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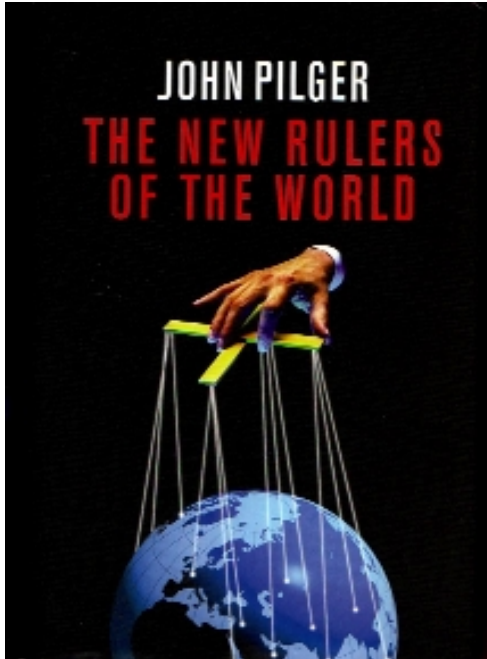


JOHN PILGER

AN EXCERPT FROM HIS BOOK
THE NEW RULERS OF THE WORLD

PAYING THE PRICE

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An excerpt from his latest book
THE NEW RULERS OF THE WORLD
(Taken from Chapter Three, Paying The Price)

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INTRODUCTION

If you wonder why the Iraqi people didn't welcome the American forces as liberators at the end of the second Gulf war, it may be enlightening to read this excerpt from John Pilger's book, *The New Rulers Of The World*, written and published before war began. Pilger describes the terrible suffering of the people of Iraq under the West's – specifically the United States and Britain – decade-long embargo of that country, under sanctions that saw hundreds of thousands of children die because of lack of medical treatment as the richest country in the Middle East was brought to its knees because of supposed – yet still undiscovered – weapons of mass destruction.

In the first part of this excerpt Pilger reports from Iraq on the murderous effects of these sanctions on the most vulnerable section of Iraq society; in the second, he travels to the United States, where he has an enlightening interview with Madelaine Albright's Assistant Secretary of State James Rubin.

In conclusion, Pilger says, "A prosecutor [at the International Criminal Court] might ask who has killed the most innocent people in Iraq: Saddam Hussein, or British and American policy-makers? The answer may well put the murderous tyrant in second place."

THE AUTHOR

John Pilger has twice won British journalism's highest award, that of Journalist of the Year, for his work all over the world, especially as a war correspondent. For his documentary filmmaking, he has won an American television Academy Award, an Emmy, and the Richard Dimbleby Award, given by the British Academy of Film and Television Arts, for a lifetime's factual broadcasting. He lives in London, England.

“What makes John Pilger a truly great journalist is his conscience and his bravery.” – Martha Gellhorn

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"We do not seek the destruction of Iraq. Nor do we seek to punish the Iraqi people for the decisions and policies of their leaders."

– President George Bush Senior

"We think the price is worth it."

– US Ambassador Madeleine Albright, when asked if the deaths of half a million Iraqi children were a price worth paying for sanctions

"They know we own their country ... we dictate the way they live and talk. And that's what's great about America right now. It's a good thing, especially when there's a lot of oil out there we need."

– Brigadier-General William Looney US air force, director of the bombing of Iraq

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HEREVER YOU GO IN IRAQ'S southern city of Basra, there is dust. It rolls down the long roads that are the desert's fingers. It gets in your eyes and nose and throat; it swirls in markets and school playgrounds, consuming children kicking a plastic ball; and it carries, according to Dr Jawad Al-Ali, 'the seeds of our death'. Dr Al-Ali is a cancer specialist at the city hospital and a member of Britain's Royal College of Physicians. He has a neat moustache and a kindly, furrowed face. His starched white coat, like the collar of his shirt, is frayed.

'Before the Gulf War, we had only three or four deaths in a month from cancer,' he said. 'Now it's thirty to thirty-five patients dying every month, and that's just in my department. That is twelve times the increase in the cancer mortality. Our studies indicate that 40 to 48 per cent of the population in this area will get cancer: in five years' time to begin with, then long afterwards. That's

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almost half the population. Most of my own family now have cancer, and we have no history of the disease. It has spread to the medical staff of this hospital; yesterday, the son of the medical director died. We don't know the precise source of the contamination, because we are not allowed to get the equipment to conduct a proper survey, or even test the excess level of radiation in our bodies. We strongly suspect depleted uranium, which was used by the Americans and British in the Gulf War right across the southern battlefields. Whatever the cause, it is like Chernobyl here; the genetic effects are new to us. The mushrooms grow huge, and the fish in what was once a beautiful river are inedible. Even the grapes in my garden have mutated and can't be eaten."

Along the corridor, I met Dr Ginan Ghalib Hassen, a paediatrician. At another time, she might have been described as an effervescent personality; now she, too, has a melancholy expression that does not change; it is the face of Iraq. 'This is Ali Raffa Asswadi,' she said, stopping to take the hand of a wasted boy I guessed to be about four years old. 'He is nine years,' she said. 'He has leukaemia. Now we can't treat him. Only some of the drugs are available. We get drugs for two or three weeks, and then they stop when the shipments stop. Unless you continue a course, the treatment is useless. We can't even give blood transfusions, because there are not enough blood bags . . .'

In the next bed, a child lay in his shrouded mother's arms. One side of his head was severely swollen. 'This is neuroplastoma,' said Dr Hassen. 'It is a very unusual tumour. Before 1991, we saw only one case of this tumour in two years. Now we have many cases.' Another child had his eyes fixed on me and I asked what would happen to him. She said, 'He has an abdominal mass. We have operated on him, but unless the tumour receives treatment, it will recur. We have only some drugs. We are waiting for the full course. He has renal failure now, so his future is bad. All the futures here are bad.'

Dr Hassen keeps a photo album of the children she is trying to save and has been unable to save. 'This is Talum Saleh,' she said, turning to a photograph of a boy in a blue pullover and with sparkling eyes. 'He is five-and-a-half years old. This is a case of Hodgkin's Disease. Normally, with Hodgkin's, a patient can expect to live and the cure can be 95 per cent. But if the drugs are not available, complications set in, and death follows. This boy had a beautiful nature. He died.'

I said, 'As we were walking, I noticed you stop and put your face to the wall.'

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'Yes, I was emotional ... I am a doctor; I am not supposed to cry but I cry every day, because this is torture. These children could live; they could live and grow up; and when you see your son and daughter in front of you, dying, what happens to you?'

I said, 'What do you say to those in the West who deny the connection between depleted uranium and the deformities of these children?'

'That is not true. How much proof do they want? There is every relation between congenital malformation and depleted uranium. Before 1991, we saw nothing like this at all. If there is no connection, why have these things not happened before? Most of these children have no family history of cancer. I have studied what happened in Hiroshima. It is almost exactly the same here; we have an increased percentage of congenital malformation, an increase of malignancy, leukaemia, brain tumours: the same.

Under the economic embargo imposed by the United Nations Security Council in 1990 and upgraded the following year, Iraq is denied equipment and expertise to decontaminate its battlefields, in contrast to how Kuwait was cleaned up after the Gulf War. The US army physicist responsible for cleaning up Kuwait was Professor Doug Rokke, whom I met in London. Today, he himself is a victim. 'I am like many people in southern Iraq,' he said. 'I have 5,000 times the recommended level of radiation in my body. The contamination was right throughout Iraq and Kuwait. With the munitions testing and preparation in Saudi Arabia, uranium contamination covers the entire region. The effect depends on whether a person inhaled it or ingested it by eating and drinking, or if they got it in an open wound. What we're seeing now, respiratory problems, kidney problems, cancers, are the direct result of the use of this highly toxic material. The controversy over whether or not it's the cause is a manufactured one; my own ill-health is testament to that.'

Professor Rokke says there are two urgent issues to be confronted by people in the West, 'those with a sense of right and wrong': first, the decision by the United States and Britain to use a 'weapon of mass destruction', such as depleted uranium. He said, 'In the Gulf War, well over 300 tons were fired. An A10 Warthog attack aircraft fired over 900,000 rounds. Each individual round was 300 grams of solid uranium 238. When a tank fired its shells, each round carried over 4,500 grams of solid uranium. These rounds are not coated, they're not tipped; they're solid uranium. Moreover, we have evidence to sug-

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gest that they were mixed with plutonium. What happened in the Gulf was a form of nuclear warfare.

'The second issue is the denial of medical care to American and British and other allied soldiers, and the tens of thousands of Iraqis contaminated. At international symposiums, I have watched Iraqi officials approach their counterparts from the Department of Defence and the Ministry of Defence and ask, plead, for help with decontamination. The Iraqis didn't use depleted uranium; it was not their weapon. They simply don't know how to get rid of it from their environment. I watched them put their case, describing the deaths and the horrific deformities that are showing up; and I watched them rebuffed. It was pathetic.

The United Nations Sanctions Committee in New York, dominated by the Americans and British, has vetoed or delayed a range of vital medical equipment, chemotherapy drugs, even pain-killers. (In the jargon of denial, 'blocked' equals vetoed, and 'on hold' means delayed, or maybe blocked.) In Baghdad, I sat in a clinic as doctors received parents and their children, many of them grey-skinned and bald, some of them dying. After every second or third examination, Dr Lekaa Fasseh Ozeer, the young oncologist, wrote in English: 'No drugs available.' I asked her to jot down in my notebook a list of drugs the hospital had ordered, but had not received, or had received intermittently. She filled a page.

I had been filming in Iraq for my documentary *Paying the Price: Killing the Children of Iraq*. Back in London, I showed Dr Ozeer's list to Professor Karol Sikora who, as chief of the cancer programme of the World Health Organisation (WHO), wrote in the *British Medical Journal*: 'Requested radiotherapy equipment, chemotherapy drugs and analgesics are consistently blocked by United States and British advisers [to the Sanctions Committee]. There seems to be a rather ludicrous notion that such agents could be converted into chemical and other weapons. He told me, 'Nearly all these drugs are available in every British hospital. They're very standard. When I came back from Iraq last year, with a group of experts I drew up a list of seventeen drugs that are deemed essential for cancer treatment. We informed the UN that there was no possibility of converting these drugs into chemical warfare agents. We heard nothing more. The saddest thing I saw in Iraq was children dying because there was no chemotherapy and no pain control. It seemed crazy they

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couldn't have morphine, because for everybody with cancer pain, it is the best drug. When I was there, they had a little bottle of aspirin pills to go round 200 patients in pain. They would receive a particular anti-cancer drug, but then get only little bits of drugs here and there, and so you can't have any planning. It's bizarre.'

I told him that one of the doctors had been especially upset, because the UN Sanctions Committee had banned nitrous oxide as 'weapons dual use'; yet this was used in caesarean sections to stop bleeding, and perhaps save a mother's life. 'I can see no logic to banning that,' he said. 'I am not an armaments expert, but the amounts used would be so small that, even if you collected all the drugs supply for the whole nation and pooled it, it is difficult to see how you could make any chemical warfare device out of it.'

I asked him how his criticisms were received by the World Health Organisation. 'We were specifically told not to talk about it afterwards, about the whole Iraq business. The WHO was embarrassed; it's not an organisation that likes to get involved in politics.'

Mohamed Ghani's studio in Baghdad is dominated by a huge crucifix he is sculpting for the Church of the Assumption in Baghdad. As Iraq's most famous sculptor, he is proud that the Vatican has commissioned him, a Muslim, to sculpt the Stations of the Cross in Rome, a cultural acknowledgement, he says, of his country as Mesopotamia, the 'cradle of western civilisation'. When I visited him, Mozart was playing on his venerable tape deck, which perched on a refrigerator of similar vintage and in which were two small bottles of beer. He handed me one. 'Here's to life and no more sorrow, please,' he said. His latest work is a twenty-foot-high figure of a woman, her child gripping her legs, pleading for food. 'Every morning I see her,' he said, 'waiting, with others just like her, in a long line at the hospital at the end of my road.' He has produced a line of figurines that depict their waiting; all the heads are bowed before a door that is permanently closed. 'The door is the dispensary,' he said, 'but it is also the world, kept shut by those who rule the world.'

The next day, I saw the same line of women and children at the Al Mansour children's hospital. Their doctors' anguish had a terrible echo. 'Children with meningitis can survive with the precise dosage of antibiotics,' said Dr Mohamed Mahmud. 'Four milligrams can save a life, but so often we are allowed only one milligram. This is a teaching hospital, but children die

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because we are not allowed parts for machines that separate blood platelets.

It was here, as we walked along the line of people waiting, that my companion Denis Halliday had an extraordinary reunion. A courtly Irishman who the previous year (1998) had resigned as the UN's Co-ordinator of Humanitarian Relief to Iraq in protest against the effects of the embargo on the civilian population, he had returned with me to Baghdad. Now he spotted a man and his daughter, and the three erupted with greetings.

'Saffa!' he said, dropping to his knees to take the hands of a nine-year-old girl.

'John, this is Saffa Majid and her father, Majid Ali. Saffa I met two years ago in this hospital, when I was the UN chief in Iraq and she was in a very poor condition with leukaemia. One cannot deal with thousands, but one can deal with two or three or four children. And I was able, with the help of the World Health Organisation, to bring in drugs, on the quiet. They were enough for two years of treatment for this little girl. And today, look at her! She looks wonderful and her father says she has only to come once a month now. So I think she's almost cured of the leukaemia. Saffa was one of four I helped. Two little girls died.'

'Why did they die?'

'They died because the medications were not available.'

'And when you set out to help these children, you were the United Nations representative here.'

'That's right. And to help them, I had to act illegally. I had to breach my own economic sanctions, so to speak, established by the Security Council, led by Washington and London. In this hospital, we have seen the evidence today of the killing that is now the responsibility of the Security Council member states, particularly Bill Clinton and Tony Blair. They should be here with us. They should see the impact of what their decisions and their sustaining of economic sanctions mean.'

'The very provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and the Declaration of Human Rights are being set aside. We are waging a war, through the United Nations, on the children and people of Iraq, and with incredible results: results that you'd not expect to see in a war under the Geneva Conventions. War, targeting civilians. Worse, we're targeting children like Saffa who of course were not born when Iraq went into Kuwait. What is this about? It's a monstrous situation, for the United Nations for the western world, for all of us who are part

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of some democratic system, who are in fact responsible for the policies of our governments and the implementation of economic sanctions on Iraq.'

Denis Halliday had resigned after thirty-four years with the UN. He was then Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations with a long and distinguished career in development, 'attempting to help people, not harm them'. His was the first public expression of an unprecedented rebellion within the UN bureaucracy. 'I am resigning,' he wrote, 'because the policy of economic sanctions is totally bankrupt. We are in the process of destroying an entire society. It is as simple as that ... Five thousand children are dying every month ... I don't want to administer a programme that results in figures like these.'

Since I met Halliday, I have been struck by the principle behind his carefully chosen, uncompromising words. 'I had been instructed,' he said, 'to implement a policy that satisfies the definition of genocide: a deliberate policy that has effectively killed well over a million individuals, children and adults. We all know that the regime, Saddam Hussein, is not paying the price for economic sanctions; on the contrary, he has been strengthened by them. It is the little people who are losing their children or their parents for lack of untreated water. What is clear is that the Security Council is now out of control, for its actions here undermine its own Charter, and the Declaration of Human Rights and the Geneva Convention. History will slaughter those responsible.'

In the UN, Halliday broke a long collective silence. On February 13, 2000, Hans Von Sponeck, who had succeeded him as Humanitarian Co-ordinator in Baghdad, resigned. Like Halliday, he had been with the UN for more than thirty years. 'How long,' he asked, 'should the civilian population of Iraq be exposed to such punishment for something they have never done?' Two days later, Jutta Burghardt, head of the World Food Programme in Iraq, another UN agency, resigned, saying that she, too, could no longer tolerate what was being done to the Iraqi people.

When I met Von Sponeck in Baghdad in October 1999, the anguish behind his measured, self-effacing exterior was evident. Like Halliday's, his job had been to administer the so-called Oil for Food Programme, which since 1996 has allowed Iraq to sell a fraction of its oil for money that goes straight to an account controlled by the Security Council. Almost a third is not used on humanitarian aid, but pays the UN's 'expenses', as well as reparations demanded by Kuwait, one of the world's wealthiest nations, and compensation

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claims by oil companies and other multinational corporations. Iraq must then tender on the international market for food and medical supplies and other humanitarian resources. Every contract has to be approved by the UN Sanctions Committee in New York.

When sanctions were imposed, following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, all imports, including food, were effectively banned for eight months, even though Security Council Resolution 661 of August 6, 1990 explicitly exempted food and medicines. For a year, the UN refused to allow Iraq the means of raising funds beyond its exhausted cash reserves. As Iraq imported almost everything, the effect was immediate and devastating, compounded by the results of a bombing campaign designed to cripple the civilian infrastructure. 'US military planners,' reported the Washington Post, 'hoped the bombing would amplify the economic and psychological impact of international sanctions on Iraqi society ... Because of these goals, damage to civilian structures and interests, invariably described by briefers during the war as "collateral" and unintended, was sometimes neither. The worst civilian suffering, senior officers say, has resulted not from bombs that went astray but from precision-guided weapons that hit exactly where they were aimed - at electrical plants, oil refineries and transportation networks. Among the justifications offered is that Iraqi civilians were not blameless. A senior air force officer said, "They do live there . . ." '

Reporting on the aftermath of the bombing, UN Under Secretary- General Martti Ahtisaari described the 'near apocalyptic' state of the country's basic services. 'Iraq has for some time to come been relegated to a pre-industrial age,' he wrote, 'but with all the disabilities of post-industrial dependency on an intensive use of energy and technology.' A Harvard University study team concluded that Iraq was heading for a 'public health catastrophe', with tens of thousands of deaths by the end of 1991 alone, the majority of them young children. The team of independent American professionals and academics estimated that, during the first eight months of sanctions when all shipments of food and medicines were blockaded, 47,000 children under the age of five had died. The administration of George Bush Senior appeared to concur with these assessments; and yet, wrote Dr Eric Herring of Bristol University, a sanctions specialist, 'comprehensive economic sanctions remained in place. Those policymakers who backed the sanctions cannot say that they did not know what

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was going to happen. Whatever the political purpose, it was a conscious and callous choice to deny an entire society the means necessary to survive!.

In 1991, the Security Council, in its Resolution 687, stated that, if Iraq renounced 'weapons of mass destruction' (nuclear, biological and chemical weapons) and ballistic missiles with a range of more than 150 kilometres, and agreed to monitoring by a UN Special Commission on Iraq (UNSCOM), the embargo would be lifted. In 1998, UNSCOM reported that, despite Iraqi obstruction in some areas, 'the disarmament phase of the Security Council's requirements is possibly near its end in the missile and chemical weapons areas.' On December 15, 1998, the International Atomic Energy Agency reported that it had eliminated Iraq's nuclear weapons programme 'efficiently and effectively'.

Scott Ritter, for five years a senior UNSCOM weapons inspector, agreed. 'By 1998, the chemical weapons infrastructure had been completely dismantled or destroyed by UNSCOM or by Iraq in compliance with our mandate,' he told me. 'The biological weapons programme was gone, all the major facilities eliminated. The nuclear weapons programme was completely eliminated. The long-range ballistic missile programme was completely eliminated. If I had to quantify Iraq's threat, I would say [it is] zero.'

While food and medicines are technically exempt, the Sanctions Committee has frequently vetoed and delayed requests for baby food, agricultural equipment, heart and cancer drugs, oxygen tents, X-ray machines. Sixteen heart and lung machines were put 'on hold' because they contained computer chips. A fleet of ambulances was held up because their equipment included vacuum flasks, which keep medical supplies cold; vacuum flasks are designated 'dual use' by the Sanctions Committee, meaning they could possibly be used in weapons manufacture. Cleaning materials, such as chlorine, are 'dual use', as is the graphite used in pencils; as are wheelbarrows, it seems, considering the frequency of their appearance on the list of 'holds'. As of October 2001, 1,010 contracts for humanitarian supplies, worth \$3.8S billion, were 'on hold' by the Sanctions Committee. 13 They included items related to food, health, water and sanitation, agriculture and education.

Most members of the Security Council want the sanctions eased considerably or lifted. The French have called them 'cruel, ineffective and dangerous'. However, American dominance of the Council is such that the US and British

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representatives on the Sanctions Committee alone veto and delay contracts. The British claim they hold up only 'one per cent' of humanitarian contracts.

This is sophistry, by never objecting to American obstruction, they give it tacit support. Moreover, a veto or 'hold' can only be rescinded by the Council member who orders it.

So blatant is the obstruction that Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary-General virtually appointed by the Americans, complained that the delays and vetoes were 'seriously impairing the effective implementation of the [Oil for Food] programme'. He urged the approval of water, sanitation and electricity contracts without delay' because of 'their paramount importance to the welfare of the Iraqi people'. The Executive Director of the UN Office of the Iraq Programme, Benon Sevan, has attacked the Council for holding up spares for Iraq's crumbling oil industry, warning that the less oil Iraq is able to pump, the less money will be available to buy food and medicine. In 1999, a senior Clinton administration official told the Washington Post, 'The longer we can fool around in the [Security] Council and keep things static, the better.'

In Britain, Customs and Excise have stopped parcels going to Iraqi relatives, containing children's clothes and toys. The chairman of the British Library, John Ashworth, wrote to Harry Cohen MP that, 'after consultation with the Foreign Office', it was decided that books could no longer be sent to Iraqi students. The British Library had already distinguished itself by informing a translator in Baghdad that it was not permitted to send him a copy of James Joyce's Ulysses. From the petty and craven to the farcical: an attempt to send documents to Iraq advising Iraqis on human rights and press freedom was blocked by the Department of Trade and Industry in London. The package, which also contained advice on family planning and Aids, was posted to Mosul University but was intercepted and returned to Article 19, the anti-censorship group.

When Denis Halliday was the senior United Nations official in Iraq, a display cabinet stood in the foyer of his office. It contained a bag of wheat, some congealed cooking oil, bars of soap and a few other household necessities. 'It was a pitiful sight,' he said, and it represented the monthly ration that we were allowed to spend. I added cheese to lift the protein content, but there was simply not enough money left over from the amount we were allowed to spend, which came from the revenue Iraq was allowed to make from its Oil.' He describes food shipments as 'an exercise in duplicity'. A shipment that the

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Americans claim allows for 2,300 calories per person per day may well allow for only 2,000 calories, or fewer. 'What's missing,' he said, 'will be animal proteins, minerals and vitamins. As most Iraqis have no other source of income, food has become a medium of exchange, it gets sold for other necessities, further lowering the caloric intake. You also have to get clothes and shoes for your kids to go to school. You've then got malnourished mothers who cannot breast-feed, and they pick up bad water. What is needed is investment in water treatment and distribution, electric power production for food processing, storage and refrigeration, education and agriculture.'

His successor, Hans Von Sponeck, calculates that the Oil for Food Programme allows \$100 for each person to live on for a year. This figure also has to help pay for the entire society's infrastructure and essential services, such as power and water. 'It is simply not possible to live on such an amount,' Von Sponeck told me. 'Set that pittance against the lack of clean water, the fact that electricity fails for up to twenty-two hours a day, and the majority of sick people cannot afford treatment, and the sheer trauma of trying to get from day to day, and you have a glimpse of the nightmare. And make no mistake, this is deliberate. I have not in the past wanted to use the word genocide, but now it is unavoidable.'"

The cost in lives is staggering. A study by the United Nations Children's Fund, Unicef, found that between 1991 and 1998, there were 500,000 deaths above the anticipated rate among Iraqi children under five years of age. This, on average, is 5,200 preventable under-five deaths per month. Hans Von Sponeck said, 'Some 167 Iraqi children are dying every day. Denis Halliday said, 'If you include adults, the figure is now almost certainly well over a million.'

In 1999, a humanitarian panel set up by the Security Council reported that Iraq had slipped from 'relative affluence' prior to 1991 into 'massive poverty'. The panel criticised the Oil for Food Programme as 'inadequate' to remedy a 'dire' humanitarian situation 'that cannot be overstated'. The panel's members took the remarkable step of attacking their sponsor, charging that 'the Iraqi people would not be undergoing such deprivations in the absence of the prolonged measures imposed by the Security Council'. Once again, children were found to be the main victims, with the infant mortality rate soaring from one of the lowest in the world in 1990 to the highest.

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In a separate study, Richard Garfield, a renowned epidemiologist at Columbia University in New York, says that, in tripling since 1990, the death rate of children in Iraq is unique. 'There is almost no documented case,' he wrote, 'of rising mortality for children under five years in the modern world'. Extrapolating from these statistics, American researchers John Mueller and Karl Mueller conclude that 'economic sanctions have probably already taken the lives of more people in Iraq than have been killed by all weapons of mass destruction in history.'

In 1999, seventy members of the US Congress signed an unusually blunt letter to President Clinton, appealing to him to lift the embargo and end what they called 'infanticide masquerading as policy'. The Clinton administration had already given them their reply. In 1996, in an infamous interview on the American current affairs programme 60 Minutes, Madeleine Albright, then US Ambassador to the United Nations had been asked: 'We have heard that half a million children have died ... is the price worth it?' Albright replied, 'I think this is a very hard choice, but the price – we think the price is worth it.'



FLEW TO WASHINGTON IN THE HOPE OF seeing Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to ask her about her statement that 'we think the price is worth it'. She was not available, alas, and her spokesman, Assistant Secretary of State James Rubin, agreed to an interview. In his mid-thirties, self-assured and ideological, Rubin is the model of the post-cold war 'spin doctor', a professional propagandist who can also be refreshingly candid. When UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali was effectively sacked by Albright for not being sufficiently malleable, it was Rubin who told the media: 'Dr Boutros-Ghali was unable to understand the impor-

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tance of co-operation with the world's first power.'

The interview took place at the State Department in a room decked with flags and prints from the War of Independence. Rubin's assistant, Price Floyd, a worried man, fussed about the nature of my questions and the time Rubin could spare me. Tension built. When Rubin arrived, it was clear he preferred giving what he called 'presentations' to the press. Much of what he said had little basis in fact.

For example: 'We [the United States] allocate billions of dollars' worth of food and medicine for the Iraqi people,' In fact, the United States gives not a dollar: all humanitarian aid is paid by the Iraqi government from oil revenues authorised by the UN Security Council. He said that American policy was 'not sanctions per se, but to deny Saddam Hussein's regime the funds they would otherwise have to rebuild their mad military machine ... the sanctions that we've imposed have made sure that Saddam Hussein has not had access to hundreds of billions of hard currency that he could use to build up that mad military machine ... to build new chemical weapons capabilities, to build new biological weapons capabilities ...'

I asked him, 'Don't you think it's ironic that for many years the United States helped Saddam Hussein obtain these weapons of mass destruction to use against his neighbours?'

'No, I don't find that ironic. Iraq's regime is responsible, that's who's responsible. The United States didn't gas the Kurds . . .'

'The seed stock for Saddam Hussein's biological weapons was supplied by the American Type Culture Collection, a company that's just down the road from here, in Rockville, Maryland.'

'I'm sure they've been prosecuted for it.'

'No, they had Commerce Department approval.'

'To suggest we were sanctioning the sale of chemical weapons to Iraq is ridiculous.'

'It's true. The Senate hearing in 1994 heard that this particular company was given Commerce Department approval to sell biological agents to Saddam Hussein. All the documents are in the Library of Congress.'

'Are you suggesting that kind of thing was a goal of the United States?'

'It happened, and I'm only suggesting it's ironic that the US gave such support to this dictator, and now imposes an embargo that is causing such suffer-

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ing not to him, but to the civilian population.'

'The suffering is not our fault ... they have enormous quantities of food and medicine available. They store it in warehouses; they don't distribute it.'

'The senior United Nations Co-ordinator denied this. He said 88 per cent of all humanitarian supplies were delivered within a week of entering the country. A report by the head of the UN Office of Iraq in New York says that 76 per cent of medicines are distributed and the rest kept as a buffer stock, as directed by the World Health Organisation.'

'If you take a careful look at that report, there are examples where the Iraqi government has imported food and medicine, then not distributed them . . .'

'More than 73 million dollars in food production supplies for Iraq are currently blocked in New York by your government. If what you are saying is true, why did Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, recently criticise the United States for holding up 700 million dollars' worth of humanitarian supplies?'

'You'll have to ask him.'

He went on to argue that a report by Unicef, the UN Children's Fund, proved that where the Iraqi government was in charge of distribution, in the south of the country, it was to blame for a higher child-mortality rate. I pointed out that the report had stated the opposite, that 'the difference in mortality rates between the north and south cannot be attributed to the way the relief effort has been implemented.'

He retorted, 'If you'd like to give a speech, we can switch chairs.'

'I don't think it becomes a senior State Department official to speak like that.'

'Let me hear your speech.'

'Why have you misrepresented the Unicef report?'

'Our analysis is based on a wide variety of sources, not simply the Unicef report . . .'

'The chief United Nations official in Iraq, Hans Von Sponeck, has appealed to the United States and Britain to let supplies through. He said, "Don't fight the battle against Saddam Hussein on the backs of the civilian population."

'Mr Von Sponeck is commenting on subjects beyond his competence.'

'He is commenting on the humanitarian situation, and he is the senior United Nations humanitarian official on the ground in Iraq ... Mr Rubin, by what

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logic can an entire nation be held hostage to the compliance of a brutal dictator, simply because they are unlucky enough to live under his brutal regime?'

'Look ... in the real world, real choices have to be made, and it's our view that to allow Saddam Hussein unchecked access to hundreds of billions of dollars in oil revenue would be a grave and clear and present danger to the world. We have to weigh our profound sorrow at the tragic suffering of the people of Iraq against the national security challenge that Saddam Hussein would pose to the world if he weren't checked by the sanctions regime and the containment policy.'

I asked if the choice he described had been summed up by Madeleine Albright when she said that the 'price' of half a million dead children was 'worth it'.

'That quote has been seriously taken out of context.'

I handed him a transcript of the interview given by Albright. Her words were in context.

'Well, we don't accept the figure of half a million.'

'It's from the World Health Organisation.' (And backed by Unicef.)

'It's derived from a methodology we don't accept. We do accept that in choosing, in making policy, one has to choose usually between two bad choices, not between a good choice and a bad choice, and unfortunately the effect of sanctions has been more than we would have hoped.'

'Why is the US bombing civilians in Iraq?'

'Our aircraft are there to prevent Saddam Hussein from raining hell down on his own people. If he was not shooting at our aircraft, we would not need to take out the surface-to-air missile sites.'

'Your aircraft are taking out shepherds, their children and their sheep. It's in a UN report.'

'That report was based primarily on Iraqi sources. Iraqi propaganda will do anything to misrepresent what went on . . .'

'I went to Iraq to investigate and I found it to be true.'

'Well, I don't know the facts [and] I'm not a military expert. You'll have to address that to the Pentagon.'

'Have you been to Iraq?'

'No, I don't think I would be very welcome there!'

'Then how can you speak with such authority about what is going on there?'

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'I've spoken to a lot of people ... What you have to understand is that Saddam Hussein invaded another country. It's about Iraq's violation of the basic rule of the international system. They are paying the price for that.'

'Who is paying the price?'

'We're trying to minimise the price for the people of Iraq ... what you have to understand is that there is a real world and an ideal world.'

'Is it too idealistic to ask who pays the price in Iraq? We are not talking about Saddam Hussein, but innocents. Was it too idealistic to ask who paid the price in the Holocaust, and East Timor and other atrocious happenings around the world?'

'Well, the idea of comparing what's going on in Iraq with the Holocaust, I find personally offensive.'

'It's also known as a holocaust.'

'Well . . . to compare the effects of sanctions with the Holocaust is an offence to the people who died in the Holocaust.'

'You don't think the deaths of half a million children qualify?'

'We've gone over that.'

'How much power does the United States exercise over your committee?'

'We operate by consensus.'

'And what if the Americans object?'

'We don't operate.'

In London, I sought an interview with Robin Cook, then the Foreign Secretary, another ambiguous figure, or so it seemed. A leading proponent of sanctions, he was also the inventor of the 'ethical dimension' in British foreign policy under New Labour (which has since been abandoned). My request was submitted in writing to the Foreign Office, and I was told there was 'a good prospect of a ministerial interview'. However, an official said that Cook was reluctant to be in a film 'next to images of dying babies', because this was 'an emotive issue', and he did not wish to be 'skewered'. I offered assurances that the interview would be straightforward and fairly edited, and said he could have most of the questions in advance.

After two months of to-ing and fro-ing, letters and phone calls and general stalling, Cook demanded an exclusive screening of the film, followed by an uncut ten-minute 'response' by him at the end. I replied that I wanted to con-

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duct an interview with him, like everybody else in the film. His junior minister, Peter Hain, also wanted editorial control. I declined.

When *Paying the Price: Killing the Children of Iraq* went to air, triggering a significant public response, the Foreign Office produced a standard letter signed by Cook or Hain or an official. It exemplified the 'culture of lying' described by Mark Higson, the Iraq Desk Officer at the Foreign Office during the arms-to-Iraq scandals of the 1980s.

Almost every word was misleading or false. These ranged from 'sanctions are not aimed at the Iraqi people' to 'food and medicines have never been covered by sanctions'. One of the most persistent lies was, 'Saddam Hussein has in warehouses \$275 million worth of medicines and medical supplies, which he refuses to distribute.' The United Nations, right up to Kofi Annan, had refuted this. George Somerwill, the United Nations spokesman on Iraq, said, 'Not one of [the UN's] observation mechanisms has reported any major problem in humanitarian supplies being diverted, switched, or in any way misused.'

Then there was the \$10 billion lie. 'Baghdad,' said Cook, 'can now sell over \$10 billion of oil per annum to pay for food, medicine and other humanitarian goods.' Cook knew that more than a third went on reparations and UN expenses. This was topped by Peter Hain, who claimed that '\$16 billion of humanitarian relief was available to the Iraqi people last year'. Citing UN documents, Hans Von Sponeck replied that the figure used by Hain actually covered four years and that, after reparations were taken out, Iraq was left with \$100 for each human being it had to keep alive.

'Knowing what you know,' Von Sponeck accused Hain, 'you repeat again and again truly fabricated and self-serving misinformation.'

Hain: 'UN Resolution 1284 [continuing sanctions] represents the collective will of the Security Council!

Von Sponeck: 'You know how deceptive this assertion is. Three out of five permanent members and Malaysia did not support this resolution.'

Hain's enthusiasm for promoting sanctions has shocked those who remember him as a tenacious anti-apartheid campaigner and opponent of the American invasion of Indochina. Perhaps ambitious apostates are like that. He has even claimed 'there is no credible data' linking the use of depleted uranium by Britain and the US in Iraq with a sevenfold increase in cancers among the civilian population. As Professor Doug Rokke has shown, the evidence for

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the carcinogenic effects of depleted uranium is voluminous, from a warning in 1944 by Brigadier Leslie Groves, Director of the Manhattan Project, to numerous internal reports leaked from the Pentagon and Ministry of Defence. In 1991, the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority calculated that if 8 per cent of the DU fired in the Gulf War was inhaled, it could cause '500,000 potential deaths'.

There is little doubt that if Saddam Hussein saw political advantage in starving and otherwise denying his people, he would do so. It is hardly surprising that he has looked after himself, his inner circle and, above all, his military and security apparatus. His palaces and spooks, like the cartoon portraits of himself, are everywhere. Unlike other tyrants, however, he not only survived, but before the Gulf War enjoyed a measure of popularity by buying off his people with the benefits from Iraq's oil revenue. Having sent his opponents into exile or murdered them, more than any Arab leader he used the riches of oil to modernise the civilian infrastructure, building first-rate hospitals, schools and universities.

In this way he fostered a relatively large, healthy, well-fed, well-educated middle class. Before sanctions, Iraqis consumed more than 3,000 calories each per day; 92 per cent of people had safe water and 93 per cent enjoyed free health care. Adult literacy was one of the highest in the world, at around 95 per cent. According to The Economist's Intelligence Unit, 'the Iraqi welfare state was, until recently, among the most comprehensive and generous in the Arab world.'

It is said the only true beneficiary of sanctions is Saddam Hussein. He has used the embargo to centralise state power, and so reinforce his direct control over people's lives. With most Iraqis now dependent on the state food rationing system for their day-to-day survival, organised political dissent is all but unthinkable. In any case, for most Iraqis, it is cancelled by the sense of grievance and anger they feel towards the external enemy, western governments. In the relatively open and pro-western society that existed in Iraq before 1991, there was always the prospect of an uprising, as the Kurdish and Shi'a rebellions that year showed. In today's state of siege, there is none. That is the unsung achievement of the Anglo-American blockade.

Of this, ignorance is assured. 'Most Americans,' wrote Roger Normand, 'are unaware that sanctions against Iraq have killed more people than the two atomic bombs dropped on Japan, because the media have focused exclusive-

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ly on the demonised figure of Saddam Hussein and presented Iraq as a country of military targets rather than people.' By making the connection between the barbarism of western policy and that of the tyrants, opponents of sanctions are often called 'dupes'. (The late James Cameron, a journalist who was no stranger to this abuse, once told me, 'If they call you a dupe, you know you're getting something right.')

This has been Peter Hain's unconscionable tactic, smearing principled whistle-blowers like Denis Halliday and Hans Von Sponeck: an ironic echo of the apartheid regime in South Africa calling the younger Hain 'a dupe of communism'. Perhaps this is the familiar ritual of denial by those who, having retreated from their past, are the keenest participants.

The playwright Arthur Miller was more charitable. 'Few of us,' he wrote, 'can easily surrender our belief that society must somehow make sense. The thought that the State has lost its mind and is punishing so many innocent people is intolerable. And so the evidence has to be internally denied.'

The economic blockade on Iraq must be lifted for no other reason than it is immoral, its consequences inhuman. When that happens, says Scott Ritter, 'the weapons inspectors must go back into Iraq and complete their mandate, which should be re-configured. It was originally drawn up for quantitative disarmament, to account for every nut, screw, bolt, document that exists in Iraq. As long as Iraq didn't account for that, it was not in compliance and there was no progress. We should change that mandate to qualitative disarmament. Does Iraq have a chemical weapons programme today? No. Does Iraq have a long-range missile programme today? No. Nuclear? No. Biological? No. Is Iraq qualitatively disarmed? Yes. So we should get the inspectors in, certify that, then get on with monitoring Iraq to ensure they do not reconstitute any of this capability.' Iraq has already accepted back inspectors of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

UN Security Resolution 687 says that Iraqi disarmament should be a step 'towards the goal of establishing in the Middle East; a zone free from weapons of mass destruction . . .' In other words, if Iraq gives up, or has given up, its doomsday weapons, so should Israel. After September 11, 2001, making relentless demands on Iraq while turning a blind eye to Israel will no longer work. 'The longer the sanctions go on,' said Denis Halliday, 'we are likely to see the emergence of a generation who will regard Saddam. Hussein as too moderate

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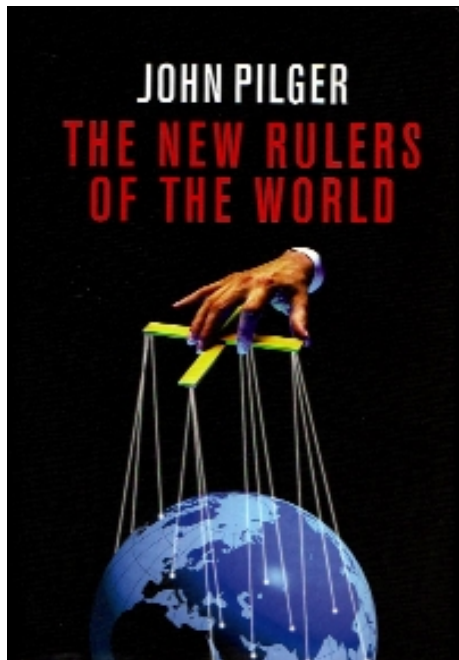
and too willing to listen to the West.'

Neither can the old double standard of justice apply. At the time of writing, forty-three countries have ratified the establishment of an International Criminal Court; sixty are needed. The United States opposes the court, fearing Americans will be indicted. Certainly, if Saddam Hussein is to be prosecuted, so should Ariel Sharon; and so should their Faustian sponsors in the West, past and present.

In a letter to the *New Statesman*, Peter Hain described as 'gratuitous' my reference to the possibility that he, along with other western politicians, might find himself summoned before the International Criminal Court. It is not gratuitous. A report for the UN Secretary-General, written by Professor Marc Bossuyt, a respected authority on international law, says that the 'sanctions regime against Iraq is unequivocally illegal under existing human rights law' and 'could raise questions under the Genocide Convention'. His subtext is that if the new court is to have authority, it cannot merely dispense the justice of the powerful.

A growing body of legal opinion agrees that the court has a duty, as Eric Herring wrote, to investigate 'not only the regime, but also the UN bombing and sanctions which have violated the human rights of Iraqi civilians on a vast scale ... It should also investigate those who assisted [Saddam Hussein's] programmes of now prohibited weapons, including western governments and companies.'

In 2000, Hain blocked a parliamentary request to publish the full list of law-breaking British companies. A prosecutor might ask why, then ask who has killed the most innocent people in Iraq: Saddam Hussein, or British and American policy-makers? The answer may well put the murderous tyrant in second place.



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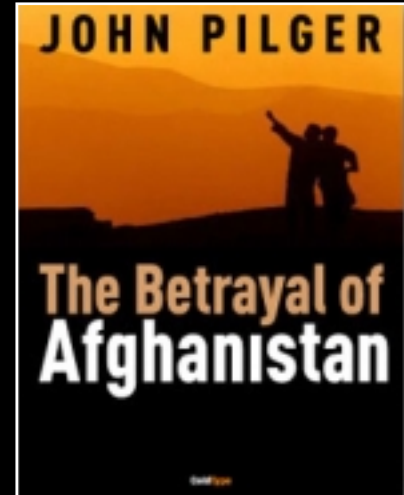
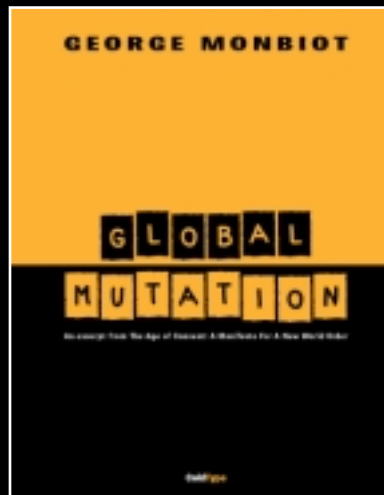
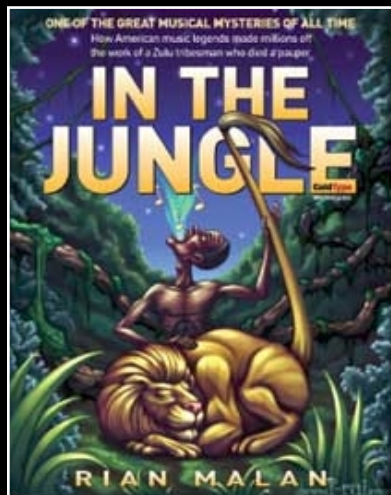
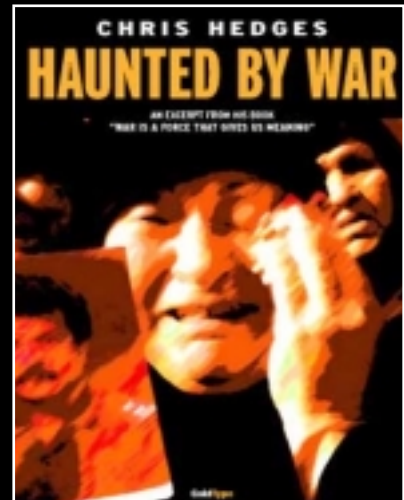
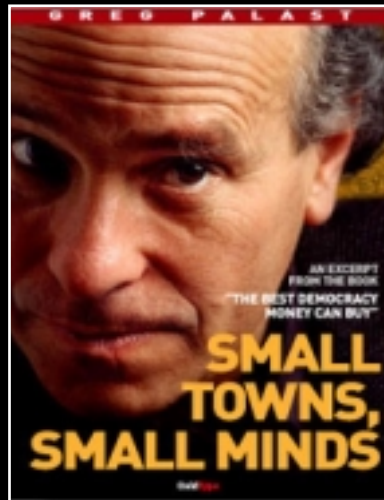
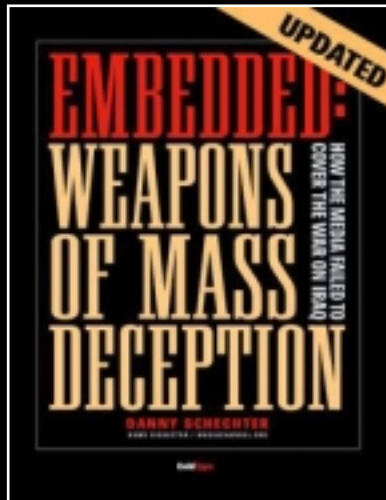
"The fervour of the book is compelling, its interview material often poignant, its revelations of human suffering in Iraq, Indonesia and in the heart of affluent Australia shocking.." – *New Statesman*, London

"John Pilger's reporting and analysis is rooted in compassion for the victims of the abuses of western power. A common thread running through 'New Rulers' is the failure of the mainstream media to report honestly and accurately on such abuses. This is no conspiracy. 'It is simply the way the system works', emphasises Pilger. It is a system that ensures 'access' and 'credibility' to those voices who are eager 'to credit more ethical intent to government policy-makers than the policy-makers themselves.' " – *Medialens*, London.

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