

The Ever Dependable Bully on Embassy Row; Venezuela and Iraq Are No Longer Worlds Apart

Embassy raided; citizens starved by sanctions; coveted oil resources targeted — again.

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The United States is still punishing Iran for the 1979 takeover of its ‘sacred’ premises, its embassy in Tehran. By contrast, when American authorities occupy another nation’s embassy there’s nothing but approval from the American public and silent acquiescence by others. I don’t know about you, but I heard no outcry, not even a quiet show of concern emanating from the diplomatic corridors of Washington or New York earlier this month around the violation of sovereign diplomatic property—that of Venezuela. That hush recalls a similar embassy breakin—the American assault on and occupation of the Iraqi embassy on Massachusetts Avenue in late 1990.

Anticipating the recent incursion, at least the Venezuelan administration was able to remove their files and to arrange with a brave team of American supporters, The Embassy Protection Collective, to occupy the building for as long as possible in order to attract some media attention to the threat and eventual (illegal) takeover of its property by U.S. law enforcement personnel. That handful of activists stood against not only a police force, but a menacing crowd of Venezuelan opposition supporters eager to assume control of the building in the name of U.S.-backed Venezuelan president-in-waiting Juan Guaido.

The 1990 assault on the Iraqi embassy went unnoticed and completely unprotested at any level. At that time, a public unfamiliar with Kuwait (and Iraq) was overwhelmed by terrifying media accounts of an unspeakable military aggression. Worldwide, emotions were swiftly roused by images of a new Hitler; Saddam Hussein was reframed as a menace to the entire world, his arsenal directed at Europe.

There wasn’t a whimper when Washington’s Iraq embassy was stormed and barricaded. It would remain empty and barred to any Iraqi presence for more than 12 years (until 2003 when the U.S. occupied Iraq and installed its chosen leaders in Baghdad).

The American assault proceeded at multiple levels, as with Venezuela, but more rapidly in Iraq’s case and with blanket global approval. Within a mere four days, after the August 2, 1990 invasion of Kuwait, an unprecedented international embargo, probably drawn up in anticipation of an Iraqi miscalculation and blunder — was imposed on the nation of 18 million. It was comprehensive, ruthlessly policed and internationally adhered to, lasting long after Iraq’s weapons-of-mass-destruction were neutralized, after billions of dollars of Iraqi revenue from controlled oil sales were essentially stolen, after the country’s overseas holdings were impounded, after treasures were pillaged, after millions died or were stricken by embargo-related illnesses and starvation, after medicines were long unavailable, and

after millions of its citizens fled in search of relief from that punishing siege.

Sound familiar? Today we hear how Venezuelans' health and living standards have deteriorated, how unemployment is driving poverty, how American allies have frozen Venezuelan assets held in their banks, how millions of desperate citizens have emigrated, how Maduro is a tyrant, how his police are smothering dissent, how opposition is deepening — all [endorsed by American media](#) and members of Congress' support for regime change.

Thus far, remarkably, Venezuela has resisted outside efforts to instigate a coup and impose its chosen leader. A few voices are calling for a negotiated settlement to the standoff, although [Amnesty International is playing its part](#) in demonizing the Maduro government. Recall how AI affirmed the [story of Kuwaiti babies](#) ripped from hospital incubators by Iraq's occupying forces— a phony but effective ploy later exposed.

Iraqi people's resistance to the murderous U.S. embargo was noble but the experience was nevertheless silently punishing—a war whose harmful ramifications continue today. It was a brutal siege worth remembering because of this, also because the deaths and suffering during that 13-year prelude to the invasion is not calculated into the Iraq war record. Neither are they included in U.S. war crimes and obfuscations by our media.

First, the 1990 embargo on Iraq was wholeheartedly sanctioned by the United Nations. Second, within a few months the U.S. led a massive bombing campaign to drive Iraqi troops from Kuwait and to bomb key infrastructure in the Iraqi capital and other population centers. That strategy smashed bridges and factories and the nationwide power grid, unleashing a plague of toxicity that would infect Iraq's water, its soil and its air for decades—a plague that persists to the present. American-led bombing continued for years, theoretically aimed at an illegal 'no-fly zone' prohibiting flights in the north but effective nationwide, allowing allied jets (mainly U.S., British, and French) to terrorize the entire population. Well documented but little known were summer attacks by fighter jets loaded with incendiary bombs that set Iraq's ripened wheat fields alight, destroying one of the people's few domestic sources of food.

While the Bush Sr. administration designed and imposed the embargo, the succeeding Democratic Clinton presidency (1993-2001) strictly maintained it. So critics of the current policy against Venezuela who blame a pugilistic Trump administration need to recognize this is a tried and tested non-partisan American—Republican and Democrat—war policy.

Eventually—rather late, as is often the case— documents would provide details of that embargo war. [My own reports](#) joining voices of colleagues, notably [John Pilger](#), Felicity Arbuthnot, Kathy Kelly, George Galloway and the International Action Center led by former attorney general [Ramsey Clark](#), documented devastation wrought by the embargo.

It was only in 2012, after the U.S. invasion and occupation ended, when noble institutions like Harvard Press risked publishing [The Invisible War: The United States and Iraq Sanctions](#), a study of that episode. Also belatedly (in 2010) came [Cultural Cleansing in Iraq](#), a credible account of the pillaging of Iraq following the U.S. invasion.

What informs our consciousness of that distant war today? Accounts of ISIS atrocities and memoirs by retired American marines of their lost comrades.

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