

# Why you should care about the Middle East

Whatever chance it's got is steeped in blood and treasure of South Dakotans

By TODD EPP  
For The Daily Republic

So why should you care about Iraq and the Middle East?

As residents of central South Dakota, perhaps you should care more than anyone.

Back around Veterans Day 2011, I interviewed, for The Daily Republic, a number of local National Guardsmen who were serving or had served in Iraq or Afghanistan. Some had been on multiple deployments. But the U.S. — and our Guardsmen — were leaving Iraq.

South Dakota paid a heavy price for its lost sons. According to [icare.org](http://icare.org), 20 South Dakotans were killed in Iraq; 141 were wounded.

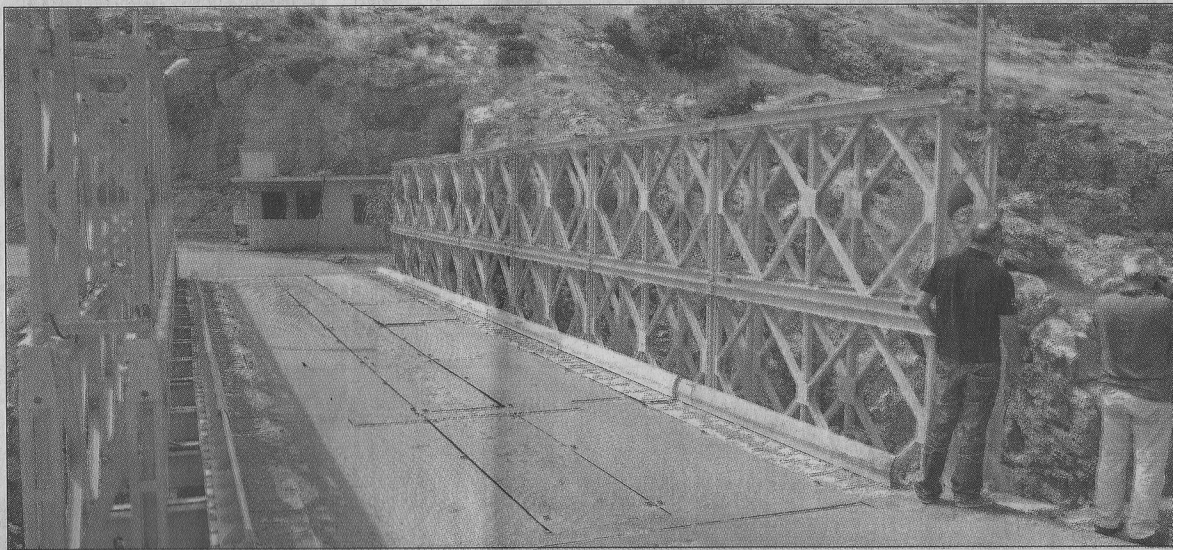
The United States has spent at least \$806 billion on the Iraq War, according to various sources.

That's approximately \$2,600 per person in the United States.

Plus, I saw a couple of bridges that you and I, the rest of South Dakota and America paid for in Iraq. Nice, strong, steel trussed bridges over gaping ravines that kept Kurdish farm products going to market. You and I paid for the ones Saddam blew up to screw with the Kurds.

And today the money keeps flowing.

The United States is slated to send 36 F-16s to Iraq, according to Stars and Stripes. That's an Iraq that has as its prime minister an



Todd Epp/For The Daily Republic

You paid for this. Members of the U.S. Army built this one-lane steel bridge over a gorge in the Kurdish mountains south of Turkey after the start of the Iraq War. Dictator Saddam Hussein destroyed the previous bridge and bridges like it to make life difficult for Kurds.

from the safety of Kurdistan, what Iraq needs most is electricity, not fighter aircraft. One hundred and 20 degrees in the shade in Baghdad with no air conditioning or refrigeration isn't a very good step toward the rule of law and economic development.

And perhaps you don't care too much about my Kurdish brothers and sisters I've written about in this series. Fine. But they know and I know that those U.S.-built warplanes will be used against them should their cold war of words and staring across tank bunkers turn hot on the Kirkuk

## A South Dakotan abroad

This is the third and final installment in a series of first-person accounts by South Dakotan Todd Epp about his recent time spent in Iraq as a legal consultant.

ing peace and prosperity possible. To paraphrase actress Sally Field: "They like us! They really like us!"

Besides the practical reasons of American and South Dakotan blood and money being spilled and

juxtaposition with the current lawless state of much of Iraq is regrettable. But that fact alone also should give hope that modern day Mesopotamians can figure out this whole rule of law thing and lead a society that is based on laws and not wealthy and powerful families.

In Erbil, there's a massive fortress on a mostly man-made hill overlooking the crowded souk below and a modern courtyard with fountains and shops. Humans have continually occupied the Citadel for nearly 6,000 years.

My wife Donna and 17-year-old son Matt made the trek up the

archaeologists are digging down through the years to see what they might find and are restoring the maze of houses and alleys. When or if it is ever done, it will be incredible. Not just as a tourist attraction but as a living museum to human development.

Imagine people living in the same spot for six millennia. Here in South Dakota, even 60 years is a long time in our still-young state.

But on this day when the sun bore on your neck like a 1,000-watt bulb and the sweat was gone from your face before you were sweaty, the Citadel was like a lot of Iraq.