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A LAUGHABLE EXCUSE FOR INVADING IRAQ

by Jacob G. Hornberger

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Among the most laughable excuses for invading Iraq was the one that said that the U.S. government invaded the country to help free the Iraqi people from Saddam Hussein's tyranny. That was the big excuse that was trotted out after the WMD excuse proved to be unfounded.

For one thing, there was never any concern for the well-being of the Iraqi people prior to the invasion. Recall, for example, the 11 years of brutal sanctions that preceded the invasion. Year after year, the Iraqi people were suffering economic devastation from the sanctions. Even worse, Iraqi children were dying by the thousands every year. In fact, the mindset of U.S. officials was captured perfectly by U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Madeleine Albright, who declared that the deaths of half-a-million Iraqi children from the sanctions was "worth it." That was in 1996, and there wasn't a peep of protest from her boss, President Clinton, or any other U.S. official. That's undoubtedly because they agreed with her. The sanctions lasted another seven years.

How is it possible for U.S. officials to have invaded Iraq out of love for the Iraqi people when they were so willing to sacrifice Iraqi children for regime change over a period of 11 years? After all, once a year or two went by without Saddam Hussein's resignation or ouster from power, wouldn't a legitimate concern for the Iraqi people be manifested by a lifting of sanctions that were killing their children? Why continue the sanctions for some 12 years?

And it's not as though there weren't people who were calling on U.S. officials to stop the death and destruction. Suffering a crisis of conscience over what the sanctions were doing to the Iraqi people, Denis Halliday, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Iraq, resigned in 1998 after a 34-year career at the UN. He later said, "I was driven to resignation because I refused to take Security Council orders, the same Security Council that had imposed and sustained genocidal sanctions on the innocent of Iraq. I did not want to be complicit. I wanted to be free to speak out publicly about this crime."

Halliday was replaced by Hans von Sponek. In February 2000, von Sponek resigned the position for the same reason that Halliday had resigned.

That still didn't induce U.S. officials to dismantle the sanctions, which they still hoped would bring about the ouster of Saddam Hussein from power. The sanctions were maintained until 2003. There was never an upward limit on the number of Iraqi children that the U.S. government was willing to sacrifice to achieve that end. Since we're dealing with the deaths of people's children, it's difficult to reconcile that mindset with one that purports to love the Iraqi people and wants to bring them freedom and democracy.

In fact, among the fascinating things about the invasion and occupation of Iraq was the U.S. government's attitude toward ordinary Iraqis. For one thing, the Pentagon steadfastly refused to keep track of the number of the people U.S. troops were killing. That would seem an odd way to reflect love and concern for Iraqis.

Equally important was the fact that there was never an upward limit on the number of Iraqi people who could be killed to bring freedom and democracy to Iraq. It really didn't matter how many Iraqis were killed or maimed or had their houses and businesses destroyed. Any number would be considered "worth it," just as any number of deaths of Iraqi children from the sanctions would have been "worth it."

That is an odd way to express love and concern for people.

Proponents of the war say that all this death and destruction was worth it because Saddam Hussein was such a bad man, one who tortured and killed his own people. But there's one big problem with that rationale, one that proponents of the war never like to talk about: The U.S. government's partnership and alliance with this bad man during the 1980s. Yes, that's right—the U.S. government embraced Saddam Hussein for years, just as it has embraced many dictators around the world and continues to do so today. In fact, take a wild guess who furnished Saddam Hussein with those infamous WMDs that were initially used as the excuse for invading Iraq. For the answer, click here.

Finally, we mustn't forget the U.S. government's fierce prosecution of American citizens who tried to help out the Iraqi people with food and medicine during the period of the sanctions. There was Burt Sacks, who was fined \$10,000 for violating the sanctions, a fine that U.S. officials were still trying to collect until fairly recently, without success because a federal judge threw their case out of court. Much more serious though was the criminal conviction of Rafil

Dhafir, an American physician, who is now serving a 22-year jail sentence for helping out the Iraqi people in violation of the sanctions.

How are those prosecutions consistent with love and concern for the Iraqi people?

Why can't interventionists just be honest? Why do they have to use the WMDs or a purported love for the Iraqi people or some other laughable excuse for their brutal invasion, war of aggression, and occupation of Iraq? Why can't they just admit that the sanctions and the invasion were about regime change, one of the core principles of U.S. foreign policy — the ouster of dictatorial regimes that are not submissive to the U.S. national security state and their replacement with pro-U.S. regimes?

Perhaps the answer is that they just want American citizens to feel good about what the U.S. national-security state does to people overseas. Or maybe it's just because the invasion and occupation of Iraq ended up replacing one anti-U.S. dictatorial regime with another anti-U.S. dictatorial regime.