

The Impact of a Shifted and Isolated Ally Turning Sour

Iraq And The US

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The United States and Iraq had a very close relationship in the 1980's when Iraq was in a long and deep war with Iran for over eight years. Iraq was a perfect ally in many ways for the US because of its location and the threat that it could provide to its neighboring country around the resources that were of US interest, mainly oil. There was a partnership between Iraq and the US through a sharing of CIA (central intelligence agency) and intelligence sharing as well as through biological and chemical agents being sent to Iraq for experimentation, later used as 'weapons of mass destruction.' When we speak of Iraq as an isolated country that has developed certain capabilities, we also must reflect on the ways that this was being supported and encouraged from the outside. One of these ways was through the United States.

After eight years of a devastating war between Iraq and Iran, the Iraqi economy was starting to crumble. The leadership, in a not so surprising event (if we had looked at the strategic situation of a country going downhill) invaded Kuwait, nearing the many of the oil fields that produce oil for the international market and owned by multi-national corporations, including some from the US. Known by many US officials who did nothing to prevent the invasion, Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990. Only four days later, troops were already making their way to the Gulf from Western and other countries. The UN Security Council had already agreed to place economic sanctions on Iraq as a more peaceful means to persuade Iraq to withdraw from occupied Kuwait, to retreat to its own recognized borders. In the region was the beginning of the standoff with the Iraqi regime. The sanctions prevented Iraq from selling its number one export, the resource of dependence, oil. The Iraqi infrastructure had been developed, built, and maintained by revenues from oil and by outside companies such as the Swiss, the French. The civilian infrastructures and facilities and weapons development were all supported by the Iraqi economy of oil, as was health and educational welfare of Iraqis.

The sanctions have brought a breakdown of Iraqi society economically, socially. There has been a rise of religious extremism as people get more and more desperate. As we have seen in

other places in the Middle East, when things go unsolved, it is a perfect time for the germination of extremism. This happened in Nazi Germany, it is happening now in Israel and Palestine, and now in Iraq. We have seen the power of extremist Islamist movements in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine. We have seen their exclusion in any political processes and public discourse and we have seen their inclusion in more moderate ways. There is a need that is being fulfilled that we still have yet to identify as an international arena. In this case, the US in its relationship with Iraq was very short term, looking at the sanctions and Gulf War as a means to end the production of weapons of mass destruction, while also forcing Iraq to open its market of oil to the international world. While doing so, an entire population of Iraqis has been isolated and alienated from most other countries, relying on limited amounts of oil to be sold for its economical needs. It has targeted a civilian population and it gives them a need and ammunition to feel an anti-Western sentiment, especially toward the US. Child Labor is now a phenomenon in Iraq that was not a common part of the Iraqi culture, and a decrease in education and literacy. Economically, children in Iraq are being forced to take more responsibility for their own survival as well as that of their families.

Iraq did not withdraw before the deadline of January 15, 1991. On January 16, the ground and air war with Iraq began. February 28, the war ended, the US and others claiming a victory over the Iraqi army and their retreat out of Kuwait.

What were left behind were remnants of the war in radioactive dust that permeated the lungs, water and air of Iraqis, US gulf war veterans and clean up crews. This dust comes from depleted uranium. In using several rounds of DU bullets, after incinerating everything inside, it would leave a dust that is harmful to livestock, water, air, a person's health. There are reports from Gulf War veterans similar to those of Iraqi civilians in the south, exposed to not only the oil fires but the chemicals from weapons destroyed and used in the war. Iraqis and veterans alike suffered from having children with birth defects and abnormalities and high rates of cancer in addition to many other ailments. The NGWRC has done research and continues to battle with the pentagon for an acknowledgement of the illnesses (National Gulf War Resource Center).

What was also left behind was the signature of the Iraqi leadership of a document calling for the exposure and destruction of all weapons of mass destruction. Though this notion was the key for ending the war (we thought the end), no one really thought through what a policy with such vagueness might bring.

Ten years later and about one million dead, according to UNICEF reports (1998), and 5000 children under the age of five dying each month from the sanctions, Iraq is still under the harshest sanctions ever placed on a country. Children are dying from treatable conditions including dehydration and diarrhea. They are drinking from sewage water and there are not enough medicines to handle the capacity of sickness. Sometimes the doctors say that they must play G-d deciding who to give medication to and who not to, who might be most likely to survive or live longer, who is most likely to die regardless of the medication. This was not their training in medical schools in Iraq nor in the west (interviews in Basrah, 1999).

Though statistics in Iraq are difficult to come by, even though UNICEF and most definitely through the Iraqi ministry of Information, the most conservative studies are by Richard Garfield, a nurse and researcher in the US. He estimates that there has been an excess of 250,000 children's deaths due to the sanctions (Richard Garfield statistics). Though it is hard to know the research, even with statistics that lower the number of deaths due to sanctions, there are hundreds of thousands of people being affected. There are children who have no protection as long as the sanctions remain in place. Is this the policy that the international world is keeping in check? Several medical delegations have been in Iraq to see the conditions themselves and have mentioned like many health workers and UN officials, that the development of a child who is malnourished is irreversible after three years old (Medical Delegations, AFSC, 1999).

Since the Gulf War, UNICEF and other humanitarian arms have been working on distributing oil for food programs and food baskets to the population in Iraq, a population that could feed itself before the war.

In addition to the sanctions being the main cause of the these ailments, Garfield recognizes, as do UN agencies and humanitarian groups, that the worn down and/or destroyed civilian infrastructure such as water treatment plants, electrical grids, perpetuate the problems and make them worse. The US and the sanctions committee see that most of the infrastructure items that are needed to repair and maintain systems are considered dual purpose/use, which means that these items are not permitted because of the possibility of their contribution to weapons of mass destruction (appendix: Impact of 9 year sanctions War on the people of Iraq- UN statistics).

As a response to the humanitarian crisis and the impact of sanctions on the Iraqi population as a whole, several UN officials have resigned from their posts to protest the continuing inhumanity of the sanctions regime. Dennis Halliday, former head of the UN

Humanitarian Coordination in Iraq, as well as his follower, Hans Van Sponeck, also a former head of UNOHCI resigned within two years of one another and have been speaking out against the sanctions with a desire for more creative solutions. Jutta Butgard from the World Health Organization in Iraq, also resigned in protest. Scott Ritter, who was a member of UNSCOM, the weapons inspection team in Iraq, resigned as a statement about the obstacles that he faced in bringing the inspections to a complete close. Scott Ritter has been on the speaking circuit explaining in interviews in the US and other locations, that Iraq has been qualitatively disarmed. It does not have the weapons capability that would make it dangerous to its neighbors, nor does it have a production of arms happening that would increase its capacity. Quantitatively, Iraq still has some weapons, but nothing of deep concern that would threaten others with capabilities (Ritter interview, 1999). Even from the newly appointed UNMOVIC chairman, the new inspection team that was formed to inspect Iraq, has said the following in an interview with a reporter from *Arms Control Today* (Vol. 30, No. 6, July/August 2000):

Anticipating Inspections: UNMOVIC Readies Itself for Iraq; an Interview with Hans Blix, Executive Chairman, UNMOVIC):

ACT: "Is there any indication that Iraq is trying to rearm?"

Blix: " No, I don't think you can say that. Sometimes there are reports in the media from intelligence organizations that they are watching the procurement efforts here and there, but we have nothing to substantiate that."

Ralph Ekeus, also part of UNSCOM, has come out and spoken about Iraq's disarmament too.

In the last year, there were efforts on the ground in the US to get a congressional delegation to go to Iraq to explore the impact of the sanctions and to assess the current sanction regime policy on Iraq. Five congressional aides went to Iraq with the American Friends Service Committee and Voices in the Wilderness with other cosponsoring organizations. The delegates returned and were able to report more effectively on the sanctions and become activists to lift the economic sanctions and pursue a more humane policy (Congressional Delegation report). There was a recognition that Saddam Hussein is not without fault at all, but that the collective punishment of a whole nation of 23 million people was only creating a deep resentment to the west, it was contributing the deaths and suffering of people, and the policy was not working. There have been two letters circulated in congress, one of 42 people, the other of about 70, congressional leaders that support the lifting of economic sanctions...or the de-linking of sanctions with the other issues. At the same time, a group of 70

congressional leaders had a letter in response to the President, called on keeping the sanctions in place.

While the sanctions remain in place, while the bombings in the US declared northern and southern no fly zones, arms sales to the region continue. Arm sales have increased because of the perceived threat of Iraq to other nations while also keeping US and allied troops in the Gulf responding and continuing the silent and deadly air war. 43% of all US arms sales go to the Middle East. Between 1992-95, the US supplied the Middle East with \$24 billion of arms (Peace Action 2000). It is often easy in looking at figures to be critical of what comprehensive peace and an end to the extremism and violence may look like.

Author's note: the US administration has repeatedly said that the sanctions will not be lifted until Saddam Hussein is no longer the leader in Iraq.

The quote by Madeline Albright often arises in grassroots circles when she was being interviewed by Leslie Stahl of 60 minutes in 1996. She was asked about the sanctions killing over 500,000 children, was that worth it? Albright's response: yes, it is worth it.

The UN Security Council besides agreeing on the economic sanctions on Iraq, the resolutions to have Iraq expose its weapons of mass destruction, the oil for food programs, they also agreed on a nuclear free zone in the Middle East. Little has been done to follow up on this principle other than in Iraq, where different people are offering different information about Iraq's capabilities. In addition, the US administration has outwardly agreed to support through monies in congress, the Iraqi opposition in the Iraq Liberation Act (there are many opposition groups, what to fund and what kind of funding are still yet to be determined....there is still a notion that it may also come in the form of arms, as well as operational costs to run particular organizations).

As statistics about war express, about 80% of those impacted are civilians. In this case, there continues to be a silent war waged against the Iraqi people through the economic sanctions. It poses a threat not only to civilians but of our notion of acceptable punishment for a leadership when the people are the ones being hurt. The sanctions on Iraq violate international humanitarian law, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Fourth Geneva convention, and even the US legal codes for terrorism: (Addendum II).

Not included in the discussions about the impact of sanctions is the trauma faced by the entire Iraqi population by these sanctions and continued bombings, the trauma that children in the middle of no fly zone areas are exposed to, and the landmines that kill and maim children in Iraq.

Grassroots organizations and policy groups have slowly come to openly admit and recognize the role of Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi regime in the suffering, and the human rights violations of Iraqis. However, they are constantly reminding themselves that the loss of life and suffering supported by the UN is unacceptable. Whatever contribution the Iraqi regime has made to the devastation of the Iraqi people does not justify the impact the sanctions have had on the people as a whole, in an attempt to collectively hold them hostage for the actions of their leader.

In a world where the international arena is working for a resolution of this issue with Iraq- in punishing the regime for trying to occupy Kuwait long term, it is morally, ethically, internationally unacceptable to allow sanctions to stay in place. The UN resignations were posts of highly effective, respected and long term UN workers who resigned because of the humanitarian dilemma.

The UN is supposed to protect and offer solutions to the peoples of various countries. In this case, it has virtually been silent and supporting a slow deteriorating silent war against Iraqi people, led by the US and Britain.

The international movements to lift sanctions have been so successful in placing the agenda wide enough on the table that many Arab governments, as well as France and Russia- have concluded that the deadlock of lifting sanctions only change with the intentional breaking of sanctions by the international world. Flights have not been going into Iraq for over ten years until now. With plane loads of people with humanitarian supplies, relief packages, to eliminate the damage already done. This breakdown of sanctions is significant in its message to the US and British administrations about their position and further isolates them on the sanctions regime issue. Hopefully, this will dramatically change the UN Security Council position and that of the US position without it having to save face that US policy on Iraq was a failure. The Future of peace relies on the uplifting of human beings and their rights to Life versus the arms sales that seem to manage what does and does not happen in the Middle East.

In the end, the grassroots community, the international community will express its grief in having waited so long to do something that would change policy toward Iraqis, one that has cost them their society, culture, family life, economy. They will be the ones who have made a shift in understanding morally a situation and think of more creative ways to resolve the weapons issues... including ending the production of those same weapons in the US and the end to arm sales to the region, especially to irresponsible and unaccountable leaders. In the end also, the US will have convinced the American public that its policy has been for the

people and against the Iraqi government, without mentioning the supply of arms to Iraq in the 1980's. The US has benefited in some ways, getting oil wholesale or the hope that Iraq's oil, when eventually out on the market, would have to be open markets, versus nationalized oil as it had been before. It is far better to have the enemy outside of yourself than within your own country; enemy making is a great way to keep people focused on their nationalism. Similar to what Israel and Palestine face today: is the destruction of one people less upsetting than the other? Can we judge human beings from where they came in way that commits them to death or no freedom? The US will not create a precedent to admit its mistakes and failure of policy, for what would that mean for the superpower showing weakness?

The last issue is accountability. On rare occasions there have been reporters and journalists who have told the story from the ground, rather than from a State Department perspective. It is a much harder argument to make when you ask the American public to judge the sincerity and need for troops in the Gulf and for continued air war and sanctions once they start hearing about the lives of real people. A new congressional delegation will go in January 2001 to take a look again at the sanctions impact. A house resolution has been going around to see if there is enough momentum to override the administration's feelings about keeping sanctions in place.

It is clear that the international world has come to its senses in recognizing its role in deepening the suffering of Iraqis by maintaining sanctions. My hope is that the US administration will one day admit its wrongdoings and ask forgiveness for the destruction they have placed upon a whole people for its own benefit. Then peace processes will start being more successful, as we recognize the rights of all people to have stability, security, freedom and safety.