It's truly precious how members of the antiwar left, whose superior consciences bade them to oppose war in Iraq because they really cared about the lives of U.S. troops and Iraqi civilians, are now bemoaning the lack of pre-emptive U.S. military force to protect Baghdad's national museum.

New York Times columnist Maureen Dowd opined that "the Pentagon could easily have saved the National Museum and library if they had redeployed the American troops assigned to guard Ahmad Chalabi, the Richard Perle pal."

"The whole world saw the U.S. priorities when they guarded the oil ministry and stood by while other ministries were trashed by looters, while the (Iraq) National Museum was trashed and three or four hospitals," antiwar Brit Alice Mahon, a member of Parliament, complained.

Somehow Iraqis loot their own museum and hospitals, and it's not their fault. It's U.S. Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld's fault for not stopping them.

Of course, the more you know about what happened, the better the United States looks.

For one thing, many of the thefts apparently were inside jobs. Already valued artifacts have become available on the black market in Europe, Japan and the Middle East. Interpol and the FBI are investigating.

At a Paris confab on Iraqi and world antiquities, McGuire Gibson of the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute explained, "The vaults where the best pieces are kept were opened with keys. Looters coming in off the streets don't usually have keys, do they?"

Koichiro Matsuura, director general of the United Nations Educational and Cultural Agency, blamed the Iraqis, saying, "It is those bandits who looted their own heritage," according to London’s Sunday Telegraph.

It's also highly probable that many of the missing artifacts were stolen before the war started -- by Saddam Hussein's henchmen.

According to The New York Times, locals who witnessed the looting of the national museum didn't see people leaving with statues and pottery shards marked with cuneiform; they witnessed an exodus instead of typewriters, old rifles and lighting fixtures. Most of the good stuff was already gone.

This suggests that if U.S. troops had driven straight to the museum -- which they didn't do because the area wasn't secure, according to Pentagon spokesman Dan Hetlage -- soldiers would have arrived only in time to guard antiquated office equipment.

"We would have had to kill people to do that," Hetlage added.

Which makes you wonder why it's the antiwar types who are the most vocal in their outrage over the Pentagon's failure to guard the museum from the very instant U.S. troops entered Baghdad. I guess they don't care that protecting the museum could only have been done by risking American lives and shooting at Iraqi civilians.
Not long ago, the peaceniks were so enamored with weapons inspections that you'd think they'd love how authorities want to reclaim the stolen museum items: by increasing the border patrol -- call them "inspectors" -- and agreeing to pay off and grant amnesty to those who return stolen items.

It's not a pretty solution, but it may be the most efficient way to reclaim historic treasures that are a testament to Babylon's rich heritage.

Call it Food for Shards.

Some Iraqis already have returned artifacts. Oddly, National Museum curator Donny George, after noting that Islamic clerics were asking the faithful to turn over stolen items, lamented to the French news service Agence France Presse, "Even the imams at the mosques have felt obliged to do the work of the Americans."

The work of the Americans? It's not enough that the U.S.-led coalition defended the world against a cruel despot -- and with minimal military and civilian casualties.

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