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## **THERE ARE NO SIGNS THAT IRAQ CAN BE BOMBED INTO STABILITY**

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Truth Out (April 09, 2017)

By Janine Jackson, FAIR | Interview

Janine Jackson: More than 200 men, women and children were killed in a US airstrike in the city of Mosul in northern Iraq last month. As bodies were pulled from the rubble, the Los Angeles Times offered counsel to US readers. "The death toll is a tragedy," wrote the paper's Doyle McManus.

Well, other news reports bow their heads longer before the "human toll," as it's often called. But that isn't the same as deep consideration of the war on ISIS -- launched as "targeted," "limited" airstrikes, and since expanded to include four countries, more than 50,000 bombs and, of course, over \$11 billion handed out to defense contractors. But the worry, expressed in a recent New York Times editorial, was that Congress hadn't officially authorized it: "duck[ing] their constitutional responsibility for making war by not passing legislation authorizing the anti-ISIS fight," was how the paper had it.

We are joined now for an alternative view by Raed Jarrar, government relations manager at the American Friends Service Committee. He joins us by phone from Washington, DC. Welcome back to CounterSpin, Raed Jarrar.

Well, if I can put it very crudely, the media assessment, or the assessment that you would take from media in the wake of the Mosul airstrike, is that civilian deaths are sad but unavoidable, especially because of ISIS and their methods. And the takeaway is, we can only hope that in the end it will have been "worth it." The damage and the harm from attacks like the one that we just saw, in other words, is not ignored, but it stands itself as justification for further attacks. And so one hardly knows how to intervene in that logic loop, if the goal is really to stop the dying.

I would intercede with two points. The first one is that the level of civilian casualties to US airstrikes, and to those forces supported and aided by the US, might actually reach to the point of war crimes. So we're not just talking about a tactical difference -- you know, we're offending some groups. The US apparently has changed its rules of engagement in the last few months, and this came after promises by President Trump to take the gloves off against ISIS. And he said that we have been "restrained," we have to take it all the way. So there is an intention there to start bombing more and to disregard civilian lives.

And under international law, these principles of proportionality and distinction are not optional; it's not an issue that a president can decide to tweak for political reasons. So that's my first point, is that the US might have been engaged in war crimes in the last few weeks because of the unprecedented level of civilian casualties in Syria and in Iraq, where hundreds of civilians are

being killed by airstrikes by the US, in what seems to be a new pattern of US engagement.

My second point is that I completely disagree with the premise of what's going on in Mosul. So if you were to listen to mainstream media in the US, or to the US government, what's going on is supposedly a liberation of Mosul. That's why any price should be given for this liberation of Mosul from this pure evil group, because at the end of the day, supposedly, we're getting all of these Iraqi civilians liberated.

And I disagree with this premise, because what's going on in Mosul is nothing more than a handover between one sectarian and violent militia, called ISIS, to another sectarian and violent militia, called the Iraqi government. Civilians in Mosul are not being liberated; in some cases [there is] worse treatment by the Iraqi government and militias affiliated with the Iraqi government. Human Rights Watch issued a few reports in the last few years. One of them is called "After Liberation Came Destruction," and in that report, Human Rights Watch documents how Iraqi forces, aided and funded and trained by the US, committed systemic war crimes in areas that they took back from ISIS, including ethnic cleansing and rape and torture and extrajudicial killing. We're talking about the same level of violations committed by ISIS.

So there is no liberation going on there. Iraq is not getting to a point where we're opening a new page. What's going on now is exactly another step, a continuation of the destruction of the country.

It's very similar to what happened a decade ago around Fallujah, when the US told us that we have to go bomb Fallujah, because it was controlled by Al Qaeda, by pure evil there, and everything will be OK after that. Nothing became OK after that. There is more death and more destruction and more extremism.

So that is my second point. My second point is that I challenge this narrative of liberation, and I doubt that what's on in Mosul is a change in course. It's actually another example of how the US and its allies have been operating in Iraq for the last 15 years or so.

In some ways, we want to talk about something being new, a loosening of rules of engagement, and we have seen a higher toll of civilian casualties, even with nominally a lower number of airstrikes, which suggests some sorts of change, and at the same time something not new at all.

You and I both participated in a tribunal that was to mark the anniversary of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, but you made the point at the time that that's not the beginning of the US making war on Iraq. And we may, and media may, divide things into timelines in order to organize them, but for Iraqis, and in terms of the US involvement there, it's almost a somewhat artificial delineation to cut it up into administrations, because there's more continuity, in a way, than change.

You're right, because what I talked about during that tribunal, and I think on your show in the past, is that from an Iraqi and regional perspective, the US war on Iraq started back in 1991. So we're talking about a war that has been going on for a quarter century, that has not really changed that much. Since 1991, the US has been engaged in direct and indirect military intervention in Iraq. That included bombing the country, imposing sanctions on the country, and trying to divide the nation into smaller ethnic and sectarian enclaves. This has been the US policy under President Bush, then Clinton, then second Bush, and then Obama and now Trump. So it hasn't really shifted that much. So there is, unfortunately, this continuity of death and destruction that the US has caused in Iraq.

And that's why many people, including myself, doubt that dropping more bombs in Iraq will fix it. Because this is exactly what the US has been doing since 1991, and there are no signs that Iraq can be bombed into stability or bombed into moderation. It seems like more bombs cause more instability and more extremism. And what's going on in Mosul now is no exception.

The US is continuing to drop bombs, and send military aid and sell weapons to groups in Iraq who are committing gross human rights violations on almost a daily basis. So it's not only the US bombs that are killing civilians. It's also the US allies, the tens of thousands of militiamen who are going right and left executing civilians, and pushing them out of their homes in these systemic ethnic-cleansing campaigns.

So I'm really surprised to see how this new campaign is packaged as a new idea, or something that we would expect some amazing new result out of it. Because for me, this is nothing [more] than another example of the US policies in Iraq; it has not worked in the past. Even when groups like Al Qaeda were weakened, we saw the rise of another group called ISIS. It's not really about Zaraqawi or Baghdadi or individuals, it's not about this extremist group or that extremist group. It's about the foundations of what Iraq is built on today. And these foundations are broken, and the country has not been put on a different track by the latest offensive on Mosul.

So that's why I'm really surprised by this media hype around the attack on Mosul, because I'm not sure what kind of collective amnesia do we expect to have as a nation, to believe that there is something new happening.

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