

Iraqis blame Colin Powell for role in devastating invasion



Iraqis remember Colin Powell as the U.S. secretary of state who during his presentation to the UN Security Council in 2003 held up a vial that he described as one that could contain anthrax [File: Ray Stubblebine/Reuters]

Baghdad, October 18 (RHC)-- For many Iraqis, Colin Powell is the American official who went before the United Nations Security Council in 2003 to justify a devastating war against their country.

Word of Powell's death on Monday dredged up feelings of anger in Iraq toward the former secretary of state, one of several Bush administration officials whom they hold responsible for a disastrous U.S.-led invasion that led to decades of death, chaos and violence in Iraq.

His UN testimony was a key part of events that they say has had a heavy human cost for Iraqis. "He lied, lied and lied," said Maryam, a 51-year-old Iraqi writer and mother of two in northern Iraq who spoke on the condition her last name not be used because one of her children is studying in the United States. "He lied, and we are the ones who got stuck with never-ending wars," she added.

As chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Powell oversaw the Gulf war to remove the Iraqi army in 1991 after Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait.

But Iraqis remember Powell more for his UN presentation justifying the invasion of their country by casting Hussein as a major global threat who possessed weapons of mass destruction.

In the Security Council chamber, he displayed photographs and diagrams purporting to detail Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, as well as translations from US intelligence intercepts. At one point, Powell brandished a small vial containing a teaspoon of simulated anthrax, warning that Iraq had not accounted for "tens upon tens upon tens of thousands of teaspoons" of the deadly pathogen.

No such weapons were ever found, and the speech was later derided as a low point in his career.

"I am saddened by the death of Colin Powell without being tried for his crimes in Iraq ... But I am sure that the court of God will be waiting for him," tweeted Muntadher al-Zaidi, an Iraqi journalist who vented his outrage at the U.S. by throwing his shoes at then-President George W Bush during a 2008 news conference in Baghdad.

In 2011, Powell told Al Jazeera he regretted providing misleading intelligence that led to the US invasion, calling it a "blot on my record." He admitted that sources cited by the intelligence community were wrong.

Saif Salah al-Hety, an Iraqi journalist in a tweet said Powell's testimony to the UN remains one of the most consequential developments in Iraq to this day. "May God's judgement be upon him, as well as those who supported, aided and participated with him," al-Hety said.

The rebellion that emerged from the U.S. invasion and occupation grew into deadly sectarian violence that killed countless Iraqi civilians, and the war dragged on far longer than had been predicted by the Bush administration and eventually helped give rise to the ISIL (ISIS) armed group.

Powell's UN testimony "resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of Iraqis. This blood is on his hands," said Muayad al-Jashami, a 37-year old Iraqi who works with nongovernmental organizations.

While he did not suffer direct losses, al-Jashami said he has continued to struggle with stress and panic attacks as a result of growing up with war, displacement, and years of bombings in the country.

Aqeel al-Rubai, 42, who owns a clothes and cosmetics shop in Baghdad, said he did not care if Powell regretted the faulty information he gave on weapons of mass destruction.

Al-Rubai, who lost his cousin in the war, also blamed the U.S. for the death of his father, who had a close call during the sectarian blood-letting that followed the U.S. invasion, and later had a fatal heart attack.

“What does that remorse do for us? A whole country was destroyed, and we continue to pay the price,” he said. “But I say may God have mercy on him.”

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