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Sanctions: The Cruel and Brutal War against the Iraqi People, Part 1 **by Jacob G. Hornberger**

Immediately after the September 11 terrorist attacks, President Bush and other U.S. officials announced that the attacks had been motivated by hatred for America's "freedom and values." Nothing could have been further from the truth, and U.S. officials knew it. For 12 years, they had been waging a cruel and brutal, silent and undeclared war against the Iraqi people — a war which not only had plunged the Iraqi populace into economic privation and desperation but had also taken the lives of hundreds of thousands of their children. U.S. officials knew full well that it was just a matter of time before someone struck back, which is why they continually warned about the threat of terrorist attacks during the late 1990s.

Unfortunately, all too many people have forgotten about the cozy relationship between U.S. officials and Saddam Hussein during the 1980s. In fact, it is fascinating how the members of Congress and the mainstream media have, by and large, ignored one of the most critical aspects of that relationship: during the 1980s, the United States furnished weapons of mass destruction to Saddam. As *ABC News* put it in a report entitled "A Tortured Relationship," by Chris Bury,

Indeed, even as President Bush castigates Saddam's regime as "a grave and gathering danger," it's important to remember that the United States helped arm Iraq with the very weapons that administration officials are now citing as justification for Saddam's forcible removal from power.

(See a [list](#) of online articles detailing the history of the U.S. government's furnishing of weapons of mass destruction to Saddam Hussein.)

Even worse, as the *New York Times* reported in an August 18, 2002, article entitled "Officers Say U.S. Aided Iraq Despite Use of Gas," by Patrick E. Tyler,

A covert American program during the Reagan administration provided Iraq with critical battle planning assistance at a time when American intelligence agencies knew that Iraqi commanders

would employ chemical weapons in waging the decisive battles of the Iran-Iraq war, according to senior military officers with direct knowledge of the program.

Keep in mind that the reason that the U.S. government was helping Saddam while he was employing his U.S.-provided WMDs against the Iranian people was that U.S. officials were still chafing over the Iranian people's ouster of the shah of Iran, the U.S.-appointed ruler who had tortured and killed his own people during his reign with the support of the U.S. government.

What does this have to do with the U.S. government's 12-year war against the Iraqi people? It evidences the cruel and brutal mindset of U.S. officials, a mindset that will stop at nothing to retaliate against recalcitrant foreign rulers, including even the targeting of the citizenry who happen to live under them.

The Persian Gulf intervention

The U.S. government's war against the Iraqi people began a few days after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and before the U.S. military intervention in the Persian Gulf War. The United States and UN Security Council (led by the United States) imposed what the State Department later described as the "[toughest, most comprehensive sanctions in history](#)" against the Iraqi people. While ostensibly excluding medicine and, later, food from the embargo, the goal was to shut down all commerce into and out of Iraq, especially the export of Iraqi oil on which the Iraqi economy largely depended.

The embargo was reinforced during the Persian Gulf War in a devious and sinister manner — by deliberately targeting Iraq's water, sewage, and electric-power facilities, with full knowledge of the likely consequence — the rapid spread of dangerous and deadly infectious diseases among the Iraqi population.

In his new book, *Terrorism and Tyranny*, James Bovard cites the official U.S. reports that document the state of mind of U.S. officials when they decided to destroy Iraq's sewage, water, and electric-power facilities. For example, the Defense Intelligence Agency noted that "unless the water is purified with chlorine, epidemics of such diseases as cholera, hepatitis, and typhoid could occur." A Pentagon analysis confirmed the DIA's analysis: "Cholera and measles have emerged at refugee camps. Further infectious diseases will spread due to inadequate water treatment and poor sanitation."

The never-ending war

When the military operations of the Persian Gulf War came to an end, the embargo, unfortunately, did not. Instead, taking a page from the vindictive Treaty of Versailles at the end of World War I, which imposed cruel and brutal punishments on the German people (and which ultimately contributed to the rise of Adolf Hitler), the United States decided to indefinitely

continue the embargo against the Iraqi people, with the ostensible purpose of requiring Saddam Hussein to dismantle his weapons of mass destruction, the same weapons that the United States had delivered to him only a few years before. The real purpose? To squeeze the Iraqi people to death with a downward spiral of economic privation until they ousted Saddam Hussein from power.

In a section of his personal website entitled "[Iraq: Paying the Price](#)," the noted journalist John Pilger, who produced a documentary for British television entitled "Paying the Price: Killing the Children of Iraq," observed that "before 1990 and the imposition of sanctions, Iraq had one of the highest standards of living in the Middle East."

The sanctions put an end to that. Nine years after the sanctions were implemented, Pilger wrote,

Now Unicef reports that at least 200 children are dying every day. They are dying from malnutrition, a lack of clean water and a lack of medical equipment and drugs to cure easily treatable diseases. The current food ration, while nearly sufficient in calories, does not include enough vitamins, minerals and protein for health or growth. Malnutrition is now endemic amongst children. Diseases like kwashiorkor or marasmus are common in paediatric wards. Before 1990 the most important problem faced by Iraqi paediatricians was childhood obesity.

(See this [list](#) of online articles about the sanctions, including ones cited in this article.)

Barbara Stocking wrote in the *International Herald Tribune* on December 27, 2002, "Up to 16 million people — more than two-thirds of the population — already rely on a fragile system of food aid for their survival."

U.S. officials had done their job well with their destruction of Iraq's sewage, water, and electric-power facilities: infectious diseases ran rampant through the Iraqi population, especially among the young and newborn. Why hadn't Iraqi officials repaired those facilities after the war had ended? Because the "toughest, most comprehensive sanctions in history" had ensured that the Iraqis could not procure the necessary parts and equipment to do so. The "brilliance" of the U.S. strategy was matched only by its cruel and brutal success.

Here's just one of many examples, as described by Seattle *Post-Intelligencer* reporter Larry Johnson, who traveled to Iraq with U.S. physicians who risked U.S. prosecution for violating the embargo by providing medicines and medical assistance to the Iraqi people without the permission of the United Nations:

At Al Mansour Pediatric Hospital in Baghdad, malnourished children, covered with flies, lie on stained mattresses. Mothers and fathers sit on the beds, methodically swatting at the flies. Medicine is in short supply. The hospital is dark; electrical power is shut off periodically each day to conserve

resources. The usual antiseptic odor of medical facilities has been replaced with the stench of urine, feces and decay. Moving from bed to bed, Dr. Tarig Al-Shujairi lists the illnesses afflicting the children: typhoid fever, pneumonia, leukemia, tuberculosis, cholera. Even polio and measles are making a comeback, he says.

There are disputes over the exact number of children who died as result of the sanctions, but most everyone agrees that the number ranges between 225,000 and 500,000. (See Sheldon Richman's accompanying *Freedom Daily* article on this point.) Let that sink in: Our own government — the U.S. government — knowingly and deliberately implemented and maintained a cruel and brutal policy with the intent to target the civilian population of Iraq, with the full knowledge that it would cost the lives of countless innocent people, including innocent children.

Even worse, year after year, knowing full well that economic privation, near-starvation, and death were the actual results of the embargo — and that it was not producing the ouster of Saddam Hussein from power — U.S. officials nonetheless steadfastly continued it. As Anupama Rao Singh, the United Nations Children's Fund representative in Baghdad, put it,

Ten years ago, malnutrition was almost non-existent. From 1991 to 1998, children under 5 were dying from malnutrition-related diseases in numbers ranging from a conservative 2,690 per month to a more realistic 5,357 per month.

And it was all happening because of a 12-year U.S. government obsession with a man who had formerly been a close U.S. ally — one who had never attacked or even threatened to attack the United States and, in fact, one to whom the United States had entrusted weapons of mass destruction to use against others.

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