

Iraq

When society goes mad, Christians should probably be where the consequences will be the worst.

—Cliff Kindy, letter to supporters, March 17, 2003¹

BY THE TIME CPT set up a project in Iraq in 2002, members of the organization had realized that effective peacemaking was safer than its founders had originally thought. Participants in the 1993 training imagined it likely that one of their numbers might die or be seriously injured in the line of duty, and in the early years, single parents of young children were not encouraged to apply, nor were children admitted on project locations. As years passed, however, minor assaults by Israeli settlers and tropical diseases were the most physically dangerous crises that CPTers had faced.² The outcomes of death threats against the Hebron and Colombia teams were largely positive, i.e., they resulted in increased visibility of the teams' work and increased solidarity with grassroots organizations that spoke on their behalf. In every training, participants still planned their memorial services and made out their wills, but gradually, children, spouses, and other family members began visiting CPTers on location and teams made hosting international and national civilians wanting to know more about the team's work a priority.

1. CPTnet, "Iraq: Letter from Cliff Kindy," Mar 19, 2003.

2. The Israeli settler assault on Kim Lamberty and Chris Brown took place in 2004, two years after the establishment of the Iraq team. One might argue that team members who stayed in Hebron and Beit Jala homes while the Israeli military was shelling them in the early years of the Al Aqsa Intifada put themselves in jeopardy, but the families they were staying with always took them to safe places within the homes, out of the line of fire.

CPT's work in Iraq would snap it back to its original understanding of the danger to trained peacemakers stepping into the line of fire. By 2006, the Iraq team would experience two serious auto accidents, have friends and colleagues die in violence that spiraled out of control after the invasion of the Multinational Forces in 2003, be tied up and robbed by armed men, and have a delegation kidnapped. Two trained CPTers would die in Iraq, one in an accident and one in an execution-style murder.

HISTORY

Historians refer to Mesopotamia, which encompasses Iraq, as the "cradle of civilization." Mesopotamia boasts the first recorded instances of reading, writing, trade, urban centers, metallurgy, agriculture, and a legal system. The cities of Ur (birthplace of Abraham), Nineveh, and Babylon, among others, are mentioned in the Bible and their remnants remain in contemporary Iraq. Over the millennia, the Sumerian, Mittani, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Seleucid, Ottoman, and British Empires ruled the region.

In 1979, after a brief period of stability and prosperity, Saddam Hussein took over the offices of both President and Chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council. He had been the *de facto* ruler of Iraq for some years before he formally came to power. Hussein launched the war against Iran in 1980 over disputed territories in the Persian Gulf region. When hostilities ceased in 1988, Iraq had the largest military in the region, but also faced a mountain of debt and an ongoing rebellion of Kurds in the north that Hussein's government brutally repressed.

A territorial dispute with Kuwait led to Iraq invading the country in 1990, because a section of Kuwait had been part of Iraq's Basra province during the Ottoman Empire. Kuwait had declared independence in 1961, over the Iraqi government's objections. In the months leading to the First Gulf War, Iraq accused Kuwait, more or less accurately, of "slant-drilling," i.e., drilling on the border in such a way as to pump oil from under Iraqi territory. The Arab League and U.N. Security Council condemned the invasion and four days later, the Security Council imposed an economic embargo on Iraq. Iraq responded by annexing Kuwait as its "19th province" on August 8, 1990.

In November 1990, the U.N. Security Council adopted Resolution 678, which authorized military action against the Iraqi forces occupying Kuwait and demanded a complete withdrawal by January 15, 1991.

CPT'S FIRST DELEGATION TO IRAQ

CPT first became involved with issues related to Iraq in October 1990, when it encouraged its constituent churches to participate in “Oil-Free Sunday” on October 21 (see chapter 1). In November 1990, it held its second CPT Training Action conference—a gathering that eventually developed into the annual Christian Peacemaker Congress. Participants in the Denver, Colorado, event took nonviolence training and attended workshops on the Persian Gulf Conflict. Five of them were arrested for trespassing at Lowry Air Force Base. Attendees also raised \$700 for a CPT delegation to Iraq and commissioned Hedy Sawadsky and Gene Stoltzfus to lead the delegation by anointing them with oil.

This delegation, comprising thirteen Mennonites, Brethren, and Friends (Quakers) with backgrounds working in the Middle East then traveled to Amman, Baghdad, and Babylon between November 21 and December 1, 1990. Delegates hoped to persuade Saddam Hussein to release his western hostages, and to end the food and medicine blockade by the US-led coalition. They hoped that by doing so they would be able to “open up less emotionally-charged space for genuine dialogue leading to negotiations.” While not successful in achieving these goals, the delegates made hundreds of public appearances in churches and the media after their return.³ Additionally, Stoltzfus noted in his Iraq Peacemaker Team Activity Report, that the delegation had presented the Iraqi Minister without Portfolio a list of five western hostages whom the U.S. State Department had identified as having serious medical conditions. Later, the Iraqi government released those hostages and ten others to the care of boxer and humanitarian Muhammad Ali whose delegation had not provided any names to the Iraqi government.⁴

The delegation met with some of the forty plus hostages—most of whom were free to move about in Baghdad. They were nominally hostages

3. CPT, “Christian Peacemaker Teams Activities 1984–2000.”

4. Ali and the delegation were staying in the same guest center. They went to events with him and his staff and shared ideas informally. The hostages were probably released to his care because of his higher media profile. Gene Stoltzfus, e-mail, Sept 11, 2007.

in that the Iraqi government would not give them an exit visa. Hussein's government forced others to stay in strategic locations, presumably to prevent western countries from bombing those sites. At the conclusion of the report, Gene Stoltzfus listed eight points under "Conclusion and Next Steps." The three he emphasized in bold text were,

1. Iraq was willing to come to the negotiation table. "As one Iraqi intellectual said, "If you come to us in anger, you will find the Iraqi a fierce combatant, but if you come kindly and respectfully, you will find that he will give you his house."
2. CPT urgently needs finances to fund a smaller team in mid-January.
3. Persons need to call the White House number to encourage serious negotiations and a lowering of the rhetoric. "Prayers are needed everywhere."⁵

After the delegation, the CPT Steering Committee circulated a call for CPT supporters to observe an "Emergency Sabbath," in which people would plan worship for, and participate in, peacemaking activities on the first Monday after hostilities began.

In the years between the first and second Gulf Wars, CPT maintained connections with Iraqi issues. A December 1991 *Signs of the Times* featured the efforts of early CPT supporters Cathy and Andre Gingerich Stoner who worked with Mennonite Central Committee in Germany providing counsel to personnel on military bases who wished to become Conscientious Objectors during the Gulf War. Veteran Chicago-based peace activist Kathy Kelly participated in most of the CPT trainings from 1993 onward. CPT officially endorsed her organization, Voices in the Wilderness, which publicized the human cost of the war and sanctions

5. Gene Stoltzfus, "Iraq Peacemaker Team Activity Report." The report also records a meeting with Joe Wilson, the Charges d'Affairs at the US Embassy in Baghdad. Stoltzfus described him as explaining U.S. policy "in a brisk [George H. W.] Bush style with a picture of Marilyn Monroe hovering over his head." However, as the conversation progressed, Wilson became genuinely interested in CPT's mission. Wilson would later write an op-ed in the *New York Times*, "What I Didn't Find in Africa," accusing the George W. Bush administration of using intelligence it knew was false to justify the second invasion of Iraq in 2003. Members of the administration then retaliated by leaking information to the press that Wilson's wife, Valerie Plame, was a CIA agent, which resulted, as of this writing, in a criminal conviction of Vice President Cheney's former chief of Staff, I. Lewis Libby.

regime on Iraqi civilians.⁶ Palestinians in Hebron were concerned about the fate of fellow Arabs in Iraq under the sanctions regime. One family that the team visited frequently in the Hebron project's early years had pictures hanging on the wall of a sister-in-law and her five children incinerated in the Amiriya bomb shelter during the first Gulf war.⁷

As the George W. Bush administration looked for reasons to invade Iraq after the catastrophes of September 11, 2001, killed almost three thousand people, CPT began developing a response. The damage done to the Iraqi infrastructure in the First Gulf War and grievously exacerbated by the sanctions prompted CPT to begin sending delegations to Iraq in 2002 as a way of preventing such destruction from happening again.⁸ By sending delegations in the months leading up to the war, CPT hoped both to educate people about the damage done by the previous war and sanctions and to evaluate the possibility of setting up a CPT project that might protect Iraqi civilians and civilian infrastructure.⁹

On one of these exploratory delegations the first of several tragic episodes in the history of CPT's Iraq team occurred. As the delegation was traveling in a three-vehicle caravan between Basra and Baghdad on January 6, 2003, the Chevrolet suburban in which seventy-three-year-old George Weber was riding blew a tire and rolled over, killing him instantly. (Other delegates sustained minor injuries, including a broken nose and broken rib.)

6. Gene Stoltzfus, e-mail, Sept 11, 2007. He noted that in CPT's early years, the organization did not endorse many other peacemaking ventures. He also wrote that he had wanted to send CPT delegations to Iraq for the entire sanctions period, but had to give up that idea because CPT lacked the staff to carry it out.

7. CPTnet, "Tea with the Muhtasibs," Dec 8, 1996. CPTer Jim Loney visited this shelter in 2003 and reported seeing images of bodies seared into the walls and floor. CPTnet, "Iraq: Things are not as they seem, part 1," Feb 17, 2003.

8. Before the first delegation in October 2002, CPT put out a "Wake Up Call" on Iraq, urging its constituent churches to bang pots and pans at federal buildings, among other acts of resistance, to alert people to the danger of the war. CPTnet, "Urgent Action: Wake Up Call," Sept 27, 2002.

9. Unicef estimated in 1999 that out of the one million Iraqis who died as a result of the sanctions, half were children. "Iraq surveys show 'humanitarian emergency.'" See also CPTnet, Jane Pritchard, "Mosul, Iraq: Children's Hospital visit," Feb 25, 2003. Delegate John Worrell wrote about a pre-war hospital visit in CPTnet, "Iraq: Why Don't They Hate Me?" Nov 27, 2002. A version of this article that appeared in the fall 2002 *Signs of the Times* was used by a US border guard as an excuse to deny CPTer Matthew Bailey-Dick, a Canadian citizen, entrance into the US. Bailey-Dick had been returning to seminary in Indiana after a speaking engagement in Ontario. See Kern, "A clash of views."

Weber, who had served as a reservist in Chiapas and Hebron, had become increasingly disturbed, as war with Iraq increasingly seemed to become inevitable. He told his wife, Lena, "I just can't sit back and do nothing. What would I say to my grandchildren?" In an interview with a local paper before he left, he said, "We are going to suffer along with the Iraqis. It's an opportunity to light a candle instead of cursing the dark."

His wife, Lena, said later that whenever they approached a taxi stand in Nicaragua and Mexico, he always chose the man driving the most dilapidated taxi, figuring that the driver was the one that needed the money most. In the same spirit of aiding the impoverished, Weber went to a tailor in Baghdad to order a new suit. Jim Loney picked up the suit and paid the tailor upon return to Baghdad and Weber's body was clothed in it for the funeral. Doug Pritchard wrote of the service:

We have now accompanied our dear friend George Weber along another step of his journey home.

Twenty-one CPTers and partners participated in the funeral service at his hometown of Chesley ON yesterday [January 13]. It was a very snowy, blowy day with all schools and some roads closed but most people were able to get there. . . .

The church was full with about 300 attending. At the front was the simple made-to-measure casket he had traveled in from Iraq topped by lovely photo of him and a green CPT Directory with the "Getting in Way" Logo prominent. . . .

After the service, the CPTers donned their red hats and formed one side of an honour guard from the bottom of the steps of the church to the hearse and George's Rotary Club colleagues formed the other side. The pallbearers brought the casket down the steps, through our honour guard, and into the hearse. We then followed the hearse on foot for several blocks through the snowstorm to the funeral home where his body would wait until the roads were clear enough to drive to the crematorium in Owen Sound.

Summarizing the impact Weber's death had on CPT as an organization, Gene Stoltzfus wrote,

We all have known that this moment in our life together would come. We could not have predicted how it would come or that our

fallen brother could provide us with such a modest, mature and well timed witness to what all of us aspire to be.¹⁰

By March 2003, the invasion of Iraq by the George W. Bush administration was clearly going to happen. Working under the auspices of the Iraq Peace Teams¹¹—which was an outgrowth of the Voices in the Wilderness organization—the team¹² sent out an Urgent Action on March 6, 2003, that listed the locations, e.g., water treatment and electrical plants, schools etc., where they and Iraq Peace Team members would be when the bombing started.¹³ On March 15, the team put out the following letter, à la the epistles of the Apostle Paul, to churches in Canada and the United States.

A Letter to the churches in Canada and the United States from the Christian Peacemaker Team in Iraq

10. CPTnet, "Basrah, Iraq: CPT reservist killed," Jan 6, 2006; CPTnet, "Chicago/Toronto: Memories of George Weber," Jan 17, 2002. See also CPT "George Weber Memorial." Initially, the UN sanctions against Iraq forbade the "export" of Weber's body. Canadian officials got permission, based on "humanitarian" reasons, to transport the body to Amman on January 9, 2002. See CPTnet, "Baghdad, Iraq: Body of CPTer killed," Jan 10, 2002. The Al Wathba water treatment plant in Baghdad, where CPT/IPT had encamped during the 2003 bombings, still, as of this writing, bears the plaque by a date palm planted there: "Tree of Life, in honor of George Weber, 1930–2003, CPT volunteer, and CPT presence here during 'Shock and Awe' March–April, 2003." CPTnet releases: "Iraq: Remembering George Weber," Jan 13, 2004; "Iraq Update: July 29–August 1, 2004," Aug 10, 2004; Peggy Gish, "Iraq Reflection: Progress with water and peace," Aug 24, 2004.

11. When asked how CPT came to work under IPT, Kathy Kelly wrote in a Jan 6, 2007 email:

In August of 2002, a group of Voices activists met in Chicago and decided to move ahead with a commitment to form a team intent on remaining in Iraq throughout a war that we hoped we could prevent. We wrote documents seeking permission for the team and began building outreach, developing a careful screening process for potential participants . . .

In the fall of 2002, CPT decided to begin sending people recruited and prepared by CPT to join the Iraq Peace Team. CPT was reliant on Voices for visas, and it was important to understand that ultimately Voices would be responsible for anyone who came to Iraq and that it would be quite important to assure that people understood basic guidelines and were in agreement with them.

12. Cliff Kindy, Peggy Gish, Lisa Martens, Scott Kerr, Betty Scholten, and Stewart Vriesinga.

13. CPTnet, "Iraq Urgent Action: Write and/or call your Representatives," Mar 6, 2003.

...As members of Christian Peacemaker Teams, from both Canada and U.S., we have found a warm welcome in the homes of Iraqis. We have visited the institutions that shape this society. Iraqi people understand that the low intensity war of sanctions and bombings in the “no fly” zones is perpetrated by our very own government. Yet they seem to have the moral and spiritual resources to treat us graciously even though our bombings and sanctions have destroyed their economy for more than a decade, killing hundreds of thousands of people, many of them children . . .

In order to live out our convictions, we will continue to be prayerfully present in Iraq and develop friendships with Iraqi people even in the event of an escalation of violence here. We don't know what we might experience in a bombing or occupation, but we plan to accompany civilians in specific places of our choosing. In an occupation, we will be on the streets, documenting and trying to prevent human rights abuses. At this time, the Iraqi government is not restricting us or determining where we go or what we do. We will continue to cry out against the apostasy of war in this setting of God's creation.

We invite you, sisters and brothers, to the nonviolent life of Jesus. From prayer and fasting, find the strength to stop paying for war. From joy in discipleship, hold fast to the evangelistic boldness to invite soldiers and corporate technocrats to abandon their posts. From the faith that teaches us that we are all sisters and brothers, believe in the reality of barriers broken down between all enemies. Live in Easter hope.

Then Jesus said to them, “Go out into the whole world and proclaim the Good News to all creation.” Mark 16: 15¹⁴

At 4:00 a.m. on March 20, 2003, the deadline that U.S. President George W. Bush had given for Saddam Hussein and his sons to leave Iraq expired. The team in Baghdad celebrated communion and prayed for the security of all people. About an hour and a half later, team members began hearing aircraft overhead, sirens, and explosions. Within the first hour of the bombing, CPT Iraq team members Lisa Martens and Stewart Vriesinga were on CTV national television across Canada reporting live from Baghdad.¹⁵

14. CPTnet, “Iraq: A letter to the churches,” Mar 15, 2003. See also the statement that CPT sent as part of the Iraq Peace Team to the US, Iraqi, and other governments (as well as “Supporters, Press, and interested parties”): CPTnet, “Iraq: Christian Peacemaker Team statement,” Mar 17, 2004.

15. Doug Pritchard, who was CPT Canada Coordinator and the contact person for

Once the barrage was over later that morning, Peggy Gish, Betty Scholten, and Cliff Kindy set up a tent at the Al Wathba Water Treatment Centre, which was near an electrical plant and provided water to one sixth of the city, including a nearby hospital complex. The banner at the campsite read, "To Bomb this Site is a War Crime/Geneva Convention, Article 54.)" Scott Kerr, Lisa Martens, and Stuart Vriesinga and IPT member Father Jerry Zawada stayed at the Al Daar hotel in a civilian neighborhood. Martens concluded an e-mail reporting these events with, "Be outraged. Make Peace."¹⁶

Over the course of the next six days, eleven updates appeared on CPTnet, most based on phone conversations team members had with Gene Stoltzfus and Doug Pritchard about the force of the bombings, the presence of life on the streets and what sort of wounds local hospitals were treating. On March 26, after a communication center was hit, the coordinators lost phone contact with the team. CPTers and IPTers, who had intermingled in groups that were staying at different hotels, also lost contact with each other.

Because one group could not call a taxi, they walked to a team meeting and examined the site of the destroyed communications tower on the way, after checking with a police officer who said they could do so. They were taking pictures of a bombed-out restaurant across the street when Iraqi security personnel arrived and took them to a police station. They had to stay there for about five hours, whereabouts unknown to the increasingly worried CPTers and IPTers in other groups. A Mr. Zaid, the team's Iraqi government "handler" finally met the detained group at the station and ordered its members out of the country the next day.¹⁷

Iraqis had been burning oil around Baghdad to make U.S. reconnaissance photography more difficult and the security personnel may have thought the team was going to submit the photos to U.S. intelligence. Kerr

the Iraq Team at the time, wrote in his comments on a draft of this chapter:

Providing this alternative media voice was a large part of the team's work with a couple people on the phone at all times doing interviews with media from around the world (although few from the US as I recall) while other team members were on the street gathering the latest info. It was at this time that we did a major overhaul of the CPT website with Diane Janzen's help in order to make it much more useful, informative and up-to-date for media and inquirers.

16. CPTnet, "Iraq: War report from team in Baghdad."

17. Cliff Kindy e-mail, Jan 8, 2007.

noted in a communication with the author that Iraqi government personnel might also have wanted to protect team members from someone who had lost a house or family member from taking revenge.¹⁸

Zaid told the remaining CPTers, a recently arrived CPT delegation, and IPTers they now had to stay all in the same hotel. Since part of the Iraq team's *raison d'être* was to stay in as many places as possible to protect vulnerable sites, some team members and delegates chose to leave with those designated for expulsion on the morning of March 29, 2003.

Because the U.S. and British forces were actively bombing the road, the drivers of the three vehicles in which delegates and team members were riding decided to spread them apart and drive as fast as they could. Once again, a tire blew in the third vehicle in the convoy and the driver lost control.¹⁹ Because of the distance between the vehicles, the people in the first two did not observe the accident.

After the crash, Weldon Nisly and Cliff Kindy were bleeding heavily. Delegation member Doug Hostetter reported that they were "just beginning to panic," when an Iraqi civilian car approached and the driver packed them in and took them to the town of Rutba (population about twenty thousand), about 140 kilometers east of the Jordanian Border. Although the town had no apparent military structures, much of it had been destroyed in the bombing, including a children's hospital in which two young patients had died. At an approximately 20 x 20 foot clinic, the town gathered to welcome their foreign guests and read the leaflets the delegates handed out explaining who they were. A doctor who spoke perfect English diagnosed a broken thumb, several broken ribs and other possible fractures in Weldon Nisly. He apologized that Kindy would have to receive ten stitches to the head without anesthesia and that he could not take them by ambulance to Jordan under the circumstances.²⁰ Later, when the two other cars returned and found the group, the doctor and clinic staff refused an offer of payment as the entourage left, saying, "We

18. CPTnet, "Amman, Jordan: Report from CPTer Scott Kerr," Apr 2, 2003; Scott Kerr, e-mail, Feb 16, 2007; Cliff Kindy, e-mails, Jan 29 and Feb 17, 2007.

19. Gene Stoltzfus, in a September 11, 2007 e-mail, wrote that at the time he heard that metal left on the road from the bombings had probably punctured the tire.

20. When members of the group resumed their trip to Jordan, they saw a bombed-out ambulance not far down the road. CPTnet, Hostetter, "Welcome at Rutba," Mar 30, 2003.

treat everyone in our clinic: Muslim, Christian, Iraqi or American. We are all part of the same family, you know.”²¹

On April 1, the remaining team and delegation members left Baghdad for Amman. In addition to their Iraqi handlers no longer allowing them to move freely, they realized that they were using food and other resources in short supply. “Everyone in Baghdad is making cutbacks, so we decided to cut back too,” Scott Kerr told CPT staff in a phone report to CPT staff.²²

Team members returned to Baghdad on April 16 and 18, 2003, and immediately began renewing acquaintances and assessing the damage. Via satellite phone, Scott told Doug Pritchard,

It is terrible here. It is very sad. I couldn't believe the level of devastation as we approached the outskirts of Baghdad with destroyed vehicles and buildings everywhere. People are walking around dazed not knowing what to do. Every public building has been bombed or burned. I see buildings blown away or with holes right through them from one side to the other. All the records are gone—birth records, marriage certificates, school reports, hospital files. Some public buildings were bombed by the US. Some were

21. *Ibid.* Gene Stoltzfus, in a September 11, 2007 e-mail, wrote:

CPT Chicago learned of the event during a Steering Committee meeting in Chicago. AP and Israeli Army news reported that people had been killed and hotel staff where CPT stayed in Amman called our office to say that something terrible had happened to the CPT vehicle . . . Because the trickle of news was already on the airways, we immediately called the families to inform them that there had been an accident; we did not confirm wounds or fatalities because we did not have confirmation. From approximately 4:30 in the afternoon until approximately 9:00 p.m., we worked the phones and prayed. Every hour I called the hotel in Amman to find out if they knew more or if the group had arrived. The Steering Committee continued to meet and pray. Finally, at 9 p.m. when I called the Hotel, the group had arrived and everyone was injured but alive. I asked to speak to Cliff Kindy who came on the phone to say that they arrived at the hotel to a feeding frenzy of the press from all over the world . . . [He] then proceeded to describe the accident, the help in Rutbah and the hard work of evacuating Weldon Nisly to Amman by using a series of four ambulances which either broke down, ran out of gas or had other difficulties. . . . We then called the families and prepared a press release profoundly grateful that we had been cautious, not gone with the reports that the press had sent out and stuck by our procedures of confirming all things as much as possible.

22. CPTnet, “Amman, Jordan: Report from CPTer Scott Kerr,” Apr 1, 2003.

destroyed by Baath party officials covering their tracks. It completes the destruction of Iraqi history and culture. This started with the Gulf War and twelve years of sanctions, and now the rest has been destroyed. The history of the country and its people is gone. . . . Every day there are large gatherings of protestors outside the Palestine Hotel where the US administration is based. There are lots of street demonstrations elsewhere too and they are getting bigger. Some thank the US for coming but now they want the US to leave. People are tired and desperate. They are angry and explode at each other in a way I never saw before.”²³

The team’s first focus in the conquest’s aftermath was the piles of unexploded ordnance (missiles, bombs, grenades) left all over the city that were injuring curious children and other civilians.²⁴ When team members tried to alert U.S. forces so they could clean up the sites, or enclose them or mark them in some way, they received frustrating responses. “Each time, we have made the report, the Army personnel have said either we should make more reports, or that the munitions are partly burned and too dangerous for them to touch or that they have to wait for engineers or that the site is not a priority because the munitions are too unstable to transport or that we should make more reports,” wrote Lisa Martens.²⁵

After the team had spent almost two weeks in a fruitless effort to get the U.S. military to clean up these sites, they visited a four-year-old boy, Ali, whom a bright yellow cluster bomblet had blinded. A doctor who was treating the boy asked the team during their visit to the hospital why guarding the Oil Ministry was more of a priority for the U.S. than cleaning up the weapons sites. Since U.S. officers had told the team they could not mark off the sites because they did not have orange tape left, Lisa Martens wrote at the end of one release, “God help me, I would like to shut with bright coloured tape the mouths of Major Colin Mason, Lieutenant Wheeler, Jay Garner and several others, and sit them down in Ali’s room for a while to listen.”²⁶

23. CPTnet, “Iraq Update: April 19, 2003.”

24. For a more comprehensive list of their concerns, see CPTnet, “Iraq: Questions from CPT Iraq,” Apr 30, 2003.

25. CPTnet, “Iraq: Not a priority,” May 6, 2006.

26. Ibid. Wheeler’s response to Martens, and her follow-up to that response, appeared in CPTnet releases, “Iraq: Letter from US Army Captain,” Jan 2, 2004; and “Iraq: Letter from CPTer Lisa Martens,” Jan 2, 2004.

Accordingly, the team's first action after the war was to encourage CPT's U.S. constituents to send pieces or rolls of brightly colored tape to their congressional representatives. In the accompanying letter, the team asked people to tell these representatives,

I urge you to use your influence to ensure that international or locally-developed demolition teams are deployed to Baghdad and other areas in need, along with plenty of bright-coloured tape. This will assure Iraqis that the U.S. values their lives and the lives of their children more highly than Iraq's oil.²⁷

THE OCCUPATION

The team soon found other reasons to intervene with the U.S. military. Between 2003 and 2004 they put out more than three hundred releases, documenting their accompaniment of Iraqis as individuals and during nonviolent demonstrations. As increasing numbers of Iraqis began approaching the team and telling them terrible stories of what coalition forces had done to their families during home raids, the team members also began documenting human rights abuses and atrocities²⁸ committed by coalition forces and their Iraqi trainees and the indifference of U.S. officers to Iraqis seeking redress. One officer, a Colonel Brennan, would tell them bluntly, "The U.S. Forces say no property was confiscated. I would trust an American soldier ten times more than any Iraqi." When they brought Iraqi human rights lawyers to talk to Colonel Nate Sassaman about abuses his unit had committed, he told CPTers the lawyers were frauds who were

27. CPTnet, "Iraq Action Alert: Send Coloured Tape," May 1, 2003. This release lists the efforts the team had put into getting one site taken care of since April 22, 2003. Prior April updates include information about other ordnance sites. The unavailability of the tape presaged the controversy Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was to ignite in December 2004 when he visited troops in Kuwait. Army Specialist Thomas Wilson asked him, "Why do we soldiers have to dig through local landfills for pieces of scrap metal and compromised ballistic glass to up-armor our vehicles, and why don't we have those resources readily available to us?" Rumsfeld replied, "As you know, you go to war with the army you have, not the army you might want or wish to have at a later time." See "Soldier's question puts Rumsfeld on spot."

28. See, for example, CPTnet, Holmes, "Iraq: U.S. soldiers kill four of their own," Dec 12, 2003; CPTnet, Cliff Kindy, "Iraq: CPTers investigate November 22 killings in Al Jazeera," Dec 27, 2003. See also Kern, "The rest of the story."

using team members. The day after the meeting, Sassaman's unit raided one of the lawyer's homes and detained him and his five brothers.²⁹

In November and December 2003, the team began handing out leaflets to US soldiers they met with the following message:

Like all human beings, Iraqis have a right to just treatment and respect. Yet many Iraqi families have shared with us their stories of U.S. troops violating their human rights and dignity. As a result, support is growing among Iraqis for violent resistance.

If any Coalition soldier mistreats an Iraqi citizen, it endangers all Coalition soldiers. For your own safety and for the well being of Iraqi citizens, we invite you to abide by these principles taken from the Geneva Conventions, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and related humanitarian and human rights law:

1. Soldiers have a duty to protect civilians. Care must be taken not to harm those who are unarmed, or women, children, and the elderly or sick. Force should be used only when absolutely necessary and in proportion to the level of force threatened.
2. Coalition Forces, as the Occupying Power in Iraq, are ultimately responsible for ensuring that family members of detainees are notified as to where they will be detained.
3. It is against international law to punish a group of people collectively, (such as reprisal assaults on a family, neighborhood, or town) because individuals within that area have attacked Coalition Forces. Only those who have are guilty of wrongdoing should be punished.
4. Soldiers shall respect the property of civilians. If property is confiscated, a receipt must be issued with explicit instructions for how it may be retrieved.

Iraqis detained by Coalition Forces have been held for months without charges, without legal counsel, and without contact with their families. The loss of husbands and fathers and the income and security they provide creates terrible hardship for families. Often men are detained on the basis of false information and malicious

29. CPTnet, "Iraq Update: January 1–17, 2004," Jan 23, 2004; Slater, e-mails, Jan 23 and 24, 2007; CPTnet, Cliff Kindy, "Iraq: U.S. military detains lawyer," Feb 10, 2004. Sassaman's career in the military would end after his superiors discovered he covered up evidence that men in his unit had thrown two captive Iraqis into the Tigris River and one of them had drowned. Chernus, "Is Anyone Responsible"; Filkins, "The Fall of the Warrior King."

rumors. Please remember that suspicion is not proof and that the men detained may be innocent of all wrongdoing. . . .

You can be held liable for your actions in Iraq even if you are obeying orders from your commanding officer.

When you return home, will you be able to tell your families that you acted with honor and compassion?³⁰

2004

In the first week of 2004, the Iraq team released a sixteen-page report presenting seventy-two case studies of abuses that coalition forces had committed against Iraqi families during home raids that resulted in the detention of family members. The release announcing the availability of the report provides a good summary of the team's foci for 2003–2005.³¹

Violent House Raids

During these raids, soldiers seized men of the household almost indiscriminately and abused terrified family members. In a society where women covered their hair for modesty's sake, for a foreign soldier to see not only their hair but the women's bodies through their night clothes caused immense shame.

Family Visits with Prisoners

Many of the releases from 2003 and 2004 detail CPTers accompanying Iraqis to the U.S. authorities and trying to find out where the U.S. military was holding their family members. Often, the authorities gave the family wrong or misleading directions, and the families had no way to inquire about the detainees' well-being or whether they were getting necessary medications. Given that many detainees were injured during home raids, family members were especially anxious to know whether they were receiving treatment.

30. CPTnet, "Iraq: Text of Human Rights Leaflet," Dec 1, 2006; CPTnet, Milne, "CPTers leaflet," Dec 1, 2003.

31. CPTnet, "Iraq: CPT summary report," Jan 6, 2004; CPT Iraq, "Report and Recommendations."

Theft of Property

Confiscating jewelry and money from homes that Coalition Forces raided was one of the most underreported aspects of U.S. troop behavior in Iraq. In interview after interview, Iraq team members heard families tell about soldiers taking away their valuables. In one case, troops even sacked a church built in 1668, breaking the walls and taking church funds and the passports of the church workers.³²

The Coalition Provisional Authority maintained soldiers had security reasons for confiscating property, and that owners would be recompensed after investigations, providing they had a receipt. In their report, team members wrote, “Team members have not heard of any instances in which Coalition forces gave the owners receipts for confiscated property.” When they accompanied families to the Iraqi Assistance Center (IAC) to apply for compensation, the military authorities there would give them no proof that they had made the application, so they could not follow-up.

This callous disregard for the needs of already impoverished people inspired Allan Slater to do an ad hoc hunger strike at the Iraqi Assistance center. After U.S. military personnel closed the IAC an hour early on January 8, 2004—while twenty-four Iraqis were still waiting—Slater said he would refuse to leave the building until the soldiers helped them. Still waiting there at 1:00 p.m. the next day, he told the personnel that he would stay until he had a chance to talk to Coalition Provisional Authority administrator Paul Bremer or commander of coalition forces Lt. General Ricardo Sanchez about soldiers confiscating money, jewelry, and other property. Slater had been accompanying three men swept up in a September 30, 2003, house raid that Coalition Forces (CF) admitted later was a mistake. Despite that acknowledgement, however, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) had not returned the Iraqis’ property. Frustrated by how the IAC had been stringing the men along, Slater decided to fast until it addressed their concerns. However, once he realized he would not be able to do so outside of the IAC, he gave the idea up.³³

32. CPTnet, Slater and Chandler, “CPT documents sacking of church,” Nov 28, 2003. For other examples of looting, see CPTnet releases: “Iraq Update: May 13, 2003 10 p.m./2p.m. EDT,” May 13, 2003; “Iraq Update: June 13–17, 2003,” June 18, 2003; “Iraq Update: June 20–23, 2003,” June 27, 2003; Milne, “Iraq: Operation Iraqi Freedom,” Oct 6, 2003; “Iraq: Testimony of an Iraqi minor,” Nov 3, 2003; “Iraq: Testimony of Saddam Saleh Al Rawi,” June 2, 2004.

33. CPTnet, “Iraq: CPTer Allan Slater holding sit-in,” Jan 8, 2004; CPTnet, “Iraq: CPTer

In its report, the team wrote,

CPT urges Coalition forces to cease unnecessary confiscation of property, to issue receipts when confiscation is necessary, and to return all property that has been unjustly confiscated. . . . Many people who have applied for compensation for damaged and confiscated property have not received any written proof of their application. CPT urges the CPA to document and follow through on all requests for compensation, and to give families copies of all documents relating to compensation.³⁴

Detentions of Innocent Persons and Mistreatment of Detainees

Often home raids resulted in coalition forces seizing every adolescent and adult male in a home or cluster of homes. In its report, the team noted that released detainees had reported that the military had put them in crowded tents without proper clothes or toilet facilities. CPTers had themselves seen soldiers leading handcuffed prisoners around with plastic bags over their heads.

The detainees and their families were especially bitter that the coalition forces were freeing ordinary criminals—who were taking advantage of the social upheaval to commit their crimes—to make space for the mostly innocent detainees.

Detainee issues would continue to be the primary focus of the team for the next two years.

PRISONER ABUSE SCANDAL

The January 2004 report about abuses committed during home raids received modest news coverage in the international media. Virtually no one came to the press conferences CPT held in Washington and Toronto to announce the availability of the report.³⁵ A team update covering the

Alan Slater begins hunger strike," Jan 10, 2004. In a January 23, 2007 e-mail, Slater wrote, "We were not aware of the interest the fast was generating in North America. That was unfortunate because I had been fasting long enough that my body had adjusted quite well. I was feeling fine."

34. CPTnet, "Iraq: CPT summary report," Jan 6, 2004. CPT Iraq, "Report and Recommendations."

35. Doug Pritchard, in his comments on a draft of this chapter, wrote:

We also sent it to legislators and officials. Gene says a few US legislative aides began calling him about it. At this time, we learned later, the US