

BETWEEN WARS

IRAQ

LIFE GOES ON

BETWEEN WARS - IRAQ - LIFE GOES ON

On 20 March 2003 two Lockheed F117A stealth fighters and thirty six Tomahawk cruise missiles were launched against Dora Farms on the outskirts of Baghdad to decapitate the leadership of Iraq. This was the starting point of the invasion led by US/British military to rid Iraq of its WMD's (Weapons of Mass Destruction) to oust Saddam Hussein and bring democracy to the Iraqi people.

Five years later Saddam Hussein is dead, the WMD have never been found and Iraq is in a state of civil war. A society ruled by the gun where taking your child to school can cost your life hardly qualifies as a democracy.

The debate whether the invasion was justified goes on as the death toll has exceeded thousands of soldiers and hundreds of thousands of civilians and still counting. This is today's reality of those who are forced to stay in a violent, volatile and sectarian Iraq.

BETWEEN WARS – LIFE GOES ON shows a different side of Iraq to that of the violence and killing that has numbed a worldwide TV audience. It is a collection of images from 1991-1996 showing daily life in the Iraqi capital and throughout the country under UN sanctions during Saddam's dictatorship. Life was not free or democratic but stable and without constant fear, albeit under repression.

The images range from the Kurdish controlled Zakho in the North, to the IMK (Islamic Movement of Kurdistan (a.k.a. Ansar al Islam) controlled areas around Halabjah in the East, to the Shia controlled South in Basrah and the Western deserts of Al Qaim along the Syrian border.

In the center of it all the bustling capital Baghdad with a population of four million people, its many souks and vivid street life.

In the narrow alleyways one will find fish sellers, butchers, vegetable and grain merchants and displays of bright plastic kitchen wares. Coppermiths, oud-builders and watch-makers toil away amongst the daily hustle-and-bustle .

On Fridays, animal lovers congregate in the shadow of the ancient Caliphs mosque to talk, have tea and trade anything that moves.

In the shadow of the 13th century Mustanseriya school once the pinnacle of education in the Islamic world-numerous stores are nestled selling carpets, jewelry and antiques. Some of which the shrinking middle class had been forced to sell to procure daily necessities during in times of hyper inflation.

Two bridges upstream, cars are clubbed to death with the back of an axe before being pegged up around a wood burning fire and served as Masgouf, a Baghdad speciality.

BETWEEN WARS – LIFE GOES ON is a snapshot of a country referred to as the "cradle of civilization" during an era void of suicide vests and roadside bombs - a country not worth to be forgotten.

Henry Arvidsson – November 2007

BETWEEN WARS – IRAQ – LIFE GOES ON is intended as an exhibition with an accompanying book (catalogue) and a website selected from a 2500 slide library.

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Bio

Born in Sweden in 1961 with a degree in civil engineering, a profession which served me well as a platform for future endeavors, I started to explore photography using a SLR in 1980 and got hooked after completing a photography course at the University of Stockholm.

I thought of ways to incorporate photography into my life as I was questioning the story behind the 30-second sound bite the news pumped out about the conflicts in the Middle East. I joined the UN Peace keeping forces (UNIFIL) in Southern Lebanon in 1988 to get a close-up. This was also the year the Nobel Peace prize was awarded to the "blue helmets" and I used my portfolio of images taken there to apply to the International Center of Photography (ICP) Photojournalism program in New York. From 1989-90, I honed my skills under the tutelage of Gilles Peress (who lent me his flak jacket for a workshop), Mary Ellen Mark, Charles Harbut, Chris Morris and the inspirational guidance of Cornell Capa and James Nachtwey, while an internship at Magnum exposed me to the world's best photojournalism. Also during that time, a picture shot from my bedroom window of a murdered taxi driver made the cover of Daily News.

I approached the United Nations Department of Public Information and eventually landed a career-shaping assignment to work with the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) to document the dismantling of the Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) program in Iraq. I arrived in Baghdad in July 1991 for a week-long inspection assignment. A week became a month and a month years in Baghdad. My images of these inspections formed part of the official record and were published in Time, Newsweek, New York Times, CNN, Stern, Der Spiegel and other international media.

Whenever possible, I walked the streets of Baghdad and photographed shop keepers, carpet washers and daily life in and around the lively souks. I traveled throughout Iraq and visited ancient sites such as Babylon, Nineveh (Mosul) and Ur. My "office" onboard a helicopter used for aerial surveillance gave me a birds-eye view of the country.

These images now form BETWEEN WARS - IRAQ - LIFE GOES ON.

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Clock maker-flyer (1108-09 IR)

On the back streets of the Baghdad souks old crafts are preserved. This clock maker had his shop amongst old radio dealers and other fine mechanic repair workshops. Under the sanctions, anything that could be saved was reused and some old trades revived.



Taxi driver (0588-25 IR)

This taxi driver kept his old Soviet built Volga car running with anything he could get his hands on. It must have been one of the slowest cars in the capital and it barely made it across the Tigris river bridges. Cracked windshields were a constant problem as their import was prohibited under the sanctions.

IRAQ



Anti UN sanctions rally (0637-05 IR)

One of many rallies outside the United Nations Development Programs office on Abu Nawas. The use of children was popular in the regime's staged rallies to get the sanctions lifted. Different unions were bussed in on different days to take part.



Wedding celebration at Palestine Hotel (0601-18 IR)

On Thursday nights couples got married and celebrated their honeymoon at one of the former luxury hotels around Baghdad. Family and friends danced in the street outside the hotels where musicians played to collect a few dinars.

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Boat builder in Ramadi (0638-04 IR)

A boat is being finished by putting a "sealant" between the planks of this small fishing boat at this workshop in Ramadi. The boy learned the craft to eventually take over the family business.



Grain and dry goods souk (0993-06 IR)

A woman passes through the souk on her daily pursuits. Iraq was a secular country with no restrictions on women's rights to work and move around freely.

BETWEEN WARS



Khademiyah shrine gate (0632-29 IR)
At Friday prayer the Shia Muslim shrine built on the outskirts of Baghdad in 1515 filled with worshippers of all ages.



Nightingale at the pet souk (1003-04 IR)
Every Friday morning, Baghdadis congregate to trade birds, fish, dogs and other exotic animals in the shade of the Caliphs mosque.

IRAQ



Kurdish refugee camp (0771-10 IR)
After the failed attempt to overthrow Saddam's regime after the 1991 Gulf war, many Kurds took refuge in UN camps.



Silversmith in his shop (0991-08 IR)
Silver is traditionally worked into jewelry and decorative objects with intricate patterns.

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Samarra spiral minaret and great mosque (0589-11 IR)
The once largest mosque in the Middle East built in 852 AD is predated by the 52 meter high brick spiral minaret.



Abu Nawas fish restaurant (0659-01 IR)
A carp is netted to be clubbed to death and stuck on poles around a fire to be served as Masgouf, a Baghdadi specialty.