

Raed Jarrar, American Friends Service Committee

Who will save the baby on the mountaintop?

Last year, President Obama was the 4th consecutive US president to announce his intention to bomb Iraq. I remember watching George Bush, Sr. deliver the address in 1991, Bill Clinton later that decade, and of course we all remember George W. Bush's speech in 2003. But unlike the first speeches that were mixed with the noise of US bombs falling on my neighborhood in Baghdad, this time I was a US citizen living in Washington, DC.

The official reason given by President Obama for the new war in Iraq was not to protect Iraq's neighbors, find weapons of mass destruction, or spread democracy. It was saving little thirsty babies trapped on top of mount Sinjar in Northern Iraq. "We can act carefully and responsibly to prevent a potential act of genocide," he said.

"Today, America is coming to help," Obama told Yazidis stuck on the mountain.

It is hard to oppose wars that would supposedly save babies from bad guys. I saw a picture of a Yazidi baby in the news, stuck on top of that mountain. I felt as though he was looking right at me. It is also hard to oppose wars that are supposedly waged to defeat a pure evil, genocidal groups.

Although the US has been bombing Iraq for over 25 years now, the notion that we can bomb the country into moderation and stability is still alive in DC. Non-violent strategies and tactics are often viewed as either naive or as possible accessories that can be utilized during military interventions.

Moreover, I don't think many people would disagree that the situation in Iraq is disastrous, but effective solution should start with getting an accurate diagnosis of the situation. While ISIS is an extremely violent and destructive group, mainstream analysis of Iraq portray it as if it's the only problem there. As if defeating ISIS will end violence, and as if we have legitimate "good guy" partners helping fight this scary monster.

War is ugly. I can't really describe it in words, and I don't think anyone could. That noise of an explosion outside. The sound of our home's windows shattering. It's that feeling in my stomach. It's the silence between bombs, the darkness, the smell, the fear. War for me is that unnegotiable proximity to death and destruction.

For Washington, DC, though, war is nothing more than a policy option – some might describe it as DC's preferred option. It's the tool we use to deal with any and all problems. Whether it is fighting Ebola, getting rid of bad guys around the world, or feeding babies, it is almost impossible for policy makers to see a problem it doesn't want to drop a bomb on - or at least drop some food and water from a military plane.

The problem is not just in DC, though. Many Americans, the vast majority of whom have never experienced war, still fall for arguments justifying it. As a nation, we're still open to discussing war as an answer to a wide latitude of problems around the world.

In addition, a more accurate analysis of the situation may suggest that ISIS is nothing more than a symptom of a problem, and that many of our partners and allies are as brutal and destructive as ISIS. It's not about ISIS alone - it's about violence, sectarianism and foreign interventions. It's about the rise of religious and ethnic sub-identities, and the demise of the rule of law.

Iraq is devastated by violence and extremism, but it will not be bombed into peace and moderation. There are many viable, nonviolent solutions that can and will put the country on the right path, but all such solutions must be Iraqi-led. The US has no political or moral capital left to play a role of a pacemaker or even a broker for peace. All the US can do at this stage is stop causing additional harm by direct and indirect military interventions, then work with our friends and foes in the region to create a space for Iraqis to start the reconciliation, reconstruction and healing process

I have no doubt there is an Iraqi baby who needs to be saved right now -- but it will not be the US who saves that baby though, and it will not be a laser-guided bomb that would protect her.

Raed Jarrar
Government Relations Manager
Office of Public Policy and Advocacy
American Friends Service Committee
1822 R St NW
Washington, DC 20009
[\(202\) 483-3341](tel:2024833341) ext 103