

“Liberating Iraqis”, Limb by Limb, Life by Life, Home by Home, Gene by Gene

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“Why should we hear about body bags and deaths ... I mean, it’s not relevant, so why should I waste my beautiful mind on something like that ...” (Former First Lady, Barbara Bush, Good Morning America, 18th March 2003)

In these days of the tenth anniversary of the illegal invasion and near destruction of Iraq, answers are owed not alone for the dead, but to the cancer stricken, the deformed, to their parents, their siblings and all Iraqis. They were left with a land poisoned by depleted uranium in 1991, the burden ever building over twelve more years of (illegal) US and UK bombings, then the enormity of 2003.

Fallujah’s victims have rightly come under medical and media scrutiny since the US military onslaught of April and November 2004, but throughout Iraq, there have been no reports of areas unaffected.

In context, Dahr Jamail writes from Fallujah, “Official Iraqi government statistics show that, prior to the outbreak of the First Gulf War in 1991, the rate of cancer cases in Iraq was 40 out of 100,000 people. By 1995, it had increased to 800 out of 100,000 people, and, by 2005, it had doubled to at least 1,600 out of 100,000 people. Current estimates show the increasing trend continuing.

“As shocking as these statistics are, due to a lack of adequate documentation, research and reporting of cases, the actual rate of cancer and other diseases is likely to be much higher than even these figures suggest.” He also cites, “ ... a dramatic jump in miscarriages and premature births ... particularly in areas where heavy US military operations occurred ...” as Fallujah.

Jamail cites the study by Dr Chris Busby, Malak Hamdan and Entesar Ariabi: “Cancer, Infant Mortality and Birth-Sex Ration in Fallujah, Iraq 2005-2009.” Of it, Dr Busby’s opinion was that the Fallujah health crisis represented “the highest rate of genetic damage in any population ever studied.”

There were numerous reports during the 2004 April and November-December US assaults on Fallujah of, in addition to DU - three times unanimously designated a weapon of mass destruction by UN Sub-Committees - illegal, experimental chemical weapons and napalm being used in the decimation of this city of about three hundred thousand people.

After the second assault, Dr. Saleh Hussein Iswawi of the Fallujah General Hospital told the BBC, “About sixty to seventy percent of the homes and buildings are completely crushed and damaged, and not ready to inhabit ... Of the thirty percent still left standing, I don’t

think there is a single one that has not been exposed to some damage.”

Charred bodies and those half eaten by stray dogs littered the streets. One resident, Yasser Sattar said,

“This is the crime of the century. Is this freedom and democracy that they brought to Fallujah?”

What happened in Fallujah was a pogrom. It was by no means the only one.

People leaped into the Euphrates River to put out their burning flesh – it continued to burn in the water. Dead were described as “caramelized.” Other bodies were described as melting, disintegrating, but their clothing staying intact, by doctors who have seen much in Iraq in 1991 and since, but never this.

“All forms of nature were wiped out,” stated the (pro-American) Iraqi Health Minister, Dr. ash-Shaykhli.

In December 2004 and January 2005, respectively, UK MPs Alice Mahon and Harry Cohen asked similar questions of the then Defence Minister Adam Ingram about the use of napalm in Fallujah.

Mr Cohen questioned

“ ... whether Mark 77 (MK 77) firebombs (napalm) have been used by Coalition forces (a) in Iraq and (b) in or near areas in Iraq where civilians lived; whether this weapon is equivalent to napalm; whether the UK and the US have signed the UN convention banning the use of napalm against civilian targets; and if he will make a statement.”

On the 11th of January, Mr. Ingram replied in writing:

“Firebombs/Napalm, “The United States has confirmed to us that they have not used Mark 77 firebombs, which are essentially napalm canisters, in Iraq at any time. No other Coalition member has Mark 77 firebombs in their inventory. The United Kingdom is bound under Protocol III to the 1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) not to use incendiary weapons (which would include napalm) against military targets located within concentrations of civilians.”

“US policy in relation to international conventions is a matter for the US Government, but all of our allies are aware of their obligations under international humanitarian law.”

Ingram sidestepped the question about whether the US had signed the CCW of 1980. The US is a party to the Convention, but did not sign the relevant Protocol.

Kim Phúc, the Vietnam napalm survivor of the unforgettable photograph states,

“Water boils at 100 degrees Celsius (212°F). Napalm generates temperatures of 800 to 1,200 degrees Celsius (1,500-2,200°F).”

Mr Ingram’s faith in US allies’ awareness of their “obligations under international humanitarian law,” and apparently their truthfulness, was misplaced. Napalm was used in Iraq and in Fallujah.

In June 2005, Ingram wrote to Alice Mahon's successor as MP for West Halifax, Yorkshire, Linda Riordan:

"In December last year, your predecessor asked whether napalm or any similar substance had been used by coalition forces in Iraq either during or since the war. My officials put specific questions to US personnel in Iraq and, based on the assurances they received, I told her that neither had been used. I regret to say that I have since discovered that this is not the case and must now correct the position.

"The US destroyed its remaining stock of Vietnam era napalm in 2001, but according to the reports for 1 Marine Expeditionary Force serving in Iraq in 2003 they used a total of 30 MK 77 weapons in Iraq between 31st March and 2nd April 2003, against military targets away from civilian areas."

"The MK 77 firebomb does not have the same composition as napalm, although it has similar destructive characteristics. The Pentagon has also told us that owing to the limited accuracy of the MK 77, it is not generally used in urban terrain or in areas where civilians are congregated."

A quick check shows that in fact, the MK 77 - weighing seven hundred and fifty pounds "is the direct successor to napalm ... the mixture also contains an oxidizing agent, making it more difficult to put out once ignited, as well as (containing) white phosphorous."

"Napalm by another name," commented the Sydney Morning Herald (the 9th of August 2003). The Director of the military studies group Global Security stated, "You can call it something other than napalm, but it is still napalm. It has been reformulated in the sense that they now use a different petroleum distillate, but that is it. The US is the only country that has used napalm for a long time."

The US also admits to dropping five hundred of these human being incinerating weapons of mass destruction in Iraq in 1991.

Also used in Fallujah were white phosphorous shells, which a report by the Israeli Defence Force warns "... can cause serious injury and death when it comes into contact with the skin, is inhaled or is swallowed. Because it is very soluble in fat, it quickly penetrates the skin from the surface or from an embedded fragment. Most of the tissue damage is caused by the heat accompanying the continuing oxidation of the phosphorus, and from the product of the oxidation - phosphoric acid ... Systematic poisoning can result." Less than ten percent burns can be fatal via impact on liver, heart and kidneys.

It was Italy's RAI-TV that cut through the Pentagon's misleading and denials as to the weapons used in Fallujah, with interviews not only with residents, but the US military, confirming that, "... the US used MK77 ordinance and dropped massive quantities of white phosphorus, indiscriminately killing ..." Army Captain, Eric Krivda, of the 1st Infantry Division's Task Force 2-2 Tactical Operations Command Centre, told RAI: "Usually we keep the gloves on, for this operation, we took the gloves off."

A Google check shows that the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force, whose use of thirty-three MK77 in three days had been acknowledged (only thirty three?), were also in both assaults on Fallujah, where:"the gloves were off."

Across Iraq, three hundred and sixty-five sites have been identified as contaminated with DU. Children play where DU damaged tanks and vehicles have been dumped, clambering over them, sitting, pretend driving in them. The scrap metal is collected by dealers and metal workers to be fashioned into wheels, window frames, car parts and numerous utilities, as has happened since 1991. The number of sites is certainly an underestimate given the comprehensive blitzkrieg of the country which was “liberation.”

US Army manuals warn that personnel should not approach, sit in, or even take “trophy” photographs by such damaged vehicles.

Doctors at Basra maternity hospital recently told the BBC that they have seen a sixty percent rise in birth defects since 2003, with Dr Muhsin Sabbak certain that the rise is due to the munitions used. Basra’s recorded birth defects after 1991 were the stuff of nightmares, less than nine months after that first attack. Year after year, there was a new and horrific phenomenon.

Just five years later, a doctor talked of a “new problem.” In a ward, a beautiful child of two sat on a bed, his face lighting up, exited at a new face. He looked me over through his one eye, in the centre of his forehead. “We are hearing of cases in other parts of Iraq,” said the doctor.

For Iraq, this is now a long and increasing medical phenomenon. Usually it is accompanied by limited brain and pathetic facial distortions. One cause of cyclopia is exposure to toxins.

In September, 2000, for *The Ecologist*, in an extensive piece on the cancers and congenital deformities, from personal witness I wrote, “Babies born without eyes; internal organs adhered to the (outer) stomach and back; foreshortened limbs – no limbs; no genitalia, no brain, no nose, no trachea ... no head.”

The burden of the poisoned legacy left in Iraq is now further devastating the population, its children, the genes, fauna, flora, water in orders of magnitude greater than the obscenity of 1991.

Just one example,

“In 2012, European researchers visited a scrap metal site in Al Zubayr, an area near southern Basrah. A local police officer told them that the site had at one time held military scrap metal from battles waged during the American invasion. A local guard (said) that children had been seen playing on the scrap during that time, and both adults and children had worked disassembling the military leftovers. At one point (he) said, members of an international organization with equipment and white suits showed up, told guards that the site was very dangerous and quickly ran off.”

While that was almost certainly DU, during the invasion, journalists were also reporting US planes widely dropping “napalm-like weapons” on the border with Kuwait and elsewhere in southern Iraq. The military confirmed also using the same near bridges over the Tigris, and over the “Saddam River” irrigation canal – created so the farmers and agricultural project workers through whose lands it now flowed had access to a water source for their livestock and produce.

Of the bridges, US Colonel Randolph Alles said, “We napalmed both those (bridge)

approaches... Unfortunately there were people there ... you could see them in the (cockpit) video ...”

In Najaf - where the gilded Imam Ali Mosque, named after one of Shia Islam's most revered figures, and adjoining the 7th century cemetery, believed the largest in the world, for centuries decreed "The Gateway to Heaven" for the Shia community worldwide - death, deformities and cancers also stalk the newborn - and cancers plague the population and surrounding areas.

In 2004, the US military bombarded the city and outlying villages for three months - driving their tanks through the sanctity of the Wadi-ud-Salaam cemetery.

According to a Marine spokesman, they had "pretty much just been patrolling and flying helicopters all over the place, and when we see something bad, we blow it up."

There were

" ... bombers, helicopter gunships, field artillery and tanks ... unleashed against Iraqi fighters armed only with small arms and grenade launchers that are next to useless against American armored vehicles. Electricity, water and medical services ... ceased to function in the city of 600,000. Thousands of shrines and graves in the revered cemetery have been destroyed or damaged. Much of the historic old city, dating back 1,300 years, which surrounds the Mosque has been reduced to rubble."

The " bitter irony in the American military laying waste to the religious and cultural center of Iraq's Shiite population was that the no-fly zone enforced by the US over southern Iraq from 1991 until the invasion was justified as a measure to protect the Shiite population from repression by Saddam Hussein's regime."

Between the 1991 bombings, the 2003 invasion and subsequent post "mission accomplished" destructions, an upper estimate of radioactive and chemically toxic DU alone expended (half-life 4.5 Billion years) is nearly three thousand tonnes. To quote again the succinct UK Atomic Energy Authority's "self initiated" warning regarding 1991, they warned that if fifty tonnes of depleted uranium dust was left "in the region" there would be "half a million cancers by the end of the century" (2000). The figures prove them tragically correct, except for a near certain underestimate.

The obfuscation, however, continues. This month a report funded by the Norwegian Foreign Ministry and conducted by Dutch peace group IKV Pax Christi downsized the DU load to four hundred tonnes (appalling, but nothing like the seeming reality) and estimated the cost of a contamination clean up at thirty million US dollars.

In the real world, things look a little different. As Brian Willson, author of "Blood on the Tracks," has written:

"In 20 years of DU testing at the Jefferson Proving Grounds in Indiana, roughly 150,000 pounds of uranium were discharged over 500 acres. When the Pentagon assessed the cost of the necessary radioactive cleanup to make the area safe for future use, they were shocked to learn of the four- to five-billion dollar price tag. To date, they have not cleaned the cordoned-off site ..."
(Costs as of 2003)

Further,

“A General Accounting Office report in 2000 put the cost of cleanup at the uranium enrichment plant in Paducah, Ky., where DU is processed for use in weapons and nuclear reactors, at \$1.3 billion. By December 2003, the cost of cleaning up and closing the plant, estimated to take until 2070, was up to \$13 billion.”

Imagine the cost of cleaning up, if a method could be devised, 437,072 square kilometers (168,753 square miles) – that is the size of Iraq. Imagine the time frame.

The examples above are an inadequate microcosm of the plight of societies throughout Iraq.

On the 20th of March, the tenth anniversary of the start of a war crime of historic enormity which was the bombardment and invasion, President Barack Hussein Nobel Obama, arrived in Israel to enjoin in further mooted the option of similar war crimes against Syria and Iran.

The United Nations – responsible for the deaths of over half a million children resulting from its strangulating embargo on Iraq, in little over the first five years, to 1996 and whose then Secretary General, Kofi Annan, took until September 2004 to admit that the invasion was “illegal,” designated “The 20th of March 2013 the first ever International Day of Happiness.” (Assembly Resolution A/RES/66/281)

“The General Assembly ... Conscious that the pursuit of happiness is a fundamental human goal ... Recognizing also the need for a more inclusive, equitable and balanced approach to economic growth that promotes sustainable development, poverty eradication, happiness and the well-being of all peoples, Decides to proclaim March 20 the International Day of Happiness.”

Note to UN, in the annals of bad timing, this must rate a sick, deviant world first.

It is also World Sparrow Day: “designated to raise awareness of the threats to sparrow and of other birds, to their populations.” They should start in Iraq. Whilst there, perhaps they might also take representatives of the relevant United Nations Committees and give a thought to raising awareness of the threats to the endangered Iraqis and their population.

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