

For Immediate Release



## **AUB professor's research on health costs of Iraqi war highlighted in Brown University study**

Beirut, Lebanon- 23/04/2012 -In addition to physical and human losses, the war on Iraq has burdened Iraqis with the high cost of seeking medical care outside their country, since their own health care system has crumbled, warned a public health researcher at the Faculty of Health Sciences.

Omar Dewachi, professor of medical anthropology and public health at the Faculty of Health Sciences, contributed a paper to [a newly released report overviewing an extensive Brown University study](#) on the direct and indirect human and economic costs of the Iraqi war.

Released in commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the US invasion of Iraq on March 19, the report compiles the research of about 30 academics and experts, as part of the Costs of War Project, which is based at Brown University's Watson Institute for International Studies. The new report updates data compiled in a 2011 report, produced ahead of the tenth anniversary marking the US War on Terror.

“Though possessing one of the most advanced health care systems in the Middle East prior to the 1990s, Iraq experienced the exodus of half of its 34,000 medical doctors, the destruction of hospitals and disruption of medical services by both insurgents and coalition forces during the 2000s,” explained Dewachi in his recent paper, “[War and the Costs of Medical Travel for Iraqis in Lebanon](#),” which was part of the Brown report.

Costs of war are measured as human costs, economic costs and social and political costs. The Brown report compiled papers on topics ranging from the war's influence on civil and human rights and democratization in Iraq to environmental and public health impacts on Iraqi civilians and US service members as well as the war's long-term financial costs.

One of the consequences of war has been the collapse of health care infrastructure, the exodus of doctors and widespread corruption. Distrust in the Iraqi health care system, with related misdiagnosis and frustration, combined with bureaucracy have prompted many Iraqi to seek medical care elsewhere.

As a result, many Iraqis have opted to leave the country in search of medical care in Delhi, Beirut, Amman, Tehran, or Istanbul. Lebanon represents a desirable destination because of the common language (Arabic), favorable visa regulations and proximity.

Since 2005, a total of 4,824 Iraqi patients have been admitted to AUB Medical Center (AUBMC), with 36 percent having been admitted through the Emergency Unit. Patients come

to AUBMC for cancer chemotherapy, renal dialysis, and surgery, including reconstructive surgeries from various blast and bullet injuries.

But the cost of living in Beirut is higher and so are the prices of medical tests, some of them reaching 5 times more than those in Iraq.

Many of these patients have opted to sell their belongings, borrow money or depend on the aid of charity organizations, to seek crucial medical and surgical procedures abroad.

As Dewachi explains, “It is important to understand that the war is not over - rather, it continues to manifest in all kinds of ways in the everyday lives of Iraqis both inside and outside Iraq. The massive cost of this war is a reminder of its devastating and long-lasting impact”.

**As for the main findings of the Brown report, they can be summarized as follows:**

- A least 190,000 people have been killed in Iraq in the last 10 years. More than 70 percent of those killed, or 134,000, were Iraqi civilians. The rest are security forces, insurgents, journalists and humanitarian workers. As many as four times that number is attributed to indirect deaths due to increased vulnerability to disease or injury as a result of war-degraded conditions.
- The total cost of the Iraq war will cost US taxpayers at least \$2.2 trillion - a figure that includes care for veterans injured in the war.
- Iraq’s health care infrastructure remains devastated from sanctions and war. More than half of Iraq’s medical doctors left the country during the 2000s and tens of thousands of Iraqi patients are forced to seek health care outside the country.
- The \$60 billion allocated for reconstruction in Iraq has gone primarily to the military and police rather than to rebuilding infrastructure such as roads, health care and water treatment systems as meant. The Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction has found massive fraud, waste and abuse of reconstruction funds.
- The total number of US service members killed in Iraq is 4,488 and 3,400 contractors have also died.
- Terrorism has increased dramatically in Iraq

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Note to Editors

## **About AUB**

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 600 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,000 students. AUB currently offers more than 100 programs leading to the bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full service 420-bed hospital.

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