

VOICES

FOR CREATIVE NONVIOLENCE

vcnv.org

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Dear friends,

Shortly after we finished our July mailing, Kathy Kelly went straight to Kabul, Afghanistan, and I went on a trip through the Western U.S. that included a short speaking tour on the U.S. embargo of Cuba, a visit to a church working with immigrants in south Texas, and a peace walk through Olympia and Seattle, part of the Walk for a Nuclear Free Future.

As we were traveling, news was coming to us about the air strikes in Gaza and then the ground invasion. Many peace activists rightfully felt it was necessary to put their full effort behind opposing the entire system of support for this slaughter. Those who had experienced war in the West Bank and Gaza were especially poised to build vigorous pro-peace sentiment in this country. Meanwhile, Kathy and I continued to sustain other very important movements.

Likewise, there came a time in late August when the risk of war and bloodshed in Iraq was becoming so high that we felt we had to drop everything in order to address it.

Our roots--- as a peace group that was started specifically to oppose U.S. sanctions on Iraq that killed over half a million children under age 5, and as a group that stayed in Baghdad through the early years of the invasion--- put us in an appropriate place to counter much of the prevailing media revisions regarding past U.S. military incursions and policy in Iraq.

We feel that such revisionism seriously impacts public willingness to accept new military offensives, sent in to shore up U.S. corporate interests in Iraq.

And so we offer this early edition newsletter as a beacon, as a call to lucid thinking, and as an encouragement of our many readers to keep doing the work that builds peace and impedes war.

Buddy Bell, on behalf of
Kathy Kelly, Brian Terrell,
Cathy Breen, Nicole Heiden,
Tom Heuser, and
David Smith-Ferri

Because of the short duration between newsletters, we hesitate to enclose an envelope with this one. We want to circulate written material that might be useful, perhaps as fliers, sample texts for letters to the editor and letters to elected representatives, or even as a base for lesson plans at schools and Universities. But we don't want those of you who've supported us for so long to think that we're appealing to you to send us more money. We are genuinely grateful for all past support. If you and your community would want to help defray the cost of this newsletter, your generosity will be welcome. Our main aim is to raise awareness and generate nonviolent resistance to yet another war.

Behind the Iraqi crisis: the crushing of the nonviolent Sunni uprising

by Milan Rai

Originally printed in *Peace News*, August 2014

The crisis in Iraq has reached truly frightening proportions, with the brutal 'Islamic State in Iraq and Syria' (ISIS) controlling a large swathe of territory in both countries – something that may trigger the partition of Iraq.

It is easy to get the impression from the mainstream media that violent conflict between Sunni and Shia Muslims in Iraq is something that goes back millennia, and has merely re-surfaced in the recent conflict between Sunni ISIS and the Shia-dominated government of prime minister Nouri al-Maliki. This is a serious distortion of a complicated reality. (*Note: since this article was written, Maliki has stepped down and now holds the office of vice president.*)

Noam Chomsky has observed: "By now, Shiites and Sunnis are the bitterest enemies, thanks to the sledgehammer wielded by Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney (respectively the former US Secretary of Defense and vice president during the George W. Bush administration) and others like them who understand nothing beyond violence and terror and have helped to create conflicts that are now tearing the region to shreds."

Chomsky points out that the violence engulfing Iraq is a direct consequence of the US/UK invasion of 2003, and the sectarian system the two powers imposed on Iraq. For example, the US occupiers set up a governing council for Iraq in July 2003 structured along sectarian lines. Responsibility for the current violence lies with the aggressors.

Having acknowledged this truth, we can look at another part of this complex story.

The Maliki government was offered the opportunity last year to satisfy the legitimate concerns of the Sunni minority and to heal some of the divisions in the country.

That opportunity was offered by a nonviolent Sunni uprising in north-western Iraq that ran from December 2012 to December 2013.

It was Maliki's decision to denigrate, harass and then attack the Sunni protest movement that laid the basis for the dramatic Sunni military uprising in June.

While the mainstream media gave ISIS all the credit for the insurgency, Michael Stephens of the Royal United Services Institute has pointed out that the June turmoil was "a more general uprising by large groupings of disaffected communities throughout north-western Iraq and a product of years of social exclusion, poor governance and corruption by the Iraqi government."

Stephens was told by a Sunni university student from Mosul (which fell to ISIS-led forces in June): "There are two types of ISIS, those with the religion and the long beards, and those who are fighting to free us, don't confuse the two."

Independent journalist Patrick Cockburn wrote on 14 June: "It is becoming clear that ISIS is not the only Sunni militant group involved in the Sunni insurgents' multipronged offensive that was carefully coordinated. Among those engaged are the Jaish Naqshbandi, led by Saddam Hussein's former deputy Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri, former members of the Ba'ath party, the Mukhbarat security services and the Special Republican Guard. It is these [secular] groups, rather than ISIS, which captured Tikrit." (Tikrit was the home town of the late dictator Saddam Hussein, leader of the fascist Ba'ath party that ran Iraq until 2003.)

The alliance which has this summer triumphed over disintegrating Iraqi government forces is rooted in last year's Sunni nonviolent uprising. The protests were sparked in December 2012 by the arrest of aides to the then-finance minister Rafia al-Issawi, and threats to arrest him. Issawi, a Sunni, is from Fallujah.

Peace researcher Victoria Fontan was one of the few non-Iraqis to visit the heart of the movement in Fallujah in Anbar province in western Iraq.

Fontan, professor of peace and conflict studies at the University of Duhok in Iraqi Kurdistan, visited what she refers to as 'Occupy Fallujah' in July 2013, seven months after it began.

She wrote about the project in glowing terms in *Counterpunch*: "Somewhere far away from their capital city, a group of concerned citizens set up to physically occupy a piece of land at the entrance of

their town: they humbly call it 'the demonstration'. Its physical presence consists of a circle of tents articulated around a podium where they run their general assemblies. They maintain a twenty-four hour presence in this space, where they share everything from organic food to moral support. On Fridays, they distribute food to the poor and homeless. They meditate several times per day in a specially allocated tent to center themselves. Overall, they seek to share ideals of consensus, coherence with their spiritual beliefs, and inclusiveness with their local community..."

The leader of Occupy Fallujah, sheikh al-Hamoudi, told Fontan she was the first Westerner to visit the encampment: "As we parted, he asked me to think about the following point: if no one listens to

Occupy Fallujah when they are employing Western non-violent collective action strategies, how else could they make their voices heard?"

Sheikh al-Hamoudi was assassinated (with his son) in December 2013, a killing claimed by the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood, according to Fontan.

In the mainstream journal Foreign Policy, Kirk Sowell painted a rather more skeptical picture of the Sunni protest movement, which spread across the north-west: "Each protest site was run by political parties, or at more radical sites, by insurgent front groups." This didn't mean that the movement wasn't a spontaneous grassroots phenomenon as far as the participants were concerned, Sowell concedes.

According to Sowell, the Ramadi site was dominated by the Popular Committees (linked to the tribal 'Awakening' militias) and by the Anbar Coordinating Committee (linked to the Islamic Party). The second-largest group of Sunni protest sites was apparently run by a front group for the Ba'athist 'Jaish Naqshbandi' (JRTN) militia.

Despite these paramilitary linkages, the Sunni protest movement remained largely nonviolent until

the Maliki government stormed a protest camp in Huwija, in Kirkuk province, on 23 April last year.

Gunmen at the JRTN-controlled camp had killed a Sunni soldier in the government army, providing Maliki with an opportunity to rally non-Ba'athist Sunnis to the government's cause.

Instead, he sent in heavily-armed paramilitary forces, and they gunned down 44 unarmed protesters.



Wreckage. Oil flares on horizon. VCNV stock photo.

There was no immediate large-scale armed confrontation, and in fact this Sunni Bloody Sunday was followed by intense negotiations, which petered out in December 2013 when it became clear the government was demanding the closure of the protest camps in return for small concessions.

The protest movement, which now had a grassroots element outside the control of any particular political party or insurgent grouping, had at its core three demands: an end to the idea of federalism; equal opportunities for Sunnis and Shias (meaning an end to de-Ba'athification); and Maliki's resignation as prime minister – to be followed by new, free and fair elections. Maliki is hated by most Sunnis for having governed in a sectarian, discriminatory manner (with US weapons and support).

On 21 December 2013, an ISIS ambush near the Syrian border killed the commander of the Iraqi army's seventh division as well as several senior commanders.

Many Sunni leaders expressed strong support for the government's resulting campaign to hunt down ISIS forces in the west of Anbar province (well away from Sunni population centers).

Sowell comments: "At this point Maliki had a historical opportunity to unite the country in a fight against ISIS, which had not only been launching mass casualty attacks against Shiites but had also conducted a relentless campaign of assassination and extortion against Sunnis in Anbar and

elsewhere. But instead he decided to use the national groundswell to shut down the Ramadi protest site.”

Maliki claimed the camp was an al-Qa’eda headquarters; he arrested a Sunni MP (killing his brother and sister in the process); he (illegally) declared martial law on 28 December; and then he ordered the bulldozing of the Ramadi site on 30 December, leading to over a dozen deaths.

Maliki then compounded matters by first withdrawing the army from the cities in Anbar province, allowing insurgents to take control, and then beginning a shelling and bombing campaign against Fallujah.

A few months later, Human Rights Watch reported indiscriminate attacks on civilian areas in Fallujah by government forces: “An Iraqi government security officer based in Anbar, who spoke to Human Rights Watch on condition of anonymity, said government forces have targeted the hospital with mortars and artillery on 16 separate occasions.”

By March, Sunni clerics, Ba’athists, nationalists, tribal groups, and al-Qa’eda (which had disowned ISIS in February) were cooperating in a coordinated military command.

In other words, they had re-established the Sunni insurgent coalition that devastated Iraq in 2006, and that was broken up by US bribery, turning tribal insurgent groups into anti-al-Qa’eda ‘Awakening Councils’ in 2007.

What has happened in 2014 is that most of this Sunni coalition has decided to merge with well-funded, well-trained ISIS forces, leading to the ejection of government forces from Mosul and a string of other towns and cities in June.

ISIS is attempting to stamp its authority on the entire Sunni insurgency. It is unlikely to be able to fully disarm all the other groups, and history suggests it will be unable to stop itself alienating the Sunni population, as its precursor, al-Qa’eda in Iraq, did.

That is, unless outside forces pose a unifying threat to the Sunni community.

The triumph of ISIS was far from inevitable.

The descent into sectarian civil war was far from inevitable.

On Worthier Victims

by Buddy Bell

If someone is not accustomed to hearing much about death and suffering, it can be very upsetting to suddenly hear that a human being was brutally killed in some foreign location. Another someone who has a larger context in which to place that death, while not less upset, might feel less of a sense of momentary kneejerk urgency regarding that singular piece of news. Put in another way, the increment between 0 and 1 human deaths feels intuitively much greater than that between 1000 and 1001 human deaths.

What the first ‘someone’ lacks is proportion. This kind of haziness has been exploited, in one generation after another, as a foundation to construct justifications for war. Those who want to justify war don’t want us to see, let alone value, the first 1000 human beings.

Media attention to the daily murderous instability in Iraq and Afghanistan has been sorely lacking. Even the consistently repeating deaths and injuries of U.S. soldiers receive only momentary pause. Yet when General Harold Greene was recently killed in a ‘green on blue’ attack or when James Foley and Steven Sotloff were beheaded, the story moves to the top of the page for days; people talk; the dead have names. It looks like there is an acute crisis on our hands when actually it is a chronic one.

The reasons for renewed energy on the part of the media go beyond the pure attention-grabbing novelty of these killings. There is an internalized perception of self-superiority, to which viewers and readers often respond, and from which reporters and editors are not necessarily immune. Ever-ambitious politicians, especially those who are bought by defense contractors and resource extraction industries, construct the case for starting or widening wars in this context. The shooting of a general at a training facility is seen as more vile than breaking down the door and shooting into a family home. Beheading one’s victims becomes more disgusting than burning them alive with a hellfire missile or with white phosphorous. And for some reason, I haven’t heard Dick Cheney on the radio saying that ISIS waterboarding is not torture.

If we could somehow put aside the double-standards, what would the picture in Iraq look like?

Two facts would not be in doubt: ISIS is a murderous threat to the people in its immediate vicinity and U.S. military force has often been a murderous threat to people in its immediate vicinity and beyond.

History is not on the side of the U.S. military. The War on Terror--- ostensibly meant to destroy Al-Qaeda, a terrorist group with little consolidated territory of its own at the time, zero in Iraq--- has brought us to the point where a worse group is controlling and governing a third of Iraq and a third of Syria next to that. The Iraq War never led to building a cohesive state in the shell of the one it completely and rapidly dismantled.

Sectarian divisions in the government excluded a large Sunni population, and the U.S. gave weapons and money to preferred local Shi'a militias. Baghdad became violently segregated. The standard of living declined for many and rose for a few. Oil companies were not hurting very much, and people noticed it. The Pentagon could not or would not address the problem of Christian extremists embedding themselves with U.S. Army and Blackwater mercenaries. I haven't yet gone into the torture at Abu Ghraib, the poisoning of Fallujah, the massacre in Nisoor Square. All of these factors were generators of unemployment, aimlessness and trauma among young people who were and continue to be vulnerable to manipulation by ambitious warlords.

Whether the U.S. sends ground forces, drones or conventional aircraft to target ISIS fighters, they will end up making the problem worse. Sending planes to bomb high-level leaders will have the effect of encouraging the most extreme behavior possible among militia fighters. The most extreme and brutal will be the most likely successor to fill a power vacuum.

For the most part, the U.S. ought to be authentically extracting itself from the sovereign country of Iraq.

If U.S. citizens working in Iraq need the protection of the U.S. military, that is a sign that these citizens should leave along with the military, or else stay at their own risk. This of course would not be in the

short-term interest of U.S. companies, but it *would* be in the long-term interest of the Iraqi and U.S. populations: ISIS stands to lose significant power once its major unifying antagonist is no longer on the scene.

If there is a helpful role for the U.S. and other countries to play, it has to do with arresting the cycle of revenge. This can be accomplished by: encouraging Iraq's government to form a more equitable power-sharing structure; ending all interference in Iraq's elections; paying for the medical treatment of those maimed by U.S. bombs and munitions; engaging diplomatically with wealthy neighbors Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey to help Iraqis

locally administer a system that will supply Iraqis with basic human needs--- clean water, food, shelter, medicine; and providing meaningful help to Iraqi entrepreneurs who can create employment.

If such measures were promised and demonstrated on the frontier of ISIS control, their appeal may be strong enough to encourage potential defectors who might elude the more brutal ideologues in their camps and successfully escape with their lives. (If this is to happen, the defectors would also need to have confidence in a government de-militarization and re-entry system.) Multiplied enough times, such defections could disable ISIS, as well as other militias. Those who would call this set of ideas a pipe dream should ask themselves what they would call another campaign of bombing when alternatives haven't yet been attempted.

The U.S. and the U.K. can start paying for these humanitarian measures with money they would have spent anyway: on the order of \$110,000 for each hellfire missile they plan to drop in Iraq.



Kathy Kelly and children, Basra. Photo by Alan Pogue.

What about the Incubators?

by Kathy Kelly
April 13, 2000

It feels oddly like being at a wake in a funeral home. Our four delegation members whisper together as we wait to tour the Al Mansour Children's wing at the Saddam City Medical Centre. The Director is away, so someone has been sent to find a senior doctor to brief us. As I flip open my diary, it dawns on me that at this time four years ago, March 1996, the first Voices in the Wilderness delegation visited Iraq. 30 delegations later not much has changed within this hospital. What must the doctors and nurses think as one delegation after another hears the litany of shortages and views the dying children?

When a doctor finally enters the office, my grim mood lifts immediately; it's Dr. Qusay Al Rahim, of whom I've spoken so often, to so many groups in the U.S. My companions meeting him for the first time will probably feel the same warmth towards him as I do, and hold him in the same esteem. He draws forth a sense that we're working, in concert, to solve intractable problems, that even little gains, in the face of ridiculous odds, are rewarding. I wonder how he maintains his quiet, indomitable strength.

Two years ago, when I first met him, he solicitously accompanied us up to his ward, apologizing for the elevator that didn't work, the hallways that were dark because they had no light bulbs. Suddenly he raced away in response to a furor down the hall. Hospital visitors were shouting for help at the bedside of Feryal, a 7-month-old baby, whose mother was sobbing frantically. Feryal had just suffered a cardiac arrest. Dr. Qusay swiftly bent over her and administered mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Feryal's heart gave out in a fight against malnourishment plus septicaemia — full body infection. The hospital lacked both the nutrients and the antibiotics this little one desperately needed. I watched Dr. Qusay face the anguished mother to pronounce the verdict, "I am sorry, but your child cannot live. We have not the oxygen, we



have not the tube." How many times, since then, has Dr. Qusay felt shattered, having to speak tragic words to disbelieving parents?

Now he is explaining to us that in a very real way he thinks we are all fathers and mothers to these children, that it's a challenge to invent new ways to help them. And when something works, "well, you see, this keeps you hopeful." He carefully details some of the greatest problems they presently face — they've run out of high protein biscuits formerly supplied by UNICEF and they lack immunizations for MMR (measles, mumps and rubella). Actually, sufficient batches of the vaccine arrive, but electrical outages interfere with proper storage, damaging the vaccines. So far, his tone has been that of a kindly teacher, one who wants us to understand.

But then he lowers his head and shakes it back and forth several times. "We had a terrible tragedy recently. Our incubators are old and broken down, but some we try to repair. We placed an infant inside a patched incubator, thinking it would work, but the sealant was faulty, and the baby grew very cold. In fact, we lost that baby."

I jotted down in my notebook, "Incubators — mom!!" Shortly before the Gulf War began, I applied to join the Gulf Peace Team, a non-violent, non-aligned encampment that would position itself on the border between Saudi Arabia and Iraq, between the warring parties. The organizers placed me on a waiting list. To my surprise, I learned that if I could be in Boston in two days, I could join a U.S.

contingent leaving on a plane that would be the last to land in Baghdad before the bombing began. I had just enough time for a hurried visit to my parents. Of course, they tried their hardest to dissuade me from going. As I flew out their door, the last thing I heard was my mother calling out, in her thick Irish brogue, "What about the

incubators?! Kathy! What about the incubators?!"

She was referring to testimony from Nayireh, a young Kuwaiti girl, who told the U.S. Congress that she had witnessed invading Iraqi soldiers barge

into a Kuwaiti hospital and steal the equipment. With luminous eyes and a compelling presence, she told of her horror as she watched the menacing soldiers dump babies out of incubators. Months later, when the war was a distant memory, reporters learned that "Nayireh" was actually the daughter of a Kuwaiti emir, that doctors in Kuwait could not corroborate her testimony, that in fact the supposedly stolen incubators had been placed carefully in storage during the invasion, and that the Hill and Knowlton Public Relations firm had rehearsed with the young woman how to give apparently false testimony effectively.

The Desert Storm bombardment destroyed Iraq's electrical grid. Refrigeration units, sewage and sanitation facilities, and all sorts of valuable equipment were ruined. Life-saving devices found in a modern hospital were rendered useless. As the Allied bombing went on and on, my mother's question became more and more relevant, yet went largely unasked. "What about the incubators?"

Now, when our teams visit Iraq, following nine and a half years of the most comprehensive state of siege ever imposed in modern history, we see incubators, broken and irreparable, stacked up against the walls of hospital obstetrics wards. Sanctions have prevented Iraqis from importing new incubators and from getting needed spare parts to repair old ones. And this is only one vitally needed item that sanctions prohibit.

Dr. Qusay's heroism is commendable. Earnest as ever, he tells us of other methods he wants to pursue, in the wake of the tragedy incurred by an irreparable incubator. "I have heard about, maybe you know it, the kangaroo method and this they do in Australia. I tell the mothers of tiny infants to try it. They can place the baby between their breasts and wrap themselves in a garment and this may keep the baby warm enough. Or I tell them to try to find gauze and cellophane and with this they might recreate conditions like an incubator. You see, we must invent and try to cope."

I wonder what would happen if Dr. Qusay testified before Congress as Nayireh did 10 years ago. Would we respond with the same moral outrage now that such actions are American policy? Would we mobilize to end sanctions with the same fervor that drove us to destroy Iraq, and its incubators and its babies? Now, as then, any mother, Kuwaiti or Iraqi, can tell you child sacrifice is wrong.

Telephone Calls from Iraq

by Cathy Breen

I was just called to the downstairs phone in our house. A woman from Baghdad crying out in Arabic, "Please help us, please help us! Explosions! Explosions!" I couldn't make out much more and felt totally helpless to know how to respond, not to mention how inept I am in Arabic. So often in the last months this has been the case. Telephone calls from Turkey, from Lebanon, from Iraq....from relatives of Iraqis in the states, in Canada. Can you help us? Sometimes I don't have it in me to answer the phone. We have friends within Iraq who are being targeted, who live in open vulnerable areas, who contact us to ask if we can find a country that will take them and their families? Tragically, we [the US] have made all Iraqis the "enemy" and, despite our contacts, we have not yet been able to find countries that will grant them visas, or offer them resettlement.

So many times over the last weeks I have wanted to write, but I have felt overwhelmed and paralyzed, not knowing where to begin.

A friend emails from Iraq: "The government says don't drink the water. There are dead bodies floating in the river." A doctor friend writes from Baghdad: "Things became beyond the scope of our minds....the scene in Iraq is very complicated and needs papers [explanation] for outside people." Another friend: "We live with fear. I pray to GOD to finish this tragedy...Really it is a dirty game happening here in Iraq, and the people are the losers." A recent email from someone who has been in hiding as militant militias are coming to his family home in Baghdad looking for men to kidnap or kill: "Yesterday I made a search for an empty apartment or small house ...but in one of them I found many refugees from southern cities. They are living in schools, or a small house, some having ten families. Their situation is so bad that many of them wish to go back home....let us see what will happen and keep praying for the safety of the kids."

Perhaps it was in nursing school that I first learned, if you don't document something, it didn't happen. Maybe that is why I have religiously over years found myself taking notes, keeping tallies on the number of dead, documenting stories of human suffering as a result of our wars.

The total figure of reported deaths in May was an alarming 2,249. But even this figure did not warrant U.S. media attention. Something shifted in June. When ISIS (militantly anti-Shia) took Mosul in early June and later that month declared the establishment of a caliphate, Iraq suddenly reappeared with force in the media: "The specter of sectarian war and partition in Iraq grew on Friday as the country's top Shiite cleric implored his followers to take up arms against an insurgent army of marauding Sunni extremists militants who have captured broad stretches of northern territory this week in a sweep toward Baghdad." (NY Times front page, June 14, 2014)

The death toll in June was reported at 5,456 by antiwar.com. "ISIS booty includes two airports, banks as it takes control of Iraq's 2nd largest city" (McClatchy, June 10, 2014); "Security Forces Accused Again of Killing Prisoners; Over 300 Killed Across Iraq" (Margaret Griffis Antiwar.com, June 23, 2014); "Over 500 Killed in Iraq Carnage" (antiwar.com, June 17, 2014); "ISIS Caliphate Has Baghdad Worried Because of Appeal to Angry Young Sunnis" (Patrick Cockburn, June 30, 2014).

Also in June, Obama sent 300 military advisors to Iraq, and the Grand Ayatollah Al Sistani called for new leadership and declared a *fatwa* calling thousands of Shia to take up arms. "In July over 5,000 Killed across Iraq." (Margaret Griffis, Antiwar.com, July 31, 2014) And now, the US is not only engaging in "targeted airstrikes" again in Iraq, but sending arms directly to Iraqi Kurds. Military force once again in the guise of humanitarian ends! The media portrays us as heroes saving the Yazidi population besieged in the mountains, while we might as well be pulling the trigger as we rush weapons to Israel to bomb innocent civilians in Gaza!!! How can we not be affected by this madness?

A couple of days ago an Iraqi friend said with great relief over the phone, "Now we can breathe a little easier." Two of his married daughters, together with their spouses and children were forced to flee the northern town of Mosul in Iraq last month. Chaldean Christians, they left everything behind: possessions,

home, employment, school for the children, car, etc. My friend, a refugee himself had been resettled to Canada some years ago. In past years he acted as one of my trusted translators and guides in Damascus, Syria where he, his wife and several of their children had fled from Iraq.

He described how, together with hundreds of others, the young families were denied entrance at the Turkish border and had to sleep on the ground. One of his grand-daughters is a severely handicapped ten year old. I remember holding her in my arms as a three year old in Damascus. Given no hope for resettlement as refugees in Syria, this young family had no option but to return to Iraq. Now they have fled Iraq a second time. After two heart-wrenchingly painful days, the Turkish border was reopened and they were mercifully granted entrance.

They have joined the millions of refugees Turkey has taken from Syria and Iraq. "Now a new suffering is waiting for them," says my former translator, "due to the complicated and long procedures of the High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR)." Not able to

work legally, and not speaking the language, how will they manage? At least for the immediate future they will be able to survive.

Cathy Breen lived in Iraq during the 2003 bombing and has worked steadily with Iraqi refugees in Syria up to late 2012. Since then she traveled to Iraq three times. She resides in New York City.



Boy with sheep. VCNV stock photo.

Carmen Trotta, of New York City, and Sherri Maurin, of San Francisco, traveled to Afghanistan last month as guests of the Afghan Peace Volunteers. The APV have recently opened a 'Borderfree Centre of Nonviolence,' which hosts a variety of community programs and events to engage local young people. Luke Nephew, of New York City, was also in Kabul one year ago helping Afghan youth to overcome trauma through art.

Brian Terrell and Sherri Maurin just returned from visiting the grassroots protest of a naval base hosting U.S. warships at Jeju Island, Korea. Brian lives in Iowa.

Cathy, Carmen, Sherri, Luke and Brian are available to share their experiences with classes and community groups. They can be contacted through Voices.

Break the Lock

by David Smith-Ferri

**Amman, Jordan
May, 2008**

Hiwa speaks

The Americans did not tell us they planned to stay.

They did not tell us they came to build a stadium to brandish their strength, an arena where helicopters circle and swoop like prehistoric birds of prey, where triceratops tanks trample our cities, where warplanes like weather systems hurl lightning from Iraq's blue skies. We stiffened as they flung open the doors to our country and a steady flow of Western architects, builders, and machinery entered.

They did not tell us they planned to invite terrorists into this arena, that Iraq would be a staging ground for apocalyptic combat, on every side the high ideals of honor and sacrifice fueling the battle, turning our soil red.

Eleven months later, in early 2004, waiting in a day labor line at our market in Kirkuk, we blew on our hands and rocked in our shoes to keep warm in pre-dawn darkness. The man who hired us that day did not tell us we were to work at a US military base in Tikrit. Ten hours later, en route home, the car that eased in front of our van did not signal it was wired with explosives.

Leaning over me like a thief in the molten wreckage, even the fire lied, flames licking my face and torso lied to me.

Whispering comforting words in my ears, they lulled me into a coma. But fifteen days later, I awoke like a newborn rubbed raw, screaming. And like a newborn, helpless, dependent, I went home.

My wife and children hid every mirror in our house. They would not tell me my face was a charred field, a sterile moonscape. Only the scars forming on my arms and hands and chest spoke the truth. Only these scars and a mirror I found a year later in a locked cabinet when my family left me alone in our house. I did not tell them I knew their secret, but O! Why had I lived to see the day? Was it to have my wife leave me, my children turn their back on me and walk away?

Four years later in Iraq, American helicopters still wheel and swoop, and snaking through our cities, military convoys hiss and rattle their tails. Their fangs are visible, but Iraqis are forgotten, locked in a cabinet, hidden like a secret. How many of us are incognito, unrecognizable? How many are defaced or have severed limbs, like broken statuary in a ruined garden? How many of us wear a map of our country on our face, our body? If my face must be a mirror of Iraq, then break the lock and bring it out of the cabinet. Let Americans see me, my shriveled nose and ears where cartilage burned, how my skin contracted as it heated. Let American fingers touch my scars. Let Americans befriend me. Send their weaponry away but let American hands help heal me.



Destroyed home, Amarah, Dec 1998. Photo by Alan Pogue.

Ferguson everywhere now

by Luke Nephew

Blood is dripping down our faces onto the stainless steel of the armored police van. The hot yellow light flickers against the angry eyes of six young black men. We are trembling in pain and rage. Our chests are heaving. We are still breathing. One man's eyes stare into mine.

"They didn't have to do that," he says. He is shaking. "How they hit me in the face when I'm already cuffed? Kicked me too."

We all chime in, recounting the details of how we were just brutalized.

"They kicked my ribs."
"They straight smacked my face."

"They scraped my skin across the asphalt."

We had just been arrested by the police on the streets of North County St. Louis for peacefully protesting the murder of another unarmed black person. Minutes ago, we were standing together calmly. We were talking, praying, listening, chanting and looking each other in the eyes. Then the police broke into the crowd and started grabbing people.

Everyone started to run. I got around one line only to meet the next line in riot gear. I was tackled to the ground. Multiple cops jumped on me. One grabbed my face and smashed it into the concrete. I felt one of them slam his knee onto the back of my neck. All around, the police were doing the same thing to innocent people. My brothers were laid flat on the ground with automatic weapons pointed at their heads.

I was dragged across the street and thrown at the foot of a cop car. The cops yelled, "masks on!" and pulled on their gear to protect themselves from tear gas. They let us choke with our hands cuffed behind our backs. Then we were pushed into the back of the police van. The last time I was handcuffed, beaten and put in a wagon like this was in Palestine.

I think of Gaza and look at the young black men by my side. Dehumanization. Whoever thinks Ferguson and Gaza are disconnected doesn't understand that we are in a desperate struggle against the poison of dehumanization. Wincing in pain, we catch our breath as the chaos continues outside. I heard the world is watching. But they can't see inside of this steel cage police van.

I'm here in Ferguson because I can be. And I can be here because of many privileges. I have my health. I have relationships with people who have offered their hospitality. I have freedom of

movement. I have access to compassion, which makes me want to respond when my family is under attack. I was on tour with my crew, the Peace Poets, and we had enough money for gas to drive here. In addition, no matter where I live or what my culture is, I have the privileges of white skin, which are significant in this moment as they are in all instances in this country. All these are privileges that many people do not have, and so

I must first recognize that these factors and many more have allowed me to come here to St. Louis during this moment of crisis.

Beyond that, there are a number of personal reasons as a human being and strategic reasons as an organizer, educator and artist that brought me here. The source of my pain and rage is clear: I see and feel all people as my family. In the United States, my family members with darker skin are systematically criminalized, consistently killed and regularly denied justice. These are my brothers and sisters. I'm in the streets of Ferguson to demand justice for my brother Mike Brown and for Ramarley Graham, Anthony Baez, Hilton Vega, Nicholas Hayward Jr., Shantel Davis and all the many more. I'm also here because I see the repression as connected to the violence of white supremacy, misogyny, homophobia and xenophobia. This connection reminds me of what Frederick Douglass once wrote: "I will be a slave until all my people are free."

Inches away from my face, another brother is



Bombed schoolyard, Baghdad. Photo by Doug Johnson.

pushed into a separate area of the armored van on the other side of bulletproof glass. Bring the cameras in here. This is the crisis. The emergency. He writhes in pain, his face contorted by the burning of pepper spray. We all went silent for five seconds. They must have put him alone so we couldn't even lend our shoulders for him to wipe the burning off his face. He was right next to me but I couldn't reach him.

I yelled through the glass, "You all right, brother? You breathing?"

He shakes his head no and utters, "I can't breathe..."

His head shook, his body convulsed. We yelled for the cops to help him. I screamed to get my voice to the front of the van, where the cop sat in the driver's seat waiting for the order to take us away.

"Heeeeeey! He can't breathe! Open the door! He needs help! Hey!" I yelled.

Through the two layers of scratched bulletproof glass, I saw the cop casually raise his white-skinned hand with an open palm as if to say, "Oh well. Too bad."

I shuddered in rage. This is Ferguson. This is every city in America. There are white hands causing and dismissing the unspeakable anguish of black brothers and sisters. There is a debate about what's happening here. But those talking can't see these vile, sinister inhumane racist

acts on your television screen. They can't hear me yelling through the glass to this brother, "Look at me brother! Say something!"

We beg him to stay strong. I strain my eyes to see if his chest is still moving. It is. He rests his head on the glass, tears uncontrollably flowing out of his clenched eyes. I place my bloody forehead against

the glass next to his, trying to talk him through the worst moments of the chemicals singeing his skin. In my throbbing head, I'm terrified he won't make it. I renew my promise to never stop fighting the oppression raging against our family. His tears and my blood are smeared against the glass of the police van. Michael Brown's blood on the concrete. Same blood. His mother's tears and cries for justice. Same tears.

With zip ties cutting off the blood flow to our hands, we keep talking about the police violence and ideas for solutions. These young men are awake. Their courageous resistance is why we're here. At 5 a.m. when we're processed and let out onto the streets of St. Louis, we embrace. We're all asking the same question: "You going out there tonight again?"

Bravery abounds here, and what I'm realizing now is that what we must recognize Ferguson all around us: in our communities and all the way out to Palestine and countless other places. We must see the disgusting oppression and powerful resistance. We must raise up the beautiful voices of the people screaming, "Don't shoot." If we've been made blind by media and mis-education, we must strain our eyes like I did to see if that young man was still

breathing. When we look, we'll find that we are fighting for dignity and survival in the face of countless insidious acts of hate in all corners of this country. We cannot look away.

Of course, not everyone can be in Missouri right now, and not everyone can block the tanks in Gaza.



Boy with prosthetic leg. UNICEF photo.

But still we are all being called to respond. Speak out for justice and dignity! Call out white supremacy and racism! Love your community, your family and ourselves enough to see this moment for what it is: A brave invitation to escalate our struggle for human dignity.

Everywhere Ferguson now.

U.S. TO IRAQIS: HELP OR HINDRANCE?

1979 Iranian revolution; Iran expels foreign oil companies.

1983 U.S. envoy Donald Rumsfeld meets with Iraq President Saddam Hussein; U.S. supplies Iraq with intelligence and conventional weapons for use in the Iran-Iraq War. *Newsweek* Sep. 16, 2002

Mid-1980s Commerce Department export documents indicate shipment of helicopters, chemical analysis equipment to Iraq; the Center for Disease Control releases nearly 2 dozen viral and bacterial samples to Iraqi scientists. *Congressional Record* Sep. 20, 2002 (Senate)

1987-88 Thousands of Iraq's Kurdish minority massacred in gas attacks; reportedly sprayed from helicopters. U.S. blames Iran.

1990-91 U.S. repels invasion of Kuwait but allows Hussein to retain his attack helicopters; he uses them to gun down mass popular uprisings.

1990-2011 Sanctions kill more than 500,000 children under age 5 and debilitates Iraq's infrastructure; Iraq War kills over 100,000 civilians.

2009-10 U.S. Army intelligence agents ordered to gather intelligence on Sunnis vocally opposed to Iraq Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's reelection. *Account of Army Pvt. Chelsea Manning to the NY Times* June 15, 2014

2011 Maliki abuses the legal system to target Sunni political opposition.

Jun 2013 CIA gives weapons to Syrian rebels, some of whom join ISIS.

2013-14 Maliki attacks Sunni protest movement, leading to violent rebellion; U.S. supplies Maliki with weapons; mortar fire rains on civilians.

Aug-Sep 2014 U.S. planes are sent to bomb ISIS fighters, who are killing thousands of Iraqi civilians.

Timeline compiled by Buddy Bell.

For use as a flyer please contact Voices for Creative Nonviolence at 773-878-3815.



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