

# The dark legacy of ISIS lives on

*In the northern Iraqi city, women and girls still suffer from the stigma of sexual abuse*

LIZZIE PORTER

At Tal Afar General Hospital in northwestern Iraq, dozens of women squeeze onto waiting room chairs. They all want to see the small team of gynaecologists, who appear stressed and overworked.

Since the other hospital in the area was blown up by ISIS, Tal Afar General Hospital has been overburdened and under-resourced, serving the city as well as towns and villages far and wide.

But even if services were sufficient, one group of the neediest would-be patients would still stay away.

They are the 22 Shia Turkmen women and girls who have returned from being raped, beaten and forced into marriage to ISIS members. Some were just 12 years old when they were kidnapped as they tried to escape the terror group's assault on northern Iraq five years ago.

Since their return, community stigma – mainly from their tribes and nosy neighbours – has prolonged their suffering. Some are forced to stay at home by their relatives, who associate a rape survivor with shame. They prevent the girls from going to school, having any kind of financial independence or repairing their friendships.

Instead, their families make them do menial chores at home. Even if healthcare services weren't overstretched, the girls couldn't leave the house to get regular check-ups for any physical or mental health effects of ISIS's abuse. As researchers and



Women and children being evacuated from a Turkmen region of Iraq in 2014.

humanitarian workers have said, it's another kind of captivity.

Tal Afar, 60 kilometres west of Mosul in Nineveh governorate, is majority Turkmen – Iraqi citizens of Turkic origin. Some are Sunni, others Shia. They haven't always lived peacefully side by side: post-2003, the Sunnis were marginalised by newly dominant Shia politicians and were subjected to pernicious harassment and violence.

Later, Tal Afar was controlled by Al Qaeda in Iraq and once ISIS

took over, many of its commanders based themselves in the city. Retaken by Iraqi security forces in August 2017, it was one of the terror group's last strongholds.

Since Tal Afar's liberation, about half of its 200,000-strong overall population, both Sunni and Shia, have returned, including the few who have been released from ISIS captivity. But the stigma facing those survivors is made all the worse by a dearth of government services in the city.

Researchers say there needs to

be vocational training for those who cannot return to normal schooling.

That could help the boys and girls who witnessed unspeakable violence and suffering after ISIS kidnapped them. They might not be able to sit in a normal classroom for a while but they urgently need alternatives to help them learn to be children again.

The sexual violence survivors need special attention. The Iraqi state needs to provide much more in terms of proper healthcare,

# 45 years on from Nixon, America needs

JANINE DI GIOVANNI

*Nixon's resignation 45 years ago was followed by greater accountability. We need a new reckoning, writes Janine di Giovanni*

Exactly 45 years ago, Richard Nixon, the 37th president of the United States, gave his resignation speech in the Oval Office of the White House. Nixon's role in the Watergate cover-up had been made clear to the public a few days earlier when taped Oval Office conversations – including one known as “the smoking gun” – revealed without a doubt that Nixon had been aware of the White House connection to the Watergate burglary. Two years earlier, five men had broken into the Democratic National Committee headquarters in Washington DC, leading to the discovery of multiple abuses of power by the Nixon administration. This led to a constitutional crisis. The country was in deep pain and Nixon had to go.

Nixon did the right thing by standing down on August 9, 1974. His involvement in the Watergate scandal had grown too large for him to manipulate and hide. He was deeply unpopular throughout the country and had earned the dubious moniker Tricky Dicky. His political support had collapsed.

“With the disappearance of that base,” Nixon told the American public, “I now believe that the constitutional purpose has been

served and there is no longer a need for the process to be prolonged.” By evening, a helicopter had landed on the White House lawn and whisked away Nixon and his family to their home in California. Gerald Ford was installed as the new president. “Our national nightmare is over,” he told a traumatised country.

One president left; another began. It was that swift.

Nixon was the only US president to resign from office and it had a tangible effect on political life in Washington. Because of Watergate, more than 69 government officials were charged and 48 were found guilty but the real cost was that trust in the executive branch had taken a plummet. That trust did not rebound again until the Clinton administration.

Nixon's resignation came just after one of the most volatile times in US history. The war in Vietnam had raged for more than a decade, an unpopular, ugly conflict that divided the country and left societal wounds that would take decades to heal. Racial violence was spiralling out of control, culminating in riots in urban flashpoints in 1968. A counterculture hippie movement rejected mainstream American ideals, forego- ing the materialism and suburban life that had been the hallmark of 1950s post-war America. College



President Richard Nixon is seen in the Oval Office of the White House.

campuses staged moratoriums. Underground radical movements, many of them militant, were born.

After the initial shockwaves subsided, the long-term effect of Watergate and Nixon's resignation, however, had a positive

effect on the country. It became an era of legal reform. Laws were passed to ensure what had happened would not happen again: the Ethics in Government Act; the Freedom of Information Act. Reporters from the Washington

Post had doggedly tracked and broken the Watergate story so investigative journalism was at an all-time high. Post-Watergate, everyone was accountable.

The comparison between Nixon's administration and our pres-