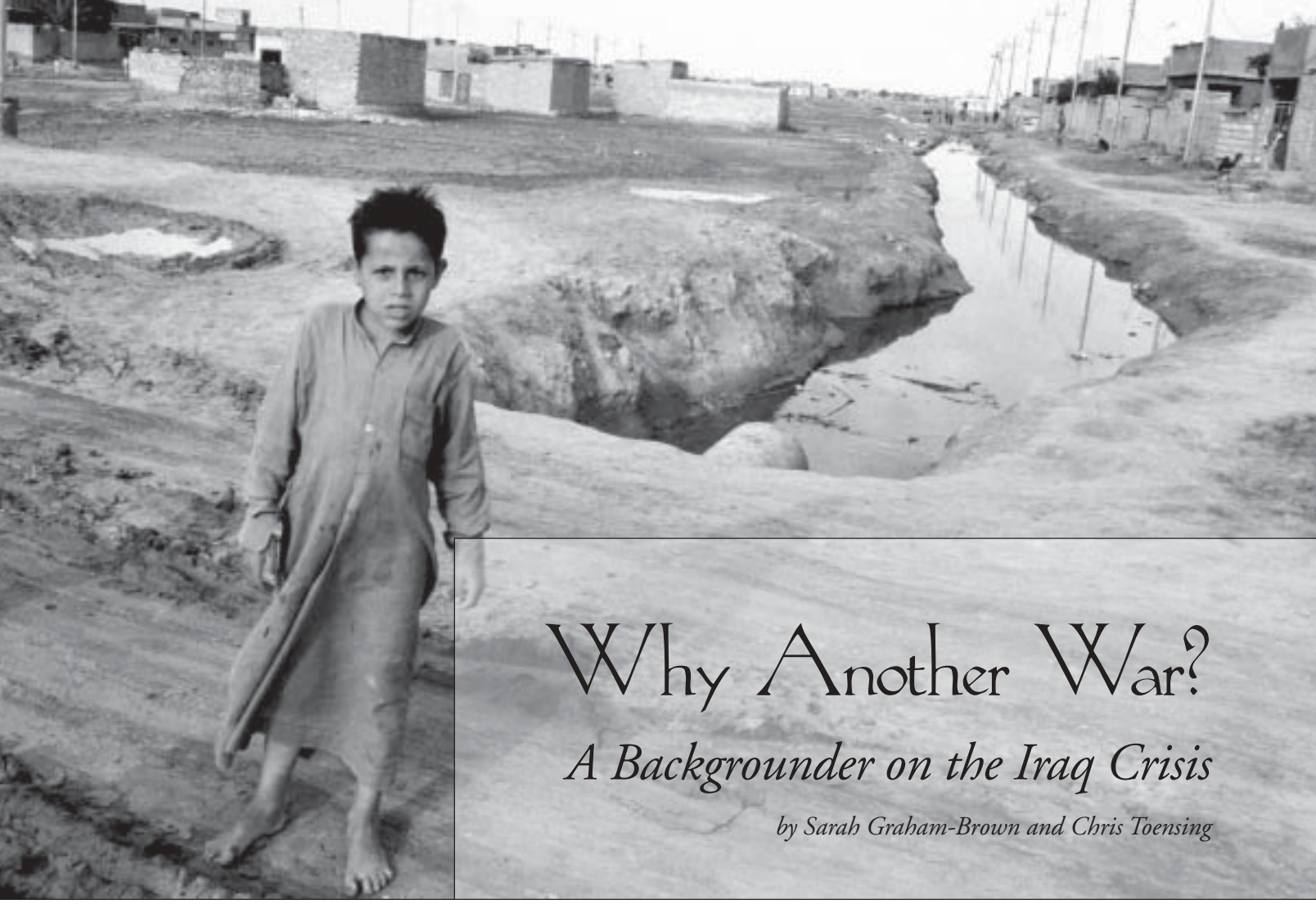

Why Another War?

A Backgrounder on the Iraq Crisis

by Sarah Graham-Brown and Chris Toensing

Boy near open sewer on the outskirts of Basra in southern Iraq, March 1999. Karen Robinson/Panos Pictures

After both houses of Congress granted the White House authorization for a US-led military strike to overthrow Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, George W. Bush claimed that "America has spoken with one voice" about the "mortal threat" posed by Iraq's presumed programs for weapons of mass destruction. But much of the US public remained unconvinced that Iraq really imperiled the world's sole superpower. Bush has failed to prove the existence of an urgent threat coming from Iraq. His administration's push for war begs for alternative explanations.

The Bush administration is liberally staffed with neo-conservatives who spent the decade after the Gulf war criticizing President Bill Clinton's policy on Iraq from the right. As the 1990s wore on, the US and to a lesser extent, Britain, became frustrated by the breakdown of international and regional consensus behind the comprehensive sanctions on Iraq, as well as the failure of sanctions and "containment" to topple Saddam Hussein. Instead of regime change, the US and Britain witnessed the increasing success of the Iraqi regime in its strategies for rehabilitating itself, and a growing belief in international public opinion that the devastating humanitarian impact of sanctions was too high a price to pay for containment of Hussein. The neo-conservatives argued, with considerable fervor, that Iraqi defiance warranted more robust US military action than Clinton's periodic missile strikes.

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- **1958** Iraqi monarchy overthrown in military coup led by Abd al-Karim Qasim.
- **1959** Saddam Hussein, 22, flees Iraq after involvement in attempted assassination of Qasim.
- **1961** Qasim claims newly independent Kuwait as part of Iraq. Kurds begin armed revolt against Baghdad.
- **1963** Ba'th Party overthrows Qasim, then is edged out of power by allies in coup. Iraq renounces claim to Kuwait.
- **1966** Ceasefire between Kurds and government forces.
- **1967** Iraq breaks diplomatic relations with the US after Arab-Israeli war.
- **1968** Baâthist coup makes Saddam Hussein vice president and deputy head of the Revolutionary Command Council.
- **1970** Baghdad and Kurdish Democratic Party sign peace agreement.
- **1972** Iraq Petroleum Company—a consortium of Western companies—is nationalized.
- **1974** Collapse of 1970 accord with KDP. Failed Kurdish rebellion produces refugee crisis.
- **1975** Iraq and Iran sign treaty ending border disputes.
- **1979** Saddam Hussein becomes president and chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council. About 400 party members are executed.
- **1980** Iran shells Iraqi border towns. On September 17, Iraq abrogates 1975 treaty, and invades Iran.
- **1981** Israel attacks Osirak nuclear reactor.
- **1982** Iranian counteroffensive reclaims much ground occupied by Iraq. Syria closes pipeline to Iraq.
- **1984** Iraq restores diplomatic relations with the US.
- **1986** UN Secretary General reports Iraq's use of mustard gas and nerve agents against Iranian soldiers.
- **1986-87** "Tanker war" between Iran and Iraq in Persian Gulf.
- **1988** Anfal operation results in 50,000-100,000 deaths in northern Iraq. On March 16, Iraq attacks Kurdish town of Halabja with mix of poison gas and nerve agents, killing 5,000. Ceasefire with Iran on August 20. Iraq reasserts claim to Kuwait.

The convergence of these factors – declining consensus, the unpopularity of sanctions, the regime's survival and the neo-conservatives' ideological commitment – made a showdown between Saddam Hussein and the West predictable when Bush captured the White House in 2000. After the September 11 attacks in New York and Washington, the neo-conservatives seized the opportunity for a reckoning with their *béte noire* in Baghdad.

A Regime Rises

The Ba'th party, now headed by Saddam Hussein, has been in power continuously since 1968. Regime functionaries developed an increasingly authoritarian system of government based on state control of burgeoning oil revenues and fierce repression of any and all opponents and critics – Communists, Kurdish parties and religious parties associated with the majority Shia community. Through a combination of force and inducements, the regime has sustained its narrow power base. The party apparatus has now faded in importance, having been eclipsed by Saddam Hussein himself, his family, close allies and selected security services. Early Ba'thist ideology was pan-Arabist, but in the 1980s, the party began to speak the language of Iraqi nationalism to rally the diverse population against external enemies. Iraqi Ba'thist rhetoric remained largely secular until the 1980s and 1990s, when the regime increasingly invoked Islam to coopt potential Islamist opposition within Iraq and to exploit Islamic solidarity abroad. The words "God is great" were first emblazoned upon the Iraqi flag on January 13, 1991 – three days before the US started bombing Baghdad.

Until the mid-1980s, oil wealth allowed the regime to build an impressive welfare state, and government investment in irrigation, schools, health care and other fields contributed to steadily rising living standards for ordinary Iraqis. Iraq's relative prosperity made the country a magnet for guest workers from Egypt, Yemen and other poorer Arab countries until 1990. But eight years of highly destructive war against Iran began to undo these achievements, concentrating the country's financial resources on expanding the size and weaponry of the Iraqi army, and subsequently on rearming and rebuilding. An oil price collapse in 1986 further eroded the regime's fiscal position.

Oil revenues and financial support from the Gulf states permitted Saddam Hussein's regime to survive the war with Iran. In addition to backing from Iraq's long-time allies, the Soviet Union and France, more surreptitious support came from the US, Britain and Germany, which "tilted" in favor of Iraq against Iran. After the war, Western arms and construction companies competed for contracts in Iraq, with the governments of the US, Britain, Germany, France and Russia continuing to facilitate arms sales and business, especially by providing lines of credit. President Ronald Reagan's administration only weakly protested Iraq's appalling human rights record – including its use of chemical weapons against Iranian troops and against Iraqi Kurds during the Anfal operations of 1987-1988 – and blocked a Senate resolution that would have imposed sanctions. But the attitudes of Western powers, in particular the US and Britain, toward Iraq changed radically with the invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

Desert Storm

While Iraqi governments has staked periodic claims upon Kuwait for years, the 1990 invasion was immediately motivated by severe financial pressures

generated by the Iran-Iraq war. In need of revenue, Iraq sought forgiveness of Kuwaiti loans made during the Iran-Iraq war, disputed Kuwait's oil production levels and charged Kuwait with tapping into the Rumaila oilfield that lies almost entirely inside Iraq. Saddam Hussein appears to have misread US and broader Arab interests in launching the invasion. He believed that, given its previously friendly disposition and eagerness for contracts, the US would be amenable to negotiated solutions. Though Hussein knew of Washington's fears for the post-invasion security of Saudi Arabian oilfields, he wrongly calculated that the Saudi royal family would not allow non-Muslim soldiers to be based on Saudi Arabian soil. The fact that Iraq invaded Kuwait, a sovereign state, allowed the UN Security Council to create a wide coalition in favor of action against Iraq, including the key Arab states of Syria and Egypt, as well as traditional US allies Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

UN Security Council Resolution 661, passed in August 1990, imposed mandatory and comprehensive economic sanctions covering Iraq's imports, exports and movement of funds. Sanctions were given only a few months to force withdrawal of Iraqi soldiers from Kuwait. Meanwhile, the US, supported by Britain, began a massive troop buildup in the Gulf, including Saudi Arabia, and pushed vigorously for military action. In November 1990, US insistence secured UN Security Council Resolution 678, providing for the use of "all necessary means" to end the occupation of Kuwait. The Soviet Union, in political turmoil at the time, was persuaded to go along with the other Security Council members. China abstained after strong pressure from the US.

Numerous Arab, European and Soviet diplomatic efforts to avert war came to nothing, with the US sticking to the demand that Iraq withdraw from Kuwait without conditions. In December 1990, the press quoted US officials saying that a peaceful Iraqi withdrawal was a "nightmare scenario," because then Iraq might place its disputes with Kuwait on the negotiating table. The US and Britain also resisted attempts to link resolution of the Gulf crisis to resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including an eleventh-hour French proposal that Iraq withdraw if the US agreed to convene an international conference on Middle East peace. The air war commenced on January 16, 1991. Allied bombing caused major damage to Iraq's civilian infrastructure, including electricity generation, water and sanitation facilities. Despite concerns about Iraqi civilian casualties and Iraq's firing of Scud missiles at Israel, the Arab coalition held.

Operation Desert Storm, the brief ground war that followed the bombing, drove Iraqi troops from Kuwait. Allied troops pursued them only as far as the outskirts of the southern cities of Basra and Nasriyya. President George Bush and other coalition leaders decided not to continue fighting inside Iraq, partly to assuage Saudi concern to forestall Iraqi Shiite autonomy, partly to limit Iranian influence on post-war Iraq, and partly in fear of getting bogged down in protracted battles.

The Day After

The retreat of the Iraqi army triggered an uprising against Hussein's regime in the Shiite south, in no small part due to Bush's urgings during the war that the Iraqi military and the Iraqi people "take matters into their own hands." Fearing the influence of Iran on the rebel forces, the coalition forces stood by while Baghdad forcibly suppressed the uprising. The

- **1990** Iraq invades Kuwait on August 2. UN demands withdrawal by January 15, 1991, and imposes economic embargo. On November 29, UN authorizes use of "all necessary means" to liberate Kuwait.
- **1991** Bombardment of Iraq starts Operation Desert Storm on January 17. Ground war begins on February 24, and liberation of Kuwait occurs February 27. On March 3, Iraq accepts ceasefire. Iraqi forces suppress rebellions in the south and north during March and April, creating refugee crisis on borders with Turkey and Iran. Northern no-fly zone established in April. UNSCOM established.
- **1992** No-fly zone established in southern Iraq.
- **1993** US cruise missile attack on Iraqi intelligence headquarters in Baghdad, in response to alleged attempt on George Bush's life in Kuwait in April.
- **1994** Saddam Hussein becomes prime minister and president. Iraqi National Assembly recognizes Kuwait's borders and independence.
- **1994-1997** Fighting between KDP and rival Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. Iraqi forces move into northern no-fly zone and help KDP defeat PUK in August 1996. Failed Iraqi National Congress coup attempt in 1996.
- **1995** UNSC 986 allows the partial resumption of Iraq's oil exports to buy food and medicine in April. Resolution not accepted by Iraq until December.
- **1998** Inspectors withdraw from Iraq. US and Britain bomb Iraq from December 16-19 in Operation Desert Fox.
- **1999** UNSC 1284 creates UNMOVIC to replace UNSCOM. Iraq rejects resolution.
- **2000** First domestic passenger flights in Iraq since 1991. Commercial air links reestablished with Russia, Ireland and Middle East. Syria reopens pipeline.
- **2001** In February, US and Britain carry out major bombing raid. Rail link with Turkey reopened in May for the first time since 1981.
- **2002** In March, Arab summit rejects military action against Iraq. UNSC 1409 streamlines sanctions in May. Iraq rejects weapons inspections in talks with UN Secretary General in July. UN rejects Iraqi proposal for readmitting inspectors in August.
- **October 2002** Both houses of Congress pass resolutions authorizing George W. Bush to employ force to overthrow Saddam Hussein's regime.

ceasefire agreement signed on March 3, 1991 stopped Iraq from flying warplanes over the south but did not prevent the use of heavy armor, which became a significant factor in regime efforts to regain control.

Iraq's counterattack against rebels in the Kurdish-dominated north led to mass flight. At the Iranian border, refugees were allowed to cross, but the Turkish government refused to permit most of the refugees access, leaving them stranded in snowbound mountains. This major humanitarian disaster prompted the Gulf war coalition to send forces to secure a "safe haven" in the northwest corner of Iraq. A no-fly zone was also established above the thirty-sixth parallel of latitude, initially to protect allied troops. The zone remained in place after the coalition troops withdrew in June-July 1991. In October 1991, after a series of clashes with Kurdish forces, the central government withdrew all its troops and administrative staff from the Kurdish-dominated areas of the north, halted all government funding and placed an embargo on goods crossing into Kurdish-controlled areas. The internal embargo was not relaxed until 1997.

In April 1991, the UN passed UNSC Resolution 687, which laid down the terms of the ceasefire: elimination of Iraq's programs for developing chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, dismantlement of its long-range missiles, a system of inspections to verify compliance, acceptance of a UN-demarcated Iraq-Kuwait border, payment of war compensation and the return of Kuwaiti property and prisoners of war. UNSC 687 has formed the basis for most subsequent UN action regarding Iraq. Resolution 688, passed a few days later, after Iraq had crushed the northern rebellion, demanded that Iraq "cease this repression," but did not explicitly call for enforcement by military action. The US and Britain, however, have consistently referred to UNSC 688 to justify the continued existence of, and periodic bombing in, the no-fly zones and as a further condition for the lifting of sanctions.

Inspecting Iraq

The UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) established to verify Iraq's compliance with the weapons provisions of UNSC 687 first entered Iraq in 1991, and inspections by UNSCOM and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) continued until December 1998. Although UNSCOM succeeded in

Jacob Hollingsworth/DoD Photo

US serviceman paints a bomb to symbolize the warplane's each bombing run during Operation Desert Fox, December 1998.

locating and destroying the majority of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction sites, its inspections were frequently contested by the Iraqis, who resisted attempts to see certain sites and withheld documents.

From 1994, a clear rift opened among the Permanent Five members of the Security Council over the progress of the inspections. France and Russia wanted to reward specific instances of Iraqi cooperation with gradual amelioration of the country's economic isolation, including a "road map" toward the lifting of sanctions, while the US and UK refused to consider such measures. The dispute was fueled by critical ambiguities in the conditions for lifting the embargo in UNSC 687, contained in paragraphs 21 and 22 of the resolution. Paragraph 22 appears to allow the embargo on international imports from Iraq – primarily oil – to be removed once Iraq had complied with all clauses relating to weapons of mass destruction. France and Russia favored a focus on this provision. Paragraph 21 was much broader: international exports to Iraq could only resume when it was judged to have complied with "all relevant UN resolutions." The US and Britain took this reference to include UNSC 688, which dealt with Iraq's treatment of the Kurds and the Shia, and strove to keep sanctions in place as a first priority.

The rift between the US and Britain on one side, and France and Russia on the other, widened, and weapons inspections went on in an increasingly acrimonious atmosphere. In 1997 evidence emerged that the US, and possibly the Israelis, had been receiving intelligence gathered in the course of UNSCOM inspections. Rolf Ekeus, head of UNSCOM from 1991-1997, confirmed to Swedish radio in late July 2002 that US inspectors sought information outside the organization's mandate, such as details on the movements of Saddam Hussein. Revelations of intelligence gathering lent credibility to Iraq's protests that inspections were infringing upon its sovereignty, and eroded international support for UNSCOM's aggressive tactics.

Unanswered Questions

Despite political obstacles, weapons inspections in the 1990s achieved a great deal. UNSCOM inspections revealed a clandestine nuclear program which, according to an IAEA assessment, might have produced a usable weapon by December 1992, had Iraq continued it. The final reports of UNSCOM and IAEA filed after they left Iraq stated that Iraq's nuclear stocks were gone and suggested most of its long-range delivery systems had been destroyed. Numerous outside studies, most recently one from the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies, have concluded that while Iraq retains the scientific expertise to manufacture a nuclear bomb, it lacks the necessary fissile material.

Questions remain about Iraq's chemical and biological weapons capacity. In the 1990s, inspectors destroyed 38,500 prohibited chemical warheads and millions of liters of chemical agents. Iraq claims to have eliminated over 30,000 more weapons and tons of additional chemical agents of its own volition, but UNSCOM was unable to verify this claim before leaving the country. In August 1995, Iraq admitted having produced large volumes of weapons-grade biological materials for use in the 1990-1991 Gulf war. UNSCOM never located this stockpile, which Iraq also claimed to have destroyed. Some former inspectors, along with the US and British governments, refer to these chemical and biological materials as "missing" or "unaccounted for," and believe that Iraq has successfully hidden them from scrutiny.

On the basis of IAEA reports in 1997, Russia recommended that Iraq's nuclear file be closed, again to establish a "road map" toward Iraqi compliance and the lifting of sanctions, but Washington and London refused. Successive inspections crises ensued in 1998. In February, Iraq refused to allow so-called "presidential" sites to be inspected, again on grounds of sovereignty. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan defused this crisis by brokering an agreement under which international diplomats would accompany inspectors to these sites. UNSCOM continued to complain of Iraqi non-cooperation, and pulled out of Iraq in November, and again in December, the second time without consulting the Security Council. From December 16-19, the US and Britain heavily bombed alleged weapons sites throughout southern and central Iraq. This bombardment – known as Operation Desert Fox – took place without Security Council authorization, following a pattern established by the US and Britain over the 1990s.

Rules of Engagement

The US and Britain have regularly resorted to military action to enforce Security Council resolutions on Iraq without express UN approval. In 1991, the US and Britain designated a part of the Kurdish-controlled region lying above the thirty-sixth parallel as a no-fly zone for Iraqi aircraft. A second no-fly zone was established in the south up to the thirty-second parallel in August 1992, and extended to the thirty-third parallel, close to Baghdad, in 1996. The two no-fly zones were initially policed by the US, Britain and France. In 1996, France withdrew from the northern zone, and in 1998 from the southern zone – in protest over Desert Fox. The US and Britain have continued daily patrols of the no-fly zones, with periodic attacks on

Iraqi anti-aircraft emplacements and major bombing episodes triggered by alleged major movements of Iraqi armor in border areas or intensified anti-aircraft fire.

Following Desert Fox, the US and Britain changed the rules of engagement in the no-fly zones, allowing pilots to strike at any part of the Iraqi air defense system, not just those that directly targeted their aircraft, by firing upon them or by "locking on" radar detectors to the planes. The scale of action in the no-fly zones since that time has increased dramatically. According to British Ministry of Defense figures quoted by the *Times* (London) in June 2000, the average monthly release of bombs rose from 0.025 tons to five tons. After a lull in early 2002, air strikes again increased in intensity and frequency in the fall, and as of October 3, US and British planes had bombed Iraqi targets 46 times in 2002.

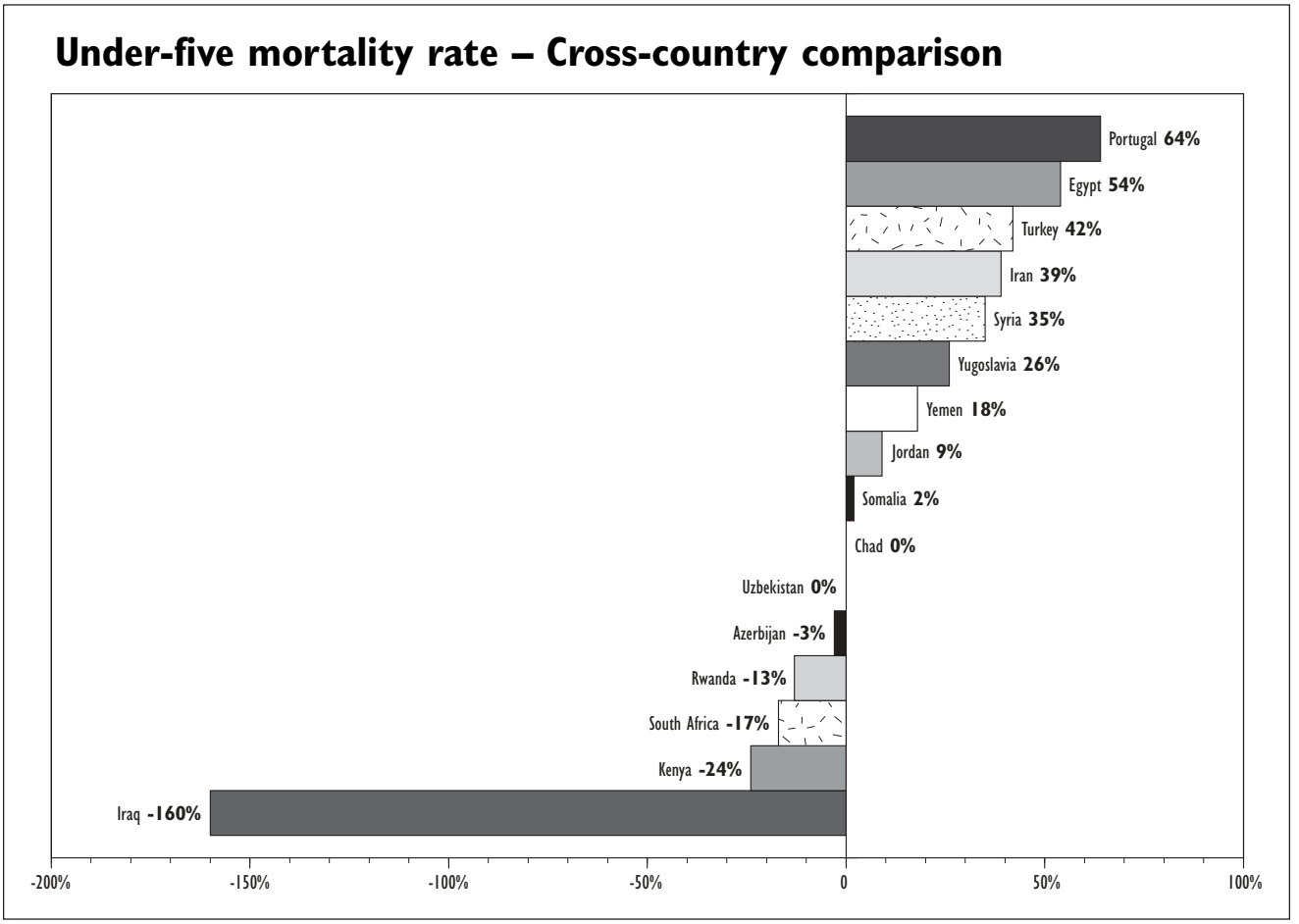
A year after Desert Fox, UN Security Council Resolution 1284 created a new arms monitoring body called UNMOVIC, headed by Hans Blix, but Iraq has not yet permitted inspectors to return. Unless and until inspections resume, assertions by Iraqi defectors and the US and British governments that Iraq persists in developing weapons of mass destruction are impossible to confirm or rebut. In 2001, negotiations sporadically took place between the UN and Iraq over the readmission of inspectors, but international diplomacy focused almost exclusively on the various proposals for reinvigorated, "smarter" sanctions.

The Sanctions Decade

Since their introduction in 1990, comprehensive economic sanctions on Iraq have raised substantial concerns about the impact of coercive measures against governments when the populations in question have no democratic rights. Both Security Council members and Iraq frequently allowed humanitarian issues to become bargaining chips in struggles over the fulfillment of UNSC 687. No clear definition was agreed upon for "humanitarian goods" – those commodities to be excluded from the embargo. The US in particular sought to limit the definition as far as possible, initially only to include food and medicine. As time went on, the Security Council allowed the purchase of more types of goods, but contracts were frequently challenged because the sought-after items might prove to be "dual-use."

Accurate assessments of the humanitarian situation have been difficult to obtain. Most international NGOs

UNICEF Sitan



Percentage change in mortality rates among children under five, from 1990-2000. Egypt's rate was 54 percent lower in 2000 than in 1990. Iraq's rate was 160 percent higher.

Karim Sahib/AFP

Women wash clothes near Basra oilfields in southern Iraq.

withdrew from government-controlled areas of Iraq by mid-1992, when the Iraqi government imposed stringent restrictions on their operations. Only in 1998 was UNICEF able to carry out a nationwide survey of health and nutrition, which found, for instance, that mortality rates among children under five in central and southern Iraq had doubled from the previous decade. Most independent observers would endorse the March 1999 conclusion of the UN Security Council's Panel on Humanitarian Issues: "Even if not all suffering in Iraq can be imputed to external factors, especially sanctions, the Iraqi people would not be undergoing such deprivations in the absence of the prolonged measures imposed by the Security Council and the effects of war."

The Security Council's punitive approach was compounded by the fact that Gulf war bombing had inflicted extensive infrastructural damage, compromising the provision of clean water, sanitation and electrical power to the Iraqi population. The resulting public health emergency, rather than hunger, has been and continues to be the primary cause of increased mortality, especially among children under five. UNICEF estimated in 2002 that 70 percent of child deaths result from diarrhea and acute respiratory infections.

For its part the Iraqi government, while providing a basic food ration, placed military and security concerns over civilian needs, especially when making decisions on reconstruction. Poor planning and public education, and shortages of trained personnel caused by the catastrophic decline of real wages in the public sector, exacerbated the humanitarian crisis.

In late 1991, under pressure from UN agencies reporting acute humanitarian needs in Iraq, the Security Council passed Resolutions 706 and 712, designed to allow Iraq use the proceeds of limited oil sales to purchase "humanitarian goods" outside Iraq. After prolonged negotiations, Iraq rejected the caps on its oil sales as too stringent, and called for the lifting of sanctions. By 1993, the Iraqi economy under sanctions stood at one-fifth its size in 1979, and then took a further nose dive in 1994. Meager rations lasted only about one third to half a month. With shrinking incomes, Iraqis could not afford the spiraling prices of goods on the open market. Soon France and Russia began to float the concept of certifying Iraqi compliance with inspections, and lifting sanctions, at the Security Council. The summer 1995 defection of Hussein Kamil, Saddam Hussein's son-in-law, who came bearing detailed information on Iraq's previously unacknowledged biological weapons program, only temporarily stalled French and Russian efforts to seek an exit from sanctions.

Oil for Food

To stymie the progress of the French-Russian proposals, the US encouraged Britain to formulate UN Security Council Resolution 986 – reviving the "oil for food" idea of UNSC 706 and 712 – in early 1995. The new resolution made some concessions to Iraq's earlier objections, though Iraq initially held out for more. The Oil-for-Food program established by UNSC 986 finally came into operation at the end of 1996. Under this program, Iraq could sell specified amounts of oil during every six-month period. The proceeds, deposited in an

Kurdish children climb on sculpture atop former Iraqi intelligence headquarters in Suleimaniya in northern Iraq. Frits Meyst/Panos Pictures

UN-controlled escrow account outside Iraq, would be used to fill orders for humanitarian goods from the Iraqi government. Until 2002, a committee of all Security Council members (known as the 661 Committee) scrutinized the operation of the Oil-for-Food program. The US, and to a lesser extent Britain, made a common practice of placing "holds" on large numbers of orders – over $5.3 billion worth in early 2002 – ostensibly because the requested items might have military uses. This practice, combined with Iraq's bureaucratic delays, interruptions of oil sales and a prolonged dispute with the Security Council over oil pricing, reduced the volume of goods getting into Iraq. Holds have disproportionately affected Iraq's ability to rebuild its water, sanitation and electricity infrastructure.

Modifications to the Oil-for-Food program later raised the ceiling on oil sales and widened the scope of goods that could be purchased, to include some items needed to refurbish Iraq's oil industry and other infrastructure. In 2001, a further resolution removed the limit on the amount of oil Iraq could sell. In 2002, Resolution 1409 reduced the role of the 661 Committee in vetting orders and placed the job of determining which items were "dual-use" in the purview of UNMOVIC, the new weapons inspection agency, and the IAEA. These "smart sanctions" – designed to deflect criticism of sanctions in general and Oil-for-Food in particular – arguably came too little, too late.

Stopgap Measure

The US and Britain often present the Oil-for-Food program as a vast humanitarian relief effort, but it was intended as a stopgap measure to sustain economic sanctions while allowing more humanitarian goods into the country. It was never conceived as a full-scale program of economic rehabilitation. Oil-for-Food has brought commodities into Iraq, rather than restoring Iraqis' purchasing power or the country's infrastructure to anything approaching pre-war levels.

In central and southern Iraq, the increase in size and caloric value of monthly rations (to 2,472 calories per person per day) has brought some improvement in nutrition, especially among young children. Market

prices have also been reduced from hyperinflationary levels of the mid-1990s. Oil-for-Food, however, has also perpetuated dependence on rations, shoring up central control over food supplies. Meanwhile, systems of public transportation, water, sanitation and electricity remain in a precarious state, the last two imperiled further by several years of drought. UNICEF figures show continuing high levels of mortality and morbidity from acute respiratory infections and diarrheal diseases.

In the Kurdish-controlled areas of the north, a different set of factors has influenced the humanitarian situation. Because the Iraqi regime embargoed the north, between 1992 and 1997 the Kurdish enclaves received significant amounts of humanitarian assistance via Turkey. Between 30 and 60 international NGOs worked in the north, though sporadic internal conflict and displacement between 1994 and 1997 kept the humanitarian situation unstable. Since 1997, food imports under the Oil-for-Food program have helped the Kurdish urban population, but effectively undermined the revival of the local economy, especially in the key area of agriculture. A recent survey by Save the Children-UK found that up to 60 percent of the northern population has nothing to fall back on should Oil-for-Food stop.

Oil-for-Food heightens the vulnerability of the whole Iraqi economy to disruption by political decisions and external factors, such as a military confrontation and the reduction or termination of oil sales. If the government of Iraq closed the de facto border with the Kurdish-controlled area, delivery of food and medical supplies purchased for the north by the Iraqi government would be interrupted. The entire ration distribution system in government areas could be disrupted if there was prolonged fighting or bombing or if large numbers of refugees fled elsewhere within the country or across the borders. In the north, because parts of the Kurdish region depend on the national grid for electricity, Baghdad is able to cut off the power supply, as it has done in the past.

Sanctions Crumble

After the passage of UNSC 986, Baghdad used trade to woo international support for modifying or lifting sanctions. From 1997-2001, companies representing the Security Council members most sympathetic to Iraq's position – France, Russia and China – garnered $5.48 billion of the $18.29 billion in contracts approved by the UN. Firms based in Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, whose governments also moved closer to Baghdad at the close of the decade, were awarded 30 percent of Iraq's import contracts under the Oil-for-Food program in 2000.

By 2001, sanctions were crumbling around the edges. Most of Iraq's neighbors, including its adversary Syria, and countries friendly to the West like Turkey, Jordan and some Gulf states, were involved in sanctions-busting trade with Baghdad. In comparison with the large-scale evasion of comprehensive UN sanctions on Rhodesia and Serbia, there has been little illegal transfer of goods in and out of Iraq, but the resulting revenues were sufficient to keep the Iraqi regime well-financed despite sanctions. Illicit trade – especially oil smuggling – also forged economic ties of mutual advantage which made Iraq's neighbors resistant to US and British schemes for "enhanced containment."

Since 1997, illicit revenues amounting to roughly $2 billion per year have accrued to the regime in Baghdad. A recent report from the Coalition for International Justice, which advocates the trial of Iraqi leaders for crimes against humanity, states that 90 percent of these monies come from oil smuggling. The most remunerative smuggling route runs through Syria's pipeline to oilfields in northern Iraq, reopened on November 6, 2000 after being closed since 1982, when Hafiz al-Asad's regime backed Tehran in the Iran-Iraq war. As many as 150,000 barrels of discounted Iraqi crude per day pass through the pipeline, enabling Syria to export more of its own oil. Another third of Iraq's contraband oil finds its way to Iranian ports, where it is reportedly mixed with outgoing Iranian oil products to conserve Tehran's domestic reserves.

The Kurdish enclave bordering Turkey has benefited handsomely from imposing exit taxes on diesel and crude smuggled into Turkey, though Turkey took steps to curtail this trade beginning in March 2002, perhaps because smuggling revenue was finding its way to Iraq-based militia units of the Workers' Party of Kurdistan (PKK), which fought a separatist war against Turkey in the 1990s. Officially, Iraq exports 110,000 barrels per day of oil to Jordan, with the tacit approval of the Security Council, in return for preferential prices on Jordanian consumer goods. Jordan is particularly dependent on the Iraqi market.

End of Consensus

Three times since the winter of 1999, the regime has halted oil exports, calculating that the resulting price spike would pressure the UN into concessions in reviews of the sanctions. Each time the maneuver failed, because Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have filled the gap in supply to prevent the price from rising too high. Iraq has twice stopped its exports during major Israeli offensives in the Palestinian territories, rather transparently to pose as the champion of the

Palestinian cause in the Arab world, also to negligible effect on the oil markets.

Smuggling and illegal surcharges on sales approved through the Oil-for-Food program have proven more effective for Iraq than direct use of the "oil weapon." Although the benefits of smuggling and sanctions-busting trade to Baghdad are well-known in Washington and London, the US has been unable (or unwilling) to cut off these sources of revenue, revealing the complexity of its relations with front-line states. Turkey and Jordan have been allowed to break sanctions with impunity, arguing that their fragile economies could not afford to lose Iraqi trade, though Iran has received harsh criticism. Syria has rebuffed US demands that it close down its pipeline to Iraq, and even offers of UN compensation for lost oil revenue, without apparent penalty. The US has backed down from calls to debate Syrian smuggling in the Security Council, because France has insisted on debating Turkish smuggling as well.

The general non-cooperation of Arab governments with US-UK attempts to plug holes in the embargo also signaled their displeasure with Washington's increasingly unequivocal support of Israel in its campaign to defeat the Palestinian uprising by force of arms. Arab governments, anxious about their own stability in the event of war, maintained vocal public opposition to military intervention in Iraq as the intention of the Bush administration to topple Saddam Hussein by force became clear.

Vice President Dick Cheney returned from a Middle East tour in mid-March 2002 without inducing any government to change its public line against forcible "regime change" in Iraq. The surprise rapprochement between Iraq and Kuwait at the March 2002 Arab summit – which also produced an unprecedented agreement among all Arab countries (including Iraq) to recognize the state of Israel inside its pre-1967 borders – marked the formal end of the Arab consensus behind the sanctions and containment policies of the previous decade. Iraq recognized Kuwaiti sovereignty for the first time, and the two countries issued a pledge (so far unfulfilled) to resolve Kuwaiti missing persons and stolen property claims from the Gulf war. The summit concluded with a unified call to lift the UN sanctions. Arab diplomats worked to persuade the Iraqi regime to accept the return of weapons inspectors.

Meanwhile, the logic of inspections and sanctions – that they would be lifted once Iraq complied with UNSC 687 – has been undermined by US and British statements that "regime change" is their preferred policy toward Iraq.

From Rogue State to Regime Change

Since 1991, there has been a constant tension in official US thinking between regime change and efforts to secure Iraqi compliance with UN resolutions. At the time of the Gulf war, Arab states, led by Saudi Arabia, persuaded the US that a military coup in Iraq was preferable to an allied drive on Baghdad. The Saudis and other coalition members regarded the post-war uprisings in the Shiite south with fear because of Iran's influence on the rebels, and possible repercussions among their own Shiite populations. In the north, Turkey, embroiled in war with the PKK until 1998, expressed loud concerns that autonomy for the Iraqi Kurds would encourage Turkish Kurds in their aspirations to independence. Until the last year of the first Bush administration, Washington held out hope that Saddam Hussein could not survive the impact of war and punitive sanctions. Yet despite a number of attempts since 1991, no coup has succeeded, with or without outside help.

By 1993, lack of progress in any direction led the Clinton administration to espouse the notion of "dual containment" of Iraq and Iran, defined henceforth as "rogue states." The primary aim of dual containment was to protect US friends in the region – Israel, Turkey and Saudi Arabia – while keeping Saddam Hussein "in a box." According to this argument, Saddam Hussein's regime could not and would not comply with the requirements for lifting sanctions, so sanctions would remain in place indefinitely, or until the regime collapsed. In a major speech on March 27, 1997, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said the US would back sanctions "as long as it takes" to usher in a "successor regime" that would comply with UN resolutions.

But attempts to promote regime change during both terms of Bill Clinton's presidency were only sporadic. Clinton's advisers were profoundly reluctant to commit ground troops after the disastrous Somalian operation and the difficulties over Bosnia. Support for the external Iraqi opposition was lukewarm, and the administration was often divided on how far to encourage it. Successive administrations distrusted the Iraqi National Congress (INC), the ostensible umbrella organization based in Britain and the US, though the US has done much to foster its claim to be representative. The INC's shifting membership has proven difficult to pin down to specific policies beyond regime change, while doubts persist whether (aside from the Kurds) INC-affiliated groups can muster any significant social support inside Iraq.

The Kurds – the part of the INC with forces and a base within Iraq – were engaged in internecine warfare

Paul Richards/AFP

Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz with George W. Bush.

from the end of 1993 until 1997. A CIA-backed effort to use northern Iraq as a base for an assault on the regime in 1995-1996 ended in catastrophe when Washington aborted an INC challenge to Iraqi forces along the de facto border and a planned coup in Baghdad failed. At the invitation of one Kurdish faction, the Kurdish Democratic Party, the Iraqi army moved into Erbil within the no-fly zone soon thereafter, killing many INC cadres and military defectors, and helping the KDP to defeat its rivals, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. This episode reinforced the message of the 1991 uprisings, which still resonates among those seeking to overthrow Saddam Hussein's regime, that the US is not a reliable ally.

Pressure from the INC's Republican allies in Congress pushed Clinton to sign the Iraq Liberation Act in late 1998, which appeared to signal more active support for the opposition and made regime change official US policy. But the State Department continued to have little trust in the effectiveness of the INC, and only $8 million of the $97 million allotted by the bill was disbursed by the time Clinton left office. Since 2000, the opposition has energetically burnished its image, but the question of what sort of government would replace the clique around Saddam Hussein has not been answered, at least in the public domain. How to bring about the regime's overthrow? Options ranged from all-out invasion to Special Forces action with the opposition in Iraq to support for a coup staged by the INC and other opposition forces, on the model of US tactics in Afghanistan.

The Bush Doctrine

Beginning early in George W. Bush's tenure in the White House, Republicans with strong views on Iraq, led by Vice President Dick Cheney and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, promoted a new foreign policy strategy focusing on preemptive and, if necessary, unilateral action capitalizing on the "overwhelming" military power of the US to preserve Washington's superpower status indefinitely. Drafts of this strategy had been prepared before the collapse of the Soviet Union, but only after the attacks of September 11, 2001 did a doctrine of preemption become the stated policy of the Bush administration. In September 2002 Bush sent a national security strategy to Congress, which read: "As a matter of common sense and self-defense, America will act against such emerging threats [posed by dangerous technologies] before they are fully formed. We cannot defend America and our friends by hoping for the best." The first target of this policy is Iraq.

The second Bush administration, like the previous two administrations, has focused on the person of Saddam Hussein, rather than the system he presides over, and it remains unclear who would be acceptable as a leader of Iraq if he were toppled, and how far the US would insist that structures of power built over several decades be dismantled. Yet leading hawks, such as Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, have succeeded in pushing regime change in Iraq to the top of the US foreign policy agenda. To prepare American public opinion, Bush revived his predecessor's concept of rogue states, embellishing the rhetoric by labeling

Iraq, Iran and North Korea as "an axis of evil." The more moderate views of the State Department have been sidelined over the past year.

Although the core of the US case against Iraq concerns the weapons of mass destruction proscribed by the Security Council, the radicals in the Bush administration at first wanted to sideline the UN entirely, rather than seeking to work though it and manipulate it, as did the first Bush administration and then the Clinton administration. The more outspoken members of the Bush team, especially Rumsfeld, have openly disparaged the utility of restarting weapons inspections. But the need to retain at least some allies, especially Britain, and Iraq's expressed willingness to accept the weapons inspectors back finally created pressure to go to the Security Council.

Bush's speech to the UN on September 12, 2002 challenged the UN to endorse new, tougher measures to enforce Iraq's compliance with UNSC 687, promising unilateral US action if the UN failed to do so. The subsequent flurry of Arab and international diplomacy persuaded the Iraqi regime to announce four days later its willingness to readmit inspectors "without conditions." Following several expressions of skepticism from US and British officials, and former inspectors, that renewed inspections could disarm Iraq, Baghdad stipulated that it would only accept inspections under the terms of its February 1998 agreement with Kofi Annan, meaning that "presidential" sites could only be inspected with prior warning and with diplomats present. The US and UK continued to lobby for a new resolution enabling more aggressive inspections and making war the penalty for non-cooperation, setting the stage for a standoff. In a speech in Cincinnati on October 7, 2002, Bush pointedly did not set aside the option of going to war unilaterally, if matters did not go his way at the UN.

H. Arvidsson/United Nations

UNSCOM members return from inspection of destroyed warehouse at the Muhammadiyat storage site.

War and International Law

In its draft resolution seeking Congressional authorization of force against Iraq, the Bush administration invoked "the inherent right [of the US], as acknowledged in the UN Charter, to use force in order to defend itself." Article 51 of the UN Charter does authorize the use of military force in self-defense, but only if a country has been attacked by another, or is under imminent threat of attack. The charter goes on to specify that the right of self-defense only obtains until the Security Council has taken measures to restore peace and security. After World War II, the international community set the bar very high for member states seeking to justify military action, to prevent a repeat of the expansionist aggression of the Axis powers. After making the political decision to remove Saddam Hussein's regime by force, the Bush administration pursued a two-track strategy to address the standard set by the UN Charter – one track which (nominally) would meet the standard and another which seeks radically to redefine it.

Given that Iraq has not attacked the US, the US must demonstrate an imminent threat of Iraqi attack. Hence the Bush war powers resolution also cited "the high risk that Iraq will employ [its weapons of mass destruction] to launch a surprise attack against the US or its armed forces or provide them to international terrorists," and top administration officials spoke ominously of the "mortal threat" posed by Iraq.

Since inspectors have not been in Iraq since 1998, it was impossible for the White House to proffer solid evidence that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction that could target US interests. Instead, the Bush administration, buttressed by the media interviews of former inspectors, posited that UNSCOM's inability to confirm

the eradication of Iraq's entire weapons stockpile in 1998 meant that the regime probably retained some of its arsenal. A dossier on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction released by the British government on September 24, 2002 repeated the conclusions of publicly available reports on Iraqi weapons capacity. Evidence in the dossier that Iraq continued to build illicit weapons after 1998 – such as the country's retention of many scientists who had worked on the secret nuclear program before 1991 – was circumstantial and not new. A CIA report published in October reached similar and hardly alarming conclusions.

To bolster the urgency of its case, the British dossier added the contention – based on unnamed intelligence sources – that "as part of Iraq's military planning, Saddam is willing to use" chemical and biological weapons. Along with similar claims advanced by US officials, also based on classified intelligence, as of October 2002 this contention was the only attempt to prove that the Iraqi regime constituted a "mortal threat." The lack of fresh evidence in the British dossier suggested that the goal of US-UK policy was not to prove the existence of, and eliminate, weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, but rather to provide a *casus belli*. But most of the Security Council appeared to agree with the Canadian foreign minister, who said that "[the dossier] shows why…inspectors have to get into Iraq and get in there quickly. I do not read this as a suggestion that Mr. Blair is advocating that we attack Iraq immediately."

The second track of the Bush team's strategy, much more in keeping with its unilateralist philosophy, focused on the possibility that Iraqi weapons of mass destruction might in the future target the West – meaning that the West should strike first to obviate the threat. Asked to supply material evidence of the Iraqi threat, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice commented that "we don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud." Rice's argument, restated by other administration officials, relied on emotional appeal generated by the September 11 attacks: wouldn't any reasonable person have supported a preemptive strike to stop the hijackers from carrying out their plot? Although the Bush administration has yet to present this case in a sustained fashion, Rice seemed to be contending that, after September 11, 2001, the stringent requirements of the UN Charter should be replaced with the far more flexible Bush doctrine of the preemptive strike. Along with Bush's vow to attack Iraq unilaterally if the Security Council refused to authorize it, the administration's strategy revealed its estimation that international law was an obstacle to be overcome rather than a guidepost for US policy.

Human Rights

The US and British dossiers calling for regime change also rely on raising the Iraqi regime's dismal human rights record, despite a decade of virtual Western indifference to these concerns in the 1980s. After the US cited Amnesty International's reports on Iraq in its background briefing accompanying Bush's September 14 speech to the UN General Assembly, Amnesty observed that "once again, the human rights record of a country is used selectively to legitimize military actions." In the 1990s, the US and other outside powers have done very little to promote human rights protections in Iraq – there is no Security Council resolution mandating, for instance, that Iraq cooperate with UN human rights monitors – not to mention the disregard of the US and other governments for the very severe humanitarian consequences of economic sanctions.

Iraq's human rights record is, without question, among the very worst in the world. The current government, since it came to power in 1968, has relentlessly suppressed basic civil and political rights in the country, and shares responsibility with the UN Security Council for the humanitarian disaster caused by more than a decade of sanctions. Arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, mass killings, assassinations of political critics and routine torture have left the country devastated.

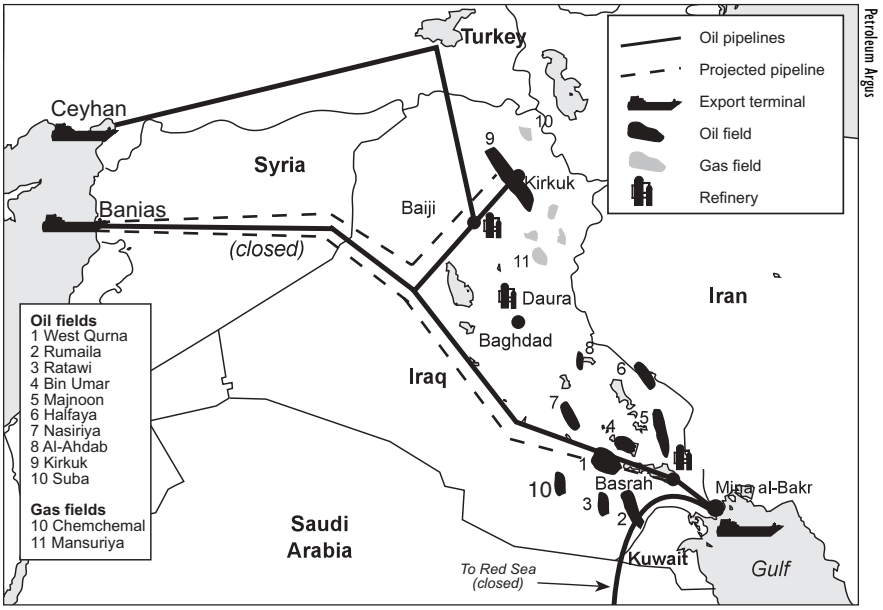
The wars caused by Iraqi aggression, the UN-imposed sanctions and the government's relentless political repression against virtually all sectors of the population have caused massive suffering and dislocation. As many as five million Iraqis – over 20 percent of the country's population – now live abroad. A recent report by the Norwegian Refugee Council estimated there are 700,000 to 1 million internally displaced persons in Iraq.

Exile was not, for many, a matter of choice. Hundreds of thousands of Shiite families – Arabs and Kurds – were forcibly exiled to Iran in the 1980s, typically with only the clothes on their backs. Thousands of villages were systematically razed in the counter-insurgency campaign against Iraq's Kurds in the north and the marshlands south of Baghdad. Conservative estimates place the number of Iraqi Kurds systematically put to death in 1988 alone at more than 100,000.

"Protecting" the North and South

The US and Britain have claimed that the no-fly zone in the north has helped to protect the lives of Kurdish Iraqis. In practice, such protection as has been provided has applied only to shelter from Iraqi aircraft, not the Turkish or Iranian air forces. The

Iraq's oil infrastructure



Iraqi oilfields and pipelines. The Syrian pipeline is now open.

Turks, pursuing their war with the PKK, used both air and ground troops on a regular basis, often causing civilian deaths, injuries and destruction of property. The US has never challenged Turkey's incursions – though the EU and UN periodically made ineffectual protests. Iraq has claimed substantial civilian casualties from the increasingly regular US-British bombing raids after Desert Fox. Fact-finders working for UN Special Observer Hans von Sponeck verified that 144 people were killed in the no-fly zones in 1999.

Further, the northern no-fly zone does not coincide exactly with the "de facto" line to which Iraqi troops withdrew in 1991. The no-fly zone therefore includes Mosul, still under government control, but excludes Suleimaniya, the largest city of the Kurdish-controlled region now ruled by two party-based administrations, along with the southern part of that governorate. Also outside the zone is the city of Kirkuk, a center of the Iraqi oil industry that remains under government control. In the Kirkuk region, Kurds are at most direct risk from the Iraqi regime, which has pursued a policy of "Arabization" of the city and the surrounding region. By the conservative estimate of the US Committee for Refugees, in the past ten years nearly 100,000 Kurds have been expelled from their homes in Kirkuk, in favor of Iraqi Arabs resettled by the regime.

In the south, low-level armed resistance continued after 1991, mainly in the marshland areas between the Tigris and Euphrates, but a southern US-enforced no-fly zone provided precious little by way of protection. The government's counter-insurgency campaign included systematic drainage of the marshes – the utter destruction in less than a decade of the largest wetland ecosystem in the Middle East. What the UN Environmental Program termed "one of the world's greatest environmental disasters" led to the nearly complete displacement of hundreds of thousands of residents.

Dangers Ahead

Each year sees credible reports from the Iraqi Communist Party and other dissident groups of hundreds – sometimes thousands – of killings and executions. The government has imposed mandatory death sentences for non-violent political "crimes" such as recruiting a current or former Ba'th Party member into any other political organization, or publicly insulting the president or the party. Since 1998, when a directive from the Office of the President authorized the creation of "supervisory committees" to "clean up Iraqi prisons," the government has conducted mass executions of political detainees.

Many of these reports have been verified by interviews with witnesses and family members who have fled the government-controlled areas to the north or to other countries. The government has refused entry to independent human rights monitors and to the long-time UN Special Rapporteur on Iraq, Max van der Stoel, whose one visit occurred in 1992. The government never permitted him to return. A new rapporteur, Andreas Mavrommatis, appointed by the UN Commission on Human Rights in 2000, made a brief, four-day visit in February 2002, as "a first step in dialogue," but conducted no fact-finding.

The human rights and humanitarian consequences of any coming war will likely be significant, however. From one side will be potential civilian casualties from a US-led air war and ground invasion. From the Iraqi government side, one real danger is the practice of "human shielding" – placing troops and high-value military targets amidst civilian populations. There is also a great danger from any chemical and/or biological weapons that the government of Iraq may possess – either from a government decision to deploy those weapons or from a US decision to target such sites for destruction. Finally, but not least, a war is likely to produce a vast refugee crisis and internal displacement, and neighboring countries, especially

Jordan, have indicated they plan to use armed force if necessary to prevent any large influx of Iraqi refugees.

Oil and War

The Iraqi Ministry of Oil estimated in the mid-1990s that Iraq could produce six million barrels per day within seven years of ending the UN embargo, with $30 billion in foreign investment. But throughout the 1990s, sanctions prevented major energy conglomerates from exploiting Iraq's 115 billion barrels of proven petroleum reserves – second only to those of Saudi Arabia – despite the willingness of the Iraqi regime after mid-1991 to relax its control of the rigidly nationalized oil industry. Since no geological survey has been conducted in Iraq since the 1970s, experts believe that the proven reserves underestimate the country's actual oil wealth, which could be as large as 250 billion barrels. Three decades of political instability and war have kept Iraq from developing 55 of its 70 proven oilfields. Eight of these fields could harbor more than a billion barrels each of "easy oil" which is close to the surface and inexpensive to extract.

Sanctions and US law barred American firms completely from exploring Iraqi fields, but beginning in 1994 international companies signed lucrative contracts with Baghdad in anticipation of the lifting of sanctions. Paris-based companies negotiated an (unsigned) agreement to develop the 18 billion-barrel Majnoon field, as well as the smaller Nahr bin Umar field, while a Russian consortium inked a deal to develop the West Qurna field, containing an estimated 15 billion barrels. Baghdad also signed contracts with Chinese firms. Frustrated that none of its partners would begin work while sanctions remained in place, the Ba'thist regime first threatened to revoke the agreements and to downgrade their attractive terms. Nevertheless, the prospect that oil exploration might start gave Baghdad a lifeline of sorts to the UN Security Council. In June 2001, France and Russia proposed removing restrictions on foreign investment in the Iraqi oil industry during Security Council deliberations over "smart sanctions." These attempts to reconstitute Iraq's oil revenue – and refill the government's coffers – ran into staunch opposition from Washington and London. Due to deteriorating infrastructure and a pricing dispute with the Security Council, in September 2002 Iraq was pumping at less than half its capacity, its legitimate oil sales tightly regulated under the Oil-for-Food program.

In the thinking of the neo-conservatives who dominate Middle East policy in the Bush White House, the primary benefit of regime change is to enshrine the Bush doctrine, but Iraq's oil reserves offer an important secondary benefit. In concert with other producers, a US-allied Iraqi government might in the future export enough oil to displace Saudi Arabia as primary arbiter of world oil prices, reducing what influence the Saudis can exert on US policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and giving the US more freedom of maneuver in the Gulf.

It is uncertain that a post-war Iraq would be willing or able to assume that role, but the possibility, combined with the sheer size of Iraqi reserves, has led many observers to conclude that oil motivates the US policy of regime change. Ahmed Chalabi, leader of the opposition Iraqi National Congress, fueled these theories when he told the *Washington Post* in September 2002 that "American companies will have a big shot at Iraqi oil." Under Oil-for-Food, the US has been the leading consumer of Iraqi oil, and the long-standing US interest in free access to Persian Gulf oil will doubtless continue to be a pillar of Middle East policy. Cheney's national energy policy report, released in May 2001, projects that US demand for oil will climb 32 percent by 2020, while domestic production remains steady. Two thirds of global petroleum reserves are found in the Persian Gulf, and the US military presence in the Gulf certainly aims to secure the westward flow of oil in the future.

But the dogged intensification of sanctions, containment and regime change rhetoric by the US and Britain, when Iraq was prepared to open its oil industry to Western investment, suggests that oil has played a more complicated part in the 12-year confrontation between Washington, London and Baghdad. The Iraqi regime has tried to use oil exploration contracts to undermine international support for the sanctions, while using illicit exports to rebuild ties with its neighbors. Determined to stop the rehabilitation of the regime, but unable to foil its economic survival strategies completely through diplomacy, the US and Britain gradually hardened their resolve – encouraged by the neo-conservatives – that Saddam Hussein had to be removed by force.

Toward the Denouement

The Bush team's determination to topple Saddam Hussein both builds on, and radically departs from, international policy on Iraq since 1991, which essentially has been made by the five permanent members of the Security Council. On the issue of Iraq, Washington retained a dominant position among the Permanent Five until the impasse that followed the withdrawal of weapons inspectors in

1998. The US also engaged in the kind of bargaining and arm-twisting in the Council that is only available to a global power. On October 7, 2002, Bush repeated his warnings to the UN to endorse the use of force or "prove irrelevant to the problems of our time." Days later, Secretary of State Colin Powell convinced UNMOVIC head Hans Blix to delay new inspections until a new resolution could be accepted. Meanwhile, apparent Pentagon preparations for war even as the UN deliberated signaled that the US would attempt to form a coerced international consensus behind military action.

The international atmosphere is not conducive to the rapid coalition building that was possible before the 1991 war. Middle Eastern states in particular are upset by Bush's failure to intervene positively in the escalated Israeli-Palestinian conflict, by seemingly clumsy attempts to link Iraq to al-Qaeda and by the possible regional implications of a new war. Regional concerns over an attack on Iraq have been rejected by the Bush administration as mere public show. International opinion increasingly asks why Security Council demands upon Iraq should be enforced by military action, when that body's numerous demands upon Israel, India, Pakistan, Turkey and Morocco remain conspicuously unmet. Reports that the US would install a military administration to govern post-war Iraq prompted nervous comparisons to British and French colonialism in the Middle East.

A military assault to remove Saddam Hussein can only deepen the problems that any new Iraqi government will face after two decades of war and sanctions. Civilian infrastructure remains severely degraded. The once vibrant Iraqi professional classes have been cut off from advances in knowledge and technology since 1990, the work force is deskilled, and the school system is in grave disrepair. The regime's survival strategies – encouraging tribal and personal loyalties – have widened existing rifts between Iraq's ethnic, religious and tribal groups that may erupt into communal strife.

Still, in October 2002 back-door diplomacy focusing on post-war access to Iraqi oilfields appeared to be softening Russian and French objections to the US-British draft resolution making war the penalty for Iraqi non-cooperation with a toughened inspections process. The 2002 crisis in the Gulf seemed to be nearing the denouement desired by hard-line policymakers in the White House: a test of the Bush doctrine of the preemptive strike. ●