

## The secret war on Iraq

Friday 5 January 2007, by [PILGER John](#) (Date first published: 19 December 2002).

THE American and British attack on Iraq has already begun. While the Blair government continues to claim in Parliament that "no final decision has been taken", Royal Air Force and US fighter bombers have secretly changed tactics and escalated their "patrols" over Iraq to an all-out assault on both military and civilian targets.

American and British bombing of Iraq has increased by 300 per cent. Between March and November, according to Ministry of Defence replies to MPs, the RAF dropped more than 124 tonnes of bombs.

From August to December, there were 62 attacks by American F-16 aircraft and RAF Tornados - an average of one bombing raid every two days. These are said to have been aimed at Iraqi "air defences", but many have fallen on mostly populated areas, where civilian deaths are unavoidable.

Under the United Nations Charter and the conventions of war and international law, the attacks amount to acts of piracy: no different, in principle, from the German Luftwaffe's bombing in Spain in the 1930s as precursor to its invasion of Europe.

The bombing is a "secret war" that has seldom been news. Since 1991, and especially in the last four years, it has been unrelenting and is now deemed the longest Anglo-American campaign of aerial bombardment since World War Two.

The US and British governments justify it by claiming they have a UN mandate to police so-called "no-fly zones" which they declared following the Gulf War. They say these "zones", which give them control of most of Iraq's airspace, are legal and supported by UN Security Council Resolution 688.

This is false. There are no references to no fly zones in any Security Council resolution. To be sure about this, I asked Dr Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who was Secretary General of the United Nations in 1992 when Resolution 688 was passed. "The issue of no fly zones was not raised and therefore not debated: not a word," he said. "They offer no legitimacy to countries sending their aircraft to attack Iraq."

In 1999, Tony Blair claimed the no fly zones allowed the US and Britain to perform "a vital humanitarian task" in protecting the Kurds in the north of Iraq and the ethnic Marsh Arabs in the south. In fact, British and American aircraft have actually provided cover for neighbouring Turkey's repeated invasions of northern, Kurdish Iraq.

TURKEY is critical to the American "world order". Overseeing the oilfields of the Middle East and Central Asia, it is a member of Nato and the recipient of billion of dollars' worth of American weapons and military equipment. It is also where British and American bombers are based.

A long-running insurrection by Turkey's Kurdish population is regarded by Washington as a threat to the "stability" of Turkey's "democracy" that is a front for its military which is among the world's worst violators of human rights. Hundreds of thousands of Turkish Kurds have been displaced and an estimated 30,000 killed. Turkey, unlike Iraq, is "our friend".

In 1995 and 1997, as many as 50,000 Turkish troops, backed by tanks and fighter aircraft, occupied what the West called "Kurdish safe havens".

They terrorised Kurdish villages and murdered civilians. In December 2000, they were back, committing the atrocities that the Turkish military commits with immunity against its own Kurdish population.

For joining the US "coalition" against Iraq, the Turkish regime is to be rewarded with a bribe worth \$6billion. Turkey's invasions are rarely reported in Britain. So great is the collusion of the Blair government that, virtually unknown to Parliament and the British public, the RAF and the Americans have, from time to time, deliberately suspended their "humanitarian" patrols to allow the Turks to get on with killing Kurds in Iraq.

In March last year, RAF pilots patrolling the "no fly zone" in Kurdish Iraq publicly protested for the first time about their enforced complicity in the Turkish campaign. The pilots complained that they were frequently ordered to return to their base in Turkey to allow the Turkish air force to bomb the very people they were meant to be "protecting".

Speaking on a non-attributable basis to Dr Eric Herring, a senior lecturer in politics at Bristol University and a specialist on Iraqi sanctions, the pilots said whenever the Turks wanted to attack the Kurds in Iraq, RAF patrols were recalled to base and ground crews were told to switch off their radar - so that the Turks' targets would not be visible. One British pilot reported seeing the devastation in Kurdish villages caused by the attacks once he had resumed his patrol.

AMERICAN pilots who fly in tandem with the British, are also ordered to turn their planes around and turn back to Turkey to allow the Turks to devastate the Kurdish "safe havens".

You'd see Turkish F-14s and F-16s inbound, loaded to the gills with munitions, "one pilot told the Washington Post." Then they'd come out half an hour later with their munitions expended." When the Americans returned to Iraqi air space, he said, they would see "burning villages, lots of smoke and fire."

The Turks do no more than American and British aircraft in their humanitarian guise. The sheer scale of the Anglo-American bombing is astonishing, with Britain a very junior partner. During the 18 months to January 1999 (the last time I was able to confirm official US figures) American aircraft flew 36,000 sorties over Iraq, including 24,000 combat missions.

The term "combat" is highly deceptive. Iraq has virtually no air force and no modern air defences. Thus, "combat" means dropping bombs or firing missiles at infrastructure that has been laid to waste by a 12-year-old embargo.

The Wall Street Journal, the authentic voice of the American establishment, described this eloquently when it reported that the US faced "a genuine dilemma" in Iraq. After eight years of enforcing a no fly zone in northern (and southern) Iraq, few targets remain. "We're down to the last outhouse," one US official protested.

I have seen the result of these attacks. When I drove from the northern city of Mosul three years ago, I saw the remains of an agricultural water tanker and truck, riddled with bullet holes, shrapnel from a missile, a shoe and the wool and skeletons of about 150 sheep.

A family of six, a shepherd, his father and his wife and four children, were blown to pieces here. It was treeless, open country: a moonscape. The shepherd, his family and his sheep would have been clearly visible from the air.

The shepherd's brother, Hussain Jarsis, agreed to meet me at the cemetery where the family is buried. He arrived in an old Toyota van with the widow, who was hunched with grief, her face covered. She held the hand of her one remaining child, and they sat beside the mounds of earth that are the four children's graves. "I want to see the pilot who killed my children," she shouted across to us.

The shepherd's brother told me, "I heard explosions, and when I arrived to look for my brother and family, the planes were circling overhead. I hadn't reached the causeway when the fourth bombardment took place. The last two rockets hit them.

"At the time I couldn't grasp what was going on. The truck was burning. It was a big truck, but it was ripped to pieces. Nothing remained except the tyres and the numberplate.

"We saw three corpses, but the rest were just body parts. With the last rocket, I could see the sheep blasted into the air."

It was not known if American or British aircraft had done this. When details of the attack were put to the Ministry of Defence in London, an official said, "We reserve the right to take robust action when threatened." This attack was significant, because it was investigated and verified by the senior United Nations official in Iraq at the time,

Hans Von Sponeck, who drove there specially from Baghdad.

He confirmed that nothing nearby resembled a military installation.

Von Sponeck recorded his finding in a confidential internal document entitled, "Air Strikes in Iraq", prepared by the UN Security Section (UNOHCI).

HE also confirmed dozens of similar attacks and these are documented - attacks on villages, a fishermen's wharf, nearby a UN food warehouse. So regular were the attacks that Von Sponeck ordered UN relief convoys suspended every afternoon.

FOR this, Von Sponeck, a senior United Nations civil servant with a distinguished career all over the world, made powerful enemies in Washington and London.

The Americans demanded that Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary General, sack him and were surprised when Annan stood by his chief representative in Iraq.

However, within a few months, Von Sponeck felt he could no longer run a humanitarian programme in Iraq that was threatened both by the illegal bombing and by a deliberate American policy of blocking humanitarian supplies.

He resigned in protest, just as his predecessor, Denis Halliday, a Deputy Under Secretary of the UN, had done. Halliday called the US and British-driven embargo "genocidal".

It is now clear from official documents that the United States is preparing for a possible slaughter in Iraq. The Pentagon's "Doctrine for Joint Urban Operations" says that unless Baghdad falls quickly it has to be the target of "overwhelming firepower". The resistance of Stalingrad in World War Two is given as a "lesson".

Cluster bombs, deep penetration "bunker" bombs and depleted uranium will almost certainly be used. Depleted uranium is a weapon of mass destruction. Coated on missiles, and tank shells, its explosive force spreads radiation over a wide area, especially in the desert dust.

Professor Doug Rokke, the US army physicist in charge of cleaning up depleted uranium in Kuwait told me, "I am like most -people in southern Iraq. I have 5,000 times the recommended level of radiation in my body. What we're seeing now, respiratory problems, kidney problems, cancers are the direct result.

"The controversy over whether or not it's the cause of these problems is a manufactured one. My own ill-health is a testament to that."

THE most devastating weapon of mass destruction was briefly in the news last week when Unicef, the United Nations children's Fund, released its annual State of the World's Children report.

The human cost of the American-driven embargo of Iraq is spelt out in statistics that require no comment.

"Iraq's child mortality rate has nearly tripled since 1990 to levels found in some of the world's least-developed countries, " said the report.

"The country's regression over the past decade is by far the most severe of the 193 countries surveyed. Unicef said that a quarter of Iraqi babies were now underweight and that more than a fifth were stunted from malnutrition."

Under the rules of the embargo, Iraqis are allowed less than £100 per person with which to sustain life for an entire year.

To date, the cost of the current, "secret" and illegal British bombing of Iraq is a billion pounds.

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