



11350 Random Hills Road, Suite 800, Fairfax, Virginia 22030 Phone (703) 934-6101 Fax (703) 352-3678

fff@fff.org www.fff.org

Support the Policymakers **by Jacob G. Hornberger**

Labeling resisters to the U.S. occupation of Iraq as “terrorists” obfuscates an important point — that there are people in Iraq and all over the Middle East who hate the United States ... and, equally important, have good and sound reasons for hating the United States. That’s the last thing that U.S. officials want the American people to focus on, but the American people ignore these points at their peril.

Most everyone is now aware of the U.S. government’s deception with respect to the pre-war hype about Saddam Hussein’s weapons of mass destruction. But the administration’s fallback position — that it actually invaded Iraq to liberate the Iraqi people from Saddam Hussein’s tyranny — is equally deceptive.

Doesn’t the aim of liberating people connote a concern for their well-being? Well, when exactly did the U.S. government acquire its born-again concern for the well-being of Iraqi people?

Think about the [economic sanctions](#) that were imposed on the Iraqi people for more than a decade. Estimates of the [death toll](#) from those sanctions range all the way up to 500,000 Iraqi children, whose deaths are attributed to the horrible economic conditions in Iraq that the sanctions helped to bring about.

Now, it’s true that there is debate over the actual number of deaths, which is not surprising, since it is not an easy task to determine whether the death of a newborn child from adverse health conditions should be attributed to economic sanctions or to Saddam Hussein’s socialist economic system. But even if we reduce the number of estimated deaths to, say, 50,000, we’re still dealing with an enormously large number of innocent children.

More important than the actual number, however, is the perception among the Arab community in the Middle East. Most Arabs have no doubt that the number is in the hundreds of thousands. More important yet, throughout the entire period of the sanctions, Arabs in the Middle East were fully aware of a fact that most Americans were not aware of: that U.S. officials didn’t care what the actual number was, didn’t care whether 50,000 or 500,000 Iraqi children were dying, and didn’t care how Arabs or anyone else felt about it.

All that mattered to U.S. officials was their hope that the sanctions would ultimately squeeze the Iraqi people into getting rid of Saddam Hussein. No cost in terms of Iraqi suffering was too high to achieve that end.

That callous disregard for the well-being of the Iraqi people — and their offspring — was perfectly manifested by the answer that America's UN ambassador, Madeleine Albright, gave in response to a question from *60 Minutes* concerning the large number of deaths of the Iraqi children — “I think this is a very hard choice, but the price — we think the price is worth it.”

That statement was never disavowed or condemned by U.S. officials for one simple reason: Albright's statement reflected their mindset as well. Throughout the 13 years of sanctions against Iraq, the federal mindset was one of arrogance, callousness, and indifference to the plight of the Iraqi people. Also, let's not forget that not one single U.S. senator who voted to confirm Albright as U.S. senator condemned her callously indifferent statement.

There are those who today say, “Oh, no, it wasn't the sanctions that killed all those children. It was Saddam Hussein's indifference to the suffering of his own people that was the cause.”

There's no question that those critics are right but only partially. The truth is that neither Saddam Hussein nor U.S. officials had any regard for the plight of the Iraqi people. And that joint lack of concern placed the Iraqi people within a vise consisting of Saddam Hussein's socialist controls and the U.S. economic sanctions. It was the callousness on both sides that, year after year, tightened the vise on the Iraqi people.

It shouldn't surprise anyone that Saddam Hussein would place the interests of his own dictatorial regime above the well-being of his own people. That's what dictators have done throughout history.

What surprised many people, however, was the callousness and indifference to the suffering manifested by U.S. officials. The United States was supposed to be different. At least from the time it recognized that the sanctions were contributing to the horrific suffering of the Iraqi people (and not bringing about the ouster of Saddam Hussein), one might have assumed that U.S. officials would call for their end. They did not, year after year after year.

It was the horrible suffering that the sanctions were producing among the Iraqi people that motivated high UN officials, Hans Von Sponeck and Denis Halliday, to resign their posts. (See [“The Secret War on Iraq.”](#) by John Pilger.)

Despite their devotion to the United Nations, their conscience prevented them from participating in what they considered a genocidal program.

The point is this: While some of the families who lost their children during the 1990s might have forgiven the United States, there are others who will never forgive and who will continue to hate the United States and the UN for the rest of their lives.

And that hatred is not limited to the affected families. What all too many Americans fail to recognize is the solidarity that exists among Arabs all across the Middle East, regardless of the national borders that separate them. No matter how they felt about Iraq's dictator (many of them hated him), most of them sympathized with the plight of the Iraqi people and their children.

Thus, U.S. officials are absolutely right in connecting Iraq to al-Qaeda and the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States, but for the wrong reason. The reason that Osama bin Laden was able to easily recruit people from all over the Middle East to commit those suicide attacks was not that he or the suicide bombers had entered into an alliance with Saddam Hussein (whom bin Laden despises); it was because of the anger and hatred millions of people all over the Middle East feel for what the U.S. government did to the people of Iraq for more than ten years.

It was, in fact, those deaths, that suffering, and the corresponding callous indifference that was angrily cited by Ramzi Ahmed Yousef, one of the terrorists who attacked the World Trade Center at his federal sentencing hearing in 1993 — eight years before the September 11. Would it have made any difference if the sanctions against Iraq had been lifted during the intervening years?

It's true that Osama bin Laden cited two other reasons for his declaration of war against the United States — the stationing of troops on Islamic holy lands in Saudi Arabia and U.S. foreign aid to Israel. But one cannot help but wonder whether those things alone would have been enough to engender widespread hatred for America if the U.S. government had not used economic sanctions against the Iraqi people as a central instrument of its foreign policy in the Middle East.

Stationing U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia was another direct consequence of the Persian Gulf War. Those troops became the central force in the enforcement of the so-called no-fly zones, which were never approved by either the U.S. Congress or the UN. We must not forget that the enforcement of those zones provided the excuse to periodically fire missiles and drop bombs that killed an untold number of Iraqis. More important was the constant callous indifference to those deaths, which contributed further to the anger and hatred that Arabs in the Middle East had for the United States.

Let's also not forget the thousands of Iraqi families who have now lost family members or suffered other calamitous consequences (e.g., the loss of limbs) as a direct consequence of an invasion that was falsely sold to the American people as an attempt to protect America from Saddam's weapons of mass destruction. Let's not forget that the U.S. government factored those losses into its pre-war calculations. Let's also not forget that the U.S. government has had no interest in keeping track of such losses.

Thus, today while many Americans have swallowed hook, line, and sinker the administration's fallback position that it invaded Iraq to liberate the Iraqi people from tyranny, people in the Middle East will have none of it. Why in the world would the U.S. government, all

of a sudden, be so concerned about the welfare of the Iraqi people after so many years of callous disregard and indifference for their well-being?

And while the chaos, killings, and destruction in postwar Iraq can certainly be attributed to people in Saddam Hussein's regime and to people who simply hate a foreign occupier in their country, there's no doubt that the presence of U.S. troops and arrogant U.S. officials is attracting more and more Arabs in the region who hate what the U.S. government has done for so many years in the Middle East.

And that's why Iraq is now serving as a magnet for terrorists all over the Middle East. But let's not let that label — "terrorist" — obfuscate the reason they are coming. Arabs all over the Middle East are angry and full of hatred because of the U.S. government's foreign policy in the Middle East. And unlike the hijackers who had to travel thousands of miles to attack large numbers of Americans on September 11, millions of Middle Eastern Arabs who hate the United States now only have to travel a few miles to do so, a deadly phenomenon that U.S. officials are now perversely claiming is actually an asset to America and our troops!

Unfortunately, of course, the people who are paying the price for the latest example of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East are the American troops, whose mission is to occupy and "rebuild" Iraq — a nation that contains millions of people who have suffered mightily under the iron hand of U.S. force for more than a decade — in a region that contains millions more people who hate the United States because of it. Too bad that we can't "support the policymakers" by sending them to replace the troops.

Mr. Hornberger is founder and president of The Future of Freedom Foundation. Send him [email](#).

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