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## America's Rogue Government

*They Don't Mean Well*

by SHELDON RICHMAN

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Americans have a strange need to believe that their “leaders” mean well. Nowhere is this more true than in foreign policy. Even when the horror of some government operation is revealed (usually after being kept from the American people), solemn pundits and elder statesmen will drone on about unintended consequences and the fog of war, while admonishing against “pointless” recriminations. Typically, the harshest accusation leveled against those responsible for a calamity is incompetence, and even that’s rare.

Yet when one examines the U.S. government’s bloody record in foreign affairs, it is tough to come away thinking that the long trail of death, mayhem, and devastation is anything but the result of malevolence in the pursuit of political and economic interest.

In a recent article for CounterPunch, former *60 Minutes* producer Barry Lando describes the horror inflicted on the Iraqi people by American officials, beginning in 1990 with the George H. W. Bush administration. Officials actually began making life hell for Iraqis well before that, as Lando discusses in this interview with Scott Horton. The U.S. government (specifically, the CIA) not only helped to bring Saddam Hussein to power, it supplied him the means and

intelligence to use chemical weapons in his aggressive war against Iran in the 1980s. (The Iranians have not forgotten.) Collusion with Saddam continued right up until he invaded Kuwait, as U.S. officials helped instigate that event by meddling on both sides of the dispute.

“The last thing the U.S. should do is become militarily embroiled in the conflict raging again in Iraq,” Lando writes. “But for Americans to shake their heads in lofty disdain and turn away, as if they have no responsibility for the continued bloodletting, is outrageous. Why? Because America bears a large part of the blame for turning Iraq into the basket case it’s become.”

This will be news to most Americans, who seem to prefer ignorance to knowledge when it comes to the government’s hideous conduct abroad. How many understand what was inflicted on average Iraqis by the American-led embargo that began in 1990?

The embargo cut off all trade between Iraq and the rest of the world. That meant everything, from food and electric generators to vaccines, hospital equipment — even medical journals. Since Iraq imported 70 percent of its food, and its principal revenues were derived from the export of petroleum, the sanctions dealt a catastrophic blow, particularly to the young.

Enforced primarily by the United States and Britain, the sanctions remained in place for *almost 13 years* and were, in their own way, a weapon of mass destruction far more deadly than anything Saddam had developed. Two U.N. administrators who oversaw humanitarian relief in Iraq during that period, and resigned in protest, considered the embargo to have been a “crime against humanity.”...

Even after the sanctions were modified in the “Oil for Food Program” in 1996, the resources freed up were never enough to cover Iraq’s basic needs. [Emphasis added.]

While the embargo’s ostensible purpose was to force Saddam to give up his (nonexistent) weapons of mass destruction, in fact it was aimed, futilely, at driving him from power. Ironically, the U.S. government and its accomplices conducted biological warfare against the Iraqis. How so?

The effect of the sanctions was magnified by the wide-scale destruction of Iraq’s infrastructure — power plants, sewage treatment facilities, telephone exchanges, irrigation systems — wrought by the American air and rocket attacks preceding the first Gulf War. That infrastructure has still to be completely rebuilt.

Iraq's contaminated waters became a biological killer as lethal as anything Saddam had attempted to produce. There were massive outbreaks of severe child and infant dysentery. Typhoid and cholera, which had been virtually eradicated in Iraq, also packed the hospital wards.

The resulting deaths of Iraqis, including half a million children, were not unintended consequences, but foreseen results of America's malicious policy. That's murder. (The embargo policy is being repeated in Iran.)

The next phases of the American onslaught, the 2003 invasion and the eight-year occupation, inflicted more death and suffering on the Iraqis. It's not over yet.

The officials who devised and carried out these policies, like those before and after them, committed, not well-intended errors, but crimes against humanity. When will Americans care enough to rein in this rogue government?