

IRAQ

On the
edge



voices in
the wilderness

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A ticket collector awaits customers for an American film in a Baghdad cinema.

photographs by
Thorne Anderson

on the edge

01

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Iraq is a country of 24 million people living in some of the worst conditions and under the biggest gun on earth. The drumbeats for war against Iraq often drown out critical voices which implore us to consider the human toll of a full-force attack on a country already on the edge of complete disaster.

The amount of explosives employed in the opening attack on Iraq on January 17, 1991, just one day of the first Gulf War, was equivalent to the explosive power of the atomic bomb the U.S. dropped on Hiroshima. Former U.S. Navy Secretary, John Lehman, estimated 200,000 Iraqis, along with 148 Americans, were killed in the Gulf War. The intentional destruction of Iraq's electrical, transportation, economic, health, and sanitation infrastructure, combined with a sanctions regime that prevents its reconstruction, triggered an ever-mounting, and almost exclusively civilian, death toll that far exceeds the initial war casualties.

War in Iraq didn't end in 1991. The U.S. and, to a lesser extent, Great Britain continued sporadic bombing which dramatically increased in 1998. They have attacked Iraq on average one out of every three days for the past four years, killing roughly 500 Iraqis and wounding hundreds more, a large proportion of them civilians according to UN reports.

American and British weapons contain a hidden killer: radioactive and carcinogenic depleted uranium (DU). The U.S. has fired more than 300 tons of DU ammunition in Iraq (30 times the amount fired in the Kosovo war) since 1991. In that time cancer rates have increased more than five-fold in the south, where the bombing and consequent levels of DU are most severe. Previously undocumented birth defects now occur in alarming numbers. DU has also been increasingly cited as a suspected cause for the "Gulf War Syndrome" ailments among American Gulf War veterans.

But the most destructive weapon used in Iraq is the intense sanctions regime imposed by the United States and Great Britain through an increasingly reluctant United Nations. The Gulf War exposed Iraqi civilians to hunger, disease, and despair, and the sanctions have crippled any chance of recovery. The results are staggering. UN agency reports from UNICEF and WHO blame the sanctions directly for the excess deaths of approximately 500,000 children under the age of five, and nearly a million Iraqis of all ages.

Sanctions have made it impossible for Iraq to repair the infrastructure destroyed in the Gulf War. Illnesses which are easily preventable or treatable are often fatal in Iraq due to the breakdown in sanitation systems and widespread shortages in medical supplies. The leading killer of young children in Iraq is simply dehydration from diarrhoea caused by water-borne illnesses. Iraq now has one of the world's highest infant mortality rates, nearly a quarter of Iraq's children are chronically malnourished, and less than half of the population has access to clean water.

Using the lives and well-being of Iraqi civilians as a bargaining tool in political disputes with the Iraqi government, the Security Council, and particularly the United States, has allowed sanctions to strangle Iraq's economy to the point of general collapse taking Iraq's civilians, in the words of a UN Development Program report, "from relative affluence to massive poverty." Some 16 million Iraqis are now critically dependent on government food rations. A new war would certainly disrupt humanitarian supply lines now functioning at or below bare survival levels.

The sanctions have been so devastating to Iraqi civilians that two successive UN humanitarian coordinators for Iraq, Denis Halliday and Hans von Sponeck, resigned in protest. "We are in the process of destroying an entire society," Halliday wrote. "It is as simple and terrifying as that. It is illegal and immoral."

A crippled civil infrastructure, ongoing bombing, depleted uranium poisoning, sanctions, disease, and malnutrition have bound Iraqi civilians in a far more vulnerable position now than they were before the 1991

Gulf War. A recent UN draft document for planning disaster relief in the event of a U.S.-led invasion predicts that 10 million Iraqis will reach crisis levels of hunger and exposure to disease. The report predicts 500,000 direct and indirect Iraqi casualties and nearly a million refugees, and warns, "the outbreak of diseases in epidemic if not pandemic proportions is very likely."

The potential consequences of a larger regional, perhaps even intercontinental, armed conflict and a surge in terrorism sparked by an attack and invasion of Iraq are incalculable.

Voices in the Wilderness and a growing chorus of other organizations spanning a broad political spectrum urge us all to consider the human toll of warfare and sanctions and to do what we can to stop the war and end the sanctions in Iraq. In solving political disputes, there are many options to the policies of war and deprivation which primarily hurt civilians and push us all a little closer to the edge of disaster.



Browsers pick through outdated textbooks in the open-air book market in Baghdad. Import of new textbooks and scientific journals is heavily restricted under the sanctions regime.

The tomb of Imam Ali, the "father" of Shia Islam, is a primary pilgrimage site for millions of Shites around the world. Pilgrims take small chunks of earth from the site home with them in order to touch their heads to its holy soil during prayer.



On February 13, 1991, a precision-guided U.S. bomb opened up a hole in the roof of the Ameriyya bomb shelter in Baghdad. A second guided bomb passed through the hole and detonated, killing 408 civilians including nearly 100 children hiding inside. The shelter is now open to the public, preserved as a memorial to civilian casualties in the 1991 war.



"Credible estimates of the total possible deaths on all sides during [a future war for "regime change" in Iraq] and the following three months range from 48,000 to over 260,000. Civil war within Iraq could add another 20,000 deaths. Additional later deaths from post-war adverse health effects could reach 200,000. If nuclear weapons were used the death toll could reach 3,900,000. In all scenarios the majority of casualties will be civilians."

Physicians for Social Responsibility projective study
"Collateral Damage: the health and environmental costs of war on Iraq"

"With no domestic sources of both water treatment replacement parts and some essential chemicals, Iraq will continue attempts to circumvent United Nations Sanctions to import these vital commodities. Failing to secure supplies will result in a shortage of pure drinking water for much of the population. This could lead to increased incidences, if not epidemics, of disease."

U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency
"Iraq Water Treatment Vulnerabilities," January 22, 1991.



Raw sewage collects on the streets of Jumurriyah neighborhood in Basra. The sanctions regime has obstructed reconstruction of the sanitation facilities deliberately destroyed by coalition forces during the 1991 war.

A toxic junkyard on the outskirts of Safwan village in southern Iraq is littered with the remains of vehicles destroyed with radioactive depleted uranium munitions used in U.S. and British attacks.



"DU is the stuff of nightmares. It is toxic, radioactive and pollutes for 4500 million years. It causes lymphoma, neuropsychotic disorders and short-term memory damage. In semen, it causes birth defects... This whole thing is a crime against God and humanity."

Dr. Doug Rokke, Professor of Nuclear Physics and Environmental Engineering at Jacksonville State University in Alabama and an Army health physicist on the command staff of the 1991 Persian Gulf depleted uranium cleanup team. Of the original 100 primary team members 30 have since died, and many of the others (including Rokke, who has 5000 times the permissible level of radiation in his body) have serious health problems.

"More than 40 % of the population in this area will get cancer in five years' time... Most of my own family now has cancer, and we have no history of the disease. It has spread to the medical staff of this hospital. We are living through another Hiroshima... We suspect depleted uranium. There simply can be no other explanation."

Dr. Jawad Al-Ali, cancer specialist at Saddam Teaching Hospital in Basra and member of the Royal College of Physicians in Britain



Nine-year-old Natham Nasen, who was recently blinded by his skin cancer, retracts from the painful touch of sunlight on his face. The Safwan village area, where Natham lives, is poisoned with a high concentration of radioactive depleted uranium waste.

Dr. Jawad Al-Ali, cancer specialist at the Saddam Teaching Hospital in Basra, examines a patient recovering from surgery to remove part of a tumor. The hospital records a more than five-fold increase in cancer patients since the 1991 war.



Unfulfilled contracts under the Oil for Food Program:

Electricity: \$386 million Food: \$375 million Agriculture: \$350 million
Housing: \$294 million Water and Sanitation: \$232 million
Health: \$166 million Education: \$114 million

Total development and humanitarian contracts delayed or denied in the Oil for Food process: \$5 billion

United Nations Office of the Iraq Program
August 3-9, 2002 weekly report

"It is estimated that the nutritional status of some 3.03 million [Iraqi women and children] will be dire and that they will require therapeutic feeding. This consists of 2.03 million severely and moderately malnourished children under five and one million pregnant and lactating women."

"Likely Humanitarian Scenarios," an internal UN planning document draft dated December 10, 2002 anticipating an invasion of Iraq



An underweight baby, born to a malnourished mother, lies in an incubator in the Al Mansoor Hospital in Baghdad. Some of the child's overly fragile bones were broken during delivery.

"It is prohibited to attack, destroy, remove, or render useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as foodstuffs, crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies, and irrigation works, for the specific purpose of denying them for their sustenance value to the civilian population or to the adverse Party, whatever the motive, whether in order to starve out civilians, to cause them to move away, or for any other motive."

Article 54 of Protocol I, Additional to the Geneva Convention 1977
"Protection of Objects Indispensable to the Civilian Population"



In an ultimately failed attempt to save a child's life, a doctor in the Al-Mansoor Hospital in Baghdad tries an experimental, locally-made drug as a replacement for a common coagulant made unavailable by the sanctions regime.

A ticket tout hangs out the open door as his bus speeds through the streets of Baghdad at night.



"I can no longer be associated with a program that prolongs suffering of the people and which has no chance to meet even basic needs of the civilian population."

Hans von Sponeck, former UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Iraq, explaining why he chose to resign his position in protest of the sanctions regime



Lesley Stahl: "We have heard that a half a million children have died [in Iraq under sanctions]. I mean, that's more than died in Hiroshima. Is the price worth it?"

Madeleine Albright: "I think this is a very hard choice, but the price - we think the price is worth it."

May, 1996, interview with Madeline Albright, at that time the U.S. Ambassador to the UN, on the American television news program, "60 Minutes"

Iraqi Christians light candles at a Virgin Mary shrine in front of the Chaldean church in Basra. The Chaldean church is said to have been founded in Babylon - just south of Baghdad - by the apostle, Timothy.

"Sanctions continue to malnourish and kill... undermining the cultural and educational recovery of Iraq, and will not change its system of governance. Sanctions encourage isolation, alienation and fanaticism. Sanctions destroy the family, undermining women's social and economic advances... Sanctions constitute a serious breach of the United Nations charter on human rights and children's rights. Sanctions are a counterproductive concept that has led to unacceptable human suffering."

Former U.N. Assistant Secretary General and Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq, Denis Halliday, in testimony to the U.S. Congress after he resigned his position in protest of the sanctions regime



A bride is celebrated as she enters the lobby of the Hotel Palestine with her new husband in Baghdad.



Tearful pilgrims in Kerbala touch and kiss the tomb of Hussein, son of Imam Ali, the "father" of Shia Islam. Hussein died in the battle of Kerbala in 622 and is credited with the oft quoted slogan, "Death with dignity is better than a life with humiliation."

"How can you expect me to condemn human rights abuses in Algeria and China and elsewhere when the United Nations themselves are responsible for the worst situation in Iraq? It's part of my job to bring to public consciousness the incredible suffering of Iraqi society."

Mary Robinson, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and former president of Ireland

Funeral procession, Najaf





Tea house, Baghdad

VOICES IN THE WILDERNESS

Kathy Kelly, co-coordinator of Voices in the Wilderness, revisits the impoverished neighborhood in Basra where she and others from the campaign lived for two months in the southern "no-fly zone" where U.S. and U.K. bombing is still frequent. For her work in Iraq, Kelly has been nominated three times for the Nobel Peace Prize.



Voice in the Wilderness is a US/UK campaign to end the economic sanctions against the people of Iraq and to oppose a new war in the already severely battered country. Voices advocates non-violence as a means for social change and opposes the development, storage and use by any country of weapons of mass destruction, be they nuclear, biological, chemical - or economic. Since March of 1996, more than 60 Voices delegations have travelled to Iraq to see the country through the eyes of its ordinary people struggling for basic subsistence. Hundreds of American delegates have joined these peace missions in spite of U.S. government prohibitions on American citizens' freedom to travel to Iraq. In the schools and hospitals, on the streets and in the homes of Baghdad, Basra, Mosul and other cities Voices delegates witness the effects of more than a decade of economic sanctions and continuing bombings as well as the anger and fear caused by new threats of violence. Back home in church halls, classrooms, radio and TV studios, newsletters, books, and on the internet these delegates report their experiences and galvanize the campaign to end needless suffering. Today, as the menace of war in Iraq grows stronger, Voices in the Wilderness coordinates the Iraq Peace Team, a constant presence of volunteers in Iraq working in solidarity with the people of Iraq and with the millions of people around the world who are now speaking out against the use of war, deprivation, starvation, and disease for political or material gain.

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21

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GLOBAL POLICY FORUM
www.globalpolicy.org/security/issues/irqindx.htm
www.globalpolicy.org/security/sanction/iraq1/2002/paper.htm
CAMPAIGN AGAINST SANCTIONS ON IRAQ
www.cam.ac.uk/societies/casi/
HARPER'S MAGAZINE ARTICLE ON SANCTIONS
www.harpers.org/online/cool_war/
MEDIA MONITOR'S NETWORK
www.mediamonitor.net/mosaddeq17.html
IRAQJOURNAL.ORG - INDEPENDENT REPORTING FROM IRAQ
www.iraqjournal.org
CITIZENS CONCERNED FOR THE PEOPLE OF IRAQ: RESOURCES
www.scn.org/ccpi/resources.html

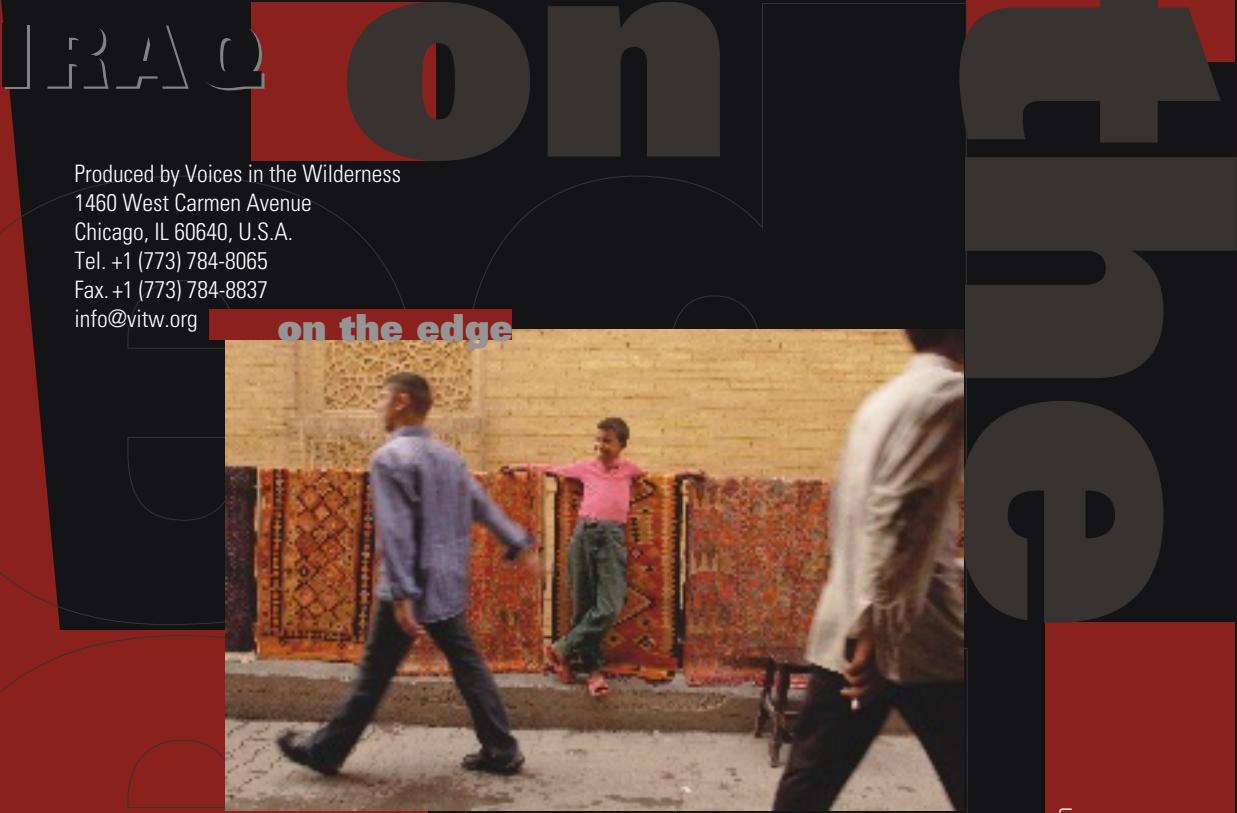
Speak Out

RESOURCE BANK ON OPPOSITION TO WAR AND SANCTIONS
www.globalpolicy.org/ngos/role/iraq.htm
GLOBAL EXCHANGE
www.globalexchange.org/campaigns/iraq/
UNITED FOR PEACE
www.unitedforpeace.org
IRAQ ACTION COALITION
www.leb.net/iac/frames.html
WAR RESISTERS' LEAGUE - INDIVIDUAL ACTIVISM IDEAS
www.warresisters.org/mosquito.htm
CITIES FOR PEACE - CITY COUNCILS AGAINST THE WAR
www.citiesforpeace.org

WRITE, EMAIL, OR CALL YOUR REPRESENTATIVES
www.congress.org/c2/issues/basics/



October 26, 2002:
Members of the Iraq Peace Team, an initiative of Voices in the Wilderness, stage a candlelight vigil opposing war and the sanctions regime at the office of the U.S. Interests Section in Baghdad.



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