

# The straight line connecting Iraq and World War Two

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At 10.05 p.m., 13 February 1945, the first waves of bombers under the command of Air Marshall Arthur "Bomber" Harris hit Dresden. By 2.15 a.m. 800 bombers dropping high explosives and a mind-boggling 650,000 incendiaries had created a "sea of fire covering ... some 40 square miles" (to quote one of the last pilots to leave the scene). The British Government's "Official History" suggests 30,000 dead; other estimates range between 100,000 and 300,000. 400,000 people were left homeless: in the most affected working class districts 24,866 out of 28,410 houses were destroyed.

"How many died? Who knows the number?" is the inscription over the mass grave in Dresden's main cemetery.

As the War Cabinet in London knew full well, Dresden's population was at least twice the normal 600,000; it was bulging with civilian refugees, bombed-out evacuees and others fleeing the approaching eastern front. Soviet troops were just 80 miles away. The firestorm's glow was visible for 200 miles. U.S. bombers were to visit Dresden twice more over the next few weeks: on 2 & 17 March, the latter involving 572 bombers. Dresden was occupied by the Red Army on April 8.

The British government maintained - in its public statements and even in its briefings to pilots before raids - that only military targets were being attacked (at the same time, the 'popular press' gloated over the devastation of German cities...)

"Nobody in history has ever erected a memorial to the hangman. We know that the decision to attack this city for non-military purposes, to demoralise the German civilian population, was taken with a heavy heart," - Herbert Wagner, Mayor of Dresden. His words reflect popular anger while at the same time offering excuses for Churchill, the man who actually took the decision - a revealing display of the psychology of defeat and self-abasement which the German imperialists are still trying to shake off.

On 30 May 1994, the Queen Mother unveiled a statue to Sir Arthur "Bomber" Harris in the Strand, Central London. Until then shame had prevented public honours for this man. An indication of the extent of this shame is given by the fact that Bomber Command's crews were never honoured with a war medal and were not even mentioned in the victory roll-call, despite the fact that, of 125,000 pilots and gunners who served in Bomber Command, 56,000 lost their lives.

Norman Longmate's book, *The Bombers: The RAF Offensive Against Germany 1939-1945*, provided many of the quotes from Harris and his contemporaries cited here. In his conclusion, he states:

"Once the European war was won, the British Government treated Bomber Command as though it never existed... The Government had never publicly admitted what Bomber Command was doing in the war, and it now preferred to forget all about it. When the Russians wished to add the bombing of

civilian populations to the list of crimes against humanity laid against the Germans on trial at Nuremburg, the British Government successfully objected. ... the public did not know what was happening because they were deliberately deceived about it... The policy of deception, as unprincipled in its way, and as successful, as anything Goebbels ever accomplished." (p366)

## The strategy of civilian bombing

Goering first practised blitzkrieg against the Basque town of Guernica during the Spanish civil war. This is widely known thanks to Pablo Picasso, who made it the subject of most celebrated picture. Unfortunately, there was no famous painter around to depict the screams of Harris's mutilated and incinerated victims in northern Iraq in 1920-22, when he first tested that innovation which was to have such a great future and which brought him so much fame and infamy: the use of aeroplanes to drop bombs on civilians.

"The Arab and the Kurd now know what real bombing means in casualties and damage. Within 45 minutes a full-size village can be practically wiped out and a third of the inhabitants killed or injured by four or five machines." - Bomber Harris, writing in 1924.

An estimated 30,000 people were killed during the suppression of the Kurdish popular uprising.

The Kurds were rebelling against their forcible incorporation into the UK Protectorate of Iraq, despite UK promises of support for Kurdish independence made to them during WWI in return for an alliance against the Ottoman empire, then in war-time league with Germany. Britain never intended to keep this promise - the whole Middle Eastern region had been secretly divided up between Britain and France in the infamous Sykes-Picot agreement. The betrayal of the Kurds was sealed when, in 1920, rich oil deposits were discovered in the Kirkuk region of what is now northern Iraq.

In the decade since Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on August 6 1990, politicians and media in the US and UK have talked a great deal about Saddam's 1988 poison gas attack on Halabja - but don't mention that the first use of poison gas against Kurdish villages in Iraq was in British artillery shells nearly seventy years before (Harris's RAF squadron dropped high explosives and incendiaries; boffins were still working on gas bombs which could be delivered by aeroplane). Neither do they like to remind us what Winston Churchill, who gave Harris his orders, thought of chemical weapons: "I do not understand this squeamishness about the use of gas. I am strongly in favour of using poisoned gas against uncivilised tribes. It is not necessary to use only the most deadly gases: gases can be used which cause great inconvenience and would spread a lively terror and yet would leave no serious permanent effects on most of those affected."

These words reveal that Churchill was unconcerned by questions of morality. He was also unconcerned by legality:

the use of chemical weapons in war had been outlawed in international treaties following WWI.

The first military use of aircraft (WWI) was to assist in the field of battle, as a tactical weapon in the hands of army commanders. As soon as aircraft technology had developed to the point where it was possible to bomb targets deep behind the front lines, the contending imperialist powers established separate air forces. Lord Trenchard, founder of the Royal Flying Corps (predecessor of the Royal Air Force), spelled out the strategy behind "strategic bombing":

*"There are two factors - moral and material effect, the object being to obtain the maximum of each. The best means to this end is to attack industrial centres where you (a) do military and vital damage by striking at the centre of war material; (b) achieve the maximum effect by striking at the most sensitive part of the German population - namely the working class."*

In February 1941 the War Cabinet gave Bomber Command its orders: "the new aiming points are to be the built-up areas, not for instance the dockyards or aircraft factories". Lord Cherwell, adviser to British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, provided the War Cabinet with the following minute (dated 30 March 1942):

*"We can count on nearly 14 sorties per bomber produced. Their average lift... [is] three tons. It follows that each of these bombers will in its lifetime drop about forty tons of bombs. If these are dropped on built-up areas they will make 4000-8000 people homeless..."*

'Undermining the morale of the German people' - i.e. attacks on the German civilians and specifically the working class - quickly became a military doctrine, and was reaffirmed at the January 1943 Casablanca conference of the Allied powers.

One bomber pilot reported:

*"My one clear memory of being briefed to bomb whole areas was the bombing of Essen, on 25 July 1943. At that period we were not aware that we were bombing civilians as such, because we had always been given aiming-points like the docks, or a rubber factory or railway yards. But on this occasion the briefing said that we were to bomb the workers' houses or residential quarters and this came as something of a personal shock."*

Quoted in "The Bombers" p378

Sir Arthur Harris defended the tactics of his Bomber Command in the behind-the-scenes debate sparked by the beginning of the terror-bombing campaign.

He was opposed to the Government's refusal to publicly admit that it was targeting civilians: he "contemptuously rejected the evasive, conscience-saving Air Ministry line that Bomber Command's operations were not aimed at "the obliteration of German cities and their inhabitants as such."

On the contrary, "the aim of the Combined Bomber Offensive should be ... unambiguously stated [to be] the destruction of German cities, the killing of German workers and the disruption of civilised community life throughout Germany. - 25 October 1943 Letter from Harris to the Air Ministry, quoted in "The Bombers" p369

On the 23 December Harris wrote again to his adversaries in the the Air Ministry:

*"The German economic system, which I am instructed by my directive to destroy, includes workers, houses and public utilities, and it is therefore meaningless to claim that the wiping out of German cities is not an end in itself but the inevitable accompaniment of all-out attack on the enemy's means and capacity to wage war."*

As Britain's military industries churned out more and more heavy bombers, so the scale of the attacks on German cities grew. Longmate provides the following account:

*"During August 1944 [Bomber Command] carried out no fewer than twelve area attacks, the last of which, on 29 August, was a classic example of 'de-housing' in action. 175 Lancasters ... had succeeded in making 134,000 citizens of Koningsberg homeless for the cost of four machines. ... Germany lay at the bombers' mercy and huge damage could be done almost anywhere at negligible risk. Typical was the fate of Darmstadt, a small town 15 miles south of Frankfurt, which contained only one 'Grade 1' target, a minor chemical factory... It did, however, possess a beautiful old market square surrounded by narrow cobbled streets and ancient baroque houses - until, that is 218 Lancasters and a dozen Mosquitoes visited it on the night of 11/12 September, killing 10,000 people, about a fifth of them children, in a population of just under 100,000 ... leaving 70,000 people homeless and 8400 buildings destroyed. ... [It] hardly merited a mention in the official history. Such operations had become routine..."*

Bomber Harris, writing in November 1944, i.e. before Dresden, summed up the results of his campaign thus: "In the past eighteen months, Bomber Command has virtually destroyed forty-five out of the leading sixty German cities. In spite of invasion diversions, we have so far managed to keep up and even exceed our average of two-and-a-half cities devastated a month..."

This bombing campaign can be accurately described as terror-bombing, since its premeditated purpose and desired effect was to terrorise millions of people to the point of insanity. It can be justly described as an act of genocide, since it was aimed at killing as many civilians as possible through carpet-bombing housing estates, and through destroying the social fabric and basic infrastructure necessary for the survival of the civilian population.

Arthur Harris became Churchill's chief executioner in 1922, when Churchill (then Minister of State for the Crown and Colonies) gave him command of the RAF bombing campaign in northern Iraq.

It is of great significance that, during WW2, Bomber Command was independent of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the three armed forces. Instead, it acted under the direct control of Churchill's War Cabinet. Many military commanders felt antagonistic to Bomber Command and opposed the systematic bombing of German cities on two grounds: its effect in stiffening the resolve of German soldiers to fight, thus prolonging the war; and because it was a huge diversion of resources from economic targets and troop concentrations.

The origin of civilian bombing in the aerial slaughter of thousands of Kurdish workers and farmers in Iraq Kurdi-

stan after WWI, and Bomber Harris's own career as Churchill's fist, suggests a relationship between the counter-insurgency war in 1920s Iraq and the WW2 civilian bombing campaign. Each event resonates with the other. Both were acts of premeditated, mass murder carried out not against an opposing army, nor against economic targets, but against unarmed civilians. The aim was to suppress a democratic revolution in Iraq following WWI and to avert a social revolution in Germany following WW2. In this sense, the crescendo of terror bombing at the close of WW2 was not directly a part of the war between the UK and German governments. It was instead, as with Harris's first civilian bombing campaign, a vile weapon in a counter-insurgency war. Its target was not the German government, but the German working class.

Apart from a few isolated hand-wringing religious figures and Labour MPs, bourgeois opinion was solidly behind the massacre of the German civilian population. The Stalin regime in Moscow also support it - Churchill later tried to deflect blame for Dresden by publishing telegrams from Stalin pressing for Dresden to be targeted by Bomber Command. In this, we can see the full measure of the Stalin regime's own counter-revolutionary role during the war against fascism. Among the very few who kept hold of the truth were the U.S. Socialist Workers' Party (not to be confused with the sect in the UK of the same name), whose "Statement on U.S. Entry into World War II" said:

*"We believe that the most fundamental bond of loyalty of all the workers of the world is the bond of international solidarity of the workers against their exploiters. We cannot assume the slightest responsibility for this war. No imperialist regime can conduct a just war. We cannot support it for one moment. We are the most irreconcilable enemies of the fascist dictatorships of Germany and Italy and the military dictatorship of Japan. Our co-thinkers of the Fourth International in the Axis nations and the conquered countries are fighting and dying in the struggle to organise the coming revolutions against Hitler and Mussolini.*

*We are doing all in our power to speed these revolutions. But those... who in the name of "democracy" support the war of United States imperialism against its imperialist foes and rivals, far from aiding the German and Italian anti-fascists, only hamper their work and betray their struggle. The Allied imperialists, as every German worker knows, aim to impose a second and worse Versailles [the humiliating "peace treaty" imposed on defeated Germany after World War I]; the fear of that is Hitler's greatest asset in keeping the masses of Germany in subjection. The fear of the foreign yoke holds back the development of the German revolution against Hitler..."*

### **"War breeds revolution"**

"War breeds revolution" was a well-known saying in all the languages of Europe, a part of popular wisdom, in the decades between the two world wars. This reflected the actual experience of WWI, which produced the Russian revolutions of 1917, the formation of Soviets in German cities and giant demonstrations of armed workers in Berlin in 1919, the factory occupations in Italy in 1920-21 - and an enormous revolutionary wave from the Balkans and the Near East right through to China.

Winston Churchill knew more about our now-forgotten saying than anyone. During 1918 to 1920 he was the main organiser of the military assault on Soviet Russia, in which a total of 22 capitalist nations fought alongside the counter-revolutionary White armies. These were the anti-Bolshevik forces within Russia and were led by fascists, whose methods of struggle included massacring all Jews in any town captured from the Bolsheviks. Direct imperialist intervention was rapidly defeated by the Red Army's feats of arms and by the explosion of class struggle within the imperialist nations themselves. (In Sheffield, where I live, in 1918 the industrial unions threatened a general strike unless Britain withdrew its army from Russia). A few years later, Churchill is Home Secretary during the 1926 General Strike, commanding soldiers to drive trains through crowds of strikers... Winston Churchill sure as hell knew all about "war breeds revolution".

As the German capitalist government led by Adolf Hitler approached collapse, Churchill's highest priority was to ensure that WW2 would not be a repeat of WWI. The very last thing that Churchill wanted was that German soldiers would mutiny, and that Germany's workers and farmers, and the millions of slaves imported from German-occupied territories to work in war industries and on the land, would rebel and attempt to bring down the Hitler regime.

German workers had endured the extermination of their leaders, the destruction of their organisations, the militarisation of their workplaces, and the unimaginable disaster of WW2. They had not forgotten that the Gestapo's first visit was to the workers' unions and parties (Pastor Niemoller reminds us of this in his famous poem "*First they came for the socialists and communists...*"). Churchill was afraid that, if they were given a chance, the German workers' movement would reappear and attempt to reassert itself. He wanted to ensure, at all costs, that the same German ruling families who had bankrolled Hitler to power and who had profited from his rule should remain in power...

The civilian bombing campaign, which killed perhaps more but certainly not much less than a million German civilians, was Churchill's favoured weapon in pursuit of this aim. The U.S./U.K. capitalists could not stop at fatally weakening their counterparts and adversaries in Japan and Germany and then leave it up to the workers and people of those countries to determine the nature of their new governments.

The barbarous mass murders carried out in Germany and Japan during the closing months of the war had a definite purpose: to so terrorise and traumatise the working people of those countries that they would lie prostrate and acquiesce to the installation of a government of the same capitalist families who had previously sponsored the Hitler and Tojo dictatorships. This is why it made political sense to Churchill to commit actions which had the side effect of prolonging the war, and which were irrational and even counter-productive from a military point of view.

## Echoes of WW2 in 1991 bombing of Iraq

The story of civilian bombing in WW2 helps explain why, in 1991 the same partnership of imperialist powers thought it necessary to devastate Iraq's civilian infrastructure (food, fresh water, electricity, telecommunications facilities) in addition to economic and military targets. Marti Ahtishaari, UN under-secretary general in his report on the aftermath of the slaughter "...nothing that we had seen or read had quite prepared us for the particular form of devastation which has now befallen the country." The people of Iraq, he said, face an "imminent catastrophe" due to the war's destruction of the "economic infrastructure of what had been, until January 1991, a rather highly urbanised and mechanised society. Now, most modern means of life support have been destroyed or remain tenuous".

There were some differences: unlike in Germany in the 1940s and Vietnam in the 1970s, Iraqi civilian housing was not systematically targeted. But what the US & UK ruling circles wanted in 1991 was the same thing they wanted in 1941: for someone in the enemy's inner circle to despatch the tyrant with a bullet through his head, and then wave a white flag. They were, and remain, no more in favour of popular revolution against the Saddam regime than they were against Hitler.

One episode from 1991 speaks volumes: the US and UK suspended their "no-fly" zones over north and south Iraq to allow Saddam to use his helicopter gunships against the popular insurrections which followed the forty-day bombing campaign. After all, that is what they gave him them for in the first place!

## Two gigantic cover-ups: the annihilation of German POWs after WW2, and the slaughter of surrendering Iraqi soldiers in 1991

I vehemently recommend anyone reading this to get hold of "*Crimes and Mercies – the Fate of German Civilians under Allied Occupation 1945-1951*" by James Bacque (ISBN 0-316-64070-0). It was described by one reviewer (UK's Independent on Sunday) as "a great and grim masterpiece of investigative journalism, unmasking one of the most successful cover-ups in modern history".

In his account of Allied treatment of German prisoners of war, he shows how German soldiers who were captured by US, UK and French forces were treated far worse than those captured by the Red Army. Bitter irony: millions of German soldiers surrendered to Allied forces because they feared capture by the Red Army much more. This is in part because of the extreme brutality of German treatment of Soviet war prisoners, which contrasted with their treatment of captive allied soldiers. 3.5% of English and American prisoners died in captivity, though 57% of Soviet prisoners of war died. Altogether, 3.3 million Russian prisoners captured by the Germans lost their lives "through a combination of starvation, cold, disease, execution and gassing. The first to be gassed in Auschwitz were Russians". (see Sven Lindqvist, "Exterminate All The Brutes" pp 157-8 ISBN 1-86207-145-4).

Bacque's integrity as a writer forces him to admit this fact, even though it is greatly embarrassing to his anti-communist political views. But it should not be a surprise, if you think about it. The new Soviet power was obliged by

the logic of the situation to rapidly reactivate the economy in the areas under its control, and this could not be done unless the German workers were rapidly recuperated from their wretched condition. The capitalists and landlords had either fled or been the biggest Nazis around, and the refusal of the US to extend the Marshall Plan and provide western capital obliged the occupying Soviet forces to mobilise the German workers to overturn capitalist property relations. A socialist revolution took place, mutilated by the division of Germany and the German working class and extremely deformed from the outset by its Stalinist political leadership, the same leadership which twelve years earlier had disarmed Germany's working people in the face of fascism.

It must be said here that the Red Army did commit many acts of savagery, including rape and murder, against German civilians during their westward sweep in the final stages of the war. These wounds were all the deeper for having been inflicted by the supposed army of revolution and socialism. However, other less well-known facts must also be brought into the picture. One is that once the war had ended Germany's working population recovered far more rapidly in the east than in the west. By 1948 this had become a threat to US/UK hegemony over the western part of Germany. The onset of the Cold War obliged the US and UK imperialists to end their strangulation of the West German economy.

The following section is excerpted from Bacque's account of Allied treatment of German prisoners of war. Each of the quotes and facts are backed up by comprehensive references from his primary research. I have stripped these supporting notes from the following quotes. Get hold of the book.

*"Never had so many people been put in prison. The size of the Allied captures was unprecedented in all history. The Soviets took prisoner some 3.5 million Europeans, the Americans about 6.1 million, the British about 2.4 million, the Canadians about 300,000 and the French around 200,000. Uncounted millions of Japanese entered American captivity in 1945, plus about 640,000 entering Soviet captivity.*

*As soon as Germany surrendered on 8 May 1945, the American Military Governor, General Eisenhower, sent out an urgent courier throughout the huge area that he commanded, making it a crime punishable by death for German civilians to feed prisoners. It was even a death-penalty crime to gather food together in one place to take it to prisoners. This astounding order contradicted an earlier message from Eisenhower to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 10 March, saying that he would make the German civilians feed the prisoners. ... The message [a photostat of which appears in the book – JS] reads in part: "... under no circumstances may food supplies be assembled among the local inhabitants in order to deliver them to the prisoners of war. Those who violate this command and nevertheless try to circumvent this blockade to allow something to come to the prisoners place themselves in danger of being shot ..."*

*[Bacque spends several pages recounting the measures taken by the UK and US governments to erase all record of this vile episode]*

... The army's policy was to starve prisoners, according to several American soldiers who were there. Martin Brech, retired professor of philosophy at Mercy College in New York, who was a guard at Andernach in 1945, has said that he was told by an officer that "it is our policy that these men not be fed". The 50,000 to 60,000 men in Andernach were starving, living with no shelter in holes in the ground, trying to nourish themselves on grass. When Brech smuggled bread to them through the he was ordered to stop by an officer. Later, Brech sneaked food to them, was caught, and told by the same officer, "If you do that again, you'll be shot." Brech saw bodies go out of the camp "by the truckload" but he was never told how many there were, where they were buried, or how.

Former prisoners have led the way to putting names to prisoners and one civilian who were shot for the 'crime' of passing through the barbed wire. Civilian women and teenage girls were shot, shot at, and imprisoned for trying to take food to the camps... The prisoner Paul Schmitt was shot in the American camp at Bretzenheim after coming close to the wire to see his wife and young son who were bringing him a basket of food. The French followed suit: Agnes Spira was shot by French guards at Dietersheim in July 1945 for bringing food to prisoners. The memorial to her in nearby Budesheim, written by one of her children, reads- "On the 31 of July 1945, my mother was suddenly and unexpectedly torn from me because of her good deed toward the imprisoned soldiers." ... Martin Brech watched in amazement as one officer at Andernach stood on a hillside firing shots towards German women running away from him in the valley below.

The most gruesome killing was witnessed by the prisoner Hans Scharf, formerly of California, who was watching as a German woman with her two children came towards an American guard in the camp at Bad Kreuznach, carrying a wine bottle. She asked the guard to give the bottle to her husband, who was just inside the wire. The guard upended the bottle into his own mouth, and when it was empty, threw it on the ground and killed the prisoner with five shots. The other prisoners howled, which brought round US Army Lieutenant Holtsman of Seattle, who said, 'This is awful. I'll make sure there is a stiff court martial'. In months of work in the Washington archives of the army, no court martial of this or similar incidents has ever turned up. Captain Lee Berwick, who was in command of the guard towers at Bretzenheim nearby, has said that he was never aware of any court martial for shootings at Bretzenheim or at Bad Kreuznach.

The former prisoners leading the way in new research had been officially ignored for forty-four years, but they are now actively trying to uncover the truth behind the historical forgeries which have been accepted as real up to now. At Lambach in Austria early in 1996, during excavations for a new power plant, a mass grave was opened on an 80m square site near the river Traun. One theory is that these were the bodies of Jews who died during transport, but the evidence suggests strongly that these were German prisoners of the Americans. In 1945 there were three American-run POW camps in the region, one at Hofau, another at Graberfeld a little farther to the east, and one for SS men at Kuhweide to the west. Horst Littmann, an expert recommended by the Austrian Ministry of the Interior, concluded that the bodies were the dead prisoners from these American camps, men between the ages of nineteen and twenty-two, judging from the good condition of their teeth, the shape of their heads and other evidence.

Such in-ground investigations could happen in Austria, and people could dig up mass graves of prisoners at former Soviet camps recently in eastern Germany, but west German farmer Otto Tullius was prevented by the police from digging his own land for evidence of prisoners on the site of a former American/French camp. The official US Army ration book, smuggled out by an ex-prisoner, for the huge camp at Bretzenheim, shows that these captives who nominally had prisoner-of-war status – supposedly best-treated of all – got only 600-850 calories per day. The prisoners starved although "food was piled up all round the fence", according to Captain Lee Berwick of the 424<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, guardians of the camp."

(pp41-45)

Bacque's meticulous investigation allows him to estimate that over one million German soldiers died in Allied prisoners of war camps following WW2. An estimated 150,000 Iraqi soldiers were killed by US/UK forces, with minimal losses of their own. How did they die? The Iraqi conscript army had been abandoned in the southern desert, without weapons, provisions or even shoes. For forty days and nights they were carpet-bombed by B-52s, fragmentation bombed and gas-air bombed, and many of those who lived through this were buried alive in their trenches by US tanks fitted with bulldozer blades. Tens of thousands of Iraqi soldiers were denied the chance to surrender. The Iraqi army had long since ceased to exist; there was no war if to have a war you need two sides. Its final frenzy was the massacre on the road to Basra, when thirty thousand were killed. The scene was described by Jack Barnes, in a profound analysis ("Opening Guns of World War III- Washington's Assault on Iraq"), written in March 1991, as follows:

"The most concentrated single bloodletting was organized by the U.S. command in the final forty-eight hours of the invasion, as Iraqi soldiers fled Kuwait along the roads to Basra. While publicly denying that Iraqi forces were withdrawing from Kuwait, Washington ordered that tens of thousands of fleeing Iraqi soldiers be targeted for wave after wave of bombing, strafing, and shelling. These were people who were putting up no resistance, many with no weapons, others with rifles packed in bedrolls, leaving in cars, trucks, carts, and on foot. Many civilians from Iraq, Kuwait, and immigrant workers from other countries were killed at the same time as they tried to flee.

The U.S. armed forces bombed one end of the main highway from Kuwait city to Basra, sealing it off. They bombed the other end of the highway and sealed it off. They positioned mechanised artillery units on the hills overlooking it. And then, from the air and from the land they simply massacred every living thing on the road. Fighter bombers, helicopter gunships, and armoured battalions poured merciless firepower on traffic jams backed up for as much as twenty miles. When the traffic became gridlocked, the B-52s were sent in for carpet bombing. ... You couldn't move up the road. You couldn't move off the road. You couldn't surrender, wave a white flag, or give yourself up. The allied forces simply kept bombing and firing – at every person, jeep, truck, car, and bicycle. One allied air force officer called it a "turkey shoot." Others called it the biggest of the "cockroach hunts." That's the American way – carpet bombed, and shot in the back.

*This slaughter, along with similar unreported operations during Bush's heroic hundred hours, ranks among the great atrocities of modern warfare. It was the Guernica, the Hiroshima, the Dresden, the My Lai of the U.S. war against Iraq.*

("Opening Guns..." reprinted in *New International* #7 pp21-22)

According to Denis Halliday, it is believed in Iraq that only one person came out alive.

Those who ordered the bulldozing of Iraqi trenches and the massacre on the Basra road must stand trial for war crimes. But the court that will try them has not yet been built.

The infamous episode of the bulldozing of Iraqi trenches recalls an episode in WW2, recounted by James Bacque:

*"Perhaps the most poignant anecdote was given by an ex-prisoner, Johannes Heising, who in the 1990s published a book about his experiences in the US camp at Remagen. After the book was published, Heising was talking in 1991 with another former Remagen prisoner, Franz-Josef Plemper, who reminded him of something Heising had not described in the book: one night, the Americans had bulldozed living men under the earth in their foxholes. Plemper described the scene to him: "One night in April 1945, I was startled out of my stupor in the rain and the mud by piercing screams and loud groans. I jumped up and saw in the distance (about 30-50 meters) the searchlight of a bulldozer. Then I saw this bulldozer moving forwards through the crowd of prisoners who lay there. In the front it had a blade making a pathway. How many of the prisoners were buried alive in their earthholes I do not know. It was no longer possible to ascertain. I heard clearly cries of 'you murderer'."*

*And then Heising remembered."*

(p63)

### **Sanctions: another continuity between Iraq and WW2**

The use of military violence on a terrifying scale was only one part of the US/UK war on the German people. Another dimension of the allied war against the German people was the extreme sanctions regime and punitive war reparations which together took an horrendous toll upon the German civilian population. More Germans were killed in consequence of the allies' post-war blockade on food imports, maintained for a year even though famine ravaged the German population, than through the attentions of Bomber Command. This provides another theme which links Allied treatment of civilians in WW2 with US/UK enforcement of genocidal sanctions against Iraq today.

Before we look at the post-war sanctions regime imposed on Germany, we must mention another dimension of horror without precise analogy in Iraq: 15 million ethnic Germans were forced out of their homes in Poland, Czechoslovakia and elsewhere in Central Europe, in the biggest single act of ethnic cleansing that world has ever seen. Up to a quarter of them died of hunger and cold. It was a partial extermination, and it was organised by the Allied victors of WW2. "*Crimes and Mercies ...*" offers many sources on these barely-known events.

Bacque's main focus is WW2 and its aftermath, but he includes a brief account of UK/US policy towards German civilians after WW1:

*"After the Armistice ended the fighting in the west in November 1918, the Allies kept up their sea blockade which deprived the Germans both of food imported by sea and of the means to earn cash by overseas trade to buy food. Now German women and children began to starve, which was the purpose of the Western Allies, who wanted to keep up the pressure on the Germans to sign a peace treaty. It mattered not at all to the Western Allies that the Germans had signed the Armistice on the basis of Wilson's '14 Points' proposal, which included cessation of the blockade." (pp6-7)*

The naval blockade was ordered by Winston Churchill (whose name just keeps on popping up), then First Lord of the Admiralty. British warships were ordered to fire on German fishing boats attempting to leave port. Between half a million and one million Germans died of starvation during the UK-led food blockade. It broke down because of fears, especially strong among ruling circles in the US, that this policy would increase sympathy for Bolshevism among German workers.

....

Bacque's account of the much greater famine and starvation of German civilians which followed WW2 is worth quoting at length. This is partly because this is one of the few places where anything like the full story is being told. It relies on original research of important archives only now being opened up, in consequence of the end of the Cold War. This story has been long been written out of official history in the US and UK. For fear of stirring the pot, the Germany government has also participated in the cover-up.

Bacque summarises his findings in the introduction to his book:

*"for several years, the Allies wreaked a vengeance on the Germans such as the world had never seen. A whole nation was converted to a starvation prison. At least 7 million civilians died after the war, plus about 1.5 million prisoners of war." pi*

His detailed account of post-WW2 sanctions on Germany includes the following passages:

*"At the surrender in May 1945, schools and universities were closed, as well as radio stations, newspapers, the national Red Cross and mail service. Germany was also stripped of much coal, her eastern territories, industrial patents, lumber, gold reserves, and most of her labour force. Allied teams also looted and destroyed Germany's factories, offices, laboratories and workshops. So much food was confiscated that Max Huber of the International Red Cross complained about it in August 1945 in a letter to the US State department. Starting on May 8, the date of the surrender in the West, German and Italian prisoners in Canada, Italy, the USA and the UK, who had been fed according to the Geneva Convention, were suddenly put on greatly reduced rations. In the US, some ex-prisoners allege, starvation set in.*

*Gruesome expulsions of civilians from the eastern territories now began. These were described by some writers in the West as "orderly and humane population transfers", while others reported the lethal conditions as they were. German industrial production in the winter of 1944-45, which even under the*

Allied bombings was 105 per cent of pre-war levels, was reduced under the Morgenthau Plan to 25 per cent of pre-war levels by autumn, 1945.

(p29)

What this actually meant to the mothers and children of Germany was a repetition on a larger scale of the Nazi-induced famine in the Netherlands during the winter of 1944-45. Well over sixty million people were deliberately pushed to the edge of death by starvation. In Hamburg in 1946, in the British zone of occupation, one touring British writer said that about 100,000 people were in the last stages of starvation with hunger oedema. "In Düsseldorf and many other cities, people lived like rats in a few square feet of wet basement under a heap of rubble. ... The deaths of children with TB was already nearly three times the pre-war rate in Düsseldorf, about one third of the children in Iserlohn had TB; in Hamburg, diabetics in the first stages of coma were trying to force their way into hospital because there was no insulin. The latest news was that in the British zone the starvation ration of a nominal 1,550 calories per day (cpd) would now be reduced to 1,000cpd for about six months". At the top level of the US Army, reaction to all this was expressed by General J. H. Hilldring, who said that the Germans were being treated too lavishly.

These were some of the conditions that led Dr Amelunsen, Minister-President of North Rhine-Westphalia in the British zone, to predict that two to three million people in his province of eleven million would die in the next few years. (Deaths in two years at pre-war rates would be around 265,000.) The food ration did not improve in the following eighteen months, but grew slightly worse.

A member of the (Quaker) Society of Friends in Germany, Hans Albrecht, also predicted a horrendous death rate. In September 1945 he said, "No child born in Germany this year will survive the coming winter. Only half the children aged less than three years will survive." There was some evidence for this fear already in Berlin, where the infant mortality rate for several months had already been close to 100 per cent. In the summer of 1945 in Berlin, nearly every baby was born dead, or died within a few days. Albrecht was also predicting that among the estimated 2.5 to 2.7 million Germans aged three and under, half would die. Among the infants alone, the toll would be well over one million, perhaps as high as a million and a half dead. Most children under ten and people over sixty could not survive the coming winter, according to Probst Graber, a man experienced in such matters because he had just been saved from one of Hitler's camps. Graber wrote "on 12 October 1945, the forest around Berlin, countless dead are hanging from trees. One becomes indifferent to death. Mothers see their children die and bury them by the wayside, apparently without that pain which usually tears a mother's heart apart ... If this misery cannot be checked, it is no exaggeration to reckon on a figure of 20,000,000 dead this winter."

"The infant mortality rate in Berlin is sixteen times as high as was in 1943," reported the American journalist Ed Johnson. Johnson knew horror, for he had witnessed it in Hitler's concentration camps just weeks before. A German Red Cross official had predicted to him an infant mortality rate of 80-90 cent for winter 1945-46, amid scenes of desolation hard to believe in modern times. "Germans are going to die like flies"

(pp33-4)

In the British zone, Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery feared that the loss of life in the winter of 1945-46 was going to be "very heavy". The daily ration for an average adult then was 1,042 calories, which he said meant that "we are going to let them starve, gradually". There were many voices at home and abroad raised in protest against the treatment of Germany. The Lord Bishop of Chichester, Lord Bertrand Russell and Victor Gollancz protested vigorously in England, and many as well in the US. The former Chief Rabbi of Berlin, Dr Baeck, was reported in an influential US magazine to have "horrified the hate cult in this country by calling on his Jewish colleagues to join with him in demanding relief feeding for Germany". ...

### (By way of a) Conclusion

In this article, we have tried to abstract one extremely important dimension from the complex and multi-dimensional occurrence known as WW2.

World War Two contained four dimensions.

War between contending imperialist powers for colonies and markets: e.g. Germany vs. UK; Japan vs. US.

War between capitalism and socialism: the German invasion of the Soviet Union was aimed at overturning the Russian revolution, gravely weakened but not destroyed by Stalinism.

Wars of national liberation in the oppressed colonial nations; those in China, Vietnam and Korea leading to socialist revolutions.

Yugoslavia and Greece belong to the fourth dimension of world war: the war of working people against their exploiters and oppressors, the war which Churchill was determined to see didn't happen in Germany. In Yugoslavia it was victorious; workers and farmers united across ethnic and religious divisions to defeat 300,000 German soldiers and seize power from the local ruling classes, who had thrown in their lot with the fascists. The Greek revolution was defeated, in part due to disastrous misleadership by the Greek Communist Party, in part due to military intervention by UK troops.

There are all kinds of ways in which these different dimensions of conflict interacted and overlapped with each other.

To distinguish between these dimensions of WW2 is to demystify it and to demythologise it.

Considering the facts presented here concerning civilian bombing and post-war inhumanity, it is clear that we are dealing with something that goes far beyond what is covered by that odious euphemism "collateral damage". The millions of civilian deaths were not the unintended by-product of the war against Hitler. Germany's workers and farmers were themselves the target.

It could be argued that the Allies' extreme violence against Germany's civilian population had nothing to do with preventing revolution, and should instead be explained as the result of two different factors: efforts by the victorious imperialist powers to cripple the German economy and prevent the resurgence of German imperialism; and pure blood-lust and revenge.

These were undoubtedly factors. I believe, however, that it is a form of blindness to ignore the dimension of class conflict, of revolution vs. counter-revolution. Apart from anything else, such an ideologically-driven approach cannot make sense of the rise of Hitler in the first place, which was fundamentally the result of class conflict and defeat of revolution within Germany. Similarly, such an approach makes it impossible to understand why Saddam's regime was, and is, so repressive, and why the US and UK first pinned a deputy's badge on Saddam Hussein's chest.

Withdrawing Saddam's commission as local cop, the US and UK have had to take over his duties. However, their efforts to install a pro-US regime have failed. They have been hampered in the extreme by their political weakness: for all their military strength they did not dare to invade Iraq. In this context, bombs and sanctions against Iraq must be understood as first and foremost an attempt to replace Saddam's state violence against the Iraqi people... with their own.

Sven Lindqvist, in his remarkable book *'Exterminate All The Brutes'*, begins and ends his book with these words:

*"You already know enough. So do I. It is not knowledge we lack. What is missing is the courage to understand what we know and draw conclusions."*

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#### **Footnotes:**

"The Bombers", Norman Longmate, p336

"The Bombers" p341

"The Bombers" p344

Quoted in The Guardian, May 18 1992

The Guardian, July 6 1992

The Guardian, May 18 1992

Letter from Harris to the Air Ministry, quoted in "The Bombers" (from "The Bombers: The RAF Offensive Against Germany 1939-1945" by Norman Longmate. p329)

"The Bombers" p325

James P. Cannon Writings and Speeches 1940-43: The Socialist Workers Party in World War II Pathfinder, pp 209-210