

Human costs of the 1991 Gulf war and sanctions on Iraq

The human costs of sanctions on Iraq

Economy

- Iraq “has experienced a shift from relative affluence to massive poverty.” [March 1999 UN Report]
- Iraq's GDP fell by 2/3 in 1991, owing to an 85% decline in oil production and the devastation of the industrial and services sectors of the economy. Per capita income fell from \$US3416 in 1984 to less than \$US1036 in 1998. Other sources estimate a per capita decrease as low as \$US450 in 1995. [IMF and March 1999 UN Report]

Food and nutrition

- In July of 1995, average shop prices of essential commodities stood at 850 times the July 1990 levels. [March 1999 UN Report]
- “Alarming food shortages are causing irreparable damage to an entire generation of Iraqi children.” [September 1995 UN Report] One-fifth of Iraqi children under the age of five are malnourished. [UNICEF 2000] Child malnutrition in rural areas is increasing. [UN SC 2001]
- The dietary energy supply fell from 3.120 to 1.093 kilocalories per capita/per day by 1994-95. As many as 70% of Iraqi women are suffering from anemia. [March 1999 UN Report]

Health

- Government drug warehouses and pharmacies have few stocks of medicines and medical supplies. Iraqi plants are capable of supplying only 6% of medicines and other hospital consumables. [UN SC 2001] The consequences of this situation are causing a near-breakdown of the health care system. [February 1997 WHO] “Infant mortality rates in Iraq today are among the highest in the world.” [March 1999 UN Report]
- The sanctions have contributed to the death of over 1.5 million Iraqis (MECC 1999). UNICEF estimates that an additional half a million children died between 1991 and 1998 compared to the case if mortality rates had continued to decline on the same trend as in the 1980s [UNICEF 1999].

Water and sanitation

- The per person share of drinkable water has dropped by up to half in urban and rural areas. This deterioration in access has contributed to the rapid spread of infectious disease. 70% of child deaths are due to diarrhoea. Raw sewage often flows into streets and homes. [World Food Program, UNICEF 2000]]

Electrical power

- In 1990, Iraq had 126 power station units capable of generating 8.903 Mw of power. Today, the capacity is about 3.500 Mw. [March 1999 UN Report] Power generation is only 50% of demand. [UN SC 2001]

Education

- School enrollment for all ages (6-23) has declined to 53%. Some schools with a planned capacity of 700 pupils actually have 4,500 enrolled in them. [March 1999 UN Report,]
- Substantive progress in reducing adult and female illiteracy has ceased and regressed to mid-1980 levels. The rising number of street children and children who work can be explained, in part, as a result of increasing rates of school drop-outs and repetition, as more families are forced to rely on children to secure household incomes. [UNESCO]

The human costs of the 1991 Gulf war

Media coverage of the 1991 Gulf war, when an American-led military force launched war on Iraq after Iraq had invaded Kuwait, focused on the high-tech wizardry of the aerial blitzkrieg. The televised images defined the war as a game, fostering the illusion of safe, bloodless playing fields while a Third World country was being dragged back to the 19th century.

For the people of Iraq, the war was not a game, and their losses were great. The effects of the war have been the concern of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW), expressed in the book *War and Public Health*. The facts below are from the chapter "Public Health and the Persian Gulf War" written by Dr. Eric Hoskins.

- More than 80,000 tons of explosives dropped by coalition forces led by the US killed between 50,000 and 100,000 Iraqi soldiers.
- Between 2,500 and 3,500 innocent civilians were killed during the air campaign, and 9,000 homes were destroyed.
- The civilian death toll in 1991—after the massive bombing campaign was stopped— rose to 111,000 people. Shortages of medicine and damaged health facilities contributed to this high rate of "delayed mortality."
- Of these 111,000 deaths, 70,000 were children under 15 years of age. These deaths were caused by health effects resulting from the destruction of Iraq's civilian infrastructure, especially electricity-generating power plants, which led to a breakdown in water purification and sanitation. This breakdown caused outbreaks of infectious diseases such as cholera, typhoid, malaria, polio, and hepatitis.
- UNICEF has documented that the combined effects of the Gulf War and over a decade of economic sanctions have resulted in the deaths of 500,000 children due to malnutrition, diarrhea, and other preventable diseases.
- Landmines, unexploded ordnance, and antipersonnel bombs have added thousands of victims to the numbers of physically handicapped children in Iraq, especially amputees. These injuries not only effect the physical and emotional development of the child but also diminish the prospects of work, marriage, social life, self-support, and dignity for the adult.
- The psychological impact of the war has had damaging and lasting effect on many of Iraq's million children. They have little hope for the future and are anxious, fearful, and uncertain.

An appeal from international physicians

Twelve years ago, IPPNW helped to document the costs of the first Gulf War led by the first Bush Administration. We worked with hundreds of other peace organizations to prevent and then stop that war. We exposed what the war planners euphemistically call "collateral damage" by publicizing the health and environmental effects of a war in which hundreds of thousands of people lost their lives.

We are now faced with the challenge of helping to prevent another US-led war on Iraq by the second Bush Administration — one that is likely to be far more devastating than the first. We urgently need to raise our voices so that this does not happen.

IPPNW urges all policy makers and citizens in countries that the US will ask to support another war against Iraq — to remember the human costs as they consider whether going to war with Iraq again is the right thing for their country, the people of Iraq, and the world.

A new war on Iraq will be fought by the young men and women in our countries' military services. It will be fought with our tax dollars. While US and allied military casualties were light compared to Iraqi military casualties, about 350 soldiers were killed, and more than 25,000 veterans are suffering from Gulf War Syndrome. Some analysts predict that US and allied forces would sustain thousands of casualties in another war.

If you believe as we do that war is not the way to resolve disputes with Iraq, we encourage you to use our messages about the human costs of war in letters to government officials and in letters to editors of newspapers and magazines. And please share this fact sheet with your friends, family, and colleagues. We need your help to stop another war on Iraq.

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