

Iraq: Mainstream Media's Biased Reporting on US-UK Bombing

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On August 8th 2008, the U.S. announced that they had started carrying out air strikes in northern Iraq. The major reason given for this was that the United States couldn't stand idly by while the Islamic State killed, displaced and persecuted minority groups, with the fate of the Yazidis at the forefront of the justification.

Barack Obama was quoted as saying that:

'when we have the unique capabilities to help avert a massacre, then I believe the United States of America cannot turn a blind eye'.

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/08/07/statement-president>

Meanwhile, over the preceding 4 weeks, Israel had been busily massacring circa 2000 people in the Gaza Strip.

The Obama administration's response to this was to [block attempts](#) at the U.N. to hold Israel accountable for war crimes, and to [replenish](#) the Israeli military's arsenal. There were also some mildly critical statements from the U.S. towards Israel, particularly in regards to the bombing of U.N. schools sheltering refugees, but their actions demonstrated beyond any reasonable doubt that they generally supported and wanted to facilitate the massacre.

Despite this glaring double standard, an awful lot of corporate media reporting has taken Obama at his word. That the U.S. is indeed bombing Iraq to protect Yazidis, that their actions are well intentioned, and that they should be supported to this end.

On Friday 22nd August, The New Statesman published [an article](#) by Jonathan Rugman, the foreign correspondent at Channel 4 news, very much along these lines.

Here's a few brief comments on why I think the article is problematic, and symptomatic of the shallow approach that currently dominates reporting of this conflict.

Rugman:

'Britain and the US veered from over-intervening in Iraq to neglecting it'.

An [illegal invasion](#), predicated on [blatant lies](#) and half-truths, which lead to [500'000+](#) excess deaths and millions of displacements, is here airily dismissed by Rugman as 'over-

intervening’.

Within that phrase lie a multitude of sins, from the disproportionate and indiscriminate attack on Fallujah; to the systematic torture at Abu Ghraib; to the massacre at Haditha; to the use of fire bombs, cluster bombs and white phosphorous; to the general disregard for Iraqi lives inherent among their supposed liberators and now saviours.

This history is surely important in judging whether the U.S./U.K. can in any way be trusted to act in a humane and ethical manner in Iraq, but is airbrushed out entirely by Rugman.

The people primarily responsible for instigating the current carnage in Iraq are then accused of ‘neglecting’ it (that it might be a good thing if the U.S./U.K. et al left Iraq alone apparently doesn’t occur to Rugman).

It is ‘our’ duty and ‘our’ prerogative to ‘intervene’ – although perhaps the porridge has to be at just the right temperature . . .

Rugman:

‘Now, there’s the inevitable talk of “mission creep” and being “sucked in” but at least we are trying to find a middle way: surveillance, arming the Kurds, air strikes, using special forces for whom discretion is the better part of valour’.

An interesting use of the word ‘we’ here, if only because it makes clear Rugman self-identifies as being on the same side as the people currently bombing Iraq.

Rugman:

‘Intervention came too late for 100,000 Assyrian Christians abandoning some of Christendom’s earliest outposts. And too late for the vast majority of Yazidis – but at least their exodus caught the world’s attention’.

A lot of reporting currently coming out of Iraq reads like the persecution of minority groups is a fairly recent development, including the above sentence. But this is far from being the case.

Amnesty International reported in 2011, for example, that:

‘Within weeks of the US-led invasion in 2003, members of religious and ethnic minority communities were targeted for violent attack, including abductions and killings’.

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/iraq/background-religious-minorities-in-iraq-face-persecution>

Human Rights Watch reported in 2009 how:

‘Minorities in Iraq find themselves in an increasingly precarious position as the Arab-dominated central government and the Kurdistan Regional Government

vie for control of the disputed territories . . . Iraqi Christians, Yazidis, and Shabaks have suffered extensively since 2003 . . . Iraqi authorities, both Arab and Kurdish, need to rein in security forces, extremists and vigilante groups to send a message that minorities cannot be attacked with impunity’.

<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/11/10/iraq-protect-besieged-minorities>

Nor is the ‘exodus’ of minority groups anything new. As Amnesty International again reported in 2008:

‘The displacement crisis caused by the US-led invasion of Iraq and the subsequent internal armed conflict has reached shocking proportions. Millions of people at risk – Sunni and Shi’a Muslims, Christians, Mandaean-Sabeans, Palestinians and others – have fled their homes and most are now struggling to survive . . .

. . . the world’s governments have done little or nothing to help, failing both in their moral duty and in their legal obligation to share responsibility for displaced people wherever they are. Apathy towards the crisis has been the overwhelming response’.

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE14/011/2008/en/43d5f798-3637-11dd-9db5-cb00b5aed8dc/mde140112008eng.html>

As these reports make clear, the persecution and mass displacement of minority groups in Iraq was actually exacerbated by ‘intervention’ – namely the 2003 invasion – and the current phase of it is just a continuation of that.

Rugman arguing that ‘intervention has come too late’ to save minority groups in Iraq is, in a sense, a reversal of the truth; U.S./U.K. ‘intervention’ in Iraq has been a major cause of the problem, rather than any kind of solution to it.

By neglecting to mention this history, Rugman is omitting some crucial context.

Rugman:

‘My reporting rarely changes anything but maybe the first pictures broadcast on Channel 4 News of desperate Yazidi refugees trapped on Mount Sinjar helped prick the conscience of reluctant policymakers. Anyway, that’s what I like to think’.

I’m sure that is what Rugman likes to think. But it is highly likely that the U.S. would have ‘intervened’ with or without his reporting. And i’m not sure that the ‘intervention’ is in any way motivated by the ‘consciences’ of the people planning it and executing it, ‘pricked’ or not.

It might – and I stress might there – be more accurate to say the Rugman’s reporting has helped drum up public support for such an ‘intervention’, by highlighting the plight of the Yazidis, but stripping it of the historical context and critical commentary that might cause people to think twice about U.S./U.K. military ‘intervention’ as a solution.

What’s more, as someone who has followed events in Iraq fairly closely for years, I don’t

remember much media clamour to 'save' Iraqi minorities during the U.S./U.K. occupation years, or much concern about their well being, even though their problems were just as grave. As an issue it was covered, but it was never treated as pressing or urgent.

'Apathy towards the crisis' was 'the overwhelming response', as Amnesty International put it (just as now, as we speak, there is general media apathy about the [ongoing](#) 'hidden but horrific humanitarian and human rights crisis' currently afflicting Afghanistan).

A cynic might say that this is because expressing concern about the plight of minority groups in Iraq wasn't politically expedient back then (when 'the surge' was supposedly working, and a corner was being turned, and all of that palava).

It is politically expedient now though, as a pretext for the U.S., U.K. et al to 'intervene' in Iraq once again, for what are likely amoral [economic and geo-strategic reasons](#).

But correspondents like Rugman apparently want us to believe that the same States which showed near total apathy towards the plight of displaced and persecuted Iraqi minority groups circa 2007 and 2008 - and which have killed Iraqis in such huge numbers since 1990 - now all of sudden care so deeply about them that they have no choice but to bomb.

As the saying goes, 'It's get bells on'.

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