

The Forgotten Casualties

WOMEN AND CHILDREN ARE often the forgotten casualties of war. The way Vietnamese women and children suffered during Vietnam's historic liberation struggle against America continues to afflict post-liberation families. The bitter part of World War II resurfaces again and again only to remind the present generations of horror and brutality women had to face specifically. 62 years after the end of WW-II, the Japanese Supreme Court acknowledged that women had been kidnapped and coerced into sex slavery by the Japanese military during the war, yet the government still rejects claims by victims for compensation. But they were not alone in perpetuating this barbarism. After the war Japan set up a 'comfort women' system in which tens of thousands of women were forced to provide sex to US troops.

Scenario cannot be any different in any war theatre. Not much is written about how women specially suffer in Iraq and Afghanistan.

There are political, personal and economic effects of this war in Iraq that specifically and powerfully affect women and families. War does not just affect the primarily male fighting forces. The violence and chaos of this war ruins the lives of women, both internationally and domestically, while such consequences are often overlooked by those waging war, and the media who cover it. This is a particularly tragic position for women who are often excluded from decision-making and peace-making processes.

The fact that worldwide the majority of refugees are women with their dependent children contributes to this neglect. Refugee women must try to support themselves and their children in the face of discrimination in the communities where they have taken refuge: as women, because of nationality or ethnicity, and as refugees.

While waging war is still thought of as a man's job, rebuilding families and lives once the war has ended is often left to poor and traumatized women.

When men return from the atrocities of war, wives, mothers and children must witness and endure the long term emotional and mental consequences of their experiences.

Most sources state the rate of domestic violence in military couples is between three and five times the rate of non-military couples. These statistics often do not include military spouses who live off-post.

The US has shown no real commitment to helping these women once their political goals have been achieved. Afghanistan is the perfect example. The ability of Afghan women to gain even a minimal amount of freedom is being severely hampered by the US's support of the warlords, by a repressive male-dominated culture, and by the hold that fundamentalist ideas have on the countryside. Every marker that showed progress is now moving in a backward direction. Horrors are appearing that are new on the Afghan landscape. And the tragedy the Iraqi women face day in and day out beggars description.

Given Bush's determination to stay in course in Iraq despite worldwide outcry against America's war crimes, conditions there will in all likelihood decline. More families will be driven from their homes, sectarian killings will continue to take

place, the grievous situation of women in Iraqi society will further deteriorate, and more people will be adversely impacted by America's counter-insurgency campaigns. The Democratic Party claims to be against prolonging the war in Iraq but is willing, for its own political reasons, to let the President have his way. And Iraqi women have no respite from being haunted by war horror because war will continue—after all it is an open-ended conflict. □□□