



11350 Random Hills Road, Suite 800, Fairfax, Virginia 22030 Phone (703) 934-6101 Fax (703) 352-3678

fff@fff.org www.fff.org

Economic Sanctions in Iraq as a Tool of Foreign Policy

by Robert W. McGee

The United States has been imposing economic sanctions against Iraq since the early 1990s. Technically, they are UN sanctions, but the United Nations is involved in name only. The embargo would collapse within about 15 minutes if the United States withdrew its support for the sanctions.

FACTS

- Since their inception, the sanctions have killed a million or more Iraqis by means of malnutrition and disease. Many victims are children under the age of five. Reports by the United Nations and several humanitarian groups have documented the deaths, although estimates of the number of people killed vary. Ramsey Clark, a former U.S. attorney general, has published two books detailing the effects of the sanctions and the loss of life that has resulted.[1]
- Madeleine Albright, a secretary of state under President Clinton, went on record (interview with Lesley Stahl on *60 Minutes*, May 12, 1996, when Albright was U.S. ambassador to the UN) as stating that the price (in terms of deaths — about 500,000 Iraqi children under the age of five had died by the time of the broadcast) was worth it to contain Saddam Hussein. [2]
- Osama bin Laden has stated that one of the three reasons the World Trade Center was attacked was the U.S. sanctions against Iraq. [3]
- Richard Reid, the person who tried to blow up an airliner with a shoe bomb, said he wanted to do it because U.S. sanctions had killed two million Iraqis.

As a result of the World Trade Center attack and the attempted shoe bombing, both of which can be traced directly to U.S. sanctions against Iraq, a number of things have happened:

- Several thousand people died in the World Trade Center attack.
- New York City suffered billions in economic damage.
- The stock market went in the tank and will probably stay there for years to come.
- Several airlines have gone bankrupt or are on the verge of bankruptcy because fewer people want to fly; tourism is down; consumer purchases are down.
- The (supposed) surplus [4] inherited from the Clinton administration has disappeared as President Bush increases spending to fight his war on terrorism.
- The civil liberties of thousands of people were violated by warrantless break-ins and arrests as the U.S. Justice Department went crazy trying to find the culprits of 9/11. [5]
- Every person who tries to get on an airplane in the United States and in many other countries around the world is subject to the humiliation of warrantless body searches.
- The United States has become an aggressor nation, threatening a first strike against another sovereign nation for the first time in history.
- Privacy rights are being systematically destroyed. Telephones are tapped. E-mail messages are monitored. Libraries are forced to report people who check out potentially unpatriotic books. The USA PATRIOT Act makes it a crime to even disclose the fact that the government is investigating you. [6]

The question that Lesley Stahl asked Madeleine Albright on *60 Minutes* should be asked of every American: Is it all worth it? I believe not. We should lift the sanctions against Iraq immediately as a show of good faith. We should bring our troops home. We have no business being there in the first place. Launching preemptive strikes against another nation sets a terrible precedent. The United States has no moral right to kill millions of Iraqis, either with sanctions or with bombs. It is time to end the sanctions and repeal the anti-terrorist legislation that threatens the rights and liberties of the American people.

Dr. McGee is a professor at Barry University in Miami.

Notes

[1] Ramsey Clark, *Challenge to Genocide: Let Iraq Live* (New York: International Action Center, 1998); Ramsey Clark et al., *The Children Are Dying: The Impact of Sanctions on Iraq* (New York: International Action Center, 1998).

[2] Madeleine Albright, ethically challenged, <http://members.aol.com/bblum6/albright.htm>.

[3] The other two reasons were that the United States supports Israel and that U.S. troops are stationed in Saudi Arabia. He didn't like it that infidels were stationed in the land of Islam.

[4] It wasn't really a surplus but accounting gimmicks made it look like one.

[5] For details, see the Human Rights Watch website, <http://hrw.org/>, especially <http://hrw.org/reports/2002/us911/>.

[6] For details on the freedoms that the USA PATRIOT Act destroyed, see EFF Analysis of the Provisions of the USA PATRIOT Act (www.eff.org); Libraries and the Patriot Legislation (www.ala.org/washoff/patriot.html); Susan Herman, The USA PATRIOT Act and the US Department of Justice: Losing Our Balances? (<http://jurist.law.pitt.edu/forum/forumnew40.htm>); Jennifer Van Bergen, Repeal the USA Patriot Act (www.truthout.org/docs_02/04.02A.JVB.Patriot.htm).

This article was originally published in February 2003.