

The Destruction Will Not be Televised: Media Representations of Destruction in the Persian Gulf War and Sanctions against Iraq

Kathleen Wilusz

The Persian Gulf War was unlike any other war America has ever seen. An overwhelmingly supportive media painted the conflict as a bloodless and nondestructive battle. Warfare went prime time. Bombs became “smart.” Human destruction disappeared. Clear indications of government censorship appeared on photographs and film footage. And no one seemed to protest.

Reminiscent of the World Wars of decades past, state censorship of media coverage has returned to the American front. The United States government and the news industry itself, afraid of provoking the public protest attributed to the media during the Vietnam era, worked assiduously to ensure that only select accounts of the war reached the American public. These reports, absent of death and destruction, boasted overwhelming support for the war, manipulating or erasing protest, and pushing warfare into the realm of prime time, illusionary entertainment.

This antiseptic presentation of the Gulf War paved the way for the misrepresentation of coverage pertaining to post-war policy. The war against Saddam Hussein did not end with the declaration of a cease-fire, although this is the story that the media told to the American public. The malicious actions of sanctions against Iraq continue to inflict a horrific destruction on Iraq’s already war-torn civilian population. Yet, just as the war appeared in a supportive and censored light, so too do the sanctions. Like the war, they cause infinitely more damage than either the media or the government would like the American public to see.

This article examines the role of government and media censorship in the portrayal of destruction during the Gulf War, exploring the impact of these initial campaigns on the portrayal of sanctions in the war’s aftermath. A survey of mass media coverage during the war examines leading American print and television media during the conflict in order to analyze the war’s presentation as antiseptic, surreal, and devoid of protest. A similar survey of American mass media outlets during the ten year period following the Gulf War suggests that the impacts of the economic sanctions likewise remain ignored, distorted, and purportedly unchallenged. An analysis of the ways in which these economic sanctions violate international war legislation and human rights codes suggests that a decade of distorted media coverage in the Gulf region aids and exonerates the most blatant and horrific crimes against humanity, the destruction that has not been televised.

Hell No, What The Media Won't Show

In order to analyze the media's role in the Persian Gulf War, we must first examine government-media relations during earlier international conflicts. During both World Wars and the Korean War, the United States government dictated which reporters made it to the front lines and what images returned to the American public. These conflicts were marked by intense patriotism and national support. The policy mutated during the Vietnam War, however, and the loosened grip on coverage returning from the front played a pivotal role in public reaction to the war. Images of devastation and protest made their way into American living rooms, bringing previously unimaginable acts of war into the public's field of vision, and driving thousands of Americans into the streets in angry protest.

The US government learned its lesson. Acknowledging this important connection between media portrayal and public support, the government embarked on a full-fledged campaign to ensure that only approved images reached the American public. Harkening back to the days of the World Wars, the US government established strict rules, mandating that all media images go through their censors from the beginning of troop build-up in the Gulf Region until the end of the declared ground conflict. On January 14, 1991, the US Department of Defense published its "Operation Desert Shield Ground Rules." The twelve rules clearly asserted the government's intentions to prevent the publication of any information capable of jeopardizing operations and endangering lives in any way. A closer survey of these rules, however, reveals the broader underlying intentions of the government's prohibitions—to obscure an extraordinary amount of wartime information.

When Operation Desert Storms' Ground Rules are applied to the reports from Vietnam, the results are shocking. Oscar Patterson's (1995) application of the Gulf War Rules to reports from the Vietnam era found that 847 reports from Vietnam violated 901 of the rules established in the Gulf Rules. Describing how Vietnam's weekly body count ranked as one of the most disturbing factors of media coverage during the war, Patterson suggests that the vast national outcry stemming from these reports led the US government to prohibit such reports in the Gulf (Patterson 1995:27). Indeed, statistical reports of casualties and injuries disappeared from media coverage of the Gulf, replaced by nonnumeric terms. Magazines and television continually boasted of the "light" casualties and injuries resulting from warfare. Of the ten reports concerning injuries included in *Time*, *Newsweek* and *US News and World Report* during January 1991, all heralded some version of "extremely low" injury and fatality for US troops (Moriarty and Shaw 1995). No mention of injuries and death among the Iraqi population exists.

Although numeric calculations of destruction failed to appear in the mainstream media during the Gulf War, explicit signs of censorship abounded. The most dramatic indications of censorship ever presented to the American public went

largely unrecognized and unprotested. Unlike the Vietnam era, in which countless numbers of reporters, both permitted and unauthorized, reported from the center of field operations, Peter Arnett was the only television reporter permitted into Baghdad during the initial ground strike (Schechter 1998). Beyond the blatant control implicit in limiting reporting from the front to one person, labels announcing strict censorship consistently appeared in television media. News analyst John Newhagen (1994) proposes that the fact that censored material came so clearly labeled marked the most revolutionary aspect of news coverage during the war. Viewers became accustomed to hearing announcers warn of government censorship and seeing the words “cleared by censors” appear along the bottom of the screen. Yet Newhagen’s survey of the affects of censorship discovered that these labels did not lead people to evaluate the news differently nor lose trust in the validity of the reporting. He found that his subjects correctly identified stories with censorship labels less than 30% of the time and that the labels could not be linked to distrust nor altered interpretation of the news (Newhagen, 1994). Gallop Polls during the war further support Newhagen’s findings suggesting that the public’s faith in the mass media significantly increased during the period of censorship (McLeod 1994). This skewed equation of public support and mass censorship continued as dissent for the war and the government’s policies vanished from the media’s vision.

Dissidence Disappears

The news media, usually committed to the financial profitability of novelty and freedom of speech, did not need this external command to induce censorship and one-sided story-telling. Industry self-censorship and scrupulously constructed reporting reveal the media industry’s own self-initiated compliance with the US government’s aims. The media manipulated criticism of the war, presenting a portrait of war without significant protest, and portraying protestors in a negative and threatening manner. Selective pairing of stories spawned further support for the war efforts, and increased use of “expert” analysis endowed journalism with an increased sense of authority.

On the first night of the ground attack, CNN laid the groundwork for the negative depiction of protestors in a report from the United Nations Building in New York. Scenes flashing across the screen showed chanting assemblages of protestors behind a reporter who stated that “while the rest of New York” remained peaceful and quiet, the protestors wrecked a noisy havoc all night long. The reporter added that the war demonstrations “were a very dangerous time for a while” (Allen, O’Laughlin, Jaspersen and Sullivan 1994:274). The next scene captured a glimpse of supporters of the war—quiet, praying, nonviolent Americans. This selective pairing began a very deliberate and influential representation of dissent, equating protest with violence, chaos, and danger, and equating support with allegiance to God, organization, and calm.

ABC and the major news networks likewise used this method of selective pairing to inflame sentiments of nationalism and build support for the war. In a nighttime news segment in November 1990 the network immediately followed three long stories about the Gulf Crisis with a story about the rising cost of oil and its negative effects on the airline industry and domestic consumers (Peer and Chestnut 1995). A *New York Times* photo portrayed a longhaired protester holding a *Socialist Worker* newspaper, complete with a brilliant red banner. CNN transitioned from reports on the war effort to a news segment in which Fidel Castro proclaimed the Gulf War “unnecessary” (Peer and Chestnut 1995). This juxtaposition of stories reinforces the image of Iraq as antithetical to American ideology, supporting the administration’s claim that the conflict required quick and effective resolution.

Opposition among members of the government appeared in a similar manner. During NBC’s early coverage of the war, anchor Tom Brokaw and reporter Andrea Mitchell led a report from Capital Hill that concluded “of course, the political leasers are falling behind the president, even those who voted against the resolution for war” (Allen, O’Laughlin, Jasperson and Sullivan 1994:275). In an interview during the same NBC special with Senator David Boren (D., Oklahoma), who voted against the war resolution, the senator altered his ethos and declared that the US “was moving quickly and efficiently against the right targets” and that the president enjoys “the unanimous support of the people” while planning to avoid “another Vietnam” (Allen, O’Laughlin, Jasperson and Sullivan 1994:275). Thus, while members of the public opposing the war suffered the same negative portrayal, supposedly informed and publicly-minded government members were permitted redemption by publicly announcing their newfound support for the war.

Closely following the former protesters in their conversion to support for the war and painting the remaining protesters as militant, unpatriotic outsiders during the extremely limited amount of time dedicated to protest at all, the media needed to do little more to inflame support for the war. Yet the media employed a new and strategically important tool in journalistic story telling—the increased use of “expert testimony,” a process wherein news segments called upon a so-called “expert” to explain the news and offer analysis. This technique employs professional social scientists housed in universities or policy-oriented think tanks in order to supply journalists with increased credibility and authority, providing a “set of conventions journalists use to protect themselves from mistakes and criticism by limiting the extent to which they can be held responsible for what they report” (Steel 1994:801). This tactic worked, infusing a sense of credibility to news reporting, as expert testimony reached its peak during the Gulf build-up and the public’s faith in the mass media simultaneously increased. Not surprisingly, studies found that the American public’s support of and trust in the media rose simultaneously with the average American’s media exposure during the Gulf War. This combination of a heightened sense of authority afforded to the media, increased media use and the media’s careful

manipulation of war coverage demonstrates that the American public experienced a scrupulously fabricated view of the Gulf War.

The Antiseptic War

The meticulously controlled images of the Gulf War that saturated the American public's view stretched far beyond a distorted or eliminated view of opposition. War activities became illusionary and entertaining, battles became bloodless, and destruction disappeared. A survey of the leading American news magazines during the war reveals the antiseptic and carefully contrived nature of Gulf War reporting. Sandra Moriarty and David Shaw's (1995) survey of two of the most widely-read American news magazines during the period (*Time* and *US News and World Report*), coupled with my own research, (which extends their survey to include *Newsweek*), exposes the absence of visible destruction in the Gulf region.

Nearly all images of human harm disappeared from the American media during Operation Desert Storm and its buildup. Of the 783 total images surveyed, only eight (1%) depict injury, seven (.77%) expose blood, and one reveals a dead US soldier neatly contained in a body bag. Seventeen images of wounded or dead Iraqi soldiers appear amongst the 783 total photos, a fractional 2% of images imported from the front. A mere six (.76%) of these 783 photos depict blood. And of the images of people bloodied by the war, two are the same photo of a wounded Iraqi woman that ran in two different magazines. Her wound is clearly not life threatening. Not one photo of Americans bloodied by war appears in any of the magazines. Only 33, or 6% of the photos surveyed, depict soldiers in life-threatening situations, and only 48 photos (8%) involve live ground combat. A crystalline message springs forth from these pages—the war involved little or no injury.

Yet this lack of visible destruction did not end with people. Harm to property and land likewise disappeared or appeared in a very strategic manner. Extending the survey to include analysis of destruction to property, a mere 49 (6%) of the 783 total Gulf War photos display the actual impact of bombing. No pictures displaying US missiles that either malfunctioned or missed their targets appeared in any of the reports. Text messages running quickly across the bottom of screens explained that the "very limited" amount of possible civilian targets hit were most likely military targets, filled with citizens by Saddam Hussein in an attempt to protect his military with innocent noncombatants.

In contrast to these images of strategically successful, noncivilian bombing campaigns carried out by American forces, the Iraqis were depicted as consciously and continuously bombing civilian targets (when their weapons worked at all). Iraqi missiles appeared as either instruments of random destruction—these images unwaveringly depicted destruction to civilian sites—or as failed unexploded Scuds in the sand. These images reinforced the idea that the Iraqis carried out attacks on

civilian populations, and that the Iraqi government, in addition to being malicious toward their own people, employed outdated and faulty technology.

This portrayal of poor Iraqi technology and its destruction of civilian populations coincided with an overwhelming focus on the "advancement" and "intelligence" of American weaponry. Gulf War media became a catalogue of American war technology. Magazines filled with layouts describing American arms. Television specials describing and glorifying this technology filled the airwaves. Moriarty and Shaw (1995) report that the largest proportion of wartime photos depicted the weapons of war (35% of all images). Nearly half of *Newsweek's* first issue during Operation Desert Storm exclusively depicted American arms. Compared to Vietnam, this represents an increase of at least 7-24% in visual images dedicated to weaponry.

This showcase of American weaponry constantly heralded the "intelligence" and "advancement" of the arms. The weapons took on a life of their own, personified as "smart" enough to distinguish military from civilian targets, and precise enough to never run off course. The supposedly unsurpassed intelligence and advancement of American weapons, which promised to avoid unnecessary destruction, complemented the antiseptic language appropriated for the war. The term battlefield, typically resonating with images of death and destruction, became "theater of operation," bombs were renamed "ordinances" or "smart," and bombing missions became "sorites" or "visits." Enemy targets became "assets," body bags "human remain pouches," and civilian death "collateral damage" (Ebo 1995:23). This sanitary vocabulary thrived symbiotically with the media's continued promotion of the accuracy of US military technology.

The use of sanitary vocabulary pushed the war into the realm of illusionary entertainment. The Gulf War appeared as a prime-time spectacle, resembling a video game rather than an actual battle with realized destruction and mortal consequences. As Bosah Ebo (1995) points out, the American public saw the war from the realm of illusion and not from the realm of reality. The Gulf War in effect simulated the technology of illusionary entertainment (video and computer games), enthralling the public with an awesome display of the technology of human destruction, rather than the actual human and physical destruction caused by the attacks. The media, in conjunction with the military, used a number of techniques to move the war from the realm of reality into the realm of entertainment.

Setting the stage for a perfect media spectacle, the Gulf War entered the public's consciousness as a prime-time media event. The first bombs of Operation Desert Storm dropped at exactly 6:30 PM Eastern Standard Time, the beginning of prime time television. This bombing campaign marked the transition from "Operation Desert Shield" into "Operation Desert Storm." These names, chosen by the Pentagon, closely resemble the names chosen by video game manufactures for their electronic

war games (Sega's "Operation Desert Protect" and "Operation Air Desert Strike: War In the Gulf" were both released in 1991). The Pentagon further collaborated with the media in creating a war of entertainment by privileging select outlets with images taken from the cockpits of airplanes and the noses of missiles; this cooperative relationship continued until the end of the war. The ground war cease-fire began at 9 PM EST, making the war exactly 100 hours long. General Norman Schwarzkopf, reported that he liked the idea of the "Five-Day War," but the White House found the "Hundred Hour War" more appealing. "I've got to hand it to them," Schwarzkopf said, "they really now how to package a historical event" (Ebo 1995:23). Yet the packaging of this war did not end with prime time spots and Hollywood style publicity campaigns.

Analogies employed during the war frequently called upon patriotic and festive sentiments. CNN correspondents Bernard Shaw and John Holliman described the first night's airstrikes as resembling "fireworks on Fourth of July," akin to "lights lighting up a Christmas tree," and Brent Sandler of the ITN Network reported that "the night sky was filled with a star-spangled display of threatening force" (Ebo 1995:22). Repetitive use of such analogies drew upon and conjured up nationalistic, festive and celebratory sentiments in connection with the war, sentiments strongly opposed to fatality and ruin.

This carefully calculated imagery provided a comfortable space wherein Americans escaped the destructive realities of war. As Bosah Ebo states, "an important attribute of illusionary entertainment such as television and video/computer games is to create a comfortable psyche that allows players to be immersed in recreational violence without the traditional sense of remorse associated with such behaviors in real life" (1995:19). Indeed, the American public never needed to consider the possibility of war atrocities because they never saw the war coverage as "real". Real people do not inhabit the interior of video games or television screens, similarly, in the war coverage, actual people and corporal injury did not appear on the pages of magazines and newspapers. This attentively crafted presentation of the war paved the way for reports about the second phase of the attack on Iraq, actions which proved infinitely more lethal.

Sanctions: The War Continues

Following the declaration of a ceasefire in February 1991, American media forces packed up and returned home. The media reported the war against Iraq over, and hostile governmental actions against Iraq slipped out of Americans' field of vision. But, behind this seeming peace and the salute to the end of a nondestructive war, the attack against Iraq continued and grew even more horrific. The United States and the United Nations began a second, more devastating phase of the war against Iraq—economic sanctions. This is the silenced story of violence and destruction that continues to evade Americans' mainstream media.

The UN declared economic sanctions against Iraq in August 1990, including them as part of a plan to “bring the invasion and occupation of Kuwait by Iraq to an end and to restore the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Kuwait” through economic force (Osborne Daponte and Garfield 2000:546). Defense Secretary George Robertson explained that the degradation of Saddam Hussein’s ability to build weapons of mass destruction would diminish the threat he posed to his neighbors. Lobbied for and most heavily supported by North American forces in the UN, the sanctions enjoyed enormous praise, including the claim that they represented a less violent alternative to war.

The sanctions blocked virtually all commercial imports and exports in Iraq, banned travel on Iraqi transport, froze funds, and precluded every hope of the country’s reconstruction in the post war rubble. Details of the sanctions declared medical supplies and food stuffs to be exempt from the embargo (Osborne Daponte and Garfield 2000). In reality, however, these exemptions never amounted to the importation nor distribution of medicine, food, and other supplies necessary for civilian survival. The sanctions hit Iraq especially hard due to the fact that about 97% of the country’s income had previously stemmed from international trade, and 70% of the country’s prewar calories originated from external sources. Prior to the embargo, Iraq produced about 3 million barrels of oil a day, exporting 2.5 million. This trade fell by approximately 90%. Estimates postulate that Iraq lost US\$120 billion in foreign exchange earnings during the first eight years of the sanctions, funds once allocated to public health projects.

Thrust into poverty, denied its main source of revenue, and unable to rebuild a flattened infrastructure following a treacherous ground attack, Iraq plummeted into an unimaginable public health crisis. Health services dependent upon functioning water, sanitation infrastructure, electrical supplies, and equipment such as ambulances, x-ray facilities, and refrigerators to store vaccine toppled to a point of near total collapse. Field studies report that electricity in Baghdad shuts off an average of five times a day (Garfield 1991). This electrical unpredictability renders futile the equipment necessary to run hospitals—from lights and refrigerators to infant incubators and dialysis machines. Reports of the power shutting off during cesarean sections and other operations abound. Of the 100 ambulances in Baghdad, only five remain operational due to a lack of spare parts such as tires and spark plugs that are barred from trade by the sanctions (UNICEF 1999). Water sanitation systems, likewise in ruin, remain unrepaired due to the claim of the “potential military use” of the parts necessary to rebuild them. The disastrous result is one of the highest rates of water-born illness and death due to treatable illness in the modern world.

Yet even if the medicines to treat these illnesses could enter Iraqi borders, sanctions block the tools necessary for their distribution. Sources report that a small number of warehouses remain stockpiled with undistributed and expired medicine due to a lack of functioning vehicles, communication equipment, and state funding to

finance allocation. More frequently, however, the total absence of medicines and functioning equipment, coupled with an unreliable electricity supply, color the reality of a sanctioned Iraq.

Children suffer the most pronounced impacts of these sanctions. Public health professionals and epidemiologists report that infant mortality and disease rates are of great interest in analyses of community health because, more than any other numbers, they represent the overall health conditions of a population. An examination of these rates reveals the severity of Iraq's public health crisis.

From 1991-1996 alone, acute malnutrition in under-five-year-olds skyrocketed from 3% to 11%. Chronic malnutrition jumped from 19% to 31%. Low birth weights increased from 5 to 22 per 100 live births. Measles and polio cases more than doubled (Garfield 1991). Children suffer from leukemia at a rate equivalent to that of post-Hiroshima Japan, the consequence of depleted uranium shells abandoned by British and American forces in 1991 (Pilger 1999). An International Health Condition Study Team found that the baseline infant mortality rate of 32.5 deaths per 1000 live births from 1985-1990 increased to 93 deaths per 1000 live births from March to August 1991, before the most devastating impacts of the embargo even began to appear (Hufbauer 1991). These numbers are especially distressing when viewed in conjunction with the fact that Iraq experienced a rapidly decreasing infant mortality rate from 1960-1990. This decreasing infant mortality rate relates directly to a rigorous and highly successful national campaign aimed at reducing such childhood deaths that was begun by the national government in 1980 (Garfield 1991). Yet efforts to improve childhood health came crashing down alongside the toppled buildings.

Estimates report the death rate of Iraqi children as a direct result of the sanctions to be at least 4500 and possibly as high as 6000 excess deaths per month, mounting to more than 1 million childhood deaths during the past ten years. This number represents more childhood fatalities than caused by the bombing of Hiroshima. And the death toll continues to increase every month. Yet children are not the only victims of the sanctions. The other population groups most affected by the aggressive actions include pregnant and lactating women, children under five, the chronically ill and the elderly (UNICEF 1999). Health risks increased according to age, gender, geographical location, mother's education level, number of siblings, and family income. The highest risk factors for sanctions-related negative health effects and death included (1) age: under-five-year-olds are most at risk, (2) geography: those in rural areas are more prone to negative consequences than their urban counterparts, (3) income: the poorest sectors of society are the most vulnerable, (4) family size: having a greater number of children is linked to a higher risk of poor health and death, and (5) educational level: the least educated suffer the most. Estimates indicate that per capita income declined about 75% from 1990-1993, and household surveys reveal that those in the highest income bracket lost half of their income, average income

earners lost two-thirds of their income and low-income households lost more than three-quarters of their income (Osborne Daponte and Garfield 2000.) These findings should raise serious ethical concerns, since sanctions delegate the most extreme suffering to the most socially, politically, and economically impotent members of a society.

International aid wields little power to alter this disastrous reality. Humanitarian assistance during the post-war period accounted for about US\$ 1 billion in donations, a mere .83% of the lost national revenue (Garfield 1991). After the first eight months of sanctions prohibiting food importation into Iraq, the UN altered its written policy to allow for humanitarian food aid and medicine. Yet only about 5% of the medicine and food necessary for the Iraqi people's assured health and survival successfully entered its borders (Garfield 1991). And importation does not necessarily mean distribution.

The United Nation's Oil For Food program theoretically promised to generate aid income, yet in practice yielded yet another means of denying help to the most innocent members of a suffering society. The program allowed Iraq to sell a set amount of oil in order to purchase food and medicine. Oil sales from the first six months of the Oil For Food program generated about US\$ 7.7 billion for humanitarian goods (Garfield 1999). In reality, however, only about 53% of this income actually became available for funding humanitarian projects. The remainder of the income covers the Program's administrative costs, which the Iraqi government must pay alone. The US\$ 3-4 worth of food and medicines received per capita per month through the OFF program thus represents merely a fraction of the estimated US\$12 in imported per capita monthly funds received during 1988-1989. Adding insult to injury, this incredibly minimal amount of aid is hampered along every step of the way.

The "661 Committee" was established by the UN in order to monitor the sanctions and oversee Iraqi applications for humanitarian goods and consists of representatives of each nation on the Security Council. In order to sell any imported item to Iraq, a company must submit an application to the "661 Committee" (Gordon 1999). The group publishes no set criteria for approval and its meetings remain closed to Iraq, contractors submitting applications, and the public. Review of most contracts takes months, and, if during this time any of the conditions of the contract change for any reason, such as currency value, number of goods, or intended location of use, the contract is thrown out and must begin in the tedious process again. Any member country may exercise veto power on any and all contracts at any time and for any reason.

Beyond the obviously undemocratic policies intrinsic in this process, any items falling into the category of "dual-use" remain strictly prohibited from trade. Perhaps the most restrictive component of the application and review process, the prohibition of "dual-use goods" denies entrance to any and all articles with civilian

uses that may be used by the military or that may rebuild the Iraqi economy in general. These goods include pesticides, fertilizer, spare parts for crop dusting helicopters, chlorine for water purification, computers, trucks, telecommunications equipment, and equipment for rebuilding the electrical grid (Pape 1997). Yet these particular items represent the most important tools necessary to rebuild Iraq's infrastructure and alleviate the country's intense economic and health crises. Joy Gordon (1999) explains that:

Iraq's infrastructure had been devastated by massive bombing during the Gulf war, which destroyed or caused extensive damage to water treatment plants, dams, generators, power plants, pipes, electrical systems for irrigation and desalination of agricultural land, textile factories, silos, flour mills, bakeries and countless other buildings and resources. While Iraq was in principal allowed to import food and medical supplies, it was prohibited from buying the "dual-use" equipment needed to grow and distribute food, to treat and distribute portable water, to generate and distribute electricity for irrigating crops, refrigerating foods, and operating hospital equipment. [Gordon 1999:19]

It is precisely these prohibitions on "dual-use" goods that lead to the outbreak of severe epidemics of waterborne diseases such as cholera, diarrhea, and dehydration, and that prompt the collapse of the entire energy, medical, food, transportation, and distribution systems.

Humanitarian agencies wishing to bypass this tedious and time-consuming application process receive strict warnings from US agencies threatening them with the penalties for distributing aid outside of the "661" process. Activist Kitty Kelley of the Voices in the Wilderness organization, a program which aims to import food and medicine into Iraq, reports receiving a letter from the US State Department before each planned visit. These letters warn members of the organization against "unauthorized transactions," citing penalties of up to 12 years in prison and more than \$1 million in fines (McClory 1997). Yet the most criminal of acts do not belong to humanitarian agencies, but rather to the UN for instigating such horrific violations of human rights, and to the American mass media, for ignoring the sanctions and their impact for over a decade.

Conflicting Realities: Media Portrayal of the Sanctions

Although as early as August 1991 international health organizations began documenting the irrefutable, incredibly destructive impact of the sanctions on Iraqi civilians, the media continues to disregard or reshape this reality. A survey of the same magazines already cited their Gulf War coverage reveals a near total lack of attention to, and manipulation of, stories pertaining to the sanctions.

From March 1991 through March 2000, only six articles involving sanctions appeared in *Time*, *Newsweek* and *US News and World Report*. This number is astonishing when compared to the fact that during the one-month period of air and ground warfare from January through February 1991, 464 articles about Iraq-related issues appeared in the same news magazines. Furthermore, when coverage of the sanctions did surface, the meticulously crafted stories unwaveringly supported the policy. One of the articles dealing with the sanctions, found in *US News and World Report*, stated: "Saddam Hussein is a survivor. He endured the Gulf War, which wrecked his military. He has weathered seven years of economic sanctions costing him \$20 billion a year in lost oil revenues...And yet his 18 year grip on power still looks as strong as ever (Auster and Whitelaw 1997:49). The story fails to account for the over 1 million Iraqi children, and countless other civilians, left dead and suffering as a direct result of the embargo. No mention appears that the Iraqi people, especially the poorest sectors of society, suffer the greatest loss of income, and the article fails to address the fact that the original intentions of the sanctions sought to decrease Hussein's "grip on power." These silenced facts could potentially expose the incredible failure of the sanctions in both diplomatic and human rights terms.

The article goes on to state that the US chose not to direct bombing attacks at military targets likely to contain toxic agents. These actions, the article explains, were avoided because they "could cause the deaths of innocent civilians," a troubling proposition in light of the intensive civilian destruction undeniably caused by the sanctions (Auster and Whitelaw 1997:49). Again, the idea of the perfection and precision of the American military touted throughout the ground war reverberates. The article goes on to quote then US Secretary of State Madeline Albright as saying that "Saddam Hussein is trying to play his 'humanitarian card' by requesting a increase in permissible oil sales to buy food for the people 'he claims are starving' in his country (Auster and Whitelaw 1997:49). Albright boasts that "people forget about the sins of Saddam," while the authors of the article warn of Russia's increasingly loud advocacy for Iraq (Auster and Whitelaw 1997:49). No elaboration on what Russia advocates for follows, the issue of hunger remains unaddressed, and the sins of the UN and the US are erased.

The article contains a photo of female Iraqi soldiers, marching militantly, with their faces covered. The caption reads: "as U.S. military pressure on Iraq continues, women in Baghdad train as commando volunteers" (Auster and Whitelaw 1997:49). This framing presents the idea that women in Baghdad possess the physical and economic health to volunteer as commandos, a striking contrast to all available public health statistics. Just as the article's text likewise implies, Saddam Hussein's stronghold on power and the need for an insurgence of nationalistic sentiments are not seen as a failure of the sanctions, but rather as justification for their continuation. This type of report is atypical, but represents the norm of the extremely limited number of sanctions-related articles present in the mainstream media.

A *Time* article in November 1997 presents a similar image of Iraqi-American relations. The story tells of an Iraqi man caught in a bombing raid who reports that “these attacks are not strange to us. They are normal. We know they hit military, not civilian targets’ he added with a smile” (Sandler 1997:55). The message that the United States limits its destruction to military targets repeatedly surfaces, and this time it comes straight from an Iraqi citizen. (Of course, there’s nothing quite like a bomb attack to bring a smile to your face.) The article then reports that “the Iraqis have clearly had enough of the hardship caused by economic sanctions, and Saddam’s putting all the blame on the US is wearing thin” (Sandler 1997:55). As if the reporter’s conclusion that the Iraqis themselves blame Hussein for their hardships fails to accomplish the story’s angle, the article ends with an Iraqi man stating that “our problem doesn’t come from American. It comes from within” (Sandler 1997:55). This antinational statement receives the last word despite that fact that all scholarly work reveals that people tend to rally around their leader in times of national distress such as sanctions, and that even the most optimistic statistics reveal that the success rates of sanctions linger around 3% (Stremlau 1996). These are the reports that the media ignores, covering them up with Iraqi smiles.

A continuous chain of UN, World Health, and UNICEF reports, along with countless other studies by well-respected, nonprofit, and nonpartisan agencies likewise evade media coverage. The absence of these reports thrives symbiotically with the media’s intentional ignorance of the mounting protests being staged against the sanctions. Nowhere in the magazines surveyed did Dennis Halliday’s resignation from his post as Assistant Secretary General of the UN in protest of the sanctions appear. Halliday resigned in the fall of 1999, remarking in his resignation statement that he “no longer wished to be identified with a United Nations that maintains a sanctions program which kills and maims people through chronic malnutrition and continues this program regardless.... I did not join the UN to wage war on children” (Garfield 1991). Boutros Galis’s protest that the sanctions represent a “blunt instrument of force which affect the most vulnerable in a society,” likewise remain ignored, as are the protests of Sadruddin Aga Khan, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, who reported to the UN in 1991 that “we are neither crying wolf nor playing politics... it is evident that, for large numbers of people of Iraq, every passing month brings closer the brink of calamity” (Osborne Daponte and Garfield 2000:546). UN Humanitarian Reports during the past decade repeatedly called for an immediate end to sanctions as well as an influx of aid to assist with the disastrous state of the Iraqi civilian population, yet these pleas for policy change continue to elude international audiences.

The silence that the media has built around these sanctions forfeits the building blocks of war crimes. Silence becomes a voice of support; twisted media perceptions become accomplices to torture and deprivation. And while American media audiences escape the harsh realities of policies that reap havoc and suffering, the American government and the UN enjoy immunity from irrefutably criminal acts.

The Silencing of War Crimes

These US and UN imposed sanctions violate at least ten Geneva Codes, United States Wartime Regulations, and a minimum of twelve United Nation's Human Rights Codes. Yet these actions, not occurring under a formal declaration of war, remain exempt from wartime regulation despite the fact that they prove infinitely more deadly and endlessly more destructive than the actual Gulf War (which resulted in between 150,000 and 250,000 Iraqi casualties and lasted only a few months). Today, more than a decade after its inception, the war against Iraq continues, increasingly treacherous and immune from legal culpability, in the same silent shadow that obscured the destruction in the early nineties.

The paramount violation of the laws of warfare committed by the sanctions center around the essential Principals of Distinction and Proportionality. The Principal of Distinction provides for the protection of civilian persons and objects. Originally established during the First Geneva Convention in 1949, and reinforced by the Additional Geneva Protocol of 1977, the International Criminal Court, and multiple other international legal bodies, the Principal of Distinction requires that parties in armed conflict must always distinguish between civilians and civilian objects and combatants and military targets. The Principal of Proportionality, likewise violated under the sanctions, prohibits attacks that cause incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, or damage to civilian objects considered excess in relation to the anticipated, concrete, and direct military advantage of the attack. Both of these principals are "customary," considered so fundamental to all codes of warfare that they stand on their own, universally applicable regardless of ratification by member states and warring countries.

Additional codes of warfare violated under the sanctions included the Prohibition of Blocking Humanitarian Aid and the Necessity of Giving Humanitarian Aid. The Fourth Geneva Convention and the Additional Protocol of 1977 established the obligation that all parties in a conflict must "allow the free passage of all consignments of medical and hospital stores" and of "all consignments of essential foodstuffs, clothing and tonics." Furthermore, these laws state that belligerents must "treat offers of relief not as interference in the conflict so long as they are humanitarian in nature" (Article 18, Geneva Protocol II). The obvious roadblocks established by the UN's aid application process, along with warnings issued to humanitarian groups attempting to give aid, illustrate gross violations of these laws. The Geneva code further elaborates that "relief actions must be undertaken if a population is not adequately provided with basic supplies essential to its survival" (Article 14, Geneva Protocol I). Yet in Iraq's case, the only operational relief actions undertaken encounter roadblocks along every step of the way and must be funded by the Iraqis themselves.

The Laws of Immunity From Attack for Civilians as well as the Prohibition of Collective Penalties likewise suffer violations under the sanctions. The Geneva Convention of 1949 and the Additional Protocol of 1977 established that “the civilian population and individual civilians shall enjoy general protection against the dangers arising from military operations,” elaborating that “furthermore, some individuals considered especially vulnerable—children under fifteen, the elderly, pregnant women, and mothers of children under seven—are granted special protection.” Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention clearly prohibits “collective penalties” against a civilian population. Yet all statistical information concerning Iraq continues to prove that the poorest, youngest, and most politically and economically impotent members of society endure the worst blows inflicted by the sanctions.

Furthermore, Article 54 of the Additional Protocol testifies that “in no event” shall actions against targets such as waterworks and food systems be undertaken if they are “expected to leave the civilian population with inadequate food or water.” Article 14 of Protocol II states that “it is prohibited to attack crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies and irrigation works.” The dire state of the water treatment system in Iraq, along with the Food and Agriculture Organization’s estimate that at least 27% of the total Iraqi population experiences chronic malnourishment or undernourishment and suffers from large scale dehydration, diarrhea, and cholera, testifies to the fact that Iraqi water and food production mechanisms have been attacked and prohibited from rebuilding.

In addition to these grave violations of international codes of warfare, US Military Laws are likewise violated. The US Airforce Warfare code establishes that:

in conducting military operations, constant care must be taken to spare the civilian population, civilians and civilian objects. Those who plan or prepare the attack must...take all feasible precautions in the choice of means and methods of attack with a view of avoiding, and in any event minimizing, incidental loss of civilian life, civilian injury and damage to civilian objects... refraining from deciding to launch any attack which may be expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life, injuries to civilians, damage to civilian objects, or a combination thereof, which would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated.

Hence the principles of Proportionality and Distinction that are included in the US Military Code continue to be ignored, leaving one to wonder what laws, if any, are capable of protecting Iraq from a clearly criminal attack.

The sanctions do not stop at a violation of war codes. They also represent grave breaches of human rights law. The UN’s charter charges the organization with promoting higher standards of living and human development as well as equal human

rights for all peoples. The Universal Declaration of the Rights of the Child and the Convention On The Rights of the Child, among with multiple international treaties, condemn actions which obstruct the realization of basic rights such as shelter, healthcare, and food. The UN Code of Human Rights establishes that universal human rights include (1) the right to life, (2) the right to liberty and security of person, (3) the right to freedom of opinion and expression, (4) the right to adequate food and freedom from hunger, (5) the right to the highest possible standard of physical and mental health, (6) the right to adequate housing and clothing, (7) the right to adequate environmental conditions, (7) the right to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being, (8) the right to an education, (9) the right to work, and to work in just and favorable conditions, and (10) the right to social security. The vast destruction of life, land, food supplies, personal income, and environment throughout Iraq testify to grave violations of these human right codes.

Yet despite these explicit violations of human rights law and crimes of war, no legal redress for the perpetrators exists. In the absence of a formal declaration of war or massive public protest, these actions go unchecked and unpunished, and consequently, legitimated. Experts in the area of international war law explain that “legal procedure typically requires an individual to demonstrate damages through the act of another individual, and because sanctions are experienced collectively and not individually, it is difficult to legally establish reasonable doubt” (Osborne Daponte and Garfield 2000:546). Thus the only war crime that the US and UN could be held guilty of without a formal declaration of war is that of Crimes Against Humanity, an especially interesting postulation in that this crime represents the gravest crime of war. The Geneva Code outlines Crimes Against Humanity as “acts of violence against persons irrespective of whether the person is a national or nonnational.” These acts of violence include “murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, and other inhuman acts” targeted at a certain group, and carried out in a “widespread or systematic” policy. Most importantly, they can occur in times of war or peace (Gutman and Rieff 1999:107). These charges, however, could only be applied if the UN takes up a case against itself, or against the incredibly influential US. These are unlikely cases, especially in the absence of a declaration of war, the poor historical record of war crime charges brought against the US (zero), and in the absence of public knowledge and protest.

Sanctions, A New World Order?

Perhaps the most ominous and critical component of these sanctions is the role they play in the Post Cold War World Order. Employed only two times prior to 1991, economic sanctions carried out by the near omnipotent world leadership of the US and UN today deprive over 50 countries of the supplies necessary to life. This dramatic increase in the use of sanctions coincides with a growing amount of scholarly work testifying to the incredibly low success rate and the intensive human destruction reaped by such policies. The increasingly prevalent use of sanctions,

although surely a “continuation of policy by other means,” and thus compliant with the most common universal definition of warfare, enables the UN and US to titularly evade the declaration of war and to escape legal redress for their actions.

The criminalization of certain acts during times of war should not render the same acts legitimate in times of peace, just as violations of human rights must be challenged regardless of the perpetrator or the excuse of diplomatic purpose. The utility and universal applicability of human rights and the laws of warfare are undermined and made futile when left open to successful evasion by select groups, especially those with the most power or with the media protecting them. This is the same basic exploitation of power, that international laws of war and human rights attempt to redress.

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