



IRAQ, TWENTY YEARS LATER

Did US Attacks on Iraq Begin with the Invasion of 2003? Think Again

January 14,
2011

The United States dropped thousands of tons of bombs on Iraq, destroying its infrastructure, killing thousands, and creating problems for years to come. This is not only a description of the “shock and awe” campaign begun on March 19, 2003, but also **the start of the “Gulf War” on January 16, 1991**. That 43-day bombing and ground campaign, ostensibly to drive Iraq out of Kuwait after it invaded that country in August 1990, ended with a cease-fire agreement calling for a **nuclear-free Middle East** and the **continuation of some of the strictest sanctions in history** against the people of Iraq (Security Council Resolution 687). Those sanctions were mostly lifted after the 2003 invasion, but by then so much damage had been done that Iraq will need a generation to rebuild. Some estimate that over 1 million Iraqis died between the imposition of sanctions in August, 1990 and March, 2003. In a famous interview, CBS’ Leslie Stahl asked Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, “We have heard that a **half million children have died**. I mean, that’s more children than died in Hiroshima. And, you know, is the price worth it?” Albright replied, “I think this is a very hard choice, but the price—we think the price is worth it” (60 Minutes May 12, 1996).



1991

We hear a lot in this country about **how many deaths the US suffered on 9/11 (2977)**, and **how many American soldiers have died in Iraq (about 4430 as of Jan. 1, 2011)** and **Afghanistan (at least 1369)**. But hearing that number of Iraqi dead from “Gulf War part 1” should give us pause

to think. What is the term that’s used for attacking the civilian population of a country in order to try influencing its political leaders? Ah, yes, **terrorism**.

Documents revealed by Wikileaks show that even the more **conservative estimates of Iraqi deaths** since the 2003 invasion, tracked on iraqbodycount.org were too low, in part because the US government was not releasing information about the death tolls. The most recent statistics indicate **at least 99,334 Iraqi civilians have died from war-related violence since 2003**, but Iraq Body Count estimates a **minimum of 15,000 more will be uncovered** in the Wikileaks documents.

The **sanctions imposed on Iraq in 1990 prevented the repair of civilian infrastructure** such as power generators and water treatment plants. These sanctions were supposedly designed to compel the people of Iraq to rise up and oust Saddam Hussein, a US goal but not a United Nations mandate. From 1991 to 2003, the US continued to patrol Iraqi skies, **dropping hundreds of bombs in the so-called “no-fly zones.”** These bombs were dropped on average on a weekly basis from 1998 to 2003, and killed many civilians including sheep herders and other non-combatants (BBC 2/19/01). Because the sanctions restricted the importing of goods such as chlorine, which could be used as a weaponized gas but also is needed to clean water, Iraq suffered from a **lack of food, clean water and medicine**. To alleviate the suffering of the Iraqis, the UN instituted the “Oil-for-Food program,” which while creating a way for Iraq to buy some humanitarian goods through strictly controlled sale of its own oil supply, did not prevent the deaths of several hundred thousand Iraqis from **easily treatable diseases and starvation**. These deaths were particularly hard on a country which until 1990 was among the most advanced medically in the Middle East. While most remaining sanctions were lifted in December 2010, oil money will continue flowing through the UN to pay Kuwait and others seeking reparations until June 2011.

Another goal of the sanctions was to get Iraq to dismantle its weapons of mass destruction. **President Bill Clinton launched a bombing campaign** in December, 1998, just as **weapons inspectors were ready to confirm that Iraq had no such weapons**. The inspectors left the country, the bombs dropped, and the narrative was spun that Iraq had thrown the inspectors out—even though they left at the behest of the Americans (“Iraq: Former and Recent Military Confrontations



2004

with the United States,” Congressional Research Service 10/16/02).

In late 2002, **President George W. Bush made connections between Iraq and the 9/11 Al Qaida-linked attacks** on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, even though **the secular Hussein had no connection to the fundamentalist Osama Bin Laden**. Bush continued to insist that Hussein had weapons of mass destruction. The UN passed a new resolution under pressure from the US which put weapons inspectors back on the ground and called for the Security Council to decide whether Iraq was in compliance. As inspectors were ready to determine that Iraq had no WMDs, Bush circumvented the UN Security Council, **launching a massive bombing campaign on March 19, 2003.** (over)



1998

The US invaded the country, toppling Hussein's regime and installing a puppet government. Despite two rounds of elections, the **Iraqis are still without a stable government**, and cannot count on their own security forces for protection from attacks intended to drive out the US and its influence.

The west's treatment of Iraq is only one more catastrophic example of how America's long-standing intervention in the region **focuses almost totally on oil**, and ignores the people that live on top of the oil. These policies result in the **type of desperation and hatred that lead to the September 11 attacks**. The way to stop terrorism is not to ransack a nation of 23 million and then prevent the repair of the facilities necessary to support the populace.

It should also be noted that, albeit under the strong arm of a dictator, **Iraq's Sunni, Shiite, Arab, Kurd and Christian populations lived side by side, intermarried, and didn't put much thought into who was who**. That all changed with the US invasion.

The 1991 war on Iraq also marked the first time the U.S. used ammunition tipped with **Depleted Uranium (DU)**, a low-level radioactive metal so hard it can pierce armor. The particles scattered about Iraq (and later, former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, and Iraq again) are thought to be responsible for an **uptick in cancer** (at least a 60% increase in the bombarded areas of Iraq — Reuters 12/1/09) and perhaps the **"Gulf War Syndrome"** found in returning US military personnel.

Currently, though a large number of US troops left Iraq in late August 2010, **roughly 50,000 troops remain** along with an even larger number of "contractors." In addition, the US' presence includes the **largest embassy in the world**, America's fortified site that is the size of the Vatican.

How Iraq Relates to Other US Foreign Policy

The devastation caused in Iraq with little cry from the international community has led the **United States** to be able to **drop bombs and invade countries with relative impunity**. Between 1991 and 2010, the US dropped bombs in and/or sent troops into: **Haiti (1993+), Somalia (1993 and 2007+), Sudan (1998), Former Yugoslavia (1999), Yemen (2002+), Pakistan (2004+)**, and of course **Afghanistan (1998 & 2001+)**. The bombs dropped in Pakistan have mostly been from **unmanned drones**, flown by remote control from bases in the US, and despite the touting of their targeting abilities have **killed hundreds of civilians** (*New Yorker*, 10/21/09).

Looking at this recent history, it is important for Americans to question **US wargames** off the coasts of **Iran and North Korea**, which seem intended to remind those countries that they may be next on the list.

Another key issue of US foreign policy is its unbending support for **Israel**, despite that country's acknowledged **possession of nuclear weapons** (*Haaretz*, 12/12/06). Remember, the US bombed Iraq because of its alleged (non-existent) WMDs and has been ratcheting up sanctions against Iran for fear of nuclear weapons, even though **Iran is a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty** and is creating nuclear power plants). And, while the 1991 "Gulf War" was launched to force Iraq out of Kuwait for forcibly

taking over that country's land and resources, **Israel has continued to occupy the West Bank and Gaza**, rightfully Palestinian territory, despite numerous UN resolutions demanding Israel withdraw (SCR 242 et al).

The US occupation of Afghanistan, now in its tenth year, is linked to efforts to build a pipeline that will bring gas from Turkmenistan to Pakistan and India (known as "TAPI"—Reuters 12/19/10). Meanwhile, Afghanistan's people have suffered nearly as badly as Iraq, with their country torn by war since the 1979 Soviet invasion much like Iraq has been in conflict since the Iran-Iraq war of 1980.

What Does this Mean to Americans?

One question that is rarely answered accurately is, **"why do they hate us?"** That is, why do so many people and countries want to do harm to the US? The answer is not "because of our freedoms," but rather these precise **foreign policy decisions**, favoring some countries and punishing others, killing civilians by the hundreds and thousands, and seeking to control the resources of the world, that drives people to want to do harm to the US.

Rather than risk changing these policies, the US has chosen to **chisel away at the freedoms** that "terrorists" supposedly hate: instituting the PATRIOT act; slowly becoming more invasive with security measures at airports and in public buildings; jailing people for videotaping police actions; subpoenaing peace and justice activists before grand juries; and creating "sting operations" to push American Arabs and Muslims into fake bomb plots which justify security measures while perpetuating fear in the general public.

Can We Make a Difference?

Of course we can. We must demand that our country change its foreign and domestic policies to become a **cooperative entity that truly believes in democracy**. Challenge media reports that repeat what government spokespeople want us to believe. **Work for peace** locally, talk to your friends, neighbors and co-workers. Also find ways to reduce your own **dependence on fossil fuels** in order to halt the wars driven by greed. When this country was founded, women did not have the right to vote, slavery was legal and Native Americans were enshrined in the Constitution as "savages." We have come a long way and we can go further to creating a great future for everyone, but **we must stop using violence to enforce US policy**.



*This flyer was prepared January 2011 by the
Peace and Justice Works Iraq Affinity Group
PO Box 42456 iraq@pjw.info
Portland, OR 97242 www.pjw.info/Iraq.html*