

The U.S. War against the Iraqi People

American sanctions are weapons of mass destruction

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2000

If you were to ask most people in this country to define the Persian Gulf War, they probably would describe it as a victorious, six-week long military conflict, in which the U.S. repelled Iraq, a hostile invader, and restored the sovereignty and dignity of a small nation, Kuwait.

Very few would include in that definition the unabated slaughter taking place in Iraq as a result of the US/UN sanctions as well as the almost daily bombings of that country.

However, like previous so-called humanitarian missions in Vietnam, Panama and Somalia, the road paved with “good intentions” becomes a trail of corpses. In 1991, after 42 days of massive bombing raids, one of the worst ecological disasters of the previous century, and an orgy of patriotic hoopla at home, the grand imperial alliance launched by U.S. President George Bush reigned triumphant in Iraq. Nine years later, a silent and equally hideous war rages on.

This ongoing conflict has several motives, but ones that ultimately differ little with those of past American imperialist adventures: power and control. The imperial West seeks removal of Saddam Hussein and his substitution with a compliant client government, the further ravaging of Iraq’s infrastructure to halt its presence as a developmental model of Arab nationalism, and to return the country to its former colonial status as a source of cheap oil, subject to the whims of world capitalism.

Throughout last year and continuing into this one, daily attacks by American and British jets pounded military and civilian targets alike, in what even *The New York Times* calls a “war of attrition.” In reality, the imperial powers make no distinction between the two targets of opportunity, usually claiming their attacks are “retaliation” against “aggression” which often amounts to little more than Iraqi radar locking-on to foreign fighter-bombers in their country’s air space.

Paired With Another Falsity

The bombing of Iraqi defense systems is designed to prevent American and British planes from being shot down. This Orwellian concept of self-defense is usually paired with another falsity, that of claiming the Iraqi military is violating “no-fly zones” set up at the northern and southern regions of the country, ostensibly to protect oppressed Kurds and Shiites from the Ba’athi regime.

However, the no-fly zones are solely the creation of American and British imperialism and have no basis in either international law or in any of the specific UN resolutions tied to Iraqi compliance after the Gulf War. Rather, they are designed with the intent of further destabilizing the Hussein regime by weakening his defensive capabilities and fomenting internal uprisings against his rule.

While the attacks center on Iraqi oil and military facilities, they also extract a terrible human toll as well. Last year, the U.S. bombed Iraq every day in January and February, and most of March, followed by a “two-week lull,” as

The New York Times put it, so the U.S. could concentrate on terrorizing Serbia. The NATO campaign in “defense” of Kosovo was strikingly similar to what the United Nations inflicted on Iraq in the Gulf War. According to the Left Business Observer “NATO...destroyed the infrastructure [of Serbia] and poisoned the environment of southeastern Europe.”

Daily Barrage in the Middle East

With Serbia’s capitulation secured, Britain and the U.S. returned to their daily barrage in the Middle East. April 29 saw 14 damaged homes and 20 injured in the northern city of Mosul; the following day an allied air attack killed a seven-member family and 250 of their sheep. Another attack on May 12 resulted in 12 civilian deaths in the northern no-fly zone. On August 17, air strikes in both the northern and southern zones killed 20 civilians, including 12 members of a single family. Almost 16,000 sorties were flown in 1999 in the no-fly zones without a single American or British casualty.

While hundreds of Iraqis have died last year from this undeclared air war alone, an even greater death toll, reaching into the millions, has resulted from the U.S./ UN-imposed economic sanctions. According to one World Health Organization (WHO) estimate, five thousand children under five die from the effects of sanctions every month—150 every day. Malnutrition levels are over 30 percent in children and high in adults as well, according to Denis Halliday, former UN coordinator of the oil-for-food program in Iraq.

The sanctions, which place heavy restrictions on the Iraqi government’s ability to sell oil, may be responsible for over two million deaths since their implementation. Utilizing intense saturation bombing by UN planes, Iraq’s oil refineries were among the military’s primary targets during the Gulf War. The country’s sole source of revenue on the international market was rendered inoperable. The sanctions also prevent the import of supplies that could repair the devastated infrastructure, with the predictable result, reported by the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs two years ago, that “public health services are near total collapse—basic medicines, lifesaving drugs and essential medical supplies are lacking throughout the country.” This is happening to a country that once provided health care on demand, so much so, that it attracted immigrants from across the Arab world to settle there.

The pretext behind the maintenance of the sanctions continually shifts so as to make Iraqi compliance difficult if not impossible. When the war was over, the U.S. insisted that Iraq pull its armed forces out of Kuwait. After this was done, incoming U.S. President Clinton decided that Iraqi possession of weapons of mass destruction (ones like those in the armories of every other major power in the region) was the key to the lifting of sanctions. The issue of the right of international supervision and inspection to disarm Iraq was the basis of the December 1998 massive bombings following Iraq’s expulsion of UN weapons inspectors.

According to international law, no country, including the U.S., has the right to bomb another unless under attack. Also, contrary to White House proclamations, no UN resolutions exist allowing the U.S. to carry out such actions against Iraq. UN Resolution 1154, passed in March 1998, says that in the event of Iraqi violations, the issue is to be sent to the Security Council, which decides how to handle the situation.

The U.S. undertook the late 1998 bombing claiming the resolution permits it in the clause stating there should be the “severest consequences” for Iraqi violations. But according to Phyllis Bennis of the Institute for Policy Studies, the phrase means matters are to be referred to the Security Council, as Russia, China, and France have argued, not bilateral air strikes.

Rabidly anti-Hussein chief UN weapons inspector Richard Butler issued a report, which was the US/UK pretext for the bombing, cited five violations out of hundreds of inspections, and even noted that the violations occurred in the context of a “majority [of] inspections taking place with Iraqi cooperation.”

In December of last year, the U.S. and Britain pushed through a resolution to reinstate weapons inspectors under a new group called the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC). Russia, France, and China—the traditional opponents of U.S. policy on Iraq—abstained from voting on the measure, but quietly pressured Iraq to accept. Basically, the measure calls for easing sanctions in exchange for a return of weapons inspectors.

Resolution Is A Ploy

The resolution is a ploy, granting the U.S. position, what Clinton Administration National Security Adviser Sandy Berger calls, “a greater degree of legitimacy...around the world.” According to Berger, with the passage of the resolution, “we’ve re-established...a consensus on certain things...” —on Iraq’s so-called noncompliance with UN resolutions, the need for weapons inspectors, and the lifting of sanctions when Iraq complies.

This false “consensus” (one that exists only in Berger’s head since there is stiff opposition to these measures across the world) fell apart early this year when the U.S. and Britain appointed Swedish disarmament expert Rolf Ekeus to head UNMOVIC. China, France, and Russia objected to his appointment because of his work with UNSCOM, the original UN inspection group, from 1991 to 1997. They charged his appointment would be an extension of UNSCOM, which was revealed last year to have been infiltrated by the CIA, relinquishing any credibility as a neutral agency.

This is confirmed by Scott Ritter, a former UN arms inspector, who wrote in his book, *Endgame*, that the CIA infiltrated UNSCOM immediately following the war, including “paramilitary covert operatives.” The CIA/inspectors were responsible for the 1993 destruction in Baghdad of Iraq’s only laboratory producing hoof-and-mouth vaccine, leading to an outbreak of an epidemic of the disease.

The architects of this carnage are pleased with their work on this “humanitarian” mission to rid Iraq of its weapons systems. U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright’s infamous statement that half a million children dead as a result of sanctions is a “reasonable price to pay,” is just one of many examples. NSA advisor Berger boasts that the sanctions are the most severe in the history of the world. At the same time, these courageous humanitarians claim they are protecting the Iraqi people while keeping the sanctions in place. Appearing in December 1998 on the TV interview show, *Meet the Press*, Albright claimed, “The United States and our allies have made sure that the people of Iraq have food.”

Clinton, Albright, and Secretary of Defense William Cohen have tried to place the blame for the widespread Iraqi suffering on the shoulders of Saddam Hussein and the ruling Ba’athi bureaucracy while absolving the American sanctions.

“The primary goal of U.S. policy is to help Iraq,” Beth Jones, a high ranking U.S. State Department official purred sweetly in a recent interview. James Rubin, department spokesperson, has made elaborate charges, and reported widely, that the Ba’athi state has stockpiled food and medicine for its elite and is building such luxurious amenities as a lake side village resort near Baghdad.

Opponents of the sanctions who have traveled to Iraq, and are concerned with their impact on people rather than Saddam’s private life, tell a different story. Denis Halliday, an Irish national who worked for the UN for 34 years, including 13 months in Iraq as its chief relief coordinator, quit in protest over the effects of the sanctions. Robert Watkins, head of the Red Cross in Iraq, called the sanctions “a natural disaster...by the forces of man.”

Anupama Rao Singh, UN Children’s Fund representative in Baghdad, tells of the breakdown of the social and economic structure in Iraq. “Ten years ago,” according to Singh, “malnutrition was almost nonexistent.”

Hans Von Sponeck, Halliday’s replacement as UN humanitarian coordinator, was also critical of the sanctions, and finally resigned his post under pressure in February. Von Sponeck, a German career UN official, had suffered the wrath of the U.S. and Britain which was pressing UN head Kofi Annan to have him dismissed. When the State Department’s Rubin was told of the resignation, he said, “Good.”

Von Sponeck, unlike Holbrooke, Rubin, or the rest of the State Department gang, has seen the Iraqi devastation firsthand. He charged that the oil-for-food program he headed was not meeting even minimum requirements to ease the impact of the embargo on the Iraqi people. He also advocated a delinkage of sanctions from inspections while voicing criticism of the U.S. for deliberately holding up approval of at least 1,000 contracts for goods bought under the oil-for-food deal. Despite his job dealing with humanitarian relief, Rubin thinks Von Sponeck “has no business advocating changes.”

What Von Sponeck’s business is, presumably then, is to shut up and toe the Pentagon line that Saddam is to blame because he is building resorts. But if he is, then nine-years of sanctions obviously hasn’t produced a dent in his regime, but has surely made more than a dent in his people’s lives.

The key mechanism determining how much and what can be imported into Iraq is a committee made up of the fifteen members of the Security Council, set up by UN Resolution 661. Each country has a veto that can prevent Iraq from buying specific items by claiming they may have a “dual” or military use. Included among the articles that have been denied are toasters, graphite for pencils, and surgical anesthetics because they allegedly have the potential for conversion into weapons.

The oil-for-food program, established in 1996 to provide humanitarian aid to Iraq, operates at a ceiling of \$5.2 billion every six months. While this measure would appear on the surface as providing some relief, at least \$30 billion a year is required to meet people’s basic needs, according to former relief coordinator Halliday. Plus, adding in the reparations Iraq is required to pay countries like Kuwait and Israel, the actual amount of aid that trickles down to the average person is about 25 cents.

Besides harming Iraqis, there are other potentially horrendous costs that are potentially attributable to the sanctions. There are widespread epidemics of preventable diseases that, according to the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization, “may spread to other countries in the Near East, seriously undermining food—security in the region.” Even Humanitarian aid can’t get into the country as long as the 661 Committee and UNSCOM declare it to have military use.

For example, vaccines require inactive disease agents, so shipments of such are blocked on the basis that they can be used to produce biological weapons. As a result, diseases have caused the deaths of millions of sheep and other animals, plunging a starving nation into further despair and isolation. For instance, Syria won’t allow Iraqi livestock to cross its border for fear of an epidemic.

New diseases are making their debut appearance as well, such as screw-worm, which isn’t native to the region. With recent revelations of UNSCOM agents being CIA spooks and the agency’s past covert actions involving biological warfare, like the swine fever epidemic in Cuba, speculation is rampant among activists that on top of economic war conducted by the U.S. and the UN, there is also an ongoing biological war that is being fought with the same weapons that they’re supposed to get rid of.

Patterns of American Imperialism

To anyone familiar with American imperialism’s rationales for its foreign interventions, there’s an all too familiar pattern here—an evil dictator, who is a threat to his neighbors and to his people—justifies force, sanctions, covert actions and manipulation of opposition groups. Racist and militarist propaganda that typically props up such campaigns (often projecting humanitarian imagery as well such as the urgency of protecting Kurds and Shiites or Kosovars), further reveals the colonial character of these missions. However, regarding the Middle East and Iraq, there is an exact historical antecedent of an Iraqi aggressor that had to be stopped by Western force.

On July 14, 1958, the U.S., under the guise of maintaining “self-determination,” deployed 14,000 American troops to Beirut to protect the “integrity and independence” of Lebanon after a pro-Western Iraqi premier, Nuri Said, was overthrown by a coalition of populist forces.

In response, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, his brother, CIA head Allen Dulles, and chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Nathan Twining met that same night. Their fear was that the coup could be the catalyst for the spread of Egyptian premier Gamal Abdel Nasser’s concept of pan-Arabist socialism and that he might “take over the whole area.” To counter the prospect of the West losing influence in the Middle East and halt the potential spread of populism, Twining proposed an area-wide counteroffensive, with the U.S. going into Lebanon, Britain into Iraq and Kuwait, Israel into the West Bank, which was then under Jordan’s control, and Turkey into Syria. The UN was to be used as a cover to provide moral justification.

What fueled imperialist fears of the specter of Nasserism was the potential loss of profitable access to the region’s oil resources. Kuwait was the richest producer at the time, along with Saudi Arabia, and Iran not far behind. Both the British and French had significant interests in Iraq, with the British owning half of the Iraq Petroleum Company at the time. With Pan-Arabist socialism and other nationalist movements possibly threatening Western oil profits throughout the region, the U.S. dressed up the confrontation in Cold War anti-communism through the specter of stopping Nasser.

However, when the new Iraqi government announced it wouldn't prevent access to its oil by the West, the threat diminished in importance and Lebanon and Kuwait were declared safe from "communist aggression." The following day, however, a cable was sent by Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd to London from the Iraq British embassy stating that, regarding Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, the U.S. and Britain "agree that at all costs these oil fields must be kept in Western hands."

The current northern and southern "no-fly" zones also have a precedent in destabilization operations. In 1972, four years after the Ba'ath Arab Socialist Party took power, Iraq announced the nationalization of its oil industry. In response, Nixon and Henry Kissinger, through their puppet, Iranian Shah Reza Pahlavi, planned to arm Iraqi Kurds in the north with \$16 million in arms. The intent was to weaken Iraq, but, according to the U.S. Congressional Pike Report, without giving them autonomy. It stated that "neither the foreign heads of state [the Shah], nor the president and Dr. Kissinger desired victory for our clients [Kurds]. They merely hoped...the insurgents...[are] capable of sustaining a level of hostility...to sap the resources of the neighboring state."

Eventually, aid to the Kurds was cut off when Hussein and the Shah signed the 1975 Algiers Accords where, in exchange for cutting ties to the Kurds, Iran got the Shatt al-Arab waterway. With the abandonment of the Kurds came years of savage repression that included thousands of deaths and tens of thousands of refugees, according to Jonathan Randal in his recent book, *After Such Knowledge, What Forgiveness*. The brutal repression also included about fifteen hundred villages bulldozed and the inhabitants deported to "Victory Villages" that were little more than concentration camps. That mattered little to the West particularly after its preoccupation with the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Given a free hand, Hussein launched a series of campaigns, the most vicious culminating in the so-called "Anfal" campaigns in 1987-88 where 700 Kurdish villages were depopulated and close to 200,000 people killed. The most infamous act occurred in the town of Halabja, where Iraqi warplanes dropped cyanide gas, resulting in 5,000 deaths.

Iraq Was The Official Ally

Actions by the West to weaken Iraq ceased in 1979, when the Iranian Revolution toppled the Shah and the specter of Islamic fundamentalism threatened U.S. dominance in the Middle East. Saddam saw his opportunity, declared the Algiers Accords void, and the long and bloody Iran-Iraq war ensued. The U.S. followed a policy of dual containment, arming both sides in order to produce mutual protracted instability. While the U.S. armed Iran secretly, later revealed in the Iran/Contra hearings, Iraq was the official ally, provided with intelligence reports of Iranian troop movements, biochemical weapons, and even information which resulted in the downing of an Iranian passenger plane, killing all 290 people aboard.

After the end of the war, followed by the collapse of the Eastern Bloc countries, the U.S. resumed its policy of reducing Iraq to its former colonial status. With the Soviet "threat" diminished, the Gulf War became the first step by murdering a quarter of a million people and destroying its infrastructure. The overall damage suffered by Iraq reached almost \$200 billion with a loss of \$20 billion of oil revenues in the first year alone. Because oil money supported the rest of the country's infrastructure, its loss meant the Iraqi people were plunged into instant poverty. United Nations sanctions were put in place to prevent economic recovery except under terms dictated by the West.

Free Market Nightmares

Iraq has the second largest oil reserves in the region after Saudi Arabia, and produced a highly developed society during the 1970s. Its free social services and plentiful jobs were the envy of those living under the free market nightmares of Jordan, Lebanon, and the Shah's Iran, many of who emigrated to Iraq.

Even though the Ba'athist party and ideology subscribes to a mix of pan-Arabism and socialism it also exhibited features of state capitalism. However, during the 1980s, its economy became increasingly mixed with private enterprise, especially as it increased trade relations with the U.S. during the war with Iran. One important link was

the Iraq Business Forum, led by Vietnam war criminal Henry Kissinger, whose membership included fifty of the most powerful American corporations, with trade exceeding \$1.5 billion in 1989.

Much of those sales were in foodstuffs, with Iraq importing 90 percent of its rice and 100 percent of its corn from the U.S., according to Minister of Trade, Mohammed Mandi Saleh in 1992. This vulnerability in food supply accounts for the devastation wrought by the sanctions. The reduction of ordinary people's living standards is in line with reducing Iraq to its former colonial status. Dr. Riad AlQaysi of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs commented, "The attempt [by the U.S.] is to decrease the living standard of the people of the entire region, depress wages, create competitiveness for jobs, and chop off development, particularly of attempts for industrial capacity at home."

Although Iraq has undergone waves of privatization prior to its 1991 defeat, that process has been accelerated since. In the June 1997 issue of *Toward Freedom*, Barbara Nimri Aziz wrote about privatization in car and truck production and distribution, previously under the domain of the Ba'athi state. She also noted the rise in private hospitals proliferating in a country where health care was previously provided to the public, free of charge. With medical imports cut off, hospitals reserve spaces for those with the money to pay for services.

Over the past few years, a tiny class of farmers and merchants has emerged which provide goods and services that the government has until recently provided. This wealthy strata could become a new ruling elite while former middle class employees of the Ba'athi state moonlight as street vendors in order to scrape by. Aziz quotes Ali, a former teacher fluent in English, now peddling fragrant oil. Before the sanctions, he had a car and took his family on yearly vacations, but now, "I could not even buy food for us."

The gains for Capital are clear. An unnamed American economist in Aziz's article relates that "International companies have not been allowed to operate inside Iraq for thirty years...We are in a stage of global capitalization and nations who are telling the whole world to 'open your markets to international investment' could have a lot to gain in Iraq." Sanctions, he says, could be lifted if the Ba'athi state allows greater access to its markets by the West. Last May, the U.S. considered lifting the embargo if foreign (i.e., American) companies were allowed to invest in the oil industry.

Meanwhile, the U.S. has been waging covert actions, much like those used to topple Mossadeq in Iran, 1953, Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala, 1954, and Allende in Chile, 1973, in the hope of toppling Saddam. That strategy in Iraq similarly relied on hopes of a palace coup d'etat from the military, but with none forthcoming, the strategy shifted to an emphasis on grassroots opposition. Even with the December 1998 mass bombing acting as a cover for internal insurgents, they failed to act. Many of them subsequently paid with their lives at the hands of Hussein's government.

The U.S. Congress passed the Iraq Liberation Act, earmarking \$97 million for at least seven eligible groups. Among these are the Iraqi National Congress, headed by Ahmed Chalabi, a failed banker and MIT graduate, as well as Sharif Ali bin Al-Hussein, the "next in line to the Iraqi throne and Leader of the Constitutional Monarchy Movement."

Trained in the Art of Butchering

Since late October, 1999, four Iraqis, including two former officers in the Iraqi army, have undergone training at the U.S. Air Force special operations headquarters in Florida creating a military cadre bent on toppling the Ba'athi state, as well as developing "a military in an emerging state," according to *The New York Times*. As with Latin American officers trained at the School of the Americas, the new Iraqi state and its accompanying military will be trained in the art of butchering the oppressed for the maintenance of the emerging Iraqi bourgeoisie and its imperial brokers.

Saddam and his cronies remain cushioned for now despite these attempts and the constant onslaught of bombings and sanctions. For the moment, they are destroying any hope for a real revolution which will overthrow U.S. imperialism in the Middle East and Iraq.

Help Stop the Sanctions (sidebar)

Groups all across the world are organizing to stop the mass murder of Iraqi citizens by the US/UN sanctions. Contact Voices in the Wilderness, 1460 W. Carmen Ave., Chicago IL 60640; 773-784-8064; www.nonviolence.org/vitw.

In Detroit, contact Metro Detroit Against Sanctions, 195 W. Nine Mile Rd., Ferndale MI 48220; (248) 548-3920. For updates on the Web; www.nonviolence.org/iraq.

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Fifth Estate #354, Spring, 2000

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