

York Times was making a mountain out of a molehill.

On this issue there was a double deception. Qa'qaa's administrators had already informed the US, in writing, that the sum total of munitions looted from their facility was not 341 tonnes but 40,000. On this accounting, the missing explosives constituted more than 6% of all explosives in Iraq, a very great deal more than 0.06%, in fact.

Further statistical manipulation was afoot, too. While the missing materiel from Qa'qaa was pure high explosive, the 402,000 tonnes destroyed by US forces included some very heavy objects that contained no explosives at all. "[The Pentagon] was trying to compare the weight of the guns and stocks and metal and all of that stuff," says a senior weapons-intelligence analyst. "They were counting tanks and guns and bazookas - metal - as opposed to the raw explosive that can be directly used . . . It's an absolutely dishonest comparison."

On Friday 29 October, Osama bin Laden succeeded where the White House's spin doctors had failed. The first videotaped message from the al-Qaida leader for more than a year pushed the looted explosives story out of the public eye. Four days later, Bush won a second term in office.

### Torture and murder

News of Bush's glorious second victory left Yusufiyah cold. Haki and his neighbours had other concerns. Top of the list came the recently arrived Arab strangers. For al-Qaida, Yusufiyah was important not only because it was home to Iraq's largest armaments facilities, but also because it was strategically extremely well positioned. Eventually, the mujahideen fighters settled in the area permanently. For the locals, the situation rapidly became intolerable. Instead of buying explosives, the Arabs simply took them, forcing potato farmers to store the materiel in their underground bunkers, then killing them later. "Those guys started ruling the whole area," says Haki. "They weren't guests any more." In fear of his life, the farmer fled to Baghdad to become a security guard. In 2004, al-Qaida established a

camp inside the Qa'qaa complex itself. "We had a firing range, like a tunnel. It was used to shoot small-calibre bullets," says Ali. "It became a training camp for terrorists."

Anyone entering the facility without permission was killed. Al-Qaida spread horror stories about its activities, intimidating locals into collaborating. An execution room was set up with a makeshift gallows. Yusuf was part of the operation. "We used to kill people in terrible ways, torturing them to give al-Qaida more influence." Mutilations, murders and decapitations were filmed and copies were distributed around Yusufiyah to discourage dissent.

The violence increased. Anyone suspected of attempting to join the Iraqi military or police was executed. Shias were executed. People with Shia names were executed. People who did anything regarded as Shia-like were executed. When Haki's uncle was caught smoking a cigarette, al-Qaida broke all his fingers with a hammer. Then they killed him.

Soon even Yusuf recognised that things had gone awry. "We realised that al-Qaida hadn't come to rescue us. They were killing all kinds of people, saying they were atheists and that they idolised statues," he recalls.

When Haki returned from Baghdad in 2005, he found the main road into town littered with corpses, bound, tortured and shot. "We hadn't seen anything like this before in our lives. It was like a horror film."

By 2005, commentators were dubbing the Yusufiyah region the "Triangle of Death": the most dangerous sector in all Iraq. Palm-tree plantations were rigged with explosives to bring down low-flying helicopters; soldiers were abducted, tortured and murdered. Bombs went off everywhere.

It was, of course, no coincidence that Nahir Yusufiyah was so favoured by insurgents. It was where all the weapons were.

**I** Extracted from *A History of The World Since 9/11* by Dominic Streetfield, to be published by Atlantic Books at £12.99 on 01 February 2011. To order a copy for £10.39 with free UK p&hp go to [guardian.co.uk/bookshop](http://guardian.co.uk/bookshop) or call 01330 333 6847

**Cameron:** May I remind everyone that VAT is a jolly progressive tax and the little people will be much better off now we've raised it to 20%?

**The Tory party:** Really? Why are we doing it then?

**Osborne:** To save them money by making sure prices rise so steeply they won't be able to afford to buy anything. It will teach them not to rush out and waste the benefits they've scrounged on stuff they don't need. What's more, it will close half the shops on the high street, so there will be less temptation.

**Cameron:** You think of everything, Ozzy . . .

**Osborne:** I try to . . . And before you ask, there's no need to worry about transport costs. They'll all be out of work, so the chavs won't have to leave home.

**Cameron:** Perfect. So no one's got anything to moan about . . .

**Clegg:** I have, Daddy. You didn't come upstairs to kiss me happy new year. And why does everyone still keep laughing when I say students will be much better off being £27K in debt as it's only pretend money?

**Simon Hughes:** Because they aren't quite as gullible as you think they are.

**Cameron:** Look Hughes! I've had enough of you talking back to the Cleggster. You can bloody well get out there and tell the students how lucky they are, or bugger off back to Bermondsey. Wherever that is.

**Hughes:** Yes, sir. Thank you, sir. My name is Simon Hughes and I was once a serious politician.

**Cable:** That's odd. My name is Vince Cable and I was once a serious politician, too.

**Cameron:** We all need to unite around the Cleggster and make him look like the brave little soldier he is.

**May:** I'm not budging over control orders.

**Cameron:** I think you'll find you are, Theresa. Don't worry, though. We'll come up with something just as repressive but give it a different name.

**Clegg:** Oh, thank you, thank you, Daddy. I love you so much.

**Osborne:** Well, he doesn't love you. He's just doing it because you Lib Lemmings are fairly handy to have around.

**Hague:** We're going to have to do something about Coulson.

**Cameron:** I'm not listening.

**Hague:** That's what he said and no one believed him either.

