Task Force on Psychological Ethics and National Security was formed as a response to those questions, it did not address them.

The preamble to the report of the Task Force says, *“The Task Force noted that the Board of Directors’ charge did not include an investigative or adjudicatory role, and as a consequence emphasized that it did not render any judgment concerning events that may or may not have occurred in national security related settings.”*

Without denying that torture and human rights violations took place, the phrase *“events that may or may not have occurred”* implicitly leaves the door open to the notion that the “jury is still out” with regard to the factual status of events such as torture and violations of human rights. However, there is no doubt that these events HAVE occurred.

It was ironic, if not paradoxical, that the Task Force was not asked to address the role of psychology and psychologists in those events since a majority of the Task Force were well placed to know a good deal about that question. Of the ten Task Force members, three were civilian consultants to the military, at a very high level. Three others—two colonels and a captain—were in the full-time military and key consultants at Guantanamo and Afghanistan and Iraq.

The names and backgrounds of the Task Force members are currently available, at this writing, through the Division 48—Peace Psychology—website. They are worth looking at. That link is: [www.webster.edu/peacepsychology/tfpens.html](http://www.webster.edu/peacepsychology/tfpens.html)

What the Task Force DID do was to issue a set of recommendations that included two main principles: The FIRST was that psychologists could NOT under any circumstances be a party to torture or any kind of cruel, degrading, or inhumane treatment. The SECOND was that psychologists were ethically entitled to participate or advise in prisoner interrogations. The question arises: In practice, are these two principles contradictory? To answer this question, we would need to have more facts at our disposal.

We would need to know what the roles of psychologists have ACTUALLY been in what have been termed “national security investigations” up until this point. The PENS report, while stating what psychologists may or may not do, effectively functions as a screen to deflect attention away from the need for a clear and transparent disclosure of what they HAVE done—and what they might be actually called upon to do in the future. Yet those very questions prompted the creation of the Task Force in the first place.

At this writing, APA has yet to join Human Rights Watch, the ACLU, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Physicians for Human Rights in deploring the role that the United States military has played in setting the conditions for these abuses, tacitly condoning them, and at times deliberately implementing them.

My concern is that APA has not done so because it has too much at stake in its relationship to our national military institutions to combine its statement of ethical principles with a long, hard, objective look at the relation of psychology and psychologists—whether deliberate or inadvertent—to those abuses.

## **Cross-cultural and Gender Perspectives On War and Conflict in the Middle East Taleb Khairallah**

Much of the conflict in the Middle East is sustained by historical and cultural factors that are confusing and difficult to understand. A large part of this confusion results from misinformation about Middle Easterners that is directly related to the limited degree of contact that most Americans have with the people and cultures of the Middle East. In the absence of accurate information through deliberate exposure, individuals become susceptible to packaged information such as made available by government outlets. This creates a particular vulnerability to the agenda of the government at the time that the information is released.

### **Cross-Cultural and Gender Perspective**

The first barrier to effective cross-cultural communication is language. When dealing with different languages, it is very difficult to establish equivalence in translation by addressing the following: Vocabulary, Idiomatic, Grammatical-Syntactical, Experiential, and Conceptual. At a second level, it is difficult to truly internalize the meaning of language when one did not grow up in the particular target group. As early as the 1930s, the impact on language on thought was explored. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis highlighted this best by postulating that the external world is built upon the language habit of the group. As such, language becomes a guide to social reality. It serves to define experience as much as it serves to report it. Analyses of thought patterns that are reflected in literature provide evidence of this phenomenon.

The second barrier is non-verbal communication. It includes Distance and Space (Small sphere for self, more internalized ego, no sense of entitlement to public space), Smell (Being close to smell breath is OK), Eye Contact (High level of intensity of eye contact), Touch (High degree of touch within gender/not across), etc. The reader is referred to the literature for a thorough discussion of the impact of non-verbal communication.

The third barrier is related to gender construction. Middle Eastern cultures maintain a more traditional view of men and women with men being afforded a higher status than women. Middle eastern Men are very different from their western counterparts despite having some similar features as cornerstones of masculine identity. They value hard work and are willing to accept sacrifices as a cornerstone to success. They do not believe that man is an island; do not value aggression as a cornerstone of masculine identity; and are not overly focused on sexuality as a vehicle to manhood. They do focus on taking their place in the social order by marrying and procreating, are highly expressive emotionally, and are deeply engaged with their extended family including child rearing.

The fourth barrier is related to cultural worldviews. All Middle Eastern cultures share values of generosity, hospitality, and communal spirit. There is a significant emphasis on interdependence in relationships. Fatalism, a belief that destiny defines the course of life, is prevalent. Character is seen as emerging in the individual's response to life's situations or the individual's destiny. There remains a significant role for oral tradition in the construction of history. Time perception highlights that the future is not real, the present is not very real, and the past is most important.

The final barrier is related to religious worldviews. For the purpose of this paper, the author will focus on Islam. Islam teaches all people are equal regardless of their role or status. Islam highlights that everything in the world is real as created by the Creator. The divine reality is revealed to a few men as an act of kindness from the Creator. It is therefore important to honor and respect those who receive this revelation, which may explain the high level of political involvement of religious figures. Islam provides that it is a religion and form of government as well.

It is not necessary for individuals to seek enlightenment in Islam. Humanity is not seen as part of the Divine and does not need to struggle for Salvation. Islam looks favorably upon material progress. In the end, people will be judged by their deeds when they face the Creator after death. An act of sacrifice in the service of the cause of Islam is seen as affording the individual a higher level of reward in the afterlife.

A historical element is Islam, that is critical to consider in Iraq, relates to the political aspect of Islam. While all Muslims share similar spiritual values, there is a significant split in the political application of such values. As early as the fourth successor to the Prophet Muhammad, this split led to the creation of 2 factions: Sunnis and Shiites. The earliest war that marked this split occurred in today's Iraq with many other bloody wars that followed. While both groups have seen periods of dominance throughout history, the Sunnis had been the more dominant group this past century until the emergence of Iran as a religious state. This is expected to be a critical factor in the administration of government in Iraq. It belies the fear of Sunnis that the new government is part of a Shiite move to power.

### **War and conflict**

The lack of effective communication coupled with poor understanding results in ineffective problem solving strategies. It contributes to reduction in scanning for viable solutions and to ignoring historical information in the generation of problem solving strategies. This leads to escalation in conflict and a reliance on violence to achieve goals.

It is generally accepted that the United States has the most dominant military force at this time. Therefore, engaging this military in direct combat is not seen as a path to a successful outcome. An alternate strategy with a better chance for success is to engage one's enemy indirectly. This principle was successfully used during the war against the Soviet Union during its occupation of Afghanistan. Indirect warfare requires the use of methods aside from engaging soldiers in direct combat to include sabotage, attacks on civilians, and attacks on infrastructure. This perception of the moral imperative of such a strategy is dependent on the perspective of the parties in conflict. Labels may range from fight for freedom to terrorism.

In researching models of explaining what has been termed suicide attacks or terroristic behavior, Albert Bandura's theory of moral disengagement appears to offer the best explanation of how this violent behaviors can be justified. Bandura posits that the exercise of self-sanction plays a central role in the regulation of conduct. In the course of socialization, moral standards are adopted that serve as guides and deterrents for conduct. Once internalized control has developed, people regulate their own actions by the sanctions they apply to themselves. They do things that give them self-satisfaction and a sense of self-worth. They refrain from behaving in ways that bring self-condemnation. Self-sanctions thus keep conduct in line with internal standards. There are 2 aspects to the exercise of moral agency: Inhibitive: Internal regulation of conduct according to moral standards, Proactive: Self-regulatory mechanisms that allow disinhibition.

The massive threats to human welfare stem mainly from deliberate acts of principle rather than from unrestrained acts of impulse. Over the years, ordinary and decent people in the name of religious principles, righteous ideologies, and nationalistic imperatives have perpetrated much reprehensible and destructive conduct. It is the principled resort to destructiveness that is of greatest social concern. Self-exoneration is needed to neutralize self-sanction. This is often achieved by the proactive use of strategies that allow disinhibition. The disengagement strategies described by Bandura include Moral Justification, Euphemistic Labeling, Advantageous comparisons, Displacement of responsibility, Diffusion of responsibility, Disregard for or distortion of consequence, Dehumanization, and Attribution of blame. Evidence is pervasive that all of these mechanisms continue to be put to use during the war in Iraq. Both sides of the conflict rely on these mechanisms to justify "terroristic acts" and to justify responses to those acts.

Counterattacks are generally seen as legitimate response to an attack that inflicts human suffering. However, the response to a grave threat or a potential threat of such an attack is the most troublesome. There exists a considerable level of subjectivity and fallibility in judgment when assessing potential threat. Given the existence of so many psychological devices for disengagement of moral control, societies cannot rely entirely on individuals, however righteous their standards, to provide safeguards against destructive ventures. Civilized

conduct requires, in addition to humane personal codes, social systems that uphold compassionate behavior and renounce cruelty. Political systems that exercise concentrated control over the major vehicles of social influence can wield greater justificatory power than pluralistic systems that represent diverse perspectives, interests and concerns. Political diversity and toleration of public expression of skepticism create conditions that allow the emergence of challenges to suspect moral appeals. If societies are to function more humanely, they must establish effective social safeguards against the misuse of institutional justificatory power for exploitive and destructive purposes.

### **Conclusion**

Prior to and during the war in Iraq, the American public has been told that the motivation for terroristic attacks is the “Hatred of our Way of Life” and the desire to destroy it through the use of media outlets. This is in stark contrast to how most Arabs and Muslims view the US and what it stands for. Most admire the degree of freedom and the opportunities afforded to US citizens. Furthermore, most aspire to create similar systems in their own countries. It is the disagreement over US policies in the Middle East and the lack of viable options to resolve such conflicts that leads to the reliance on “terroristic acts”.

Misinformation and lack of contact contribute to the ongoing conflict in the region and undermine efforts to bring about resolution. Resolution can be reached when effective communication, understanding, and compromise are achieved. Successful intercultural communications can only occur when all parties involved:

- Understand variables impacting cross cultural communication
- Know when to be cautious with their own ethno-centric style
- Work actively to develop an effective multi-cultural style.

When conflict escalates to war, all involved parties suffer significant losses. Aside from the documented losses, the cost of war is additionally seen in the impact on cross-cultural development as evidenced by continued or increased alienation of members from opposing groups leading to decreased opportunities for contact contributing to continued misunderstanding and conflict. Another rarely mentioned cost impacts men more significantly. Since men continue to be the most represented gender in war, there is an inherent need to maintain violence in the behavioral repertoire. The incorporation of violence into normative masculinity presents men with higher risk of acting out harmfully in settings other than war. This may explain some of the attributes that have been described in the literature as the dark side of masculinity.

I will close with some recommendations to combat the aforementioned issues:

- Educate self about others using models for cross-cultural counseling- seek experiences beyond reading books about others such as eating foods, attending ceremonies, etc.

- Take action at the community level- educate others and challenge stereotypes similar to what is recommended in dealing with racism, anti-feminism and homophobia.
- Question dogmatic mass media messages and news reports
- Seek to expose self to alternative sources of information by using the internet to read newspaper reports from other countries
- Take action at the political level by engaging all political parties