

Recycling Human Misery: Aid and the Pakistan Earthquake

By [M. Asadi](#)

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At the International Donors Conference held on Saturday 11/19/05 in Islamabad, Pakistan (Dawn 11/20/05), international donors pledged \$5.8 billion for earthquake victims. Raw figures become easy propaganda tools, used for deceiving the masses, well understood by those in command of the apparatus of public relations, even though the reality of this feigned “sincerity” is much different. Historical and comparative analysis can reveal a clearer picture: Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey together have pledged \$ 923 million while USA, UK and Japan (the wealthy trio) together have pledged \$ 750 million (as a percentage of GDP, the U.S. amount comes to a minuscule figure compared to that pledged by a much poorer country like Iran). With history as a guide, particularly the on-going Iraq war and what the U.S. is “pledging” over there, we can be sure that most of these promises of funds, made by the U.S., will never materialize. Out of the \$5.8 billion pledged by the world to Pakistan, only \$1.9 billion are grants, the rest are loans that will plunge the country into further debt and impoverish the people, even as finance charges, that become profits of banks in the developed world, take a larger chunk out of the poor country’s budget (which as is allocates very little for social services).

Past IMF/World Bank loans show, and it has been well documented (see Michel Chossudovsky: Globalization of Poverty.2002), that these “pledges” come with strict conditions on who gets the contracts and where this money eventually ends up. Most of the money will be recycled back to the West in the form of lucrative contracts given to their firms for reconstruction or project management. As part of the conditions of these loans will be attempts at structural adjustment required by the IMF/World Bank, which translated into English reads “making exploitation of the poor country’s resources and wealth easier for corporations in the developed world”. Let us consider Iraq as the most recent example which provides empirical evidence for this claim: even though the U.S. is said to have pumped tens of billions of dollars to “liberate” the Iraqi people, social indicators reveal that the Iraqis were better off under Saddam than they are under U.S. occupation: Electricity and water for most of the residents has not been fully restored, unemployment is up (70% unemployed according to a study by Baghdad University, reported by the Toronto Sun 7/31/05), water and sewage systems are in shambles and widespread breakout of diseases, a real concern (according to the UN only 54% have access to clean water). (See summary [health report by Relief Web-July 2005](#))

Child malnutrition under Saddam was 4% while under U.S. occupation it has increased to 8% (according to a study by a Norwegian institute reported by USA Today 9/4/2005). Not mentioned in the above are the findings of the study conducted by researchers at Johns Hopkins University, Columbia University and the Al-Mustansiriya University in Baghdad

(reported by CNN, 10/24/'04), which found that the probability of death by violence was 58 times higher in Iraq after the U.S. occupation than it was before the war. Note that saving people from being "mass graved" is one of the reasons that is still repeated by the Bush Administration to justify the invasion of Iraq, even though the probability that an Iraqi is going to get killed violently under U.S. occupation is 5800% greater than it was under Saddam.

A July 26, 2005 news report about Iraq distributed by the Knight Ridder news agency states: "Electricity production is up to 16 hours a day in Iraqi homes according to U.S. military documents, but most Iraqis say they get eight hours of power a day on average, sometimes as many as 12. In poor areas such as New Baghdad, in the east of the capital, people go days without power, they said." Quoting an Iraqi civil engineer who is working on the U.S. reconstruction projects, the report states: "If I had \$2 billion I would have done three to five times more," Timimi said. "The Americans told me this is our money and we will spend it towards our plans. They do it their way."

The American cycle of "our destruction of the infrastructure of an entire country" (in the Iraq case) and then using "our money" to give to "our corporations (like Halliburton & Bechtel)" to "rebuild" because it is "our way" has become an all too familiar occurrence in the developing world. The aid and finance business is good for American corporations and their hegemony in the world, a very effective tool of implicit control. As far as alleviating human suffering is concerned, it has proved to be a mere farce. To those who understand this world system of recycling of wealth and human suffering, dominated by the U.S. elite, it will come as no surprise when we observe, in a few years, that the conditions in northern Pakistan are similar to or worse than the level they are at today. Forced by circumstance and no substantive help, the poor in those areas (those who survive the winter) will reconstruct their own houses, in similar fashion to what they had before. When a new earthquake strikes and strike it will, they will suffer similar destruction even as an impersonal world watches on yet once again.

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