

Iraq's Children: Choir of Despair

US deeply involved in the gravest of international crimes

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The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is a wide range of specific rights and protection measures to protect children worldwide. It is also the most ratified international human rights treaty ever. It strictly prohibits the abuse and torture of children. In most Western countries, including the US, the abuse of children is a criminal offense. However, this is not the case when the crimes are committed against Iraqi children by Western forces. It is part of the destructive policy brought into Iraq by the US Occupation of the country.

Contrary to Western politicians, Western media and Western “progressives” who welcomed the illegal war of aggression against Iraq, the plight of Iraqi children under Occupation is worsening. On all levels – human rights abuse, healthcare, medical, educational, and psychological – the Iraqi children are enduring immense hardship and suffering. It is a cover-up of crimes against humanity.

A recent investigation by Neil Mackay of the [Sunday Herald](#), has revealed that US-British forces are holding more than 100 children in jails such as Abu Ghraib and Camp Bucca in the south. Witnesses claim that the detainees – some of the children as young as 8 years old – are also being subjected to rape and torture. The investigation is based on classified UNICEF report written in June titled *Children in Conflict with the Law or With Coalition Forces* and on reports from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Many Iraqi children were detained indefinitely without access to their family or to lawyers.

The UNICEF report has not been released, because UNICEF is no longer in the humanitarian business of criticising US power and its criminal practices of torture. **UNICEF current Executive Director Ann M. Veneman, a member of the Bush cabal and former US secretary of Agriculture**, is not likely to offend the Bush administration by releasing the report.

The *Sunday Herald* noted that a section of the report reads: ‘Information on the number, age, gender and conditions of incarceration is limited. In Basra and Karbala children arrested for alleged activities targeting the occupying forces are reported to be routinely transferred to an internee facility in Um Qasr. The categorisation of these children as ‘internees’ is worrying since it implies indefinite holding without contact with family, expectation of trial or due process’. Um Qasr is a port city on Iraq’s southern border and isolated from the other centres. Further, Reports from Iraq accuse the US Marines of kidnapping children and hold them as hostages.

The ICRC reports in June 2004 that there were 107 children under 18 in six US-run prisons, but did not provide any further information. However, Arlie Hochschild, a professor of

Sociology at the University of California at Berkeley, noted in the *New York Times* on 29 June 2005 that, "In communications with Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, the Pentagon has lowered the cut-off to 16. For this reason among others, we don't know exactly how many Iraqi children are in American custody" because "[a]ge is not a determining factor in [US] detention" practices. **Since the so-called handover of "sovereignty" in June 2004, the number has risen dramatically. At Abu Ghraib prison, where the US practices the use of torture,** "boys were sodomized with the cameras rolling. And the worst above all of that is the soundtrack of the boys shrieking that your government has. They are in total terror. It's going to come out", said investigative reporter Seymour Hersh of *The New Yorker*.

Indeed, with the exception of Seymour Hersh's investigation in May 2004, crimes of sexual violence, rape and torture by US forces against Iraqi men, women and children are continue to be unreported and remain secret from the public. The U.S. administration blamed the crimes on a few black sheep and closed the door. Of course this is not true. The policy of torture is part of a secret interrogations program and comes directly from the top of US military, with direct approval of Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and the White House. According to Brig. Gen. Janis Karpinski, formerly in charge of Abu Ghraib prison, most of these detainees and prisoners found to be innocent.

Unfortunately there has been no public outrage in the US or in Europe to condemn these appalling practices against Iraqi men, women and children. This silence and ignorance by Western public have contributed to the normalisation of abuse and torture.

The Bush administration have normalised the use of torture by violating the rules of law, and human rights and decency. According to Karen Greenberg, director of the Centre on Law and Security at the New York University School of Law, editor of *'The Torture Papers'*, the U.S. government is guilty of a 'systematic decision to alter the use of methods of coercion and torture that lay outside of accepted and legal norms'. Sanford Levinson, a professor of constitutional law at the University of Texas Law School, condemned the Bush administration justice for having the power "too close" to that of Nazi Germany.

Advocates of torture and abuse of human rights are not difficult to find, especially among Western elites. Obscure academics used Bush's "war on terror" and the illegal war on Iraq to make their names known. In Australia, one of the new breed of "experts" on terrorism is a certain law professor and a former police officer by the name of Mirko Bagaric. Professor Bagaric twists and turns his case for torture use against presumed to be guilty individuals to 'extract information'. However, professor Bagaric provides no prove or evidence on the reliability of information extracted by their practice of torture and abuse of human rights. "The recently published views of the Deakin University academics have not formed in a vacuum. A disregard for human rights is being encouraged at the highest levels", wrote journalist Bob Briton in the weekly Australian, *The Guardian*. With these kinds of "experts" the chances of a just world based on the rules of law is getting bleak.

The support for torture among Westerners reflects the denial of the educated classes and the "progressives" that the US is deeply involved in the gravest of international crimes. The deliberate use of torture and the intention to inflict harm and pain on helpless and defenceless children is illegal, morally wrong and counterproductive. The Bush administration policy of torture which is in use on Iraqi men, women and children has proved

to be ineffective and sadistic criminal practices.

It is reported that Norway and Denmark, two members of the insignificant “coalition of the willing” have protested against the abuse and torture of Iraqi children. If the Norwegian and Danish governments are serious about respecting the rights of the Iraqi children, they should withdraw their troops from Iraq and stop participating in war crimes against the Iraqi children.

The healthcare situation for children in Iraq is very serious. According to a 2002 UNICEF survey, the rates of acute malnutrition among children younger than 5 in Iraq have fallen to (4 per cent) the lowest level since they peaked in 1996, at the highest of the genocidal sanctions. However, two years of US occupation, it shot up to 7.7 per cent in November 2004, according to a study conducted by Iraq’s Health Ministry in cooperation with Norway’s Institute for Applied International Studies and the U.N. Development Program. The new study reveals that roughly 400,000 Iraqi children suffering from “wasting”, a condition characterized by chronic diarrhoea and dangerous deficiencies of protein. Malnutrition appeared in Iraq for the first time in the early 1990s, as a result of the UN genocidal sanction forced by the US and Britain against the Iraqi people. The surveys suggest the silent human cost being paid across the country as a result of US Occupation.

The Anglo-American war on Iraq since 1991 and the violent policy implemented against the Iraqi children were deliberately designed to destroy Iraq as a nation. On May 12, 1996, Madeline Albright, the former US ambassador to the United Nations, told Lesley Stahl of CBS news program *60 Minutes*, when asked to comment on the death of half a million Iraqi children. Albright replied without hesitation: “We think the price is worth it”. In addition, the US and Britain have refused to lift the sanctions under any circumstances despite known the full scale of a deliberate atrocity. A generation of Iraqi children is lost. Today, Iraqi children are enduring immense hardship and suffering never before.

Report after report by the UN and aid agencies have revealed the scale of the human tragedy orchestrated by US-Britain policy toward Iraq, and particularly the Iraqi children. The tragedy was covered-up by the demonisation of Saddam Hussein in Western media in a deliberate move to silence the Iraqi children’s cries. “We find record of not a single significant demonstration protesting the wholesale destruction of Iraqi children”, wrote Professor Ward Churchill of the University of Colorado.

In the Arab World, there were no dissenting voices to protest the slaughter of Iraqi children, but long trends of Arab passivity and self-defence bankruptcy. Indeed, the Arab stooges (rulers) benefited immensely from the war and sanctions against the Iraqi people. They are equally complicit in war crimes against Iraq’s children

The World Health Organization (WHO) reported on March 1996 that; “Since the onset of sanctions, there has been a six-fold increase in the mortality rate for children under five, and the majority of the country’s population has been on a semi-starvation diet”. Denis Halliday, UN assistant secretary general and humanitarian coordinator for Iraq, said that sanctions are “undermining the moral credibility of the UN” and their continuation is “in contradiction to the human rights provisions in the UN’s own Charter”.

In October 1996, UNICEF reported that “4,500 children under the age of 5 are dying each month from hunger and disease...The situation is disastrous for children. Many are living on

the very margin of survival". The figure means the death of an Iraqi child every 10 minutes as a result of the US-Britain imposed sanctions. Philippe Heffnick of UNICEF, said; "What we are seeing is a dramatic deterioration in the nutritional well-being of Iraqi children since 1991... It is clear that the children are bearing the brunt of the current economic hardship". "They must be protected from the impact of the sanctions. Otherwise, they will continue to suffer and that we cannot accept", added Mr. Heffnick.

A recent United Nations World Food Programme (UNWFP) report, found the majority of the Iraqi population lack the required daily calories to survive and remain healthy. Iraqi living condition has worsened, and many Iraqis admit openly that life before the occupation was much better and safer. An estimated 25 percent of Iraqi babies are born with low birth weights and the WHO warned that many of these children will lag in their physical or mental development, leading to long-term health problems.

According to a United Nations Development Program (UNDP) study conducted in 2004, infant mortality and malnutrition findings show clearly that, "the suffering of children due to war and conflict in Iraq is not limited to those directly wounded or killed by military activities", says the [UN ILCS study](#). With children under the age of 15 make up 39 per cent of the country's total population of 27 million, the ILCS study notes that, "Most Iraqi children today have lived their whole lives under sanctions and war". In other words, most Iraqi children today have lived their lives in constant fear of U.S-British sponsored terrorism against children.

The "current major problems" includes "lack of health personnel, lack of medicines, non-functioning medical equipments and destroyed hospitals and health centres", the ILCS study reveals. It is a U.S-made and a U.S-accelerated tragedy.

And as a consequence of the US war, "[h]undreds of thousands of children born since the beginning of the present war have had none of their required vaccinations, and routine immunization services in major areas of the country are all but disrupted. Destruction of refrigeration systems needed to store vaccines have rendered the vaccine supply virtually useless", writes Dr. César Chelala, an international public health consultant. "Even antibiotics of minimal cost are in short supply, increasing the population's risk of dying from common infections. Hospitals are overcrowded, and many hospitals go dark at night for lack of lighting fixtures. The Iraqi minister of health claims that 100 percent of the hospitals in Iraq need rehabilitation", noted César Chelala.

Iraq's education system, one of the best in the Arab World before the war, has also deteriorated by both the sanctions and the war. Again, Iraqi children are hard hit under Occupation. The literacy rate among Iraqi children between the ages of 15 and 24 is just 74 per cent, which is according to the study is only "slightly higher than the literacy rate for the population at large". The figure is lower than that for those 25-34, "indicating that the younger generation lags behind its predecessors on educational performance". According to UNICEF, almost 1 in 4 children has no access to education under the Occupation.

The effects of "the sanctions policy not only reversed previous educational achievements but rendered the Iraqi education system unable to serve the population. The impact of the sanctions will affect future generations of school children and university students", writes Agustin De Santisteban, a Comparative Education specialist with the Faculty of Education at UNED in Madrid.

The highly publicised US propaganda of Iraq's 'reconstruction' proved to be the complete and deliberate destruction of Iraqi education system. The best example is found in the de-development of Iraq's school curriculum, one of the best in the region. Iraq's school curriculum has been replaced by US-crafted curriculum in order to brainwash Iraqi children in the same way as American children are brainwashed.

A large number of Iraqi academics, scientists, doctors, engineers, pharmacologists, officers, and lawyers have been murdered or forced to flee the country. Others are being imprisoned without charges. Iraq is not being constructed; it is suffering from a massive brain drain.

On 30 March 2004, *Al-jazeera* reported: "More than 1000 leading Iraqi professionals and intellectuals have been assassinated since last April, among them such prominent figures as Dr Muhammad al-Rawi, the president of Baghdad University". The deliberate destruction of Iraq's human resources designed to create a dependent and subordinate colonial dictatorship to serve US interests and US-Zionist hegemony.

The nation infrastructure - the country's service networks, like electricity grids, communications, bridges, irrigation, transport, sewage treatment systems and water purification plants - built up by the previous regime was largely destroyed by the US-British indiscriminate terror's bombing began in 1991. The destruction was intentional in order to destroy Iraq's economy and increase the suffering of the Iraqi people. Indeed, all targets were selected to amplify the economic and psychological impact of the sanctions on the Iraqi society for many years to come.

Even after the Anglo-American troops leave Iraq, Iraqi children will continue to suffer. Unexploded cluster bombs, originally dropped by US-British troops on populated areas, continue killing and maiming children, farm animals, and wildlife-any living thing that touches them by accident. The bomblets are deliberately made to look like playing things - yellow bright and look like beer cans - to attract children. Thousands of children have been killed by dormant bomblets in Afghanistan, and Iraq.

Under Article 85 of the Geneva Conventions, it is a war crime to launch "an indiscriminate attack affecting the civilian population in the knowledge that such an attack will cause an excessive loss of life or injury to civilians." Under the Hague Conventions, Article 22 and 23, 'The right of belligerents to adopt means of injuring the enemy is not unlimited', and "It is especially forbidden to kill treacherously individuals belonging to the hostile nation or army". However, British officials, including Geoff Hoon, the British defence secretary and Adam Ingram, British Armed Forces Minister justified the use of cluster bombs, on military grounds, saying that: "Cluster bombs are not illegal. They are effective weapons. They are used in specific circumstances where there is a threat to our troops". The truth is; cluster bombs are used often on heavily populated areas.

According to *Asia Times* (10 April 2004), after US (B52s) planes dropped their cluster bombs load, "[a]ll over Baghdad, the city's five main hospitals simply cannot cope with an avalanche of civilian casualties. Doctors can't get to the hospitals because of the bombing. Dr. Osama Saleh Al-Dulaimi at the al-Kindi hospital confirms the absolute majority of patients are women and children, victims of...shrapnel and most of all, fragments of cluster bombs. 'They are all civilians', he said. 'The International Committee of the Red Cross is in a state of almost desperation...casualties arriving at hospitals at a rate of as many as 100 per hour and at least 100 per day'". In Hilla south of Baghdad, *Reuters* reported scenes of children with no limbs and babies cut in half. The majority of the 348 who were killed or

wounded by the bombs were women and children.

The use of 'Depleted' Uranium (DU) is another scourge of the Anglo-American war on Iraq. The long term implications of DU on Iraqi children have been documented. DU is a potent radioactive carcinogen and once absorbed by the body, DU can cause cancer in the bones, lungs or kidneys. At high risks are Iraqi children and pregnant women. The rate of Iraqi children developing cancer and born with cancer is significantly high.

Furthermore, the majority of the 100,000 Iraqis killed (conservative estimate) by US-British forces were women and children, reported the reputed and peer-reviewed British medical journal, *The Lancet* in November 2004. The *Iraqiyun Humanitarian Organization* (IHO) in Baghdad estimated that 55 per cent of the at least 128,000 Iraqis killed have been women and children aged 12 and under. It is just non-Western lives do not count in the West. Thousands of Iraqi children have lost one or both parents and as a result Iraq is awash with orphaned and homeless children.

The war was an illegal act of aggression in contravention of UN Charter and international law. The normalisation of this big atrocity by Western media is shameful and lacks any moral principle. The torture and killing of innocent Iraqi civilians and the deliberate destruction of Iraqi children can not be justified by countless lies and deception. It is terrorism, not 'fight against terrorism'.

Contrary to Bush-Blair allegations, Iraq had no link to "terrorism" or to the 9/11 attacks on the US. Bush's own 9/11 Commission found there was no link between Saddam and 9/11. Iraq is not a place for "terrorists", as Mr Bush is alleging. From an Iraqi perspective, the "terrorists" in Iraq are US soldiers and mercenaries from Britain, Italy, Australia, South Korea and Japan, etc. Mr Bush is fabricating another lie to justify the ongoing occupation of Iraq. The Iraqi people have legitimate right to resist foreign occupation and liberate their country. It is clearly stated that: "International law grants a people fighting an illegal occupation the right to use 'all necessary means at their disposal' to end their occupation and the occupied "are entitled to seek and receive support" in order to resist the occupiers. The Bush-Blair ongoing policy of violence against Iraq is not only endangering the lives of Iraqis, but also the lives of Americans and Britons.

Since 1991, the US and Britain embarked on a vicious policy of dividing Iraq in the same way the colonial Britain divided the Arab Peninsular (into protectorates) and ruled behind a façade of corrupt local gendarmes, kings and emirs. Every step in the war and Occupation was deliberately designed to destroy the Iraqi civil society and provoke divisions and civil strife among Iraqis.

The Occupation is sowing the seeds for divisions among Iraqis. In order to continue the Occupation and steal Iraq's wealth and oil resources, the US is deliberately orchestrating civil strife. The aim is an imperialist one, the creation of colonial dictatorship to serve US-Israel interests.

The US-created Iraqi "army" and "police" force are ethnic-based militias. They constitute the Mossad-trained Kurdish *Peshmerga* militia, the Iranian-trained Badr Brigade, and the Chelabi and Allawi thugs. Their loyalties are to their parties and the Occupation, not to the Iraqi people. They are responsible for widespread of crimes and fear among the Iraqi population. The bulk of the violence is directed against Iraqis who oppose the Occupation and US imperial agenda.

There is no “democracy” or “freedom” in Iraq. There is no independent government; Iraq is occupied by 200,000 US troops and mercenaries. The current “government” in Iraq is a farce installed by fraudulent elections. This puppet government has betrayed the Iraqi people by failing to ask the occupiers to leave Iraq, and to provide the minimal security to protect the Iraqi people. Its presence and obsequious to the occupying forces shame every Iraqi.

The majority of Iraqis are against the Occupation and its policies of privatization and looting of Iraq’s resources and Iraq’s economy. The majority of Iraqis blame the presence of US forces for the continuing violence and mayhem. The majority of Iraqis oppose to the US-promoted division and “federalism” in Iraq.

In flagrant violations of UN Conventions and international law, the US-Britain war on Iraq has wrought nothing to Iraqis but destruction, a culture of corruption, sectarianism, murder and mayhem. The most vulnerable people of the Iraqi society, women and children are the largest victim of this atrocity. UNICEF has an obligation to the world community to release the report and uncover US crimes against Iraqi children.

The Occupation is destroying the lives of Iraqi children and increasing the suffering of the Iraqi people. The best peaceful solution for Iraq and for the world is the immediate and full withdrawal of the Anglo-American armies from Iraq. It is immoral to think otherwise.

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