

“Madam, How Can I Have Any Plans?”

By [Barbara Nimri Aziz](#)

Theme: [History](#), [Science and Medicine](#)

Global Research, April 15, 2020

“I am searching for medicine for my mother; I’ve no money to repair my car; I have my sister asking me to help her son; I have come to the end of our food ration for this week.”

A reply Americans, Italians, Indians, Brazilians, or Iranians—everyone across the globe—might offer a curious (or naïve) journalist covering the crisis. (Not to exclude testimonies from exhausted healthcare and other service workers.)

However, the respondent I quote here lived his uncertainty in a different era:—a quarter of a century ago, in Iraq. He’s Ali Al-Amiri, erstwhile poultry inspector for Nineveh’s provincial department of agriculture. We met in 2001, in Mosul, at the height of an epidemic there, namely the 13-year embargo imposed on his nation.

I’d been covering the devastation created by that global blockade since 1990. So my question was indelicate, if not guileless.

I knew conditions there well.

During a decade of assignments to that besieged, forlorn place, I’d witnessed deaths resulting from a scarcity of medicines and stress-related diseases; I’d been recording burn victims scarred by fires from makeshift stoves, rising cancer infections, low-birth-weight newborns, unchecked spread of infectious diseases, the collapse of industry and the flight of desperate young people. (All well documented for anyone caring to investigate (including [my account from Iraq](#) joined early field reports from the [International Action Center](#) and a belated [Harvard Study](#) based on secondary sources.)

Yes, my question to this and other besieged Iraqis may have been misplaced. Nevertheless Al-Amiri’s reply was instructive to those with a limited perception of war. It pointed to a frightfully blank tomorrow.

If Americans (and others who complied with Washington’s policy to force Iraq to its knees) did not grasp the concept then, today we know it: “What are your plans for the weekend? Your graduation prom? Your annual colonoscopy? Your son’s wedding? Grandfather’s 80th birthday?” They’re all on hold; we’re just trying to keep the children entertained, get through another day with a testy partner, stock up on non-perishables, learn to connect by Zoom, gather papers for an insurance claim or patch a cracked windshield.

This blank calendar is as intimate for us as it was for Iraqis. Of course it’s not the same; Iraq was completely cut off through a media blackout, a ban on flights, and by diplomatic and economic blockades. By contrast, in the midst of COVID-19, we have teleconferences and phone networking apps; we have sympathizers around the country and across the world; we can learn from others’ experiences; we can share resources and expertise.

My point here is not to assign blame or compare sufferings. It's to question the war model invoked by media commentators and politicians to interpret our dilemma; this hinders our understanding of what we're experiencing. That embargo on Iraq was a fierce assault but it wasn't interpreted by outsiders as war; embargo-deaths were largely unseen and uncounted by western historians. Just as 20 years of sanctions imposed on Vietnam after the U.S. defeat there, just as decades of embargo against Cuba, Iran and Syria continue, just as the crippling of Venezuela intensifies. Those sieges, like the current pandemic raise deeper moral questions.

It would help to drop our concept of war in this crisis where media commentators and politicians invoke '911' and the 1941 Pearl Harbor attacks. The military model (including the commander-in-chief criterion for president) is the U.S. default solution to a problem, whether drugs or a pandemic or a perceived threat to national interests. 'Smash it to bits. Hit them with all we have.'

Let's see if Americans can emerge from today's dilemma with a newly defined compassionate model of responsibility and leadership?

*

Note to readers: please click the share buttons above or below. Forward this article to your email lists. Crosspost on your blog site, internet forums. etc.

Anthropologist and journalist BNimri Aziz covered Iraq during the 13-year sanction period. The author of [Swimming up The Tigris, 2007](#), U. Press Florida, she also hosted a radio program on Pacifica- WBAI, NYC. See www.RadioTahrir.org

Featured image was produced by Oli Agrama

The original source of this article is Global Research
Copyright © [Barbara Nimri Aziz](#), Global Research, 2020

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Barbara Nimri Aziz](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca

