
Commentary: Dr. Eric Hoskins

Killing is killing, not kindness

This article first appeared in the English weekly New Statesman in January and is reprinted, slightly shortened, with the author's permission. Dr. Hoskins is the medical coordinator of the Gulf Peace Team and worked with the Harvard-based International Study Team. He recently returned from his fifth humanitarian mission to Iraq.

Cluster bombs are perfect child-killers. In appearance they are toy-like: an elongated cola can attached to a tiny parachute. Traction between the can and its parachute detonates the bomb electronically. When a child comes across one of these unexploded "toys," and pulls on the parachute, he or she loses an arm or an eye, or more commonly a life. What evil and malignant mind designs these killing devices, I do not know. Most hospitals in Iraq contain at least one child victim of such obscene creativeness. These cluster bombs, designed to kill and maim, are the most gripping example of the human unkindness that fueled the western coalition's Operation Desert Storm in the Gulf War. Opening high above the ground, the bombs release between 100-200 lethal "bomblets." The parachutes attached to each guide them delicately to Earth where they are meant to explode on impact. Tens of thousands, however, failed to detonate, and still lie unexploded and partially buried in sand in and around Iraqi towns and cities.

Two Norwegian child psychologists, world experts on the impact of conflict on children, recently interviewed 250 school-age Iraqi children. They concluded that the children of Iraq are the "most traumatized children of war ever studied." Two-thirds of those interviewed believed they would not survive to become adults.

Just over one year ago, on Sept. 30, 1990, the U.N., which was later to prosecute the war against Iraq, convened the World Summit for Children. It was the largest gathering of world leaders in history, and in the meeting's final declaration, 159 countries pledged, ironically, to build "a peaceful world where violence and war will cease to be acceptable means for settling disputes and conflicts." One hundred days later, Desert Storm rained fire on the heads of the children we so readily betrayed, making a mockery of the summit's utopian declaration.

Of the more than 100,000 tons of bombs dropped on Iraq and Kuwait during the 40-odd days of air bombardment, only

7% were "smart." An estimated 75% of all bombs dropped on Iraq missed their target, raining shrapnel and explosives on civilian populations. Coalition bombardment effectively terminated everything vital to human survival in Iraq—electricity, water, sewage systems, agriculture, industry and health care. Power stations were repeatedly attacked until electricity supplies were at only 4% of pre-war levels. Such power shortages meant that raw sewage backed up into streets and homes, while electrically driven water pumping stations ground to a halt. Water became scarce and what was available was contaminated, with the result that epidemics of cholera and typhoid killed thousands of vulnerable children.

The massive scale of the damage inflicted on the civilian infrastructure led Richard Reid, the Middle East director of Unicef, to declare that Baghdad was like a human who had all his bones and internal organs removed, with only the intact skin remaining—outwardly viable, but with all life-sustaining infrastructure, the bones of the society, broken or paralyzed.

The despair created by such devastation, as the coalition forces shamelessly admit, was devised to turn the Iraqi people against their leadership. The allies intentionally used psychological and physical terror of the civilian population as part of their military strategy to seize victory from Baghdad.

As the coalition forces were cheerfully celebrating their lopsided triumph in the streets of Washington and London, Part Two of this dirty war was just beginning.

Years of brutal oppression from Baghdad provided the impetus for uprisings in both the Shia south and the Kurdish north of Iraq.* And while the victorious West obscenely transformed the Washington night sky into an approximation of that of wartime Baghdad "to know what Iraqis felt like that first night," the killing fields opened up in the south of Iraq, leaving thousands of civilians dead. Days later, the slaughter had spread to the Kurdish north.

Nearly 2 million Kurds were forced from their homes to suffer horribly in the neighboring mountains of Turkey and Iran. There was no water, no food, no electricity, no health care. However, all of these basic essentials would have been

*The editors of *EIR* dissent from Dr. Hoskins's view here. The Kurdish groups are manipulated by CIA-controlled leaders based in Saudi Arabia, and were urged to revolt by the U.S., which is using their plight as a pretext for destabilizing Turkey and possibly a new attack on Iraq.

available to the Kurds had they been allowed to walk the one to two kilometers down the mountains to the more accessible valleys in Turkey. Indeed, when asked to describe the single most important life-saving intervention that should have been offered the refugee Kurds, senior aid officials from three well-known international charitable organizations gave the same answer: "Let the Kurds walk down the mountains to the main road." But the Turkish authorities, to prevent unrest among their own 10 million Kurds, forced the Iraqi Kurds to remain high up on the slopes. The West lacked the necessary political will to convince Turkey of its humanitarian responsibilities—sentencing further thousands of Kurdish refugees to agonizing deaths. Washington could easily have convinced Ankara to create refugee camps—not in the mountains, but in the more accessible valleys and alongside the main transport corridors, facilitating the provision of relief. But the Kurds, having fled one oppressive regime, had apparently outstayed their Turkish welcome before they had even arrived.

Now, nine months later, more than 300,000 Kurds, homeless and destitute, are living on the crumbled remains of their villages high in snowy mountain passes. While cold and hunger eat away at their bodies, they are beginning to understand that western attention is short-lived.

But guns and bombs were not the only weapons used against Iraqis. Rigidly enforced economic sanctions ensured that Iraq's destroyed civilian infrastructure would remain paralyzed, while food, medicine, and other essential imports remained both scarce and expensive.

A study of more than 9,000 Iraqi households, by a team of 90 Harvard-led researchers, has found that the death rate of children has more than tripled since the beginning of the war. At this rate of death, an estimated 50,000 children have died due to the war and the sanctions. Thirty percent of Iraqi children under five (nearly 1 million children) are currently malnourished. A shortage of infant formula (baby milk) has caused an upsurge in infant deaths through malnutrition and disease.

Food prices, meanwhile, have increased to a level that is, on average, 15-20 times higher than before the sanctions. Iraq's harvest this year was only a third of the normal yield. Sanctions prohibited the import of seeds, pesticides, and spare parts for agricultural machinery.

Of more than 5 million tons of food ordered from foreign producers by the Iraqi government since the cease-fire, and in full compliance with the U.N. sanctions, less than 220,000 tons have been received. Iraq lacks the currency to pay for the orders and, to date, only Switzerland and Greece have released Iraqi frozen assets for the purchase of urgently needed humanitarian food supplies—this despite agreement from the Security Council, months ago, that all such assets could be immediately unfrozen and used for humanitarian relief. Many deaths have occurred because medicines such as insulin, vaccines, antibiotics, heart drugs, and asthma inhalers

are either no longer available or are in short supply. Children with treatable leukemia have died because they have been unable to receive the necessary anti-cancer drugs. Hospitals, many damaged during the war or subsequent internal conflict, are ineffective, empty shells.

The world was told that food and medicine were exempt from the economic sanctions against Iraq. The truth was entirely different. From Aug. 6, 1990 to mid-March 1991, it was illegal to import even a single scrap of food into Iraq—from any source. And less than 10% of the required amounts of medicines have entered Iraq since August 1990. Following the imposition of sanctions and the economic blockade, most pharmaceutical companies immediately stopped shipping drugs to Iraq; ambiguity over what constituted a "medicine" and indirect pressure by western governments discouraged further trade.

More than 50 paid consignments of medicines, purchased before the embargo, were kept from entering Iraq until long after the cease-fire. A dozen have still not been delivered. A 1,800-ton order of baby milk, paid for before August 1990, remains in Turkey, because that government refuses to allow the baby milk to be shipped on. The milk's expiry date is close.

All the while, sanctions continue to bite into the Iraqi economy. A kilogram of meat now costs nearly one-sixth of the average monthly salary of \$18. The price of Iraq's main staple food, wheat, has increased fiftyfold since the imposition of sanctions. Real wages have plummeted to 5-10%, in real terms, of what they were a year ago. Unemployment is thought to be as high as 70%. Many families have been forced to sell all their personal belongings, sometimes even their clothes, to survive. And it is the poorest who suffer the severest effects of the sanctions.

So we have succeeded in liberating Kuwait. And we will never know whether we could have accomplished the same result without the use of force. But we do know, with great certainty, that, had we not resorted to violence, there would not have been 50,000 dead Iraqi children. And we must also remember that, for the first time, the U.N., an organization created as an instrument of peace, has sought war against a member state—in a manner in violation of its own charter. For the first time, the U.N. explicitly approved the use of food as a weapon against innocent civilians caught in conflict zones. And the entire Gulf crisis came and went with the decisions taken by the 15-member Security Council, while the nations of the world, through the General Assembly, opted out of collective responsibility.

Perhaps worst of all is the ease with which western political institutions have been able to convince us so readily that violence against the violent somehow constitutes a just war. Until we learn a more compassionate way of addressing the wrongs in this world, unless we can separate our political objectives from our humanitarian responsibilities, we have truly lost sight of our own human values.