

The bombing of Iraq

A shameful chapter in American history

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Those who are responsible for the bombing of Iraq are writing a shameful chapter in American history. Hundreds of Iraqi men, women and children have already been killed or maimed by American bombs and cruise missiles. The death toll from the air war will mount far higher. Even the Pentagon had predicted more than 10,000 would be killed in an onslaught of only medium intensity, let alone in the full-scale attack which was unleashed on December 16.

Putting aside for a moment the reactionary aims being pursued by the Clinton Administration, the massive disparity between the resources of the United States and those of Iraq endows a nightmarish and criminal character to the actions taken by the Pentagon. What is unfolding today in the Middle East resembles not so much a war as a state-sanctioned execution. But in this case, the victim is not an individual, strapped helplessly to a gurney, but rather the unarmed population of a defenseless country.

The White House, the Pentagon, the Congress, and, of course, the media sing hymns of praise to 'our heroic men and women in the Persian Gulf.' In reality, every American should feel deeply ashamed of what these 'heroes' are being ordered to do in the name of the United States. 'Heroism,' at a minimum, involves a serious element of risk and danger. 'Heroes' are not those who are willing to kill, but who are prepared to die. On the basis of this definition, the people of Baghdad are far more deserving of respect and admiration than those who are tormenting them from the relative safety of their high-tech murder machines.

There is nothing particularly courageous about placing one's finger on a button to launch a cruise missile, while floating on a naval vessel in the Persian Gulf or flying a B-52 bomber 1,000 miles from Baghdad.

In 1991 American soldiers in the Persian Gulf War had a lower death rate than their counterparts who stayed home. More died of traffic accidents than from Iraqi weapons. During the last seven years, the risks facing American military personnel have been even further reduced. US weaponry has been upgraded and Iraq's defenses have been virtually destroyed. Moreover, American pilots are guided to their targets by intelligence provided by UN weapons inspectors and spy satellites which have scoured the Iraqi landscape continuously for the past eight years.

As for the commanders who are in charge of this sordid operation, history will judge them in much the same way as it does the scoundrels who supervised the genocidal slaughter of the Indians in the 1870s and 1880s. This much is certain: 50 years from now no one will be making films like *Patton*, *The Longest Day* or *Saving Pvt. Ryan* about their exploits.

One need not agree with the politics of such World War II-era commanders as Eisenhower, Bradley, Patton, and Nimitz to acknowledge that they, at least, led their armies against an enemy fully capable of firing back. Today's generals are nothing more than bureaucrats of mass slaughter, working their way up the Pentagon hierarchy, spending a term at the top issuing orders to destroy helpless populations, then retiring to well-paid positions on corporate boards or as 'consultants' to the TV networks covering the next American blitzkrieg.

The horrors of World War II evoked searing images that profoundly influenced the political consciences of several generations. Next to those produced by the opening of the Nazi death camps, the most unforgettable images were those of the German *Luftwaffe* raining bombs on defenseless populations--above Warsaw, Rotterdam, and, most

infamous of all, the Basque village of Guernica. It was this last atrocity that was transformed on the canvas of Picasso into a universally-recognized expression of outrage against the inhumanity of fascism.

Even though the United States was, for the most part, spared much of the on-the-ground horrors of World War II, the event which brought America into the war--the bombing of Pearl Harbor--deeply aroused public opinion. There is, from the standpoint of historical analysis, little doubt that the Roosevelt Administration skillfully maneuvered the Japanese government into a situation in which it had little choice but to go to war against the United States. But the manner in which Japan initiated hostilities--bombing Pearl Harbor without warning--outraged millions. For decades to come, the phrase 'sneak attack' was synonymous with the basest form of treachery. Nearly 20 years after the end of World War II, in 1962, during the missile crisis, among the reasons given by Robert Kennedy for opposing an invasion of Cuba was that such an action would require a 'sneak attack' that would blacken America's historic reputation.

And yet, in 1998, the US government--without any fear of public objection--declares openly that the bombing of Iraq began without warning, let alone a formal declaration of war!

In no other supposedly democratic country is there such a restricted range of political expression. A resolution endorsing the military onslaught was passed by the House of Representatives with only five dissenting votes.

The mass media--television, newspapers, radio--are thoroughly integrated into the US war machine. There is no serious attempt to evaluate the impact of the air raids or to communicate to the American people the terrifying reality of modern war. The media parrots the crudest Pentagon propaganda, presenting the prospect of an antiseptic, risk-free war, in which thousands of bombs and missiles can strike Iraq but kill only a few dozen people.

The real death toll in that battered and starved country can be better estimated by considering the blast which leveled the US embassy in Kenya. If one primitive bomb, weighing about as much as a single US cruise missile, could kill nearly 300 people, what is to be expected from the impact of thousands of such weapons striking Baghdad, a metropolis the size of Chicago?

The Clinton administration's onslaught against Iraq takes advantage of the political confusion which prevails in the working class, exploiting naive patriotic sentiments and concern for sons and daughters who joined the military, in large measure, because of a lack of economic opportunity.

But the White House and the Pentagon are well aware of the great reservoir of potential hostility to a new Gulf war. They learned this in February, during the dress rehearsal for the current attack, when administration spokesmen were denounced at a public forum on the Iraq crisis at Ohio State University. The subsequent decision to launch air strikes without prior warnings or a lengthy media buildup was made, not so much to gain tactical surprise in Iraq, but to present the American people with a *fait accompli*.

No lie is too brazen, no explanation too absurd for the American media. The contradictions in the official cover story mount from day to day. When Clinton announced the attacks, he said their target was Iraq's mythical 'weapons of mass destruction' -- nuclear, chemical and biological. But US spokesmen now concede that not a single such facility has been hit by US warplanes and cruise missiles. The reason given by the Pentagon -- a barefaced lie -- is concern that Iraqi civilians could be killed by the release of chemical or biological agents. The real reason is that there are no weapons production facilities or stockpiles, and the US military will not waste bombs or missiles on facilities that do not exist.

The real targets of the bombing are Iraq's conventional military assets--troops, tanks, antiaircraft weapons--and its industrial infrastructure. What the Pentagon calls the 'capability' to produce chemical or biological weapons are breweries, dairies, pesticide factories and other facilities engaged in food-processing and chemical manufacturing, commonplace in any industrialized society.

Once the truth emerges about the real nature of the US war against Iraq, a wave of revulsion will be felt in the United States.



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