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Title: **Sanctioned genocide: the targeted destruction of Iraq's water systems is a war crime**

Description: *NATO military forces committed war crimes by depriving civilians of drinking water. The vast majority of the 1.5 million civilian deaths were caused not by the direct impact of bombs but by targeted destruction of water systems.*

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Date: June 10, 2003

Iraq(/country/irq)

Sanctioned genocide: Was 'the price' of disarming Iraq worth it?

News and Press Release

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ANALYSIS
By Rob Kennedy, dpa

- "I've been using the word 'genocide' because this is a deliberate policy to destroy the people of Iraq. I'm afraid I have no other view." - former U.N. humanitarian coordinator for Iraq Dennis Halliday in March 2002, discussing 12 years of economic sanctions.

Bangkok (dpa) - As political fallout rains down on London and Washington amid the absence of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Iraq, another controversial justification must also be revisited: economic sanctions directly responsible for the deaths of at least 1.5 million Iraqis.

For nearly 13 years, the United Nations Security Council imposed an all-encompassing embargo on Iraqi imports and exports, intending to force dictator Saddam Hussein to destroy stockpiles of biological and chemical weapons, and to dismantle a burgeoning nuclear weapons programme. Several weapons inspectors on the ground in Iraq claimed WMD disarmament was virtually complete by the mid-1990s. The sanctions, however, were removed only last month when the United States declared victory after its latest invasion.

According to U.N. aid agencies, by the mid-1990s about 1.5 million Iraqis - including 565,000 children - had perished as a direct result of the embargo, which included "holds" on vital goods such as chemicals and equipment to produce clean drinking water.

Former assistant secretary general of the United Nations, Dennis Halliday, quit in protest in 1998 after one year at the helm as the U.N. humanitarian coordinator in Iraq. He described the sanctions as "genocidal".

"I've been using the word 'genocide' because this is a deliberate policy to destroy the people of Iraq. I'm afraid I have no other view," Halliday told journalist David Edwards in a March 2002 interview.

Halliday's successor in Iraq, Hans von Sponeck, also resigned citing the same reasons after a year-and-a-half. The two former U.N. staffers, with 64-years combined experience working at the world body, said what

was inflicted on the Iraqi people during the 12-plus years of sanctions is tantamount to crimes against humanity.

Both said changes to the U.N.'s sanctions procedure must be made to ensure what occurred in Iraq from 1991 to 2003 never happens again.

The U.N. adopted economic sanctions in 1945 as a measure to keep trouble-making regimes in line. Iraq, however, was the only nation ever to have its imports and exports under complete control of the 15-member United Nations Security Council. The real decision-making power over Iraq's sanctions, however, was in the hands of veto-wielding permanent members - France, China, Russia, Britain, and the United States.

Professor Joy Gordon from Fairfield University in Connecticut, spent three years researching the economic sanctions and interviewing U.N. staff involved in Iraq. In a Harper's Magazine story in November 2002, Gordon concluded most resistance holding up vital goods into Iraq came from the United States and the United Kingdom.

U.S. officials routinely claimed "dual-use" (having both civilian and military applications) items needed to be "held" and contracts reviewed to ensure the Saddam Hussein regime could not use imports for weapons programmes. Gordon, Halliday, von Sponeck, among numerous others, accused the U.S. of deliberately withholding aid vital to the health and welfare of the Iraqi people.

Last year, for example, the U.S. blocked contracts for water tankers on the grounds that they might be used to haul chemical weapons. Yet the arms experts from the United Nations Special Commission (UNMOVIC) had no objection to the tankers, Gordon reported in the Harper's article. This was at a time when the major cause of child deaths in Iraq was a lack of access to potable water, and when the country was in the middle of a severe drought.

Award-winning journalist John Pilger - who produced the documentary film "Paying the Price - Killing the Children of Iraq" -said up to July 2002, 5.4 billion dollars in vital humanitarian supplies for the people of Iraq were being obstructed by the United States, backed by Britain.

The U.N. humanitarian reports on the blockade's effects on Iraqi children tell a grisly tale. In December 1995, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization reported 567,000 Iraqi children had died as a direct consequence of economic sanctions. In March 1996, a World Health Organization study released found the blockade had caused a six-fold increase in the mortality rate of Iraqi children under age five. UNICEF reported in October 1996 that 4,500 Iraqi children under five were dying every month as a result of sanctions-induced starvation and disease. Statistics such as these are not hard to find.

Then U.S. secretary of state Madeline Albright was adamant during her tenure about maintaining the tough sanctions despite the horrific reports coming out of Iraq. She was interviewed about the U.N. sanctions in a 1995 television interview with American TV magazine "60 Minutes".

Asked by interviewer Lesley Stahl: "We have heard that a half-million children have died (in Iraq, as a result of the sanctions) ... 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."

The real threat posed by Saddam Hussein, and the need to disarm him of alleged stockpiles of deadly arms, remains a contentious issue. The main justification for the March 2003 U.S.-led invasion was the threat of his WMD. After 82 days in Iraq, not a single banned weapon has surfaced.

"The only weapon that Iraq has is oil and its revenues," Halliday said in December 2002 interview with Cairo's Al-Ahram Weekly newspaper.

That sentiment is backed by former chief UNSCOM weapons inspector Scott Ritter who spent seven years in Iraq. He has insisted the Iraqi regime was "fundamentally disarmed" between 1991-98, with 90-95 per cent of its WMD eliminated by December 1998.

He said the fact Saddam was a tyrant should not cloud over the outrage inflicted by the U.N. Security Council on the population of Iraq.

"He (Saddam) is a brutal dictator. He may torture to death 1,800 people a year. That's terrible and unacceptable. But we kill 6,000 a month. Let's put that on a scale," Ritter said in a June 1999 interview.

Evidence exists indicating U.S. planners recognized early on the devastation sanctions would deliver upon the Iraqi population.

A declassified document from the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) in 1991 - titled "Iraq's Water Treatment Vulnerability" -outlined with deadly precision the effect economic sanctions would have on Iraq's water supply.

"Iraq depends on importing specialized equipment and some chemicals to purify its water supply," the DIA report, dated January 22, 1991, said. "Failing to secure supplies will result in a shortage of pure drinking water for much of the population. This could lead to increased incidences, if not epidemics, of disease.

"Although Iraq is already experiencing a loss of water treatment capability, it probably will take at least six months (to June 1991) before the system is fully degraded."

Thomas Nagy, a professor at George Washington University who discovered and brought the DIA document to the media's attention, said the U.S. government knew the sanctions would result in water-treatment failure and, consequently, would kill an incalculable number of Iraqis.

As outlined by the Geneva Conventions, he says, that is a war crime. dpa rk pw

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