

# COSTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF WAR IN IRAQ

2

This fact sheet is part of a series of publications produced by CESR for its Emergency Campaign on Iraq, which aims to inform public opinion and influence policy towards promoting peace and protecting human rights for resolving the crisis in Iraq.

Modern warfare is a public health catastrophe which disproportionately harms civilians rather than combatants.<sup>1</sup> In the 1991 Gulf War, US-led forces dropped 84,200 tons of munitions on Iraq and Kuwait during 43 days of bombing. Unguided weaponry, “dumb” bombs, with a reported estimated accuracy rate of only 25 percent accounted for 91.2% of dropped munitions.<sup>2</sup> They caused major damage to Iraq’s civilian infrastructure, including electricity generation and water and sanitation facilities.<sup>3</sup>

A total of 110,000 Iraqi civilians, including 70,000 children under the age of five and 7,000 elderly, died as a result of “war-induced adverse health effects” caused by the destruction of infrastructure.<sup>4</sup> This fact sheet presents the consequences of a new war and discusses the humanitarian impact of the 1991 Gulf War.

## A NEW GULF WAR

*“...a war with Iraq should be expected to be hugely costly in human terms and to carry with it the greatest risk of escalation to the use of weapons of mass destruction.”<sup>5</sup>*

A new Gulf war will be devastating for the Iraqi people.<sup>6</sup> International aid agencies warn of “a humanitarian catastrophe could leave millions without food or shelter.”<sup>7</sup> UNICEF and UNHCR also warn of large refugee flows and have begun to move supplies to Iraq’s neighbors.<sup>8</sup>

Confidential UN planning papers state that “production of oil will cease, the port of Umm Qasr in the Gulf would be shut down, and the bombing of bridges would cripple railway networks and make road travel difficult between the east and west of the country. The electricity grid would be seriously disrupted, with collateral damage to water and sewage systems. Government stocks of commodities such as grain would also be hit.”<sup>9</sup> Civilians will face hunger, disease, displacement, and death.

**Mortality:** Estimates of civilian deaths “range from 48,000 to 261,000 for a conventional conflict. If there is civil unrest and nuclear attacks are launched, the range is 375,000 to 3.9 million.”<sup>10</sup> The World Health Organization estimates 100,000 direct and 400,000 indirect casualties and anticipates that “as many as 500,000 people could



Children as young as four or five years of age have clear concepts of the horrors of war posed by bombs.

require treatment to a greater or lesser degree as a result of direct or indirect injuries.”<sup>11</sup>

**Starvation:** The UN has warned that the “Oil-for-Food (OFF)” program, which provides food rations that most Iraqis depend for survival, would be suspended during military action.<sup>12</sup> “There is reliance of the people here [Iraq] on the government and to get out of this dependency all of a sudden will be really disastrous, because people don’t have the ability to cope. Without this ration, starvation will come like this [snapping his fingers]” stated the Food and Agricultural Organization representative in Baghdad.<sup>13</sup>

Sixty percent of the population, 16 million people, depends completely on the food ration for their survival, which provides 2,200 calories a day, well below the average Iraqi intake of 3,159 calories before the Gulf War. An estimated 2.03 million children under-five and one million pregnant women will face moderate to severe malnutrition.<sup>14</sup>

**Epidemics:** Damage to the electrical grid will affect water and sanitation resulting in “...the outbreak of diseases such as cholera and dysentery

in epidemic if not pandemic proportions is very likely.”<sup>15</sup> “...39% of the population will need to be provided with potable water.”<sup>16</sup> The health sector will be affected as the lack of refrigeration renders available treatment ineffective under such conditions and “increased demand and consumption of medical supplies and drugs, render the existing stocks inadequate.”<sup>17</sup>

**Internal Displacement and Refugees:** The UN estimates that 2 million persons will be internally displaced, including 900,000 seeking refuge in neighboring countries.<sup>18</sup> Among those displaced there will be significant number of unaccompanied minors and female-headed households. Landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) will present a formidable hazard causing considerable casualties among people on the move.

**Humanitarian Assistance:** The ability to supply humanitarian assistance with any degree of freedom will be constrained. The United Nations agencies and international relief NGOs assume that in delivering humanitarian assistance, whether a military attack is sanctioned by the Security Council or not, they will interact with military authorities.<sup>19</sup> This is in direct of violation of Geneva Conventions that humanitarian operations must be independent of those engaged in war.<sup>20</sup>

## Why Does Bush Want War?

**IT’S PERSONAL:** “[Saddam] tried to kill my dad!”<sup>21</sup>

**IT’S THE OIL:** Iraq sits on top of 112 billion barrels of untapped oil.<sup>22</sup> At today’s current prices of \$30 a barrel – that translates into a \$3.3 trillion gold rush.<sup>23</sup>

**IT’S TERRORISM:** The US wants to establish a link between Iraq and Al-Qaeda. Yet, US intelligence experts dismiss a connection between Iraq and Al-Qaeda, pointing out that Iraq, as a secular, “socialist” regime, is the antithesis of Bin Laden’s vision for the Middle East.<sup>24</sup>

**GEOPOLITICAL POWER:** Overthrowing the Iraqi government would throw Iran into turmoil<sup>25</sup>, and intimidate other nations in the region and around the world.<sup>26</sup> US Control of Iraqi oil would allow the US to break up OPEC, set world oil prices in Washington DC.<sup>27</sup>

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 9 UN Report, “Likely Humanitarian Scenario” CASI (Dec.10, 2002); Bone, J., “UN Chief Issues Secret Orders for War in Iraq” The Times (Dec. 22, 2002)  
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 13 Whittaker, B. “Dual Crisis Looms for Millions in Iraq” The Guardian. (Jan. 23, 2002)

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 16 UN Report, “Likely Humanitarian Scenario” Para 28. CASI (Dec. 10, 2002)  
 17 UN Report, “Likely Humanitarian Scenario” Para 22. CASI (Dec. 10, 2002)  
 18 UN Report, “Likely Humanitarian Scenario” CASI (Dec. 10, 2002)  
 19 UN Report, “Likely Humanitarian Scenario” para 53 CASI (Dec. 10, 2002)  
 20 Geneva Conventions, Additional Protocol I, Article 81.



Andy Ryan

US-led forces destroyed 9,700 houses and rendered 75% of Iraq electrical-generating facilities inoperative in less than two weeks of bombardment.

## 1991 GULF WAR AND ITS AFTERMATH

**Lesley Stahl on U.S. sanctions against Iraq:** *We have heard that a half million children have died. I mean, that's more children than died in Hiroshima ...is the price worth it?*

**Secretary of State Madeleine Albright:** *I think this is a very hard choice, but the price – we think the price is worth it.*<sup>28</sup>

Iraq invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990, the UN Security Council immediately placed comprehensive sanctions against Iraq, banning all trade, imposing an oil embargo, and freezing all financial assets.<sup>29</sup> Saddam Hussein believed that earlier friendliness and eagerness of the US for oil contracts suggested American amenability to negotiate a solution, but by “December 1990, the press quoted US officials saying that peaceful Iraqi withdrawal was a nightmare scenario, because the Iraqis might place its disputes with Kuwait on the negotiating table.”<sup>30</sup> The US and its coalition of 27 countries had 690,000 troops in the region.<sup>31</sup>

The US-led coalition launched Operation Desert Storm on January 17, 1991, conducting a heavy bombing campaign of 43 days. Iraq withdrew from

Kuwait and accepted a formal cease-fire agreement, which extended the sanctions regime indefinitely.<sup>32</sup> The Iraqi government’s counterattack in March against civilian uprisings in the north and south resulted in Security Council Resolution 688, establishing the No-Fly Zones, which the US and UK used as a pretext for continuing bombing raids.<sup>33</sup> Comprehensive sanctions have been in place for over twelve years and bombings have intensified since 1999.<sup>34</sup> From August to December 2002 alone, there were 62 attacks by American and British aircraft – an average of one bombing raid every two days.<sup>35</sup>

**Economic Collapse:** Oil was the foundation of the Iraqi economy and a major target of air strikes. The destruction of the oil industry and the sanctions succeeded in shutting off 90% of imports and 97% of exports that “produced serious hardships to the people and set the economy back to 19th Century status.”<sup>36</sup>

**Destruction of Infrastructure:** U.S. forces deliberately targeted and destroyed Iraq’s electricity-generating facilities, repeatedly striking them even after they were initially disabled.<sup>37</sup> The Washington Post reported “Planners now say their intent was to destroy or damage valuable facilities that Baghdad could not repair without foreign assistance. 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.”<sup>38</sup> A partially declassified U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency report, prepared in 1991, had predicted that the combination of war and sanctions would cause Iraq’s water systems to break down, leading to an increased incidence of water-borne diseases, if not epidemics, and would disable key water-dependent and life-sustaining industries, such as pharmaceuticals and food processing.<sup>39</sup>

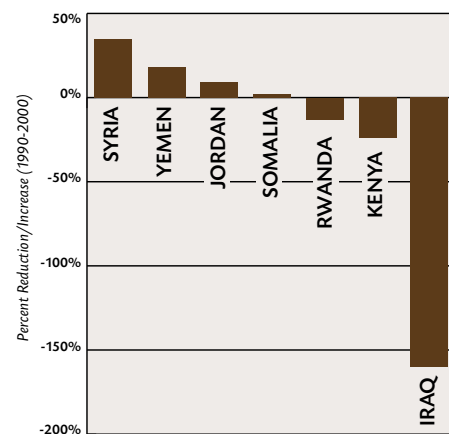
**Iraqi Casualties:** There were 3,500 civilians and 56,000-100,000 Iraqi soldiers, mostly conscripts, killed by direct hits.<sup>40</sup> A total of 110,000 Iraqi civilians, including 70,000 children age and 7,000 elderly, died in the first year of war as a result of “war-induced adverse health effects” caused by the destruction of Iraq’s infrastructure.<sup>41</sup> A second round of violence ensued when internal conflict erupted in the Kurdish north and Shi’a south at U.S. urging Iraqis to overthrow Saddam Hussein’s

regime. The Iraqi government brutally suppressed its populations. An estimated 30,000 civilians and 5,000 soldiers were killed during a brutal suppression of the revolts.<sup>42</sup> Over 100,000 Iraqis were subsequently displaced, with 70,000 becoming refugees.<sup>43</sup> During 1991-98, UNICEF estimated that over 500,000 children under the age of five died as a result of sanctions – approximately 4,500 excess deaths a month.<sup>44</sup> Even conservative estimates show that sanctions have contributed to the deaths of at least 300,000 Iraqi children.<sup>45</sup>

**Coalition Casualties:** Less than 400 Coalition forces soldiers died in the war and less than 500 were wounded in action,<sup>46</sup> including 293 U.S. soldiers who were killed, 148 of them in battle.<sup>47</sup>

**Oil-for-Food:** In 1996, faced with a catastrophic humanitarian crisis, Iraq and the UN agreed on temporary oil-for-food (OFF) program. Iraq, under strict UN control, was allowed to sell oil for the purchase of humanitarian goods, but after it paid for reparation claims stemming from the 1990 invasion of Kuwait and for the UN administration in Iraq. “Even under the most benign conditions, OFF only allows Iraq to be run as a relatively efficient refugee camp in which people get just about enough food to eat.”<sup>48</sup> While oil continues to be exported, the import of goods is often disrupted by US and UK withholding approval of contracts. “Between the springs of 2000 and 2002, [US and UK] holds on humanitarian goods tripled.”<sup>49</sup>

Change in Under-Five Mortality Rate (1990-2000)



Source: Sectoral Briefing to UNSC 661 Committee (Nov. 20, 2001)

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