

# US defends 2 ministries from the hordes

*Interesting reflection on America's supposed war aims*

Iraq's scavengers have thieved and destroyed what they have been allowed to loot and burn by the Americans – and a two-hour drive around Baghdad shows clearly what the US intends to protect. After days of arson and pillage, here's a short but revealing scorecard. US troops have sat back and allowed mobs to wreck and then burn the Ministry of Planning, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Irrigation, the Ministry of Trade, the Ministry of Industry, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Information. They did nothing to prevent looters from destroying priceless treasures of Iraq's history in the Baghdad Archaeological Museum and in the museum in the northern city of Mosul, or from looting three hospitals.

The Americans have, though, put hundreds of troops inside two Iraqi ministries that remain untouched – and untouchable – because tanks and armoured personnel carriers and Humvees have been placed inside and outside both institutions. And which ministries proved to be so important for the Americans? Why, the Ministry of Interior, of course – with its vast wealth of intelligence information on Iraq – and the Ministry of Oil. The archives and files of Iraq's most valuable asset – its oilfields and, even more important, its massive reserves – are safe and sound, sealed off from the mobs and looters, and safe to be shared, as Washington almost certainly intends, with American oil companies.

It casts an interesting reflection on America's supposed war aims. Anxious to “liberate” Iraq, it allows its people to destroy the infrastructure of government as well as the private property of Saddam's henchmen. Americans insist that the oil ministry is a vital part of Iraq's inheritance, that the oilfields are to be held in trust “for the Iraqi

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people”. But is the Ministry of Trade – relit yesterday by an enterprising arsonist – not vital to the future of Iraq? Are the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Irrigation – still burning fiercely – not of critical importance to the next government? The Americans could spare 2,000 soldiers to protect the Kirkuk oilfields but couldn’t even invest 200 to protect the Mosul museum from attack. US engineers were confidently predicting that the Kirkuk oilfield will be capable of pumping again “within weeks”.

There was much talk of a “new posture” from the Americans yesterday. Armoured and infantry patrols suddenly appeared on the middle-class streets of the capital, ordering young men hauling fridges, furniture and television sets to deposit their loot on the pavement if they could not prove ownership. It was pitiful. After billions of dollars of government buildings, computers and archives have been destroyed, the Americans are stopping teens driving mule-drawn carts loaded with second-hand chairs. ◆