

Whose No Fly Zones?

Without authorization from the UN, the US and Britain established “no-fly zones” over Iraq. The stated objective for these zones was to prevent the northern minority Kurdish population and southern Shi’ite Muslim population from attacks by the secular government of Iraq, which is comprised of mostly Sunni Muslims. Under the auspices of this plan the US and Britain have established constant armed surveillance from bases in adjacent countries.

Since weapons inspectors left in late 1998 (see side bar), these patrols have dropped bombs on an average of once every three to seven days in an apparent campaign of low level intimidation and terror. Agence France Presse reports that since the “Desert Fox” campaign began in December 1998 these bombings have killed 300 Iraqis, mostly civilians, and wounded hundreds more.

Iraq and the War on Terrorism

As the bombing of Afghanistan continues, the Bush administration is preparing to broaden its so-called “War on Terrorism.” Iraq has repeatedly been mentioned as a prime candidate, despite the lack of any evidence linking Iraq with the events of September 11 or the anthrax mailings.

In the wake of the “Gulf War” and 11 years of sanctions, the Hussein regime has clearly defied expectations that it would crumble from within. The US has made the best of this situation by selling billions in weapons to neighboring Arab countries and establishing multiple permanent military bases in the region. It is just this type of US involvement that was cited by Osama bin Laden as one of the reasons for his anger towards America.

It is fairly clear that many people in the region, and probably many people in Iraq, would prefer that Saddam Hussein not be in power. If the alternative were a US-backed government which was installed to make the oil riches of Iraq available to American-based companies, that would not best serve the interests of the Iraqi people.

The war on Afghanistan is an entirely different situation, involving armed groups opposed to the brutal but minimally armed Taliban government. In contrast, the Iraq National Congress, the main opposition group favored by the US, is made up of mostly exiled intellectuals living in Europe. Perhaps it would be best to accept that Iraq is qualitatively disarmed, lift the sanctions so that the people can regain their health and their economy, and then take steps to encourage a democratic change in leadership.

Weapons of Mass Destruction

The stepped up bombing of the “Desert Fox” campaign was preceded by the voluntary departure of the UN inspection team (UNSCOM) headed by Richard Butler. Former UN weapons inspector Scott Ritter “argues by 1996 UNSCOM had enough evidence to verify that Iraq’s military had been incapacitated. Still the US pressed investigators into confrontations” (Albany Times Union, 7/18/01). Butler knew his report would be used as an excuse by the US to justify immediate bombing, so he had the inspections team evacuate for their own safety.

As it happens, the bombing in late 1998 not only failed to force Iraq to comply with inspections—the weapons team hasn’t been allowed back in the country since. The U.S. has bombed Iraq about 200 times since then, including at least nine times since September 11th. The new weapons team, UNMOVIC, is receiving money from Iraq’s “Oil-for-Food” program to sit in its offices in New York and wait for the day they can return.

Disarmament of the region is one goal of UN Resolution 687 (1991), but it is being applied totally to Iraq, the most scrutinized country in the region, while Israel maintains nuclear weapons.

**SAY NO TO BOMBS! SAY NO TO SANCTIONS!
SAY YES TO NONVIOLENT AND LEGAL
CONFLICT RESOLUTION!**



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IRAQ 11 Years Since the “Gulf War” Next target of the “War on Terrorism”?

The “Gulf War” of 1991 proved that the US understands little about the region. The war ended with Saddam Hussein still in power and Iraq’s infrastructure destroyed. Sanctions imposed on Iraq prevented the repair of civilian infrastructure such as power generators and water treatment plants. These sanctions supposedly would compel the people of Iraq to rise up and oust Hussein, a US goal but not a UN mandate. The war continues with sanctions and no-fly zones. The meager Oil-for-Food program, while purporting to ease the suffering of the Iraqi people, has not prevented the deaths of several hundred thousand Iraqis from easily treatable diseases and starvation.

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.

Sanctions

After Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, the UN established sanctions on Iraq prohibiting all exports and imports other than food or medicine. In April 1991, the “Gulf War” cease fire (UN Security Council Resolution 687) required Iraq to, among other things, dismantle its remaining nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons programs before sanctions would be lifted. With much of Iraq’s infrastructure in ruins, the effect of the sanctions was immediate and catastrophic.

Estimates vary, but a widely respected report by Professor Richard Garfield of Columbia University states that over 350,000 children under the age of 5 have died since 1991 as a result of sanctions and the aftermath of the war. In September 2001, an article in the Progressive magazine outlined documents written by the US Defense Intelligence Agency in 1991 specifically noting that by destroying water and sewage plants, Iraq’s water supply would become contaminated and thousands would die.

In 1996, the UN redefined the sanctions program to allow limited oil sales to ease the suffering of the Iraqi people. As of November 2001, this “Oil-for-Food” program resulted in UN bureaucracy that held up \$4.2 billion worth of contracts to Iraq. Most items are labeled “dual-use” meaning they are items that could have civilian or military application. Most of these holds were initiated by the US. The UN will adopt a definite list before May 30, but loosening sanctions without taking action to rebuild Iraq still offers only meager relief.



Memorial at the Ameriyah Bomb Shelter, struck by a US bomb during in February 1991, killing hundreds of civilians. This memorial is eerily similar to those set up for the victims of the Sept. 11 attacks. (photo by Joe Zito 1997)



photo from www.vitw.org

“To me [the] worst possible memorial you could have to those who died at the Pentagon and World Trade Center on September 11th is to kill poor people in other countries by the thousands.”

-Former US Attorney General Ramsey Clark (UPI 1/2/02)

DEPLETED URANIUM: Low Scale Nuclear War

The 1991 war on Iraq marked the first time the U.S. used ammunition tipped with hardened Depleted Uranium (DU). These bullets and anti-tank shells could pierce armor—with the side-effect of disintegrating into thousands of tiny radioactive particles on impact.

Although the Iraq Health Ministry noted an increase in cancer cases of over 60% since 1991, most notably in Southern Iraq where the U.S. prosecuted the war, a World Health Organization study was derailed on November 29 due to a lobbying campaign by Washington.

DU was also heavily used in the war on Kosovo. It is a suspected cause of so-called “Gulf War Syndrome.”