

Policy and Atrocity: The US and Hussein's Iraq, 1979-2003

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Introduction

This article traces the evolution of US foreign policy towards Iraq over more than two decades—from 1979, the year Saddam Hussein assumed dictatorial power in Iraq, through to the war of 2003. It examines policy in¹ the context of the comparative study of "genocide," the term referring to the destruction of peoples, coined by Raphael Lemkin and enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide (1948). In brief, the intention is to explore the varying contexts in which the term "genocide," and the related language of mass atrocity, has been applied to actions occurring within the borders of Iraq since the 1980s; how the United States has reacted in policy terms, specifically to the evidence of atrocity; and what this might tell us about US policy on human rights more generally.

The specific contexts of genocide and mass atrocity adduced for Iraq during this period are:

1) The Kurds. Saddam Hussein's military campaigns against the Iraqi Kurds of the mountainous north, with the benchmarks of the destruction of the Barzani clan in 1983, the massive Anfal Campaign of 1987-88, and the renewed attack in the wake of the Gulf War of 1991. This last attack led to the US intervention and the establishment of the Kurdish "safe haven" in the north. The Anfal Campaign has been labelled as genocidal by Human Rights Watch, which titles its book-length report *Iraq's Crime of Genocide*. (This actually marked the first time the organization ever pronounced a judgment of genocide.)

2) The 1991 Uprisings. The Iraqi government's atrocities against domestic political opponents targeted southern Shi'a above all, who died in

¹ This essay focuses on the way the term "genocide" has been deployed. This is a separate issue from debates over definitions of genocide, which I do not consider.

their tens of thousands without significant outside intervention. Genocidal strategies simultaneously employed against the northern Kurds were rapidly suppressed and replaced by a strategy of semi-independence when the scale of the Kurdish plight became known to the outside world through mass-media broadcasts and reports. This provides a single case, and the paradigmatic one, of the "CNN Effect," in which the framing of humanitarian emergency influences policy through mass-media exposure in an age of "media democracy."

3) The Madan/Marsh Arabs. This refers to the Hussein regime's campaign against Iraq's Madan people, known as the Marsh Arabs, in the region of far-southern Iraq below the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. The campaign was squarely aimed at nation-destroying (the Marsh Arabs had joined in the Shi'a uprising of 1991); was denounced as such at the time by media and human-rights groups; and was occasionally framed outright as "genocide" in government and public discussion.

4) UN Sanctions. This is the one case considered in which those responsible for genocide in Iraq are alleged to be outside actors. The US, Great Britain, and the UN are accused of imposing a regime of economic sanctions on Iraq throughout the 1990s, continuing until the aftermath of the 2003 war that had atrocious and possibly genocidal consequences for ordinary Iraqis.

I turn now to an examination of the different cases, and the US policy response in each case.

Cases: Background and Discussion

1) The Kurds

Saddam Hussein's ascent to power at the end of the 1970s at first seemed to augur well for Iraqi Kurds. But attempts to reach agreement over limited autonomy for Kurdish regions broke down in the face of the Ba'th regime's Arabization efforts in Kurdish territories, and the Kurds' own nationalist aspirations. The Kurdish uprising of 1974 spilled over into full-scale war between region and regime the following year. With the Barzani clan viewed by Baghdad as the source of the Kurdish insurgency, in March 1975 tens of thousands of Barzani villagers were forcibly relocated to barren sites. Following further unrest several years later (1983), thousands of Barzani men and boys were seized and "disappeared," never to reappear.

The US and western reaction to this slaughter are summed up by Samantha Power in her recent, Pulitzer- and National Book Award-winning work: "[A]lthough the Kurds attempted to press their case in Western circles, neither the United States nor its allies protested the killings" (178). This was because the West, in general, was concerned to keep Iraq prosecuting its war against the fundamentalist Shi'a regime of Iran. US policymakers saw any domestic distraction—such as Kurdish restiveness provoking an atrocious or genocidal response—as a nuisance. The Kurds were "drawing some 150,000 Iraqi troops away from the Iranian front. Iraq was facing a war of attrition from both south (Iran) and north (Iran plus Iranian-backed Kurds). *This was deemed bad for the United States*" (185).

In late 1987 and continuing through August 1988, with the Iran war reaching its drawn-out conclusion, the Hussein regime turned its attention back to the Kurds of the restive north. It unleashed the so-called "Anfal Campaign," actually a series of campaigns aimed at detaining for mass murder the "battle-age" men of Kurdish communities, killing many other Kurds besides, and deporting the remaining population to government-controlled settlements far from the trouble-spots. Anfal was waged with a genocidal ferocity rarely matched in modern times. It succeeded in killing somewhere between 50,000 and 100,000 Kurds—estimates have run as high as 180,000—overwhelmingly males, leaving Kurdish women, children, and the elderly scattered in camps and along well-patrolled roadsides throughout the Kurdish zone.

The onslaught was inflicted with the knowledge of the US government, which had not only satellite photos and intelligence intercepts, but representatives on the scene documenting destruction of Kurdish communities and transportation of Kurdish populations. However, US policymakers under Reagan again judged the Kurds in terms of their utility in the broader policy picture. *Vis-à-vis* Turkey, the Kurds had always been a complicating factor in US-Turkish relations. *Vis-à-vis* Iraq, they continued to undermine the Hussein regime's bulwark status against Shi'a fundamentalism. The Kurds were inconvenient to the US, and therefore *implicated* in the violence inflicted on them, as Power explains:

Kurds were in fact doubly implicated. Not only did some take up arms and rebel against the Iraqi regime, which was supported by the United States, but some also teamed up with Iran, a US foe. As "guerrillas," the Kurds thus appeared to be inviting repression. And as

temporary allies of Iran, they were easily lumped with the very forces responsible for hostage-taking and "Great Satan" berating. (191)

The climax of the Hussein regime's genocidal campaign against Iraqi Kurds, and the only element of it visible to the outside world, was the gassing of the population of Halabja and other communities, "the Kurdish Hiroshima" (Power 189), in April and May 1988. This, finally, was photographed, and grisly footage appeared on television screens around the world, providing probably the most indelible images from Iraq of the entire 1980s. Stirred to comment and critique, US policymakers played up the ambiguities of the attacks, even hinting that Iranian forces might have inflicted the atrocities. Nonetheless, they were drawn into making the most substantial verbal condemnation ever concerning the Hussein regime's use of chemical weapons. (It was the type of weapon used, rather than the killing of civilians per se, that attracted the greatest criticism.)

The episode suggested that media exposure could to some degree offset the broadly-supportive US stance towards the Hussein regime. We will see another, and more potent, example of this momentarily. The Halabja events, however, were limited in their policy impact. George Shultz's September 1988 statement denouncing Hussein's use of chemical weapons was quickly followed by policy backtracking, with the US reverting to the 1980s norm dictated by Iraq's opposition to Iranian "expansionism." A sanctions initiative against Iraq was launched in the US Congress, but it would not be finally realized until a bare week before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Most significantly, "at no point during the eighteen-month Iraqi campaign of destruction [against the Kurds] did Reagan administration officials condemn it [...]" (Power 226). The underlying explanation for the policy orientation was geostrategy and longstanding economic interests in the Middle East region.

2) The 1991 Uprisings

As defeat loomed in the Gulf War, twin insurrections broke out in Iraq—not within the Iraqi armed forces, as US planners had hoped and anticipated, but among the population at large. Southern Shi'a rose up against the hated (and overwhelmingly Sunni/Tikriti) Ba'thists. Meanwhile, the ever-restive Kurds of the north launched their own rebellion. Both of these groups claimed they were responding, in part, to the Allies' urgent calls

to the Iraqi population to take the situation into their own hands and overthrow their oppressor. But the Allies had in mind a military coup, rather than full-scale but unorganized uprisings. This confusion helped to spark the massive popular rebellions that threatened Iraq's status as a unitary state. As soon as this threat appeared, the rebels infringed upon the overriding US policy concern, which had held true since the early 1980s. The US (and British) policy response was to ignore the rebels, at least to the point of refusing to intervene in them and *deliberately permitting* the Hussein regime to suppress them (by lifting of "no-fly" regulations to allow Iraqi helicopters to transport loyal troops to the battlefronts).

The most striking feature of the US response to the uprisings was not the lack of intervention to help the Shi'a and Kurdish rebel populations. Until 1990, the US had never intervened to question, let alone suppress, the Hussein regime's tendency toward large-scale atrocity and even genocide. Kuwait was exceptional because the invasion crossed an international border, resulted in the occupation of a close US ally, and posed a strategic threat to US economic and strategic interests.

What was unusual about the 1991 uprising was that the United States was forced to move beyond its "default" policy agenda and assist a rebel population—though in a limited fashion only, in the north, where the Kurds had risen. The explanation lies in the sudden visibility of the humanitarian crisis of the Kurds who had fled to eastern Turkey. (Those Kurds, much more numerous, who fled to Iran were virtually absent from the media sphere, and thus from the policy calculus.) With Halabja, Kurdish suffering had already been broadcast to US living rooms. But Halabja was an atrocity that was over before the news footage became available. The real-time live broadcasts from the Kurdish refugee zones in Turkey, with a thousand Kurds dying daily from exposure and disease, presented the Bush administration with a qualitatively different policy challenge. And the high degree of ground-level involvement—the US was after all in occupation of large swathes of Iraq—also placed it in an exposed position.

The result was an abrupt policy about-face, the provision of emergency relief, and the establishing of the Kurdish "safe haven" that generally flourished throughout the 1990s. It was in some ways unprecedented, and the term "the CNN effect" was subsequently coined to capture the significance of media exposure in the US policy calculus.

This media coverage contrasted markedly with the Iraqi suppression of Shi'a rebels (including the Marsh Arabs) in the south. Given Iraq's

demography and religious makeup, the Shi'a always posed a greater threat to western policy priorities. And CNN correspondents were nowhere to be seen; this was flat-out and chaotic combat compared to the slow-moving and (for outside visitors) physically-secure refugee crisis in the north. Only a small handful of cameras were available to shakily document the massacre that Hussein's forces inflicted on the peoples of the Shi'a south. As a result, US policy again followed the norm. The destruction of Shi'a and of a Shi'a sub-population (the Marsh Arabs—see below) would occasionally be cited as useful evidence for the US's opposition to Hussein throughout the 1990s. But they would not assume serious prominence until the US decided to go to war with Iraq in 2002. Policymakers began to emphasize human-rights concerns in their pronouncements, and to link them to concerns over Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction (WMD).²

3) The Madan/Marsh Arabs

The Madan were one of the main focuses of Saddam Hussein's repressive strategy in the 1990s. The fact that it was now permissible for US policymakers to deploy evidence of Hussein's crimes meant that these Shi'a received glancing US attention during the decade—significantly more than the Kurds had received during the Anfal genocide.

The Madan numbered about 500,000, concentrated on the Shatt-al-Arab waterway close to the Arabian Gulf. They had long maintained a distinct culture and way of life, but their support for anti-Ba'th insurrection at the end of the 1991 Gulf War doomed them. Hussein's repressive strategy combined traditional military-security measures with ecocide, that is, destruction of the ecosystem that sustained Madan civilization. Throughout the 1990s, Hussein supervised the diversion of the water sources that fed the Madan marshlands:

The destruction of the marshlands served no other purpose than to destroy the cultural and social cohesion of the Marsh Arabs. Dams and massive drainage canals were built without any even apparent

² It was also the point at which the legacy of Shi'a repression and genocide entered active planning considerations. It was assumed that in a renewed invasion of Iraq, the Shi'a would be skeptical of Allied intentions, since the Allies were held to have encouraged and then abandoned the Shi'a uprisings of 1991.

agricultural or developmental purpose. Today only a few thousand Marsh Arabs remain in the region of the former marshes, and it is far from clear whether the others would return if the marshes could be restored. It had become impossible to survive where they were when the water disappeared and the land dried up. Some 40,000 of the Marsh Arabs still live in refugee camps in Iran. The remainder of the Marsh Arabs dispersed throughout Iraq simply because they had no choice but to seek new places to live and work. (Dellapena)

The distinctness of the Madan civilization, and the rapid and devastating erosion of its population and social base, led many commentators to deploy the language of the Genocide Convention. This time, US administrations, from Bush to Clinton and on to Bush, were receptive to the framing. The Madan issue was raised at various points by US agencies and policymakers, and in November 2002, with Gulf War III looming, it was the subject of a State Department bulletin that sought to deepen the Hussein regime's diplomatic isolation. Even the word "genocide," normally anathema in US policy circles, was seized upon. The bulletin was titled "Legal Expert Describes Iraqi Treatment of Marsh Arabs as Genocide," while the subtitle referred to "massive network of canals meant to destroy a people" (Fuller). Obviously, however, the situation was not deemed significant enough to justify more than rhetorical denunciation and continuation of the severe economic sanctions imposed on the Hussein regime. It is to these sanctions that I now turn.

4) Genocidal Sanctions?

In August 1990, Resolution 687 of the United Nations instituted a regime of stringent economic sanctions upon Iraq that were still in place in 2003, when invasion toppled Hussein's regime. The question of whether the sanctions regime amounted to genocide assumed a surprising degree of prominence during the 1990s. It was one of the more common activist themes and mobilizing agendas, and attracted the support of some high-profile defectors from official ranks. The most notable of these was Denis Halliday, the former Assistant Secretary General for Human Resources Management and UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq, whose resignation and subsequent denunciation of the sanctions system popularized the framework of

"genocide." Halliday based his charges on statistics of mortality and morbidity compiled by a range of UN special organizations, and evidence "of the *deliberate* destruction by Gulf War allies of the means for treatment and distribution of clean water, adequate electric power generation and effective urban sanitation systems."³ Halliday's charges were taken up by a number of other commentators during the 1990s, including the British writer Geoff Simons, various Members of Parliament, and the former US Attorney-General, Ramsey Clark. Many of these critics cited the comment by then-US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, in a 1996 TV interview, that the "price" of sanctions against Iraq—the alleged death of 500,000 Iraqi children—was "worth it"; Albright disputed neither the death toll nor the direct link to the sanctions policy proposed by the interviewer (Lesley Stahl of CBS).⁴

We do not need to devote much space to the official US response to these charges. No responsibility whatsoever was assumed for Iraqi suffering, Albright's slip of the tongue excepted. Blame was placed fully on the Hussein government for allowing Iraqi livelihoods to decline amidst economic and political isolation. In the estimation of Per Oskar Klevnas, writing in *Middle East Report* in March 2003: "US and British policy, including the 'moral case' for [renewed] war, is premised on the analysis that th[e] dramatic drop in living standards [in Iraq in the 1990s] is due to the policies of the Iraqi regime." Such an analysis, according to Klevnas, depicts "as 'lies' the claim that sanctions have caused hardship—except for the way 'Saddam implements sanctions.'"⁵

To repeat, at no point in the official commentary was a framing of sanctions policy in terms of Allied atrocity and/or genocide ever contemplated. Throughout, US and Allied culpability for civilian suffering was resolutely denied, and the Hussein regime blamed for all privation.

³ Denis J. Halliday, "US Policy and Iraq: A Case of Genocide?" forthcoming in Adam Jones, ed., *Genocide, War Crimes and the West: History and Complicity* (London: Zed Books, Dec. 2003).

⁴ The British scholar, Martin Shaw, writes that "'Complicity in genocide' is one of the acts punishable under the Convention. [...] In the case of Iraq [...] a plausible case has been made that UN sanctions promoted by the USA and the UK have contributed to hunger and disease, which have weakened the population—policies continued even when the consequences were known" (39).

⁵ Per Oskar Klevnas, "Sanctions and the 'Moral Case' for War." *Middle East Report Online* 4 March 2003.

A minor but interesting modification to this approach emerged during the crisis preceding the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Now the damage associated with the sanctions regime was actively noticed, and presented as a further justification for the impending war itself! Deposing Hussein would mean alleviating the suffering of the Iraqi people under sanctions. The proximate cause of that suffering was still portrayed as Hussein's violations and manipulations of the sanctions regime. Nonetheless, as Klevnas notes, both the US and British governments "advanced the notion that one of the benefits of a war with Iraq would be the prospect of lifting the punitive economic sanctions that have been in place since the end of the Gulf war in 1991. [...] Pro-war commentators in the US [...] attack[ed] the peace movement because the default anti-war position—inspections, not war—would keep sanctions in effect indefinitely" ("Sanctions").

The US and Genocide

US policy towards the various "genocidal contexts" explored above must be seen against the backdrop of US foreign policy in the field of genocide and human rights since the Second World War. Despite playing a leading role in the establishment of the organization, the United Nations, which first named genocide and legislated against it, the US was reluctant to bind itself by the provisions of the resulting Convention of 1948. Indeed, the US held for some forty years from doing so. Not until 1987, under Ronald Reagan, did the United States finally sign on to the Convention, and then only with an opt-out clause added in the ratification process that effectively nullified the US commitment. This broad orientation was also evident under Clinton/Albright, and staged a powerful resurgence under George Bush, Jr.

At the same time, in an age of "media democracy" (Meyer and Hinchman) and strong public commitment to human rights and freedoms, the rhetoric of the international rights discourse signified by the Genocide Convention has become more important than ever in US foreign policy calculations. Most US interventions have been justified by reference to the egregious human-rights practices of the leader(s) of the target state. Thus, the Taliban in Afghanistan were anathematized by reference to their violation of human and women's rights; Saddam Hussein's genocidal campaigns were noticed and decried when his tacit alliance with the US broke apart over his invasion of Kuwait.

The result of these conflicting tendencies has been an increasing US adoption (some might say preemption) of the discourse of human rights and

mass atrocity, designed to justify key interventions as "humanitarian." At the same time, actual US denunciations of genocide or associated massive atrocities have been reserved for enemies—generally "rogue states" deemed to threaten the developed and developing liberal democracies.

In the case of the Hussein regime's genocide against the Kurds, the United States chose to overlook these atrocities while they were occurring. Despite difficulties caused by the revelation of the Halabja chemical attack, the practical substance of US-Iraqi relations, at the all-important levels of economic trade, diplomatic recognition, and day-to-day interaction, proceeded largely unhindered. Indeed, there was little that the US proved unwilling to do for the Hussein regime during this period. There is no indication that the US expressed concern about the daily Iraqi use of chemical weapons to hold back Iranian forces in the field. By the end of 1984, the US had restored full diplomatic relations with Iraq, and extended generous agricultural credits and other aid, including critical military intelligence. Considerable evidence now on the public record attests that the bond between the US and Iraq allowed the latter to make the weapons of mass destruction that would later be cited as the reasons to overthrow the Hussein regime.⁶

When Hussein took his "step too far" and occupied Kuwait in August 1990, human rights considerations abruptly leapt to prominence, alongside concern about Hussein's WMD. Both were deployed to justify the coalition-building and campaign-waging of 1990-91. As would again be the case in the 2003 war (and, perhaps even more significantly, *after* that conflict), Hussein's atrocities were highlighted as supposed policy influences, and as important policy justifications. Emphasis was placed on the atrocities inflicted upon occupied Kuwait; Kurdish and other suffering received a more limited airing. The discourse of mass atrocity was a

⁶ Phyllis Bennis of the Institute for Policy Studies writes that a leak "of some of the 8,000 pages that Washington deleted from Iraq's 7 Dec. 2002, arms declaration [...] documented 24 US corporations, 55 US subsidiaries of foreign corporations, and a number of US government agencies that provided parts, material, training and other assistance to Iraq's chemical, biological, missile, and nuclear weapons programs throughout the 1970s and 80s, some continuing till the end of 1990. The US corporations include Honeywell, Rockwell, Hewlett Packard, Dupont, Eastman Kodak, Bechtel, and more. US government Departments of Energy, Commerce, Defense and Agriculture, as well as federal laboratories at Sandia, Los Alamos and Lawrence Livermore, were also involved."

significant and largely successful feature of Allied coalition-building during this period.

In the immediate wake of the Gulf War ceasefire, the relevance of the Hussein regime's atrocities rapidly subsided. The policy framework now dictated that the US avoid undermining Iraq as a unitary state and bulwark against Iran, even if that meant leaving Hussein in power. Not only were his atrocities to be deemphasized, but he was to be permitted to inflict more of them under the Allies' noses, with his brutal crackdowns on northern Kurds and southern Shi'a. Only in the case of the Kurds did the US call a halt to the proceedings, and then only because of the unanticipated and unwelcome media exposure of Kurdish suffering.

This brief overview suggests how human-rights issues were utilized to buttress the broader policy, from 1990 onwards, of confronting Hussein militarily. In general, when this policy was highly salient to US concerns, high-profile attention was paid to the despotic character of the Hussein regime, including deployment of the language of mass atrocity and genocide. One belated beneficiary of this attention, through the 1990s, was the Marsh Arab population, which was added to the litany of Hussein's malfeasance.

Stated US concerns peaked at times of related military upsurge—notably the crisis over UN inspectors and the subsequent bombing campaign in 1998, and the buildup to fully-fledged invasion and occupation of 2002-03. The public record during the latter period bulges with statements such as this declaration from President Bush, speaking in October 2002:

Some worry that a change of leadership in Iraq could create instability and make the situation worse. The situation could hardly get worse, for world security and for the people of Iraq. The lives of Iraqi citizens would improve dramatically if Saddam Hussein were no longer in power, just as the lives of Afghanistan's citizens improved after the Taliban. The dictator of Iraq is a student of Stalin, using murder as a tool of terror and control, within his own cabinet, within his own army, and even within his own family. On Saddam Hussein's orders, opponents have been decapitated, wives and mothers of political opponents have been systematically raped as a method of intimidation, and political prisoners have been forced to watch their own

children being tortured. America believes that all people are entitled to hope and human rights, to the non-negotiable demands of human dignity. People everywhere prefer freedom to slavery; prosperity to squalor; self-government to the rule of terror and torture. America is a friend to the people of Iraq. Our demands are directed only at the regime that enslaves them and threatens us. When these demands are met, the first and greatest benefit will come to Iraqi men, women and children. The oppression of Kurds, Assyrians, Turkomans, Shi'a, Sunnis and others will be lifted. The long captivity of Iraq will end, and an era of new hope will begin.⁷

On numerous occasions, Bush and other top officials directly linked Hussein's human-rights record to his alleged weapons of mass destruction, using both to demonstrate the evil and volatility of the dictator. In March 2003, with the war underway, Colin Powell used the occasion of the State Department's release of its annual human rights report to highlight the political justification that Hussein's crimes supposedly gave to the Allies. Allied forces were "liberating the Iraqi people from a ruthless tyranny that has showed utter contempt for human life," Powell stated. He likewise emphasized the link between domestic dictatorship and international instability: the Hussein regime was "a classic illustration of the fact that such regimes which ruthlessly violate the rights of their citizens tend to pose the greatest threats to international peace and stability."⁸

The utility of the theme of Hussein's atrocious character did not disappear with the end of major combat in Iraq in May 2003. The continued low-level resistance to US and British occupation forces had begun to exact a political toll on the Bush administration by mid-summer. US policymakers depicted these rebel forces as consisting of organized remnants of the brutal old regime.⁹ Intriguingly, Donald Rumsfeld and others within the US

⁷ "President Bush Outlines Iraqi Threat," remarks by the President on Iraq, Cincinnati, Ohio, 7 Oct. 2002.

⁸ United States Dept. of State. *State Department Report Outlines Human Rights Abuses in Iraq*. Washington: GPO, 31 March 2003.

⁹ Many of them doubtless *are* remnants of the old regime, although this depiction reckons without the widespread US alienation of ordinary Iraqis through intrusive searches, indiscriminate killings, and failure to restore basic security and services.

administration began to use the term "death squads" to describe perpetrators of hit-and-run attacks on American forces. This term is most linked in recent history with the right-wing forces in Central America during the 1970s and 1980s, whose extrajudicial executions mounted into the tens of thousands. The prominence of "death squads" in this earlier era of discourse represented a successful invasion of the policy agenda by civil society—first of all because it was Latin American civil society that was being targeted by the death squads, and secondly because US civil society incorporated protests over death-squad activities into US media coverage, public discussion, and eventually congressional deliberation. Moreover, the death squads were widely depicted as centrally-directed tools of governments that the US armed and supported. Thus, it is both surprising and ironic that in the post-Iraq war deployment of the term, the centrally-directed character of death squads, which US policymakers once sought to paper over, is ardently proclaimed. The usage is clearly meant to suggest that the remnants of Hussein's old centralized regime are still pulling the strings of those committing violence against US forces and their Iraqi allies. The language of "death squads" thus appears designed to resonate with the earlier era of policy discourse, while relying on limited political memory to obfuscate the earlier complicity of US administrations in state-sponsored violence of this type.

Concluding Observations

In this essay, I have argued that US responsiveness to, and deployment of, the discourse of genocide and mass atrocity *vis-à-vis* Iraq has been linked and subordinate to broader US policy goals. These took shape after World War II and were implemented relatively consistently by successive US administrations, both Republican and Democratic.

It seems that only very rarely are broader policy concerns vulnerable to being "trumped" by outside actors and unexpected factors—as intervention in the humanitarian emergency of the Kurds in 1991 was triggered by the "CNN effect," for example. Even then, attention to the public relations dimension of the humanitarian crisis is simply incorporated into the policy nexus; it becomes *part* of the "broader policy considerations" that prevail. If war is the continuation of politics by other means, then the twenty-first century war, when waged by western democracies, assumes much of the mediated dimension of western politics in general. The destruction and suffering of war may be pushed to the margins—to individuals and

communities far from the centers of media power, or to more ambiguous and less photogenic forms of structural damage, such as the infliction of longterm malnutrition or radioactive contamination.

Accordingly, the media dimension may offer the best short-term strategy to fuel the incorporation of human-rights concerns into broad US policy priorities. Even the self-interested and inconsistent deployment of an anti-atrocity, anti-genocide discourse suggests that these issues are increasingly potent in the domestic and international debate. However, as the policy continuities examined in this article attest, such influences are unlikely to become dominant considerations for US policymakers in the near future. This is all the more true given the "backlash" in the US against civil rights and international legal instruments, both before and after 11 September 2001.

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