

# Embargoes and Blockades used as a Method of Warfare

Project for Pitiless Centuries

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Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#), [Law and Justice](#)

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*"I listen to the blackbird. A song for those who died.*

*Now it is still all left to do. So as not to lose sight of the goal, which is to lift the brutal blockade of Gaza. That will happen.*

*Beyond that goal, others are waiting. Demolishing a system of apartheid takes time. But not an eternity." (Swedish Author Henning Mankell, Mavi Marmara Survivor, diary entry, 2nd June 2010.)*

In 1990, in arguably some of the most chilling lines written in recent history, Gary Clyde Hufbauer, et al., wrote, regarding embargoes, in an advisory document for the George H.W. Bush Administration: "... We present our short list of 'do's and don'ts' for the architects of a sanctions policy designed to change the politics of the target country ... (3) Do pick on the weak and helpless ...(5) Do impose the maximum cost on your target ..." (1) On Hiroshima Day 1990, the most comprehensive embargo ever imposed by the UN., was imposed on Iraq.

This silent, comprehensive weapon of mass destruction is increasingly used as a method of warfare, often under a supine United Nations, arm twisted by the US, or on behalf of the friends it has left. The men, women and children who are victims of this unique deprivation, denying, or debilitating all life's norms, are thus targeted by a United Nations established to :

" ... reaffirm human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small ...

to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom ... the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples ... "

As Hufbauer pointed out: one hundred and seventy cases of economic sanctions have been imposed since World War 1. Fifty of these cases were launched in the 1990's.

Since might is, as ever, right, only target countries are required to scrupulously observe

international legalities. In reality, what is demanded of them is a bewildering array of moving goal posts. One demand is complied with, only for another, formerly unmentioned, to move in to view. The marauding powerful, however, ride rough-shod over all.

Geneva Protocol 1, Article 54, is unequivocal as to the illegitimacy of laying siege to populations:

1: "Starvation as a method of warfare is prohibited.

2: It is prohibited to attack, destroy, remove or render useless objects indispensable to the civilian population ... foodstuffs, crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies and irrigation works, for the specific purpose of denying them for their sustenance value to the civilian population."

Iraqis, as the relentless, embargoed years ground on, blamed Israel. "Israel is behind this ..." was the repeated refrain. Since Israel is blamed for near all the Middle East's woes, it was a claim I, as other correspondents and visitors, dismissed repeatedly, as a conspiracy too far, to be met with a pitying look, which translated: "There's stupid and - there's really stupid."

Less than four years after imposition of the Iraq embargo, in Kuala Lumpur, in May 1994, The Malaysian Conference against Economic Sanctions on Iraq, issued a Resolution which noted that the "severest economic sanctions ever witnessed in (UN) history" had been imposed "on Iraq." (2) The Resolution continued :

"... these murderous economic sanctions against Iraq already claimed at least 400,000 lives, many of them children and women, while hundreds of thousands of others suffer from malnutrition, disease and hunger, brought about by inadequate medical facilities and rapidly deteriorating health conditions." Hufbauer's "weak and helpless" were paying the "maximum cost", at the rate of over 100,000 a year, in the name of: "We the people of the United Nations."

The Kuala Lumpur Conference also recorded, that Iraq (as Palestine now) was "deprived of scientific, medical, educational and cultural materials." Further, in spite of: "Iraq's compliance with all relevant Security Council Resolutions (sanctions continued) under the influence of the United States and its ally Great Britain ..." and that the real aim of the embargo was: " ... to control the immense oil wealth of Iraq and the Gulf region (and to bring about) "a power structure in the region which favours the United States, the West and Israel ..."

Exactly two years later, in May 1996, Madeleine Albright, then US., Ambassador to the UN., was asked (on "60 Minutes") by Lesley Stahl : " We have heard that more than half a million children have died ... more children than died in Hiroshima ... and you know, is the price worth it?"

In unhesitating, pitiless, words, Albright, herself a grandmother, unforgettably replied: "I think this is a very hard choice, but the price, we think the price is worth it."

Comparing the blockade of Gaza, by Israel, with that of Iraq, similarities are chillingly stark. Iraq, seventy percent reliant on imports from fertilizer to pharmaceuticals, building materials, to medical maintenance, was bombed back "to a pre-industrial age" in 1991. All wherewithal, for not alone rebuilding was denied, but foods, soft drinks, paper, books,

newspapers, toiletries, pens, pencils, blackboards, toys, musical instruments, sheet music, trade and professional literature (including the New England Journal of Medicine and the Lancet) ping pong balls. Items hardly “dual use” to morph in to weapons of mass destruction - or even play yard destruction.

The schools for blind and deaf children closed - specially adapted items for their needs, as braille books, hearing aids and the batteries for them, also vetoed.

Requests for ambulances, bombed in 1991, or collapsed for want of spare parts, were also refused. When, after a decade, a few were allowed in, the usual built-in means of communication were denied - in case they were diverted for “military use.” The weakest and most helpless, were indeed targeted, at the maximum cost. Mr Hufbauer’s words were followed to - and beyond - the letter.

In Gaza, largely destroyed in December-January 2008/9 by Israeli bombardment, goods blocked by Israel (3) include all rebuilding materials (cement, iron, wood, tar, plaster) tea, coffee, sage, cardamom, cumin, coriander, ginger, jam, halva, vinegar, nutmeg, sweets, chocolate, fruit preserves, seeds, sage, cardamom, cumin, coriander, ginger, jam, halva, vinegar, nutmeg, chocolate, fruit preserves, seeds and nuts, biscuits and sweets, potato chips, gas for soft drinks, dried fruit, fresh meat, plaster, tar, wood for construction, cement, iron, glucose, industrial salt, plastic/glass/metal containers, industrial margarine, tarpaulin sheets for huts, fabric for clothing, light bulbs, shoes, sheets, toys, crayons, mattresses, blankets, shampoo, conditioner. All in fact, items formerly vetoed for Iraq.

As Iraq, musical instruments and strings for them are also banned. Are Brahms and Beethoven, the haunting, or joyous sound of the piano, violin, flute, lute and its Middle East musical relative, the oud, now a terrorist act?

Hearing aids and batteries for the children at the school for the deaf are denied. As Iraq, water remains a biological weapon through lack of purifying chemicals and parts to repair. Schools, hospitals, sewage plants, mosques and homes continue to lie in ruins for want of construction materials.

The Israeli Human Rights organization, B’tselem in a 45 page Report released this week, notes: 95% of factories are closed and 93% of water is polluted. Article 54 of the Geneva Convention, like the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, lie on history’s bonfire.

The majority of Iraq’s livestock was killed in the bombing, with all commercial chicken production targeted and destroyed. Importation of livestock was vetoed. In Palestine, denied importation are: horses, donkeys, goats, cattle, chickens - and heaters for commercial chicken production. Along with planters for saplings. If fishermen are not shot by Israeli patrol boats, they are anyway denied fishing nets and fishing rods - as Iraq.

In Iraq, US and British ‘planes, (illegally) patrolling the farcically named (by them) “safe havens” of the north and south (1992-2003) routinely dropped flares on harvested wheat and barley, incinerating the precious crops. In Palestine, women harvesting wheat have been attacked by Israeli forces, using live ammunition, as this is being written. Destruction of Palestinian farms, olive and citrus groves, commercial flower fields, vegetables and apricot groves, are repeatedly recorded.

Surgeon David Halpin, founder of UK., Charity, Dove and Dolphin

([www.doveanddolphin.org.uk](http://www.doveanddolphin.org.uk)) explains the condition goods arrive in from the port of Ashdod, when finally delivered to Gaza. One Dove and Dolphin consignment, taken by ship via Cyprus, included numerous boxes of donated clothes, carefully laundered, ironed by his wife - and packed by them both over many weeks - medical catheters, computers, sewing and knitting machines, basis for the genesis of a few home businesses.

They sat on the docks as Ashdod from August until December. When finally delivered the plastic catheters had perished, and none of the computers, sewing and knitting machines worked. The several dozen boxes containing the lovingly laundered, folded, clothes, had been opened by the Israeli authorities with box cutters, shredding many of them beyond repair.

Wheelchairs are finally delivered - without the batteries to operate them. Machiavellian mendacity.

Since the 31st May massacre on the Mavi Marmara, Israel announced an "easing" of the Gaza blockade. Were Gaza's plight not a gaping wound on the face of humanity, this pathetic attempt at international public relations would be comical. The territory, in need of intensive care, can now import such luxuries as shaving cream, jam - and potato chips. Rebuilding materials to begin repair of last year's blitz, still blocked, as they might be used: ".. to build bunkers." Whether true or not, the sane would think they may well need them. Ironically, as David Halpin points out, Palestinians with an (Israel granted) permit by to live in Jerusalem, are required by law, to build a bunker in their homes, at a sum of around \$20,000 - a regional fortune.

The catch all phrase, that building materials "might be used for military purposes", is also straight out of the siege of Iraq handbook, as is: "Israel's blockade of Gaza, includes a complex and ever changing list of goods ..."

The world, arguably, is regressing. Geoff Simons, writes that the "..most celebrated early (blockade) example ... was the Megrarian decree in ancient Greece, enacted by Pericles, in 432 BC., (responding) to the kidnapping of three Aspasian women."

The Megrarians " .. denied the necessities of life ... were spurned (and it was declared) they will not be on our land, in our market, on the sea .." (4) The disputed facts regarding the alleged taking, by Hamas, of IDF soldier, Gilad Shilat, nearly two and a half millenia later, is a given reason for Gaza's peoples collective punishment.

Simons further analogy, related to Iraq, is of a twelfth century English siege, when, if water running out did not result in capitulation: " ... cutting off supplies and starving the garrison ..." became the option. In the case of Iraq, as Gaza, the "garrison", becomes the country.

Two final comparisons are worth noting. In 1996, Iraq's population had hit a humanitarian low of enormity. The so called UN "Oil for Food" deal, had been agreed a year earlier, thus aid agencies had withdrawn, but as UN games continued, no moneys came though. With Iraq's bank accounts frozen, worldwide, deprivation ruled - in a country sitting on oil reserves which some experts still maintain are possibly the world's greatest.

The Iraqi authorities gave permission for a flight of humanitarian provision offered by USAID. On returning to the United States, media outlets were regaled with stories of how these "aid givers" had found stories of the embargo's deprivations false, Iraq awash with money and

goods, and a joyous population, which largely partied in expensive night spots, until the early hours.

This month, Israel, under pressure after the flotilla bloodbath and an international population increasingly checking that the bar codes on items in their shopping do not include “729”, that of Israel, produced for the world’s media, “menus” from Gaza restaurants, mouth watering, delicious fare, which proved the siege of Gaza was a non-happening. As women continue to give birth at Israeli manned check-points, and normality denied, farcically, promoter Shuki Weiss, declared the pulling out of a number of international acts, from appearances in Israel, in protest at Gaza’s treatment: “cultural terrorism.”

“I am full of both sorrow and pain in light of the fact that our repeated attempts to present quality acts and festivals in Israel have increasingly been falling victim to what I can only describe as a form of cultural terrorism which is targeting Israel ... ” he wrote.

Has some dreadful psychological ague struck a country in which such hopes of their own safe haven lay? Sometimes the smaller actions speak louder than the near incomprehensible.

When author Henning Mankell, having survived the Mavi Marmara, finally boarded a flight home, he wrote:

“On board the plane, the air hostess gives me a pair of socks. Because mine were stolen by one of the commandos who attacked the boat I was on.

The myth of the brave and utterly infallible Israeli soldier is shattered. Now we can add: they are common thieves. For I was not the only one to be robbed of my money, credit card, clothes, MP3 player, laptop; the same happened to many others on the same ship as me, which was attacked early one morning by masked Israeli soldiers, who were, thus, in fact nothing other than lying pirates.”

Gaza has natural gas, Iraq oil. Perhaps it is not alone socks and personal belongings which fall prey to “piracy”, but, as further sanctions are slammed on another oil rich state, Iran, within the last week, countries fall prey to political piracy as well.

## Notes

1. Gary Clyde Hufbauer, Jeffrey J. Schott and Kimberly Ann Elliot, *Economic Sanctions Reconsidered: History and Current Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for international Economics, 1990, p.114.) Quoted in Geoff Simons : “The Scourging of Iraq”, MacMillan, updated 1998.

2. Quotes referenced in Geoff Simons invaluable resource, as above.

3. [http://www.gisha.org/UserFiles/File/publications/Products060610\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.gisha.org/UserFiles/File/publications/Products060610_Eng.pdf)

4. Simons, as above.

5. <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=19680>

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