

THE SCOURGING OF IRAQ

Also by Geoff Simons

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The Scourging of Iraq

Sanctions, Law and Natural Justice

Geoff Simons





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The Chronology of Genocide

... nothing that we had seen or read had quite prepared us for the particular form of devastation which has now befallen the country [Iraq]. The recent conflict has wrought near-apocalyptic results ... the flow of food through the private sector has been reduced to a trickle. ... Many food prices are already beyond the purchasing reach of most Iraqi families. ... The mission recommends that ... sanctions in respect of food supplies should be immediately removed.

Report of mission (10–17 March 1991) led by
Martti Ahtisaari, UN Under-Secretary General
for Administration and Management

... it is a country whose economy has been devastated ... above all by the continued sanctions ... which have virtually paralyzed the whole economy and generated persistent deprivation, chronic hunger, endemic undernutrition, massive unemployment and widespread human suffering ... a vast majority of the Iraqi population is living under most deplorable conditions and is simply engaged in a struggle for survival ... a grave humanitarian tragedy is unfolding ... the nutritional status of the population continues to deteriorate at an alarming rate ... large number of Iraqis now have food intakes lower than those of the populations in the disaster stricken African countries.

UN Food and Agriculture Organisation,
World Food Programme, Special Alert No. 237, July 1993

Alarming food shortages are causing irreparable damage to an entire generation of Iraqi children. ... 'After 24 years in the field, mostly in Africa starting with Biafra, I didn't think anything could shock me,' said Dieter Hannusch, WFP's Chief Emergency Support Officer, 'but this was comparable to the worst scenarios I have ever seen.' ... 'There actually are more than 4 million people, a fifth of Iraq's population, at severe nutritional risk,' said Mona Hamman, WFP's Regional Manager. 'That number includes

2.4 million children under five, about 600,000 pregnant/nursing women and destitute women heads of households as well as hundreds of thousands of elderly without anyone to help them . . . 70 per cent of the population has little or no access to food . . . Nearly everyone seems to be emaciated. We are at the point of no return in Iraq . . . The social fabric of the nation is disintegrating. People have exhausted their ability to cope.

UN World Food Programme, *News Update*,
26 September 1995

. . . findings illustrate a strong association between economic sanctions and increase in child mortality and malnutrition rates . . . The moral, financial and political standing of an international community intent on maintaining sanctions is challenged by the estimate that since August 1990, 567 000 children in Iraq have died as a consequence.

Sarah Zaidi and Mary C. Smith Fawzi,
The Lancet (London), 2 December 1995

The Red Cross has strongly criticised the 'dire effects' of sanctions on civilians. . . . There is chronic hunger . . . with 20,000 new cases of child malnutrition every month.

Victoria Brittain, *The Independent*, 4 December 1995

. . . health conditions . . . are deteriorating at an alarming rate under the sanctions regime . . . the vast majority of Iraqis continue to survive on a semi-starvation diet . . . The damaging effects of poor nutrition are being compounded by epidemics . . . and by a precipitous decline in health care . . . The most visible impact of these problems is seen in the dramatic rise of mortality rates among infants and children.

UN World Health Organisation, 25 March 1996

Our policy is to keep Iraq in its box.

Western diplomat, *The Guardian*, 18 October 1995

Preface

The researching and writing of this book have been an education. I have learnt not only about one of the twentieth century's many unpublicised genocides, the subjecting of an entire people to a total years-long siege, but also about the psychology of comfortable, unthreatened human beings. Try to impress upon people – politicians, government officials, publishers, journalists, relatives, friends – what they are doing, or what they are allowing to be done in their name, and what happens?

Tell them about the innocent thousands, hundreds of thousands, forced to drink sewage; about the silent shrivelled women holding their dying babies; about the thousands of children trapped in unrelieved trauma; about the stick infants, the ballooning 'sugar bellies'; about the children now going blind for want of insulin; about the millions today being denied adequate food and medicine – and what is the response? Incomprehension, blocking out, a refusal to believe or feel – what psychologists have called *psychic numbing*. And *guilt transference*: if people are suffering, it cannot be *our* fault, *my* fault . . . There must be someone else to blame. Let us rely on the propaganda to tell us who it is.

While I was writing this book, a number of distressing and tragic child murders were copiously reported in Britain. Wrecked families struggled to adjust to a desolate new reality. No-one doubted that whoever had perpetrated such crimes must be monsters. So how are we to regard Western leaders and others who, stubbornly and knowingly, support policies that cause the deaths not of isolated children (or even 16), but of very many: 100,000 in 1994, 100,000 in 1995, perhaps half a million so far, with all the genocidal policies still in place. Are we and they, as the international human-rights worker Elias Davidsson asks, 'accomplices to mass murder'?

I propose a provocative and unfashionable theory: that any Iraqi child matters as much as any American or British child. And the corollary: that we are so ethically derelict that it needs to be said.

It is not necessary to visit Iraq. It is enough to acknowledge the copious testimonies and reports, some of which are quoted and cited here. I still feel the heavy shadow of Chapter 3, and something of what these inadequate words signal of human suffering. And I still

feel the impotent shame to which my government, and all the other psychically numbed and guilt-transferring accomplices to genocide, have condemned me. It is enough.

GEOFF SIMONS

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GEOFF SIMONS

Introduction

The main purpose of this book is to highlight the continuing and unjustifiable punishment of the Iraqi people through economic sanctions. It rests on the simple principle, enshrined in the Protocol 1 Addition (1977) to the Geneva Convention (1949), that the starvation of civilians as a method of warfare is illegal and ethically indefensible. The book does *not* represent apology or exculpation for Saddam Hussein (I have charted his bloody rise to power in *Iraq: From Sumer to Saddam*, 1994). It is important to remember that many of the politicians, business leaders, pundits and journalists who today are keenest to maintain economic sanctions on Iraq are precisely the people who in the 1980s did all they could to build up and sustain the tyrannical Iraqi regime. What is argued here is that it is unjustifiable in both law (Protocol 1; UN General Assembly Resolution 96(I); the UN Genocide Convention; etc.) and natural justice to target helpless men, women and children as a method of overthrowing a national leader.

The reality is that the Western powers are pursuing a strategic policy, linked to the control of Gulf oil, that has nothing to do with support for human rights or condemnation of military aggression (Western leaders have long tolerated abuses of human rights and military invasions when they were judged to serve Western economic and strategic interests). What this means is that the United States has consistently manipulated the United Nations to serve its foreign policy objectives; and where this option has not been possible it has acted unilaterally in defiance of UN majority opinion. As Madeleine Albright, the US ambassador to the United Nations, has admitted: 'we will behave with others multilaterally when we can and unilaterally when we must'. At the same time the United States remains in constant violation of its UN obligations – in deciding which national derelictions to ignore, which UN resolutions to support, and when, if ever, to pay its financial dues. Washington's financial debt to the UN, the largest of any Member State, has mounted over the years: in September 1995 it stood at \$1.6 billion.

Chapter 1 profiles something of the impact of the Gulf War on Iraq, the suffering of the people and the devastation of the land. In this brief conflict alone there was enough to justify copious charges against the United States of war crimes; of serious violations of the Geneva

Conventions, the Hague Conventions, and other international agreements signalling what is and what is not permissible in war (these charges have been amply justified by former US Attorney-General Ramsey Clark, Congressman Henry Gonzalez and many others). But the war was only one phase in the onslaught that the Iraqi people would be forced to endure. Even before the war the harshness of the economic blockade was bringing immense suffering to Iraq's civilian population and forcing the Iraqi economy to its knees. After the war, what were set to be years-long sanctions remained in place, compounding the chaos and devastation already wrought by months of economic embargo and weeks of unprecedented military destruction.

It soon became plain to the international community what the sanctions were achieving. The celebrated human-rights worker Elias Davidsson was later to ask: '*Are we accomplices to mass murder?*'; pointing out that 'many more civilians have died as a result of these quiet sanctions than from the massive bombings against Iraqi cities and villages in the Gulf War'. In the same spirit Ramsey Clark emphasised that the economic blockade was a weapon of mass destruction, 'a crime against humanity, in the Nüremburg sense . . .'. He stressed, as was now abundantly clear: 'The blockade is a weapon for the destruction of the masses, and it attacks those segments of the society that are the most vulnerable. Inherently, it attacks infants and children, the chronically ill, the elderly and emergency medical cases.'

In the US Congress and the British Parliament, voices were raised to protest at the genocidal impact of economic sanctions on the Iraqi people. Congressman Henry Gonzalez began impeachment proceedings against the President; and in the British House of Commons Members of Parliament who had visited Iraq reported on the horrors that they had witnessed. Thus the Labour MP George Galloway spoke of conditions that 'would have moved a person with stone for a heart. . . . We visited hospitals where there was no medicine and no spare parts for the medical equipment . . . women were having caesarian sections without anaesthetic . . . garbage lay uncollected in the streets. . . . The great waterways of the Tigris and Euphrates . . . are teeming with waterborne diseases. . . . The Minister knows about the tremendous increase in marasmus, kwashiorkor and malnutrition of all kinds, as well as in polio and cholera. . . . Iraq is a developed country which is being de-developed by the United Nations. . . . The peace that we are keeping is starving the ordinary people of Iraq' (*Hansard*, 13 December 1993). In the same vein the Labour MP Tam Dalyell declared: United Nations sanctions are causing the deaths of more than 2000 people a

week in Iraq through lack of medicine, medical services, food and diet supplements, bad water, and a lack of equipment and parts needed for health care, good water, agriculture and food processing. . . . UNICEF estimates that between 80,000 and 100,000 children under five will die in 1993 if sanctions remain' (*Hansard*, 23 February 1993).

Chapter 2 charts the chronology of sanctions, with particular emphasis on the disarmament question – the main US pretext for denying the Iraqi people food and medicine. Attention is also given to 'the 706/712/986 ploy', the cynical US tool designed to transfer the guilt for the genocide from the strategic planners in Washington to the Iraqi regime itself.

In Chapter 3 some indication is given of what the Iraqi people are being compelled to endure: the shortage of food and medicine; the spread of disease in human beings, animals and plants; the inevitable rise in morbidity and mortality rates for all sections of the population. In assessing the plight of an entire nation, Eric Rouleau, a former French ambassador to Turkey and Tunisia, declares:

ABANDON HOPE, IRAQ . . . *Iraq has been irrevocably damned* . . . Iraqis understood the legitimacy of a military action to drive the army from Kuwait, but they have had difficulty comprehending the Allied rationale for using air power to systematically destroy or cripple Iraqi infrastructure and industry: electric power stations (92 per cent of installed capacity destroyed), refineries (80 per cent of production capacity), petrochemical complexes, telecommunications centers (including 135 telephone networks), bridges (more than 100), roads, highways, railroads, hundreds of locomotives and boxcars full of goods, radio and television broadcasting stations, cement plants, and factories producing aluminium, textiles, electric cables, and medical supplies.

The Arab Monetary Fund estimated the losses to be around \$190 billion.

In the same paper ('America's Unyielding Policy Toward Iraq', *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 1995), Eric Rouleau comments also on the 'straitjacket' of the 'multifaceted embargo': the total collapse of food production in Iraq, rocketing price inflation on basic foodstuffs, and the *inexplicably proscribed articles on the 'red list'* stipulated by the UN Sanctions Committee (electric light bulbs, socks, wristwatches, ovens, sewing machines and needles, nails, textiles, grain mills, refrigerators, etc. – see also Table 3.1). Rouleau notes also that the sanctions are threatening the lives of millions of people: 'According to UNICEF,

the calorie deficit among Iraqis is now putting at risk some 3.5 million persons, including 1.58 million children under the age of 15 and 230,000 pregnant or nursing women. Many children . . . will be born mentally handicapped; the infant mortality rate, which has doubled in three years, will continue to rise.'

By 1995 there was growing recognition that economic sanctions were having a devastating and cumulative effect on the Iraqi civilian population; and, moreover, that Washington's efforts to transfer the guilt to the Iraqi government (via the '706/712/986 ploy') were unreasonable. Thus the British Liberal-Democrat MP Sir David Steel commented: The UN argues that resolutions permit the Iraqi sale of limited oil to import food and medical supplies. That is true, but *the conditions on distribution internally by external agencies are not ones that any sovereign nation could reasonably be expected to accept*' (my italics) (*Glasgow Herald*, 11 November 1994). In the same spirit the eminent British politician Lord Healey, speaking at a symposium on sanctions in February 1995, highlighted the double standards that applied to the implementation of UN resolutions.

The mounting evidence of the genocidal character of sanctions on Iraq was now stimulating an international response. The International Commission of Inquiry on Economic Sanctions was highlighting the massive 'human cost' of the embargo, not least the high death rate among children ('sanctions are a violent weapon of mass destruction which targets most directly the weakest in society'). A report on war crimes and sanctions (by the campaigner Jan van Heurck) emphasised that some 11,000 US service personnel had refused to serve in the Gulf; and that several thousand, having made public statements, were tried and imprisoned. Here it is suggested that by 1992 around 300,000 Iraqis had been killed by bombing and sanctions. In July 1994 a petition (from a composer, a physicist, a priest, a playwright, a theatre director and others) was presented to the Icelandic government urging an end to the 'collective punishment' being inflicted against the civilian populations of Iraq, Libya and Serbia through sanctions ('The punitive actions by the Security Council can be regarded as acts of war. As Iceland is formally a party to these immoral measures, we are all guilty of causing innocent civilians irreparable harm').

In August 1994 an international seminar on 'US-imposed sanctions and blockades on Third World countries' was held in London (in association with The International Commission of Inquiry – see above). The seminar acknowledged the harm being done by sanctions, recognising also that they had been imposed to further Washington's global

strategy. Thus Jaime Ballesteros, a former Spanish Member of Parliament, argued that sanctions should evoke the same revulsion as does the idea of using nuclear weapons. Taj Mohammad Khan Langah, a lawyer and Chairman of the Pakistan Saraiki Party, declared that sanctions violated international law and the UN Charter. Laura O'Sullivan, of the Irish in Britain Representation Group, said that a main purpose of sanctions was 'to destroy the independence of Third World countries' by causing hardship to civilian populations. And the Iraqi representative, Khalaf al-Sabaawe, declared that sanctions had been imposed on Iraq because that country did not obey the West. In this context it is easy to see UN sanctions as a convenient tool of American foreign policy.

Chapter 4 considers the use of sanctions, particularly in modern times and particularly as exploited by the United States. Consideration is given also to the treatment of genocide in UN resolutions and in the Genocide Convention, with attention to how such international agreements are directly relevant to what the Western powers are perpetrating in Iraq. Who are the guilty? Governments? Civil servants? The wider publics? How are we to respond to charges that we are implicated in genocide? By blocking out the information and by stifling our natural humanitarian instincts? Or, with the ready aid of the multi-billion-dollar propaganda machines, by transferring the guilt? In Britain the Archbishop of Canterbury points the way. A letter (13 May 1994) written on his behalf by a Secretary for Public Affairs points out the Archbishop is 'greatly saddened' by the suffering of the people of Iraq, and that in fact he prays for them. Of course he is in no position 'to assess personally . . . the complex international diplomatic arguments'; and he is certainly not in a position 'to comment on how the exemption of medical supplies' is working. The profound ethical question of the perpetration of genocide is no concern of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Instead, one should contact the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 'the appropriate and authoritative body . . .'.

The matter of oil is mentioned briefly at the end of Chapter 4, for this is one of the principal elements in the protracted Gulf crisis. Let Iraqi oil back onto the markets and perhaps Saudi revenues will collapse, making it hard to pay US arms suppliers for their \$billions-worth of shipments. Better by far to stoke up the tensions, if only to provide opportunities to test-fly a new generation of cruise missiles (the cruise-missile raid on Bosnia in September 1995 tested the satellite navigational systems that had replaced the earlier computer-mapping systems: Bosnia might not suffice for further laboratory tests).

Control the oil, signal US hegemony to difficult nations, sell more arms, test more weapons and communication systems, wreak destruction from time to time and then send in the US contractors, spend the munitions and stimulate the arms industries. What do genocides matter when all this exciting entrepreneurial activity is in the wind?