

The Children of Iraq

by Mark A. Goldman

John Pilger, the British journalist, has visited Iraq and reported extensively on what he has seen. Reading his commentary, one begins to understand how brutal lies can be.

Before the Gulf War, Iraq had one of the lowest infant mortality rates in the world. Today it is the highest. The economic sanctions imposed by the United Nations Security Council denied Iraq the equipment it needed to clean up the battlefields from the Gulf War. The battlefields needed to be cleaned up because the depleted uranium that was discharged by American and British bombs carried with them a silent death that was far more devastating than the initial blasts would have suggested. There are regions in Iraq where as many as 40% of the children living nearby now have cancer. It is not unusual for several children in one family to have cancer. Those who don't have cancer today are expected to get it later in life.

The death rate for children under 5 was running 4,000 per month in the year 2000 when one of the articles I am referring to was written.¹ The sanctions, which Pilger calls, "the most ruthless embargo in modern history," is killing mostly children. The children of Iraq are dying of hunger and malnutrition, dysentery and other diseases associated with the lack of sanitation. The children are dying for lack of medicines and medical supplies. The only painkiller doctors can offer their cancer ridden patients is aspirin, because the sanctions preclude the purchase of morphine. It was American bombs that took out public sanitation and the general infrastructure of the country. Apparently anything that might have been of value to someone in uniform was a target even if it was also vital to the general population. The sanctions have been unnecessarily vindictive and cruel.

As far as I can tell, the American strategy as it applies to Iraq has been... "If we destroy life, as these people know it, perhaps they will blame Saddam Hussein and run him out of office." But that is only part of the strategy. It appears to me that the other part is... "If we destroy life as these people know it, we can then come in, control the oil, and no one will be able to do anything about it." I think this is all about oil, not about terrorism. There is no greater terrorism than when it rains US bombs. And after each rain storm, we call the dead—collateral damage. They call the dead— family and friends. This is not about Saddam's evil intentions. When Saddam poisoned the Kurds, the US Government said nothing. Saddam Hussein is a product of the CIA and American policy, but that is another story.

In 1996, when then Secretary of State Madeline Albright was asked during a 60 Minutes interview about the hundreds of thousands of children in Iraq who have died because of the sanctions, and whether she thought the price was worth it... she replied:

"I think this is a very hard choice, but the price... we think the price is worth it."

WE think the price is worth it? Who is this WE and who has a right to think such a thing or to make such decisions about other people's children... in my name, in your name?

So you could argue, "Don't blame us for the death of these children, Saddam Hussein could have stopped the sanctions at any time. Blame him." Well I do blame him. But that doesn't absolve us from the part we played. We knew or should have known that Saddam Hussein would rather let his people suffer than give in to

outside pressure. So we knowingly chose to pursue a strategy that guaranteed his people WOULD suffer. And we didn't stop when we saw the results. We used the pain and deaths of these children to try to pressure Saddam Hussein to do what... leave town? It was, and still is, an ignorant, indefensible, cruel policy.

A year after Albright's appearance on 60 Minutes: "...in an interview with CNN reporter Peter Arnett, Osama Bin Laden directly stated that

'A REACTION MIGHT TAKE PLACE as a result of U.S. Government's execution of over 600,000 Iraqi children by preventing food and medicine from reaching them.'"²

Did George Bush know all this when he said the reason terrorists hate us is because they hate freedom and democracy? Of course he did. I'm not saying all terrorists are rational or that they all know what they are fighting for. But Bush was lying and he knew it. And so did the press and every other government official who works within a 50 miles radius of the White House, and this hypocrisy is also known in the halls of every foreign government.

When a plaintiff comes into a United States court, he is expected to come to the court with 'clean hands' or the court will not grant relief. To have 'clean hands' means that the party bringing the action is not engaged in immoral or illegal acts. The United States does not have 'clean hands.' Can you guess why the Bush team does not want to prosecute terrorists in a public court of law?

Can you imagine that if these criminals were prosecuted in public view, they might have an opportunity to argue that the plaintiff does not come to this court with 'clean hands'? Is it any wonder that Bush refuses to acknowledge the authority of the World Court to potentially charge a US citizen with crimes against humanity?

If George Bush ends up removing Saddam Hussein from power, maybe the children of Iraq will be better off than they are now. But that's not a certainty. How many innocent civilian lives will be lost in the war? Would you care to guess? If children or other innocent civilians had any currency in the formation of US policy, most of the sanctions would have been lifted a long time ago, and we would not now be worried about terrorism in the first place.

This is about oil. Trading basic human decency for oil. Oil is costing us our humanity, our freedoms, our self respect, and before too long perhaps the lives of more of our own children. And what will our children think of us when they eventually find out what our government has been up to? None of us is innocent, because WE are the government. Remember..? WE THE PEOPLE. Is war the only science we know? The people who represent us, are now, and have been for a long time, out of control and out of touch. Enough is enough. We each need to accept our responsibility as citizens before it's too late. And if we can't come together to find new common ground and formulate a strategy that is based on principles of honor and basic human decency, then perhaps between our apathy and government's negligence, The Great Experiment will, after all of this, have finally come to naught. Start by checking out this story. Here are the referenced links:

¹ <http://pilger.carlton.com/articles/19197>

² <http://radioworks.cbc.ca/programs/checkup/forum/messages/3206.html>

THE ONLY THING NECESSARY FOR EVIL TO TRIUMPH IS FOR GOOD MEN TO DO NOTHING.

I dedicate this piece to Ruth Wood, who was my homeroom teacher at Pennsauken High School in New Jersey and who loved me as she loved all children, and stayed my friend and had faith in me for over 40 years. Her former students live in every corner of this country.

She died in Knoxville, Tennessee, on Sunday September 29, 2002 close to the family she adored.

May God rest her sweet soul.