

## A SHORT HISTORY OF A (VERY) LONG WAR

We all know the shortest, media-popularized version, and depending on who you believe, it's either: gosh, President George W. Bush was told that Iraq had "weapons of mass destruction" and believed it; or, he lied. Thus, despite unprecedented world-wide mobilization to prevent a war before it started, the U.S. re-invaded Iraq in March of 2003. Eight years later, we can barely count the dead or assess the toll on the living. As the U.S. siege of Iraq enters its 21<sup>st</sup> year, what do we U.S. citizens care to know or remember of the real history of this war which is waged in our names? Try this:

**January 16, 1991:** The White House Press Secretary to President George H.W. Bush, Marlin Fitzwater, announced that "the liberation of Kuwait has begun." What actually began on that day 20 years ago was a near total war against the people of Iraq, spanning four U.S. administrations, two led by Republicans, and two by Democrats: Bush, Clinton, Bush, and Obama.

**Begin here:** On August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1990 Iraqi President Saddam Hussein (once a U.S. ally, placed in power in the 1970s with the aid of the C.I.A.) invaded Iraq's neighbor state of Kuwait because of a complicated dispute over oil resources. The United Nations immediately imposed economic sanctions on Iraq, and U.S. President George Herbert Walker Bush began beating the drums for war and building up a large military presence in the Persian Gulf. Locally, nationally and internationally, peace activists mobilized in massive numbers to try to stop the massacre of innocent people—a massacre they knew was motivated by the greed of multinational corporations to control oil resources and set up a permanent base in the Middle East.

**January 17, 1991:** At 2:30 a.m. on the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, a martyred hero of nonviolent resistance to injustice in the United States, the air war against Iraq began. It ended officially on February 27<sup>th</sup>. The civilian population of Iraq was left to contend with the aftermath, including the devastating impact of depleted uranium munitions.

***From the Seattle Post Intelligencer of November 12, 2002:*** In 1991, the United States and its Persian Gulf War allies blasted the vehicles with armor-piercing shells made of depleted uranium -- the first time such weapons had been used in warfare -- as the Iraqis retreated from Kuwait. The devastating results gave the highway its name [the Highway of Death]... Although the Pentagon has sent mixed signals about the effects of depleted uranium, Iraqi doctors believe that it is responsible for a significant increase in cancer and birth defects in the region. Many researchers outside Iraq, and several U.S. veterans' organizations, agree; they also suspect depleted uranium of playing a role in Gulf War Syndrome, the still-unexplained malady that has plagued hundreds of thousands of Gulf War veterans.

**FROM 1991 UNTIL DECEMBER 2010, U.S./ UN ECONOMIC SANCTIONS AGAINST IRAQ CONTINUED THE WAR. THEY WERE MORE DEVASTATING THAN THE BOMBARDMENT. Said U.N. Humanitarian Aid Coordinator Denis Halliday, who resigned in protest: "We are in the process of destroying an entire society. It is as simple and as terrifying as that."**

**Joy Gordon, a Professor of Philosophy at Fairfield University and author of the book "Invisible War: The United States and the Iraq Sanctions" (Harvard University Press), writes of the sanctions in a post on December 22, 2010:**

*Last week the U.N. Security Council voted to lift the sanctions that it imposed on Iraq 20 years ago. Vice President Joe Biden hailed the occasion as "an end to the burdensome remnants of the dark era of Saddam Hussein."*

*What he did not say was that the sanctions were more than burdensome. They triggered a humanitarian crisis that resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of children, and the collapse of every system necessary to*

*sustain human life in a modern society. And he certainly did not mention that among all the nations on the Security Council, it was the U.S. -- and the U.S. alone -- that ensured that this human damage would be massive and indiscriminate.*

*All of this took place within an obscure committee of the Security Council, known as the 661 Committee. Few have heard of it. But it was this committee that determined whether Iraqis would have clean water, electricity in their homes, or fuel for cars and trucks.*

*It was a committee that met behind closed doors, and never made its records public. Within it, the U.S. had a unique role. As the humanitarian situation in Iraq deteriorated, support for the sanctions on the Security Council began to erode. When other members of the council sought to allow critical humanitarian goods into Iraq, the U.S. vetoed them. For the first eight months of the sanctions, the U.S. would not even allow Iraq to import food. Once the committee decided to allow food, the U.S. then objected to trucks needed to deliver food and other goods, as well as irrigation equipment to increase agriculture.*

*The U.S. policies were extreme and relentless. The U.S. blocked refrigeration for medicines, on the grounds that refrigerators might be used to store agents for biological weapons. The U.S. blocked things as innocuous as plywood, fabric, glue and glass on the grounds that they were "inputs to industry," which might be used to rebuild Iraq's military.*

*The U.S. blocked child vaccines and yogurt-making equipment on the grounds that the Iraqi government might use them to make weapons of mass destruction. When Iraq tried to increase the number of small animals for meat, cheese and milk, the U.S. blocked goat and sheep vaccines, claiming that Iraq might use them as biological weapons.*

*The U.S. prevented Iraq from importing water tankers during a period of drought, while there were epidemic levels of sickness from drinking water unfit for human consumption. And water pipes for irrigation. And light switches, and telephones, and ambulance radios, and fire trucks, claiming that they might be used by Iraq's military...*

*The U.S. insisted that these policies were aimed at Saddam Hussein. But it was obvious that they had little to do with him. Iraq's political and military leadership, and the wealthy elite, were insulated from the hardship. But the population as a whole was not.*

*To destroy a country's infrastructure, to reduce a nation to a pre-industrial condition and then keep it in that state, means precisely that it will be unfit to sustain human life. The reports of U.N. agencies and international organizations such as the Red Cross ensured that U.S. officials knew, with certainty, exactly what harm was being caused by U.S. policies.*

*While Vice President Biden tells the world that the end of the sanctions means that Iraq can now move forward to a bright future, what he does not say is that in fact there was damage that was irreversible, including child deaths and stunted growth from years of malnutrition. What he also does not say is that the rest of the damage -- the collapse of the infrastructure, the terrible deterioration in industry, agriculture, electricity, health and education -- was not just due to Saddam Hussein's indifference. However much harm Saddam did to the Iraqi people, the U.S., for over a decade, made it far, far worse.*

**Distributed on Sunday, January 16, 2011 : Join our Vigil to Resist this Endless War 12-1 every Sunday at Broadway, Park, and Elm: [ctpcnh@gmail.com](mailto:ctpcnh@gmail.com), <http://newhavensundayvigil.wordpress.com>**

