

Iraq: Twenty One Years of Crimes Against Humanity

By [Felicity Arbuthnot](#)

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[NATO War Agenda](#)

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"These diaries are dedicated to the people of Iraq and to all others who have suffered the crippling effect of sanctions." (Nuha al-Radi, 1941-2004.)

With current US-led plans to remodel (read annihilate) the remaining Middle East, the 1991, twenty eight country attack on Iraq's just 27 million people, where, arguably it all started, has largely dropped from Western consciousness, though certainly not that of Iraqis.

As the first wave of missiles erased thirty years of a progress, which had made Iraq a largely modern, prosperous nation – and Cruise missiles rained down from US war ships in the Indian Ocean – on 16th January 1991, President George H.W. Bush told America: "We have no argument with the people of Iraq. Indeed, for the innocents caught in this conflict, we pray for their safety ... But even as planes of the multinational forces attack Iraq, I prefer to think of peace, not war."

March, marks the twenty first anniversary of the end of the forty two day, apocalyptic pulverization, in which over eighty million pounds of explosives were dropped. The: "whole country became collateral damage."(i)

The ceasefire was signed 28th February – after which the US 24th Light Infantry Brigade celebrated the cessation of hostilities, by massacring retreating Iraqi soldiers and fleeing families, in their "turkey shoot" on the Basra Road, beginning 2nd March.

"We can see a new world order coming in to view ... a very real prospect of a new world order ...", was the response of President George H.W. Bush to Congress, on 6th March 1991.

It was indeed a sign of things to come – and an Iraq war which was unending for just under twenty one years. Decimating sanctions, ceaseless bombings, invasion, occupation, torture, mass murders, destruction – and a further eight years of bombing.

Surviving babies, born in 1990, the year of the embargo's imposition, turn the milestone twenty one this year, have known nothing but deprivation and constant terror throughout their entire lives, from US-led malevolence.

As George H.W. Bush was praying for innocents and thinking of "peace", ninety percent of Iraq's electricity was destroyed, in the first hours, along with the water supply – deliberately targeted, with, it transpired.(ii) the intention of never allowing replacement of either,

In Baghdad, Nuha al-Radi decided to keep a diary. As "Desert Storm" engulfed the nation, she recorded the horror, the humour, some extraordinary, accurate premonitions, the

indomitable, and the inventive ingenuity with which every Iraqi seems to be born.

Nuha al-Radi, painter, ceramist and sculptor, was a true internationalist, as at home in the US, UK, Beirut, across Europe and much of the world, as in her beloved home in Baghdad. Trained at London's Byam Shaw School of Art, her work was exhibited across the Arab world, in Berlin, London and Washington.

As the bombs fell, she wrote: "I've always wanted to write a book starting with this sentence: 'I live in an orchard with 66 palm trees and 161 orange trees. Three male palms face my bedroom window, reminding me of their potency – the only males in residence.'"

Then: "My first anemones have come out. I bought the seeds last year in the US. They are white. Could it be a sign of peace? Anyway, something good from the US has grown here." That was: "Day 36."

For the six months prior to the war she was one of the few who reassured all that it could not happen: "Perhaps I couldn't believe, in this day and age, leaders could be so childish and/or plain stupid as to think war could solve any issue. I underestimated the destructive instincts of man and the agenda of the forces allied against us. Not that we are angels, we did the first wrong. But one cannot rectify one wrong by another of even bigger proportions."

On the first day, she woke to: "... the sky lit up – the noise beyond description", the electricity and the 'phone went off, and for the forty two days: "days and nights became one long day."

Sanity became clinging to normality. The second day, risking the bombs, a friend drove her and her sister to a lunch party: "Kebab and beer, delicious." Government trucks were driving Baghdad's streets: "throwing bread to the thronging crowds", the majority for whom the embargo had already impoverished to breaking point.

The following day Nuha and her sister Suha, painted her studio, with the: "war going on full blast outside." A SAM missile exploded nearby, and a dear friend, Mundher Beig, rode his grandchild's tricycle: "his legs all scrunched up ... he misses his grandchildren and is convinced he won't see them again."

The last of the water ran out.

Four days in: " ... mod cons seem alien ... cooked potatoes in the fireplace ... continuous explosions ... made a dynamic punch, Aquavit, vodka and fresh orange juice." They are: "going to the loo in the orchard ... fertilizing it", and figuring ways to: "haul water from the river (Tigris.)"

By day six: "The entire country has collapsed and disintegrated ... I wonder how long we can survive this kind of bombardment." On day seven: "The worst has happened – beer without ice ...rumour has it we are going to have a difficult night ... the seventh night, maybe Bush thinks he is God."

"I finished Mundher (Beig's) painting ... We opened a bottle of champagne."

The following day: "Depression has hit me (realizing) that the whole world hates us and is

really glad to ruin us.” She dreamed that Americans in battle fatigues were jogging down central Baghdad’s Haifa Street – as they now have – and that she was alone, with dry earth, which would not grow anything (which happened after the war, near nothing began to grow for over five years.)

She determined to: “build and plant the most beautiful garden. Am I going to be the only survivor?”

Day ten: “I don’t think I could set foot in the West again. If someone like myself, who is Western educated, feels like this, how do the rest of the country feel?”

Three days later, the great Southgate Bridge was bombed and the nearby beautiful, golden, ancient buildings were damaged, all the windows blown out. Mundher Beig went to check the damage and: “just stood there and cried.” The country would be rebuilt, he was reassured: “I’ll not see it”, he said.

“I could understand Kuwait doing this, but not the whole world. Why do they hate us so much?” ponders Nuha

Day fourteen: “Mundher Beig died in his sleep early this morning ... he really died of sorrow. He could not comprehend that they world wanted to destroy us – the people. The city. (Yesterday) he kept asking; ‘ why are they doing this to us?’ “

Nuha had hurried to finish his painting, unable to dismiss a feeling of dread and :”unveiled it in my house, even before the paint was dry. He was not made for dying, so full of laughter, kindness ...”

The house was full of people, staying in mutual support, until the bombardment ended. With: “Sirens, going off, rockets and bombs falling”, they divided the city and drove to tell friends and relatives of the death and arrangements. Mundher, they learned, had spent the previous week, traveling the city, had visited them all as the bombs fell. His “goodbye” at the end of each visit, now seemed like another premonition.

Day eighteen: “All the caged love-birds have died from the shock of the blasts, wild birds fly upside down and do crazy somersaults. Hundreds, if not thousands, have died in the orchard.” The neighbourhood dogs: “ ... actually cry with fear, making the most awful and pathetic sounds. (They) pile up together for comfort”, during air raids. Chickens stopped laying.

Day twenty two: “I saw the Jumhuriya Bridge today. It is very sad to see a bombed bridge ... (people) cram along the sides, peering in to the craters and crying.” Two more landmark bridges were hit: “I feel very bitter towards the West.”

Day twenty nine: “They hit a shelter, the one in Ameriyah, whole families were wiped out. The Americans insist that women and children were put there on purpose ... is that logical (a conversation) and Command Headquarters deciding: ‘Well, I think the Americans will hit the Ameriyah Shelter next, lets fill it with women and children.’.”

“I wish I could see in to the future.- what is in store for us?”

Day thirty one: “The score today is 76,000 Allied air raids, versus sixty seven Scuds.”

Day thirty four: "Mr Bush said 'no' to the overtures of (former Foreign Minister) Tareq Aziz ... while he plays golf, his forces are annihilating us ... Mrs Bush had the gall to say to a group of school kids: 'Don't worry, it's far away and it won't affect you.' What about the children here? What double standards. What hypocrisy. Where's justice?"

Day forty two: "This morning the war stopped. They kept us (up) all night ... just in case we had a couple of gasps left, the worst night of bombing of the whole war, relentless ..."

3rd March: "Even the high ranking officers are walking back from the south, total breakdown of the system, it takes (up to) ten days to walk from Kuwait to Baghdad, all the time dodging Allied 'planes ... trying to pick off stragglers ..." The British flying their Jaguars. "All the wounded who could not run away fast enough, got killed. The others walk with no food or water and simply collapse ..."

9th March: "I hope everyone who had a hand in this disastrous mess falls in to the burning oil wells."

10th March: "No petrol, no electricity, no running water and no telephone ... I have five candles burning in my room, what an extravagance."

My first Iris opened today."

The daily diary ended on 15th April 1991, observations continue until 1995. An undated post script added: "After the war ended, the allies spent all day and night, flying over our heads, breaking the sound barrier. Our torture went on for months ... horrific deafening noise, swooping down .."

On 31st March a yellow love bird flew through her window, they ailed outside, so she found her a white mate, in the pet shop: "they immediately began to coo happily at each other", and made their home in a large wooden cage, where they could fly in and out of the open door. Iraqis have a consuming passion for birds.

Twelve days later, the bees: "have gone crazy in the garden ... five or six a poppy, drinking the nectar ... five white butterflies are dancing in front of me. The garden is so beautiful now ... my white Irises are out." She had made the dead earth blossom, as her dream, cultivating the poisoned earth, which blighted near the country.

By the 6th June, Nuha was catching up on friends, to find: "People are dying like flies ... there is such a high mortality rate of babies ... The UN will keep the embargo on till all Iraqis are dead." There was a cancer epidemic.

In June 1995, she left for Amman, Jordan, combining a major exhibition: "Embargo", with endless visits to doctors for chronically low platelets. Iraqis were leaving their country in droves to earn harder currency to keep their families. She found a surgeon cutting meat in a butcher, and an aeronautical engineer serving coffee in an art gallery.

Nuha went to Beirut, where she also still had a home. Her health was still plaguing her and Iraq no longer had the facilities to treat anything very much, between the destruction and embargo. Another friend died of cancer - he tried to get a visa for treatment in America, it took so long that he died within three days of arriving. The daughter of a friend died from lack of an asthma inhaler. Vetoed by the UN Sanctions Committee.

And the vibrant artistic community left in droves – and despair. How did he feel about exile, she asked another friend, now in Amman: “I’m lost”, he said. Iraqis lived and breathed their country, for all its complexities. “There is a purpose and a pride you lose, when you don’t have your country”, said another.

Nuha spent the next nine years working, exhibiting and fighting the cancer which was finally diagnosed, with characteristic humour and optimism. I remember one of her last writings, for Middle East International. The heading was: “Letter from Limbo.”

She died in Beirut on 30th August 2004, a victim of the first Gulf war, witness to the second and the occupation. A vibrant, lost metaphor for the tragedy of Western belligerence and crimes against humanity, as the same plight, short of miracles, looms for embargoed Syria and Iran.

She was buried in Beirut’s pine forest, lying in a bed of jasmine, with flowers, her favourite adornment, in her irrepressible hair. (iii)

Notes

- i. <http://www.amazon.com/Lying-Empire-Commit-Crimes-Straight/dp/1567513204>
- ii. <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=6882>
- iii. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/2004/sep/07/guardianobituaries.iraq>

See also: Ode to Nuha: <http://www.rense.com/general57/urani.htm>

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