

Commemorating Iraq's Three Wars (1991, 2003, 2014): Looking Back : 'Internationally Sponsored Genocide'. Felicity Arbuthnot

By [Felicity Arbuthnot](#)

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Editors have a mantra, do not look back, move on, write what is current. But sometimes looking back is vital. Those who ignore even the recent past are doomed to understand nothing, sink deeper into quagmires – and bleat again : 'Why do they hate us' ?

Looking through material for the book that has been far too long in the making, I found a copy of a letter which I sent to a prominent (UK) Member of Parliament.

It is dated November 1993 and clarifies for ever why the invaders were never going to be greeted with 'sweets and flowers'.

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Near thirty years ago, I wrote:

Meridian Hotel, Baghdad, 4th November 1993.

As you know, when I was here in April/May 1992, I thought things could get no worse. Yet in July this year, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations note in a Report: '..with deep regret', all the: 'pre-famine indicators being in place'. Further that an appreciable proportion of the population now had less calorific intake than the most famine stricken parts of Africa. That was July. This is apocalypse. This is an internationally sponsored genocide.

Food prices have risen in real terms, one thousand percent. Some most basic of staples have risen eleven hundred times. This morning a breakfast for three, of three black coffees, two orange juices and an omelet cost, what would have been, in 1989, the equivalent of one thousand three hundred US dollars. With US dollars, one can buy stacks of black market Iraqi Dinars, an inches high wad for fifty dollars, chillingly redolent of Germany after the first world war. Most Iraqi people have no dollars.

"In the foyer of the Rashid Hotel, is one of the most magnificent display of wondrous artifacts one could ever hope to see: jewelry, paintings, superb, rare antique boxes, chandeliers, crystal, exquisite family treasures, handed down over generations, many also collected from around the globe. They are the belongings of the middle class, for sale in the hope they will be sold for hard currency to the rare visitor. Living for a few more weeks. The poor have no antiques.

"A friend, a multi-lingual, much traveled novelist and editor, whose great grandfather's statue graces an area of Baghdad, boils rose petals for a face cleaner, concocts a mixture of boracic and herbs for deodorant and uses an ancient clay for hair conditioner. She and her family, as many Iraqis, now clean their teeth with husks from a plant, a method from a bygone age. Tooth paste and tooth brushes are vetoed. Her last novel is trapped in her computer, for want of a minor, embargoed spare part. If she could release it, it would be anyway useless, there is no paper to print it on. Paper is also vetoed by the U.N., Sanctions Committee.

"Car tires cost sixteen month's average salary.

Yet people have to drive the grueling, utterly isolated, seven hundred kilometers, desert road to Jordan, to attempt to conduct any business, or for medical help, if they are the few lucky enough to have the money to operate in hard currency. They drive on re-sewn tires, often stuffed with just about anything to keep them inflated, in the searing heat. They travel in cars that are now death traps. All spare parts also vetoed.

"The deaths on the Jordan road (and the visible testimony of them) are a bare decimal point in the reality of life here.

The U.N., of course, fly in, and loudly demand Nescafe for breakfast, unattainable anywhere. The delicious Turkish coffee which is available for those who can afford it, has become a token of 'the enemy' for them, it seems. I have witnessed this over and over again, in this hotel: 'No, no, Nescafe, not Turkish coffee ...' Then something along the lines of: "What is wrong with you people, do you understand nothing'? Last night, they wanted hot 'vegetable soup'. The temperature was Hadean and the Chef had worked miracles with pulses and fresh salads, unattainable for most and now pretty difficult for even the government subsidized hotels. U.N., personnel in Iraq are a million miles from the aspirations expressed on behalf of 'We the people ...' They are bent on ritual humiliation - utterly shaming 'We the people'.

"The U.N., personnel were sporting satellite phones and beepers. Two months ago the U.N., Sanctions Committee (read US and UK., as ever) vetoed a consignment of beepers and mobile 'phones for the doctors, medical staff, ambulance drivers and other emergency units, denying all contact between emergency and life saving personnel.

"Just before I left the U.K., in September, the Sanctions Committee revoked the license for five hundred tons of shroud material. It is currently stuck in Jordan, having taken since April to get even as far as Aquaba port. Sanctions reach even beyond the grave.

"Earlier this year the U.S., U.K., and France vetoed a consignment of school writing pads, erasers, pencil sharpeners, pencils and consignment of ping pong balls. Childhood is dead in Iraq. There are few birthday parties anymore, for most, neither the food nor the presents are affordable.

"The U.S., and U.K., recently also vetoed a consignment of 'medical gauze' (i.e.: bandages) and refused to allow a Spanish company to assist in rebuilding the syringe factory, bombed in 1991. Doctors are forced to re-use syringes again and again. One lowered his eyes and his voice in shame, as he told me

that they re-use the pediatric canulars from babies who have died. He did five years post graduate studies in the United States and spoke better English than you or I. He had believed in the 'land of the free'. Not any more.

"In a tiny grocery store, very early yesterday morning, a child of perhaps five came in, with that air of pride of children everywhere entrusted to run an errand. He was clutching a five Dinar note, fifteen dollars, just four years ago. It bought one egg, which he carefully carried to the door – and then he dropped it. He was beside himself. He fell to the floor and frantically tried to gather it up in his hands, tears streaming down his small, desperate face. As I searched in my pocket, the shopkeeper shook his head, gently touched him on the shoulder and gave him another egg. Protein is unbuyable for the majority. Families chop one egg into miniscule pieces, so all have a couple of tiny morsels – in a country 'floating on a sea of oil', the second largest reserves on earth.

"How many more traumatized children, in our name? How many countless 'broken eggs' are there here now in just three years? What would be acceptable to the U.S., and British administrations? What do they expect, perhaps an army of premature babies (a quarter of live births are now premature) rising up from their non-functioning-for-want-of-western-spare-parts-incubators, to overthrow Saddam Hussein?

"People here, broadly, do not care about the government. The struggle to survive day by day is the greater challenge. Further, I went back to a large group who were highly critical of the government a year ago. They are now so furious at what the embargo is doing to their families, friends, neighborhood and the ancient country they love – and of which, it seems to the visitor, all feel that they are honored custodians – this year they all lit a candle on Saddam Hussein's birthday.

"As you know, rightly or wrongly, I have no view on politics here, it is none of our business and to collectively punish – U.N., or not, is illegal and beyond shame – twenty five million souls hostage to our Administration's' views of their government. The highest category of victims are the new born, the unborn and the under fives. This is being done, we are told, that Saddam Hussein will be forced to comply with the latest moving goal post and curb the excesses of his regime. Yet in the name of our regimes the 'mass graves' are spreading across the country – with our nations' names on them.

" I do not know when or where this shocking episode in history will end. But I know for certain that we will never be forgiven, not alone in Iraq, but across the region and beyond. Putting out the hand of friendship and being big enough to forget about 'losing face', might just avert some major tragedy, the spirit of generosity is what embodies this region. Otherwise the silent crimes of the U.S.,-U.K., driven 'U.N.' embargo may return to haunt us too."

The embargo of course, ground on for a further ten years, then came the criminality of 'Shock and Awe' and an invasion where Iraqis can be killed, tortured, stolen from, raped, run over, bombed, blown up, imprisoned without trial, with impunity.

If anyone treated a domestic or farm animal in the West, as the Iraqis have been treated for over thirty years: denied a proper diet, medication, clean water, a safe environment, that person would end up in Court and likely in prison.

The above letter is a minute snap shot from just one visit now long ago – and it went downhill from there.

Every visit saw a new crisis. Forget 'Al Qaeda', 'insurgents', 'dead enders', 'terrorist elements', 'bad guys'. The majority of the resistance are the child that dropped the egg within the man and his generation of childhoodless, traumatized children, who survived the internationally sponsored genocide. 'No child left behind'? In Iraq every child has been left behind, discarded year after year, by the 'international community'.

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