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At around 5:30 a.m. local time in Baghdad on March 20, 2003, air raid sirens were heard in Baghdad as the U.S. invasion began. Within the hour, President George W. Bush gave a nationally televised speech from the Oval Office announcing the war had begun. The attack came on the false pretext that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was hiding weapons of mass destruction, and despite worldwide protest and a lack of authorization from the United Nations Security Council. We spend today's show with two Iraqis looking back at how the unprovoked U.S. invasion devastated Iraq and helped destabilize much of the Middle East. Feurat Alani is a French Iraqi writer and documentarian who was based in Baghdad from 2003 to 2008. His recent piece for The Washington Post is headlined “The Iraq War helped destroy what it meant to be an Iraqi.” Sinan Antoon was born and raised in Baghdad. He is also a writer, as well as a poet, translator and associate professor at New York University. His latest piece appears in The Guardian, headlined “A million lives later, I cannot forgive what American terrorism did to my country, Iraq.”

AMY GOODMAN: It was 20 years ago today when the U.S. invaded Iraq on the false pretext that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was hiding weapons of mass destruction. The attack came despite worldwide protest and the lack of authorization from the United Nations Security Council. At around 5:30 a.m. local time in Baghdad, March 20th, 2003, air raid sirens were heard in Baghdad as the U.S. invasion began. Within the hour, President George W. Bush gave a nationally televised speech from the Oval Office announcing the war had begun.

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH: My fellow citizens, at this hour, American and coalition forces are in the early stages of military operations to disarm Iraq, to free its people and to defend the world from grave danger. On my orders, coalition forces have begun striking selected targets of military importance to undermine Saddam Hussein's ability to wage war. These are opening stages of what will be a broad and concerted campaign. ...

I want Americans and all the world to know that coalition forces will make every effort to spare innocent civilians from harm. ...

We come to Iraq with respect for its citizens, for their great civilization and for the religious faiths they practice. We have no ambition in Iraq, except to remove a threat and restore control of that country to its own people.

AMY GOODMAN: And this is how we began our [broadcast](#) on *Democracy Now!* 20 years ago today, March 20th, 2003.

AMY GOODMAN: Welcome to *Democracy Now!*, *The War and Peace Report*. I'm Amy Goodman. Just about 9:30 p.m. Eastern Standard Time last night, the U.S. military began an unprovoked attack on Iraq. Air raid sirens sounded throughout Baghdad just before the sun rose. Anti-aircraft fire filled the sky, and explosions shook the city. Pentagon officials said over 30 Tomahawk cruise missiles were launched from warships. Two stealth bombers each dropped two one-ton bombs. It's not clear what has been hit or the extent of the casualties. The Iraqi News Agency has just reported there are 14 injured and one dead. Iraq responded by firing three missiles into northern Kuwait, according to the U.S. military — that could not be independently confirmed.

The attack was not the beginning of the expected massive, what the U.S. government calls “shock and awe” campaign. Instead, it was a targeted strike on Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. It is not yet clear whether the assassination attempt was successful. ...

Hours before the attack, Senator Robert Byrd, the oldest voice in the U.S. Congress, condemned the Bush administration's war plans. The West Virginia Democrat said, “Today I weep for my country. No more is the image of America one of strong, yet benevolent peacekeeper. ... Around the globe, our friends mistrust us, our word is disputed, our intentions are questioned.” Byrd continued, “We flaunt our superpower status with arrogance. ... After war has ended, the United States will have to rebuild much more than the country of Iraq. We will have to rebuild America's image around the globe.”

Around the world, international leaders condemned the U.S. war. Top officials from France, Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Greece, Malaysia, Indonesia and New Zealand were among the countries opposing the attack.

AMY GOODMAN: That was an excerpt from our coverage 20 years ago today of the start of the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

Last week, the Costs of War Project estimated over 550,000 people have been killed in Iraq and Syria since 2003. Some estimates put the death toll in Iraq at over 2 million. Today, the U.S. still has some 2,500 troops in Iraq.

Well, we'll spend the broadcast today with two Iraqis looking back at how the unprovoked U.S. invasion devastated their country and helped destabilize much of the Middle East.

Feurat Alani is a French Iraqi journalist who was based in Baghdad from 2003 to 2008. He travels to Iraq frequently. He's made several documentaries, including *Flavors of Iraq*. His first novel is just out in French, titled in English,

I Remember Fallujah

. His recent

[piece](#)

for

The Washington Post

is headlined “The Iraq War helped destroy what it meant to be an Iraqi.” He's joining us from Paris, France.

And here in New York, Sinan Antoon. He is an Iraqi poet, novelist, translator, scholar, born and raised in Baghdad, associate professor at New York University. His [piece](#) in *The Guardian* is just out; it's headlined “A million lives later, I cannot forgive what American terrorism did to my country, Iraq.” He co-directed a documentary about post-2003 Iraq titled

About Baghdad

. A collection of his Arabic poetry will appear in English this summer under the title

Postcards from the Underworld

. His most recent novel is titled

The Book of Collateral Damage

.

We welcome you both to *Democracy Now!* Sinan Antoon, let's begin with you. Your reflections on this day, 20 years after the U.S. invaded Iraq? Talk about what happened to your country.

SINAN ANTOON: Thank you for having me, Amy.

I mean, what happened in the last 20 years is catastrophic by any measure. If you look at the figures of the people who have been displaced because of this invasion, a total of 8 million Iraqis had to leave their homes; 1.2 million are internally displaced in Iraq. There have been at least — well, figures vary, but 1 million deaths. We have 4 million orphans. We have an economy in shambles. We have a country that is ruled by militias, and a country that frequently is in the top most corrupt countries in the world, with all kinds of economic and social problems, and one country where climate change is manifesting its destructive effects in horrendous ways.

And it's important, I think, since we are in the United States, for citizens to remember the amount of lies and how easily they were sold this war, and, as I mention in my article, how the support for the war continued for several years. And until recently, a lot of people still think that somehow Iraq was involved with 9/11. And I think it says something, of course, about the corporate media, about how information is disseminated to its citizens — sorry. And except for *Democracy Now!* and a few other outlets, the media itself, of course, and, you know, the scribes are all complicit in selling this war and in continuing to give us these happy stories.

Just before coming into the studio out here, I was watching MSNBC, and one of its reporters was in Baghdad saying how great Baghdad is now because there is tourism, and going to one of Saddam Hussein's previous palaces, which was turned into an American University in Baghdad, which is a private university, and telling us, “Oh, it's a coed university,” as if Iraq did not have coed universities for decades. I can go on, of course, but I'll stop here.

NERMEEN SHAIKH: Feurat Alani, if you could also respond and give us your reflections on this day as we mark 20 years since the U.S. invasion of Iraq?

FEURAT ALANI: Yes. Thank you. And first of all, thank you for the invitation, and I'm really honored to share the show with Sinan Antoon, who is an inspiration to me. As he relentlessly said, the figures are enough to explain how this invasion — I refuse the term “war,” because a lot of people and observers are talking about the Iraq War. It was an Iraq invasion, illegal, and its consequences on many, many points are a disaster.

But what is really important to me as a French of Iraqi descent is to remember that Iraq was a country. Iraq was a concept. We didn't know anything about the sectarian view that the U.S. brought in 2003. Of course, it was in history, but Iraqis used to describe themselves as Iraqis. There was a sense of identity, of citizenship. When I was a kid, I had the chance to go to Iraq. I was 9 the first time, in '89. It was the only year of peace from the last 40 years. And the country, I discovered, was the opposite of all the clichés I had about the country, and at the same time I was rational of the nature of the regime. But I still remember, and I refuse to forget, that Iraq was safe. Iraq had a daily life that was comparable sometimes to the life I had in France.

Again, I would like to remind that Iraq was, of course, a dictatorship, and it was difficult or impossible to go against the regime. People were jailed, killed or silenced. My father was an opponent to the regime, and he left Iraq in the '70s, so we know that and we knew that at home back in France.

But the idea that 20 years later we still are talking about how Iraq now is a better place, how Iraq is a democracy, when it's even almost impossible to have a sense of what the Iraqi citizenship is today. Iraqis are described with their sect or origin or ethnicity. Iraqis today are described as Sunnis and Shia, Kurds and Arabs, Christians and Muslims, which is something I would oppose to what Iraq was. And to me, 20 years later, Iraq is part of a collective amnesia. And I think it's very important to highlight how Iraq was and maybe to talk about the future of Iraq.

NERMEEN SHAIKH: Well, Feurat Alani, if you could talk about — I mean, your [piece](#), you've just elaborated on what exactly has happened to Iraqi identity. To what do you attribute the fact that Iraq came to be seen along purely sectarian lines and that now, as you say, people continue to identify as Sunni, Shia, Kurd, etc.?

FEURAT ALANI: You know, when the American Army and when the U.S. administration of George W. Bush invaded Iraq, they came with the idea that Iraqis, again, were not Iraqis. They were qualified by their sects. So, from the day after the fall of the regime, we have seen on TV people that all Iraqis didn't really know, the Iraqi elite that came with the U.S. Army, representing a concept of Iraq through sects and religion and confessions.

And so, we have to remind that everything was destroyed as a country. The Iraqi Army was disbanded. The institutions were dismantled. Iraq went from a very — a dictatorship to a security and political vacuum that was filled with those ideas that Iraqis discovered to be really clear. The concept of dividing the people, of talking about a majority and a minority, to me, was really dangerous, because this security and political vacuum I was talking about was filled with people having a short-term vision about Iraq with their own interests, with probably revenge against the regime, and again, this idea, this very binary vision of Iraq, that the Iraqi people was divided in two, like people who supported Saddam and people who were against. Of course, it was much more complex than that.

And a lot of mistakes came after the invasion of Iraq. Paul Bremer, who was the American administrator of the country, did so many mistakes by, again, dismantling the Army, talking about de-Baathification, not allowing a lot of Iraqis to express themselves, to be part of a common project. I clearly remember that all Iraqis — Sunnis or Shia, Christian or Muslim — wanted to be part of something, wanted to be part of a common project. But the system brought by the U.S. mindset at that time were completely against that. And this is something that needs to be highlighted today, if you want to understand how Iraq is divided today.

AMY GOODMAN: Speaking of that division, I'd like to go back to 2006, when then-Senator Joe Biden co-authored a *New York Times* [opinion piece](#) headlined “Unity Through Autonomy in Iraq.” In the piece, he called for what's been termed a “soft partition” of Iraq, calling for the establishment of, quote, “three largely autonomous regions with a viable central government in Baghdad. The Kurdish, Sunni and Shiite regions would each be responsible for their own domestic laws, administration and internal security. ... Baghdad would become a federal zone, while densely populated areas of mixed populations would receive both multisectarian and international police protection.” Sinan Antoon, can you respond?

SINAN ANTOON: I mean, I remember that, and I actually wrote a response to that. You know, it's vintage colonial vision and attitude. Mr. Biden from Delaware co-writes a piece telling Iraqis how their country should be.

And at the time, I mean, despite the corruption and the sectarian sentiments of so many Iraqi politicians — they were vying, and they were in conflict, and they were even fighting — but none of them had asked for this type of division, actually, except for the Kurds, but that's a separate issue. But these ideas were internalized then by lot of Iraqi politicians to start calling for a separate zone for this and that, and, of course, it would be only an excuse for even more organized corruption and more siphoning of Iraq's resources.

But I should say that something that I’ve been thinking about and talking about is, you know, the epistemic violence of American occupation of Iraq, which is what my friend Feurat, who’s a talented writer that I admire — and I’m happy to be with him on the show — is this destruction and the erosion of an idea of what is to be Iraqi. Of course, every national identity is a composite, and there are always vying narratives. But what 2003 did is it really tried to dismantle the idea of Iraqi nationalism and replace it with all of these other identities.

And thankfully, the 2019 uprising by Iraqi youth men and women who went out on the street was actually the most vociferous, eloquent rejection of the regime that the United States installed. And it was a rejection of everything it stood for. And it showed that it had failed in every respect. It had failed in providing living, dignified conditions for Iraqi citizens, despite all the wealth. And one of the early slogans of that uprising was “No to Iran, no to the U.S.” because one of the consequences of the U.S. invasion is the disproportionate influence that the Iranian regime has in Iraq, through its militias, supporting the Iraqi militias and others.

And the other thing is that — what the U.S. invasion did to Iraqi sovereignty. You know, we have U.S. troops, of course, in Iraq. Turkey has troops in northern Iraq, in Kurdistan, and bombs whenever it feels like it. We have massive Iranian influence. And a lot of these U.S. journalists and so-called pundits and experts keep complaining about that. And I remember in the first few weeks of the invasion, there was a news item saying that the Badr Brigades — this is the militia of the — at the time, it was called the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, which later changed its name, which was based in Tehran, of course, because they were exiled and fought by Saddam Hussein. But the Badr militia came into Iraq, 30,000 armed men, and were allowed to enter into Iraq. And as Feurat mentioned, of course, these people went on a rampage, assassinating and killing and exerting vengeance.

So, the other issue was to completely dismantle the state institutions in Iraq and not replace them with functioning institutions. So, disband the Army but never really build a functioning army. And that’s why, when ISIS comes about, which is itself a product of American presence and occupation in Iraq — it was hatched in the U.S. military prisons. When

ISIS

comes about, there is no army to actually fight

ISIS

, because of all of the corruption. And let’s remember who are the people who were sent to be experts to help rebuild the Iraqi Army or the Iraqi police. I forgot his name, but the New York City police chief, who was himself corrupt, was sent to Iraq —

AMY GOODMAN: Bernard Kerik.

SINAN ANTOON: — to supposedly help build the army. Exactly. And, you know —

AMY GOODMAN: Who himself was jailed, in the Bernard Kerik —

SINAN ANTOON: Exactly.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: — Detention Center in Lower Manhattan. They took away the name Bernard Kerik —

SINAN ANTOON: Yes.

AMY GOODMAN: — once he was jailed there.

SINAN ANTOON: Yes. And your viewers should go and look at also how many people who planned and called for the war then went into Iraq as contractors. This was so the elite and those who supported the war did not lose anything. You know, their portfolios tripled. Their investments went up and all of that. And, of course, it's average citizens who paid the price. But — and I just want —

AMY GOODMAN: Sinan, I wanted to follow up on something that you said earlier. And that was when the — after the 9/11 attacks, President Bush immediately started pushing to attack Iraq. And as you said, many people don't realize, understand at the time — I mean, 15 of the 19 hijackers were from Saudi Arabia. A day or two after the attacks, you had President Bush on the Truman Balcony with the man they called “Bandar Bush,” the Saudi ambassador to the United States, smoking cigars together.

But right at that time — we interviewed, soon after, Richard Clarke, the counterterrorism czar, who said that the day after 9/11, President Bush questioned him and other associates at the White House to see if Saddam Hussein did this, see if he’s linked in any way. Clarke was incredulous. He said in his book, *Against All [Enemies]*, “But, Mr. President, al-Qaeda did this.” He said Bush responded, “I know, but see if Saddam was involved. Just look. I want to know any shred.” Clarke added later that he felt they were being intimidated to find a link between the 9/11 attacks and Iraq.

And when the attack on Iraq came in 2003, you had the leading Democrats, Joe Biden, Hillary Clinton, as students were being dragged out of her office in New York — she was senator at the time — she voted for the war in Iraq. Talk about the consensus at that point. There wasn’t a consensus on the ground, but the media was building this consensus for war.

SINAN ANTOON: Well, no, that’s a very important point. And I think, you know, there was a convergence of different waves and factions. Of course, we know that from the early ’90s, the group of neocons had already started this notion of changing the regime in Iraq — of course, not for the benefit of the Iraqis or for any concerns for liberty or freedom, but for geopolitical interests and protecting the interests of Israel and thinking of U.S. hegemony.

And then it converges with Bush’s messianic vision. Let’s remember — I mean, those of us who are old enough remember, but I think younger viewers should realize and should read about the type of messianic, insane vision that Bush thought that he was — you know, that he had a mandate from God. And then there is the lingering issue of his father and the supposed assassination attempt.

But exactly right away after 9/11, both Bush and Rumsfeld were into, you know, “Let’s go and attack Iraq.” So the evidence was manufactured later, and it was very weak and flimsy evidence. So, when so many, until now, are saying, “Had we known back then what we know,” actually, everything was obvious. Those of us who managed to read or who did not have the ideological leaning, it was obvious that there were no weapons of mass destruction and no link with al-Qaeda.

So, the question for U.S. citizens and for others is: Why is it that there was a consensus? And I think it’s this colonial mentality and, frankly, white supremacy that is internalized by so many. And I mention in the article that — this term that the U.S. Army uses in Iraq and Afghanistan, “Indian country.” I mean, in the first few months, I was watching TV, and I saw an embedded

journalist. We have to also think not only of embedded journalists, embedded scholars, even embedded artists. The view in mainstream U.S. culture is so skewed that a film that is actually pro-war, like *The Hurt Locker*, is considered an antiwar film. But the embedded journalist was with a group of U.S. soldiers in a Humvee about to exit a military base that the U.S. had occupied to go into somewhere near Baghdad, and the soldier tells the journalist, “We are now in Indian country.”

And that stayed with me, and I looked into it. And what does it mean? I mean, when — “Indian country,” meaning, you know, lawless land where there are no laws and no civilization. And that, you know, simultaneously, of course, invokes the national U.S. myth about spreading civilization on this continent, and erases genocide and destruction, but also it convinces the soldiers and the viewers that actually they are spreading democracy and civilization. And it extends to everyone. I mean, a lot of journalists, until today, and many years into the war, would ask, “So, did we not do something good in Iraq?” So, where does this assumption that somehow if the U.S. Army goes somewhere, they must do something good? And it’s a complete denial of the colonialism that is ingrained in this view of looking at the world and looking at other parts of the world.

AMY GOODMAN: Sinan Antoon, we’re going to continue this discussion after break, Iraqi poet and author, professor at New York University, and Feurat Alani, French Iraqi journalist. We will also hear from Sinan a poem he will read, and for Feurat to talk about what happened in his city Fallujah, this all, this conversation, as President Putin is indicted for war crimes by the International Criminal Court. We’re looking back 20 years ago today, when President Bush invaded Iraq. Stay with us.

[break]

AMY GOODMAN: “Ghurbah (Longing)” by the Iraqi Canadian musician Nova Emad. This is *Democracy Now!*

, democracynow.org,

The War and Peace Report

. I’m Amy Goodman, with Nermeen Shaikh. Our guests for this hour, on this 20th anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, are two Iraqis: Sinan Antoon, Iraqi poet and author, professor at New York University, and Feurat Alani, the French Iraqi journalist, whose family is from Fallujah. Nermeen?

NERMEEN SHAIKH: Your documentary, titled *Flavors of Iraq*, we'll just go to a clip now in which your character visits the Green Zone in 2011 just before the U.S. troop withdrawal, and your character tells American soldiers there what he thinks of the invasion. Let's go to a clip.

NARRATOR: I told them that freedom can't be forced on people, that they had empowered 1,000 dictators by trying to shoot one, that they had destroyed a country on the basis of a lie in the world, that they had started a war between armed groups supported by foreign powers, that they had done more bad than good, and today the country was in pieces.

U.S. SOLDIER: We had nothing to do here.

NARRATOR: Yes, they had nothing to do here. The Iraq that I dreamed of as a child, the Iraq that my father fled, but loved so much, the Iraq split by the Euphrates River, which I take my name from, that Iraq no longer existed.

NERMEEN SHAIKH: That's a clip from your documentary, *Flavors of Iraq*. If you could talk about that documentary and that section, the clip that we just played?

AMY GOODMAN: Feurat.

FEURAT ALANI: Thank you. Well, the aim of this documentary is, again, to go against this binary vision of Iraq. And that's why I struggled during all my career as a journalist to give a subjective view about the Iraq I know and the Iraq I've seen. And the first city I've seen, along with Baghdad, was Fallujah. Fallujah was not a well-known city before the war. It was just — it still is 50 kilometers west of Baghdad. It was a remote area, very green, along the Euphrates River, which is my name — Feurat is the Euphrates River — because my father used to live around and to play around this river and had good memories. Have you heard anywhere talking about Iraq in a beautiful way? It's very difficult today. I challenge anyone to look for any beautiful picture or image of Iraq. And my aim with this documentary is to remind that. Fallujah was a peaceful city, again, and struggled, like Baghdad, around during the embargo that started in '91 until 2003. The idea, again, is to confront a concept that completely disappeared

when the U.S. invasion happened in Iraq.

And the sequence that you just showed is about maybe the last moments of the U.S. troops occupying Iraq, and I was confronted to the young soldiers, who knew — still knew nothing about the country. And our discussion went around the idea that Iraq was more than Sunni and Shia, more than Baathists and militias. And I was really happy to give them some news about the Iraq I’ve seen. And I was amazed and surprised — sorry — on how the U.S. soldiers knew nothing about the country and still thought that Saddam had a link with al-Qaeda and with the 9/11 attacks.

So, the aim, again, 20 years later, is to describe a concept of Iraq that existed and, hopefully, as Sinan Antoon mentioned, will exist again through this new generation of young people who protested since October 2019, claiming Iraq, going against the idea that Iraq is between the U.S. and Iran. The first sentences in the streets were around this type of phrases: “We are all Iraqis. We want to get back our country.” And this is the only hope I can see today, after 20 years going back to Iraq and to cover the news there, the only hope among all the destruction, all the consequences on every level of the Iraqi society. The only hope is to see this youth claiming back what once was a country.

AMY GOODMAN: I wanted to go, Feurat Alani, to a clip of your 2012 documentary *Fallujah: A Lost Generation*?

In this, Dr. Hana Ahmed of Fallujah Hospital examines a baby born with deformities. When you made the film, you said one in five babies born in Fallujah exhibited congenital malformations.

DR. HANA AHMED: [translated] He needs an operation. At the moment, he is much too weak for us to move forward with surgery, so we have him on observation. We have seen many other types of deformities. He’s not alone. Some are more severe than others. We have some babies born without skulls, without organs, and sometimes with their legs totally twisted.

AMY GOODMAN: Feurat, if you can talk specifically about your city, about Fallujah, the extent of the attack, the use, for example, by the United States — the illegal use of white phosphorus, the second Battle of Fallujah in 2004?

FEURAT ALANI: Yes. And you mentioned that Fallujah is my parents’ hometown. So, I had a specific look at the city for personal reasons and also because Fallujah became sadly well known in the international communities. Fallujah was one of the first cities to resist the U.S. occupation and misbehavior and killings of Iraqi people. And when it started in 2003 until 2004, the first battle between residents of Fallujah and the U.S. Army was a political disaster for the U.S. administration. And then, to go briefly, they came back in November 2004 with the idea of erasing Fallujah from the map. And that’s what happened. So, when I came back to Fallujah after this second battle, I discovered a city that was, effectively, actually, completely destroyed, erased. Around 90% of the houses were on the ground.

I had the chance to talk to my uncles that stayed there and testified that the color in the sky changed, that a new kind of weapons were used, testimonies about white phosphorus, about very heavy weapons destroying in an instant a house or a street. And we discovered later on that uranium was used. When I came back to do an investigation about some terrific and terrible news about babies born with deformities, the pictures were so terrible that I could not really look at them. So I spent two weeks there talking to the inhabitants in Fallujah, to the hospital doctors, going into datas and talking to the families that were trying to hide those kids. We talked to a lot of scientists. We had studies. We had a lot of data linking the U.S. bombing of Fallujah and all the diseases and all the babies born with deformities. And you mentioned a figure that is still the case today: One in five babies are born with deformities in Fallujah. This is one of the most terrible consequences of the U.S. invasion, and still today the city is struggling with the sanitary, if we can call this this way, situation in Fallujah. And this is a catastrophe to me.

NERMEEN SHAIKH: Sinan Antoon, you’ve written a poem that will appear in your book when it comes out in the summer in English translation, a translation you’ve done yourself from the Arabic. If I could ask you, please, to read that poem, which is also about the use of white phosphorus and depleted uranium by the Americans in Iraq?

SINAN ANTOON: Sure. Sure, sure. I mean, it was written years ago, after the catastrophe that Feurat was talking about came to light. And it’s entitled “Phosphorus.”

When I was a kid, the tail end of my bike had a red reflector. It glowed in the dark like the eyes of a cat illuminated by the headlights of distant cars. Tiny bits of phosphorus. Tiny bits of phosphorus, white phosphorus, illuminated the skies of Fallujah years ago, and now infants are born there every day with two heads or without eyes.

NERMEEN SHAIKH: Sinan, thank you. That’s a very moving and beautiful poem. Now, we’re speaking as the Russian invasion of Ukraine has entered its second year, and we’ve just heard now that the International Criminal Court has called for the arrest of Putin as a war criminal. Now, the U.S. took many steps to ensure — has taken, that its own officials and military would be protected from any such attempts by the International Criminal Court or any other international body from facing such allegations. If you could respond to that — I mean, we’ve just been talking about the use of chemical weapons — and the fact that no one has been charged with war crimes?

SINAN ANTOON: Well, I also want to go back to 1991 —

FEURAT ALANI: Yes. And — oh, sorry.

SINAN ANTOON: Oh, sorry. I didn’t know. Sorry, I thought it was me. Go ahead.

NERMEEN SHAIKH: No, Sinan Antoon. If you could please respond, Sinan?

SINAN ANTOON: You know, the depleted uranium was already used in 1991 and caused catastrophic consequences for Iraqi citizens, especially in Basra, for example, and the skyrocketing cancer rates. But also there were war crimes were committed in 1991 in so-called Desert Storm. There are horrific images of how the U.S. bombed withdrawing Iraqi troops from Kuwait. It’s called the Highway of Death. And there was only one American journalist who took those images. And I think there was a — most media outlets did not show them because they were too horrific.

But, you know, there are double and triple standards in so-called international law. And as we can see, of course, the law is weaponized when it serves the interests, because, by any measure, Bush, Cheney, Condoleezza Rice, Rumsfeld, they’re all war criminals, but, of course, they will not be put on trial. And I think, actually, Bush cannot travel internationally, because he, you know, might face consequences.

So, I mean, the attitudes, especially of Americans, but of a lot of Europeans, to the Russian

invasion of Ukraine in so many ways just shows the double standards and also the hierarchy of human worth that a lot of people on this planet believe in — who really is a full human being that you can empathize with, you know, because “they look like us,” quote-unquote, or because they are European from a certain part of Europe also, and whose death really doesn’t count, whether they’re Palestinian or Yemeni or Syrian or Iraqi or Afghani, whose death doesn’t even register. And a million deaths becomes just a statistic, because they are not viewed as having lived full lives, because their lives do not resemble our lives.

So, you know, Putin is considered a war criminal, but we live in a country where war criminals are still going around, appearing on TV, dancing on the Ellen DeGeneres show, and, you know, Bush talks about his paintings. And also, when these war criminals die, as with Rumsfeld, you know, there isn’t even a mention of the catastrophic consequences of their decisions, that as we talk now about depleted uranium, this is in the unborn babies. This is in the wombs of mothers. This is in the air and in the soil, and it will always be there.

AMY GOODMAN: And let’s put the same question to Feurat Alani. As President Putin has been indicted for war crimes on this 20th anniversary of the Bush invasion, the U.S. invasion of Iraq, do you feel that President George W. Bush, that Dick Cheney and other high-level U.S. government officials should be charged with war crimes for what happened to your country, to Iraq?

FEURAT ALANI: Yes. And as Sinan mentioned, the list of crimes is very long, especially about Iraq, but not only Iraq. It was funny to see the reaction of Joe Biden talking about the ICC going after Putin, when Joe Biden said something like, “Yes, this is great.” But at the same time, he said, “But us, the U.S.A., we don’t recognize the ICC.” And we know why. Bush would be on the list. A lot of people would be on the list. Even if we can see similarities, of course, with the invasion of Ukraine by Putin and Iraq at that time, on the illegal aspect, on the aggression, of international law —

AMY GOODMAN: We have 10 seconds.

FEURAT ALANI: — it’s very important to remind — very important to remind that Bush should be judged, and it’s not acceptable that he’s still joking about Iraq.

AMY GOODMAN: Feurat Alani, French Iraqi journalist; Sinan Antoon, Iraqi poet and author.