



# Can We Stop the New War against Iraq?

## IN THIS ISSUE

- 2 MCC's Involvement in Iraq,  
by Deborah Fast and Menno  
Wiebe
- 3 U.S.-Iraq Policy: Has the  
Die for War Been Cast?  
by J. Daryl Byler
- 5 Canada's Iraq Policy since  
1990, by Bill Janzen
- 6 Iraq: A Looming Invasion?  
by John Rempel
- 8 "Please Go and Tell the  
Truth,"  
by Esther Epp-Tiessen
- 10 Iraq Sanctions: Immoral  
from the Very Beginning,  
by Bob Herr
- 11 Halting the Free Fall,  
by Edward Miller

We walk down a hall and see the vivid image of a mother and child fused together, baked against the cement wall, leaving a permanent silhouette.

## Baghdad Weeps

by Elsie Wiebe

At 4 a.m. February 13, 1991, the Al-Miriyah civilian bomb shelter for women and children was pierced by a missile sent from a U.S. fighter jet. The first missile pierced the 2-meter-thick roof of concrete and steel through to the ground level. Four minutes later, a second missile was strategically fired into the ventilation system, raising the temperature to 400°C. Four hundred eight women and children were baked to their death.

Inside the shelter-turned-tomb we stop briefly for silent prayer. We walk past pictures of those who died. One photo is of four brothers. Their father tried to enter the building immediately after the bombing and after trying all night he got in, though he lost his leg in the process. Their mother had no ability to conceive of the horrid tragedy and she became crazy, insisting daily her sons are still alive. Another mother died of a heart attack when she heard the shocking news.

We walk down a hall and see the vivid image of a mother and child fused together, baked against the cement wall, leaving a permanent silhouette. The mother must have pressed her child against her body and the wall, hoping to protect her child from the heat and flames.

"I have one question for you," our guide says. "What is the crime of these people?" She tells us there were Christians who died that day too, whose relatives visit regularly to pray and remember. She points out a wooden cross, flowers, cards, and prayers written in Arabic and English.

I weep as I think of those who have gone before, those who are yet to go, those who continue to suffer. I find myself filled with anger at our governments for their involvement in bombings. I'm angry we get caught up in stupid games that sacrifice innocent children, women, men—especially the elderly or disadvantaged. I have no words to pray so I just pray my sobs, knowing God is weeping and enraged too.

That night, after a few hours of sleep, I'm woken up by my sleep-talking. The charred flesh of baby hands. The silhouette of a woman's face holds my gaze boldly even in my sleep, without blinking her eyes, leaving a cement immovable portrait implanted somewhere behind my eyes.

I recall the red laser pointer on the shelter walls, outlining knees, feet, tummy, mouth, eye sockets. Burnt offerings by men and women who answered that attractive television call which advertises the opportunity to "Be all you can be." Featuring healthy young, attractive people fording a stream in army fatigues, smiling, appearing to work hard to "give something back to their country."

My sleep is haunted, knowing that this is just one example of many all over Iraq, especially in the south, and in Afghanistan, Laos, Angola—all over the world.

I left Iraq with vivid images and stories from people who welcomed us and trusted we would tell our people and governments what we saw and heard. As one woman said, "Canadians are special," trusting we surely would not stand by in silence and watch this happen to others.

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## Iraq Timeline

### PRIOR TO 1914

Ottoman empire controls area of present-day Iraq.

### NOVEMBER 1914

British occupy Basra (south Iraq).

### 1914–1918

British complete the occupation of Iraq.

### 1920

Mandate for Iraq given to U.K.

### 1921

Hashemite monarchy installed in Baghdad.

### 1920s

Substantial oil deposits discovered.

### 1932

Mandate ends and independence granted by League of Nations.

### 1930s AND 1940s

Series of coups d'état; frequent government instability.

### JULY 1958

Military coup d'état and monarchy overthrown; Iraq becomes a republic.

### JUNE 1961

Kuwait granted independence; Iraq demands that it be "reintegrated" and British troops arrive to protect the new state.

### FEBRUARY 1963

Coup d'état in Iraq led by Ba'ath supporters.

### NOVEMBER 1963

Coup d'état removes Ba'ath leadership from power.

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Perhaps our voices in the West can join voices in the East as they speak peace to each other constantly in their "Salaam!" greetings, and as they stop several times daily to pray. I hope our advocacy and storytelling can help bring a day when they

don't have to live in constant fear of bombing, when they no longer have reason to anticipate bombs like we anticipate rain.

*Elsie Wiebe works on peace education, sexual abuse, and domestic violence for MCC British Columbia. She traveled to Iraq with an MCC delegation in February 2002.*

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## MCC's Involvement in Iraq

by Deborah Fast and Menno Wiebe

A primary point of conflict between the West and the Arab world is that between a culture of *liberty*—the paramount political value of the United States—and a culture of *dignity*, a pervasive and fundamental value within Islam and Arab culture. As long as mutual understanding of these values eludes leaders on both sides, war and threats of war will continue.

MCC's mission statement gives high priority to dignity for all people by saying in part, "MCC strives for peace, justice and dignity of all people. . . ." Our work in Iraq seeks to respect the dignity and the humanity of Iraqis *as people* rather than as simply nameless faces in a country ruled by the vilified Saddam Hussein. An ongoing goal is to communicate their aspirations for a better future as well as the very real suffering they endure.

MCC began to focus attention on Iraq at the beginning of the Gulf crisis in August 1990. In May 1991, shortly after the official end of hostilities, MCC shipped material aid including milk powder, canned meat, and medicine via Jordan to Iraq. Partners included the Jordanian Red Crescent, the General Union of Voluntary Societies (Jordan), and local churches in Iraq. MCC representatives visited Iraq during this time.

As the initial chaos subsided and the sanctions dragged on, MCC continued to respond to the humanitarian crisis through shipment of material aid—mostly food and medicine—through CARE, the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), and the Islamic Relief Agency (ISRA). MCC involvement increased substantially in 1997 and 1998 as the needs of the Iraqi people became more apparent. MCC and the Canadian Foodgrains Bank (CFGFB) supplied a 262-metric-ton shipment of beans, valued at US\$179,000, to Iraq in 1997, with MECC coordinating distribution in Iraq.

Also at this time MCC sponsored two North American doctors to travel to Iraq to assess medical needs. MCC was exploring the possibility of sending a team of doctors to Iraq to perform operations. After four weeks traveling throughout the country, however, the doctors recommended against sending a medical team. Iraq had an abundance of well-qualified doctors and surgeons; the primary problem, they said, was an acute shortage of medical equipment and medicine. The delegation recommended that MCC concentrate its efforts in one area to maximize impact. Childhood leukemia was the recommended focus, for three reasons:

1. Leukemia rates had increased more than 600 percent since 1990.
2. Medicines were not available or were too expensive.
3. Cancer rates were reportedly higher due to the alleged U.S. military use of depleted uranium-tipped bombs.

In 1997 MCC decided, in cooperation with our local partner in Iraq, the Islamic Relief Agency (ISRA), to embark on a leukemia project, with the aim of supplying US\$100,000 worth of medicines. The plan was to provide medicines to 50 patients for the two years needed for effective treatment.

ISRA received approval from the Iraqi Ministry of Health (MoH). But the MoH later reconsidered its initial support for a focused program with 50 patients. Ministry officials wanted the medicines to be made available to as many patients as possible even if the course of treatment could not be sustained; making triage decisions was too great a burden.

The leukemia project became a high priority for MCC constituency education and advocacy in North America. To bolster the education and advocacy work, MCC decided to place volunteer Wanda Kraybill in Iraq, under ISRA's umbrella. Kraybill was to help

in the leukemia project, as well as write stories about her experiences in Iraq. During her six-month assignment she helped draft project proposals and wrote numerous articles.

Carmen Pauls replaced Kraybill in 1999 and continued with writing and project follow-up. Her term ended in April 2000. Tamara Fleming and Richard McCutcheon continued where Pauls left off. Their one-year term ended in April 2001. After eight months without a worker living in Iraq, MCC placed Edward Miller in January 2002.

In addition to the leukemia effort, other MCC-connected project work increased in 1997–2001. MCC, CFGB, Jubilee Partners, and other organizations funded this work. These projects included school kit distribution; bean and wheat flour distribution (CFGB); school rehabilitation (ISRA); Rashad Mental Hospital (food and other assistance); medicine and medical journal distribution (Jubilee Partners); internally displaced shelters (MECC); and a tomato seed project (MECC/ISRA).

### Spreading the Word

Since 1998, MCC has given more effort to organizing and hosting delegations. Through these years 20 MCC staff as well

as members of MCC's constituency, journalists, and others have traveled to Iraq. Most of these visitors have spoken and written about their experience after their return to North America.

MCC's volunteers in Iraq also updated MCC's advocacy offices (Ottawa, Washington, and New York) on news and views from Iraq. After leaving Iraq, both Kraybill and Pauls did extensive and effective storytelling tours for MCC. MCC has also issued several statements and written letters to the U.S. and Canadian governments advocating more humane and just policies on Iraq.

Iraq's future—and MCC's involvement—is full of uncertainty. U.S. preparations for expanded aggression on Iraq indicate that this action is likely. As individuals and as an organization we must continue to push our political leaders to pursue other options and to consider the devastating cost of military action, particularly for Iraqi citizens. As well, MCC will continue to affirm the dignity of the Iraqi people, to respond to the suffering in Iraq, and to call for an end to the sanctions depriving Iraqis of healthy and secure lives.

*Menno Wiebe and Deborah Fast direct MCC's programs in Jordan and Iraq, based in Amman, Jordan.*

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## U.S.-Iraq Policy: Has the Die for War Been Cast?

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by J. Daryl Byler

### Background

For more than a decade, "smart" bombs, sanctions, and harsh rhetoric marked U.S. policy toward Iraq. After supporting Iraq in its eight-year war against Iran during the 1980s, the United States did an abrupt turn-about when Iraqi President Saddam Hussein sent troops into Kuwait in August 1990.

The U.S.-led Gulf War in 1991 succeeded in driving Iraq from Kuwait. But the war also killed tens of thousands of Iraqis and devastated Iraq's infrastructure. Moreover, broad-based U.N. economic sanctions—originally imposed in 1990 to urge Iraqi withdrawal—have caused the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children and severely hindered efforts to rebuild Iraq's infrastructure.

Since the Gulf War, U.S. policy has focused on containing Saddam Hussein, fearing that he will again build weapons of mass destruc-

tion (WMD) and ballistic missiles to threaten other countries. Through the United Nations, the U.S. has pushed for weapons inspections and tight economic sanctions. Additionally, the U.S. and Great Britain have patrolled "no-fly" zones over northern and southern Iraq, frequently bombing Iraqi targets.

### Expanding Policy Goals

Under both President Clinton and the current President Bush, U.S. policy goals have expanded from simply ridding Iraq of the capacity to produce WMD to include ridding Iraq of Saddam Hussein.

These dual objectives offer little incentive for the government of Iraq to cooperate with the new weapons inspection plan currently under discussion at the United Nations. At a State Department meeting this spring, U.S. officials told the MCC Washington Office

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### Iraq Timeline (continued)

#### 1965–1966

War in Kurdistan between Kurdish nationalists and Iraqi troops.

#### 17 JULY 1968

Coup d'état again led by Ba'ath army officers; new government led by Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr.

#### JULY 1973

Coup attempt fails.

#### JULY 1979

President al-Bakr resigns and Saddam Hussein becomes president.

#### SEPTEMBER 1980

Iraqi army invades Iran; war continues until 1988.

#### JULY 1988

U.N. cease-fire resolution accepted and Iran/Iraq war ends.

#### AUGUST 1990

Iraq invades Kuwait and declares it to be part of the Iraqi state.

U.N. Security Council (UNSC) imposes comprehensive trade sanctions (Resolution 661).

#### JANUARY 1991

War begins between international coalition and Iraq.

#### FEBRUARY

Iraqi forces leave Kuwait and cease-fire is signed.

#### MARCH

Civil uprisings occur in south and north.

#### APRIL

UNSC passes Resolution 687 demanding inter alia the destruction of all weapons of mass destruction.

UNSC passes Resolution 688 on the subject of the treatment of civilians by the Government of Iraq (GoI); air exclusion zones in northern and southern Iraq created by coalition forces; these have been maintained until the present by U.S. and British forces without U.N. mandate.

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## Iraq Timeline (continued)

### NOVEMBER 1994

Gol recognizes Kuwait's independence.

### FEBRUARY 1996

Gol accepts UNSC Resolution 986 enabling the purchase of humanitarian goods using money from limited sale of oil.

### DECEMBER 1998

U.N. weapons inspection teams accuse Iraqi government of obstruction and leave Iraq; U.S. and U.K. launch four-day bombing campaign; Gol refuses the readmission of weapons inspectors.

### 2000–2001

Arab states increase trade relations with Iraq; passenger flights begin between Baghdad and some Arab countries.

### JANUARY 2002

U.S. President Bush declares Iraq to be part of an "axis of evil" in State of the Union address; U.S. administration declares "regime change" as policy goal and actively discusses military options for Iraq.

### MARCH

Gol renews discussions with U.N. over readmission of weapons inspectors.

### MAY

UNSC passes Resolution 1409 resetting the terms for the Oil for Food program, ostensibly in order to speed up the contracting and delivery of nonmilitary goods.

### JUNE

U.S. administration continues to call for the ouster of the Iraqi government and declares its intention to effect this change unilaterally if necessary.

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that, even if Saddam Hussein allows new inspections, the U.S. will not rule out overthrowing the Iraqi government. Some analysts suspect that, as a pretext for attacking Iraq, the U.S. will insist on inspection conditions that are so invasive that Iraq could not possibly agree.

As further justification for ousting Saddam Hussein, President Bush has labeled Iraq as part of a global "axis of evil." Even though the U.S. has established no links between Iraq and the September 11 attacks, President Bush's "war on terrorism" has been broadened from bringing to justice those who planned and supported the attacks to taking preemptive action against those who may pose future threats.

Indeed, for many who follow this issue, the question is no longer *if* the U.S. will attack Iraq, but *when* and *how*. President Bush has so publicly and repeatedly threatened to overthrow Saddam Hussein that many believe he has backed himself into a corner. One Republican member of Congress told the Washington Office, "Don't underestimate the personal dimension of this issue. Saddam Hussein tried to assassinate this president's father."

"An unsuccessful campaign would be simply unacceptable to the Bush administration," according to the Center for Defense Information. "Thus, any offensive would be an all-out, no-holds-barred war that would use overwhelming force and every conventional asset in the U.S. inventory to assure success."

Up to 300,000 U.S. troops would be needed. The Bush administration is also studying whether mini-nuclear weapons could be used to penetrate underground bunkers.

### The Point of No Return?

Is war against Iraq inevitable? When Iraq policy analysts gathered recently in Washington, D.C., to discuss this question, most agreed that war is "likely but not certain." If it happens, military action seems most likely during the fall of 2002 or spring of 2003. But several factors could make it difficult for President Bush to attack Iraq.

1. *Internal debate.* According to a May 24 *Washington Post* report, top military leaders at the Pentagon are now raising questions about the wisdom of a war with Iraq. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recognize that such a military action could result in the loss of thousands of U.S. troops and even more Iraqi civilians.

Anti-Iraq sentiment in Congress is strong. But some members of Congress will not support a U.S. war against Iraq without a full and open debate. Others privately raise questions about the potential fallout. Will it further destabilize the Middle East? How will it affect U.S. relationships with Arab governments?

2. *Little international support.* Canada and most European allies oppose a U.S. invasion of Iraq. And Arab governments—even those not sympathetic to Saddam Hussein—are unanimously opposed to a U.S. war against Iraq. They believe that U.S. military action will harm Iraqi civilians who have already suffered too much, and that the "Arab street" would perceive this as proof of a strong U.S. anti-Muslim bias—especially given the robust U.S. support for Israel. Saudi Arabia could deny basing rights to the U.S. military, making any large-scale action against Iraq very difficult.

3. *Strong public opposition.* One congressional staffer who has traveled to Iraq says the best way to prevent a war against Iraq is if the religious community "gives moral cover" for members of Congress to take a courageous public stand opposing war. "The religious community is the one group that could make a difference with Congress," she said. But there are many minds to change. In a recent NBC-*Wall Street Journal* poll, 57 percent said the U.S. "should take military action against Iraq."

### The Church and Change

How can church members make a difference? Already Mennonites in northern Indiana organized a national "day of prayer and faxing" on Palm Sunday. More than 4,000 faxes were sent to Bush and Congress opposing war against Iraq.

Educational events and letters or op ed pieces in newspapers could emphasize:

- The Iraqi people have already suffered two decades of war and sanctions. According to MCC partners in Iraq, for most Iraqis, "Every day is an emergency."
- War will only further destabilize an already explosive Middle East. Indeed, war cannot create the conditions for long-term peace and security. Seeds of war will only produce weeds of further violence.
- Overthrowing other governments violates international law. How can the United States expect other countries to uphold the rule of law if it shows blatant disregard itself?



- War will make the world more dangerous for North Americans. Anti-American sentiment is already strong in many parts of the world. Expanded U.S. military attacks only further promote the image of the U.S. as a domineering superpower that must be brought to its knees.
- There are good alternatives to war. Respectful dialogue can replace threats and propaganda. Ending sanctions against Iraq is more likely to produce positive and stabilizing changes for the Iraqi people than seeking to overthrow the Iraqi presi-

dent. A regional approach to WMD is more just and holds greater promise for long-term stability in the Middle East.

The die for war against Iraq is not fully cast, but there is no time to waste. People of faith must offer clear calls for creative alternatives to war. In so doing, they will help save human lives now. And they will also help the United States take a huge step back from the brink of what could become a global disaster.

*J. Daryl Byler is director of the MCC Washington (D.C.) office.*

**There are good alternatives to war. Respectful dialogue can replace threats and propaganda.**

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## Canada's Iraq Policy since 1990

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by Bill Janzen

Canada's policy on Iraq is not radically different from that of the United States though there are somewhat stronger elements of multilateralism, "soft power," and humanitarianism, and, of course, Canada is a much smaller player.

In 1990 Canada supported the several U.N. Security Council (UNSC) resolutions and the subsequent U.S.-led military action to push Iraq out of Kuwait. Canada also supported the 1991 resolutions to continue the sanctions and to send in weapons inspectors, to press Iraq to dispose of its weapons of mass destruction.

Canada has also demonstrated some concern for the Iraqi people. Already in 1991 Foreign Affairs officials responded quickly to NGO requests to clear humanitarian shipments. Canada also encouraged the development of the Oil for Food (OFF) program. In 1996 when Lloyd Axworthy, whose commitment to peace had led him to travel to Iraq in 1990, became Canada's Foreign Affairs Minister, he hired Dr. Eric Hoskins as a personal advisor. Hoskins had been on the 1991 Harvard Study Team that assessed the health situation in Iraq, and had done a lot to publicize the plight of the Iraqi people.

Axworthy's interest was timely because, despite the OFF program and progress in weapons inspection, interaction between Iraq and the U.S. was deteriorating. Late in 1998 the U.S. withdrew the inspectors and started a bombing campaign with the U.K. Then, early in 1999, Canada started a two-year UNSC term. Canada proposed three U.N. study panels, to focus on humanitarian needs, the weapons situation, and Kuwaiti

prisoners of war. Their reports helped in the long 1999 debate that culminated in UNSC Resolution 1284.

This resolution removed the oil ceiling, enabling Iraq to import many more goods. It authorized list-based approval to ease imports. It called for a cash component so that some oil revenue would go to Iraq in cash, under U.N. monitoring, to help pay civil servants and teachers. And it placed the weapons inspection commission under the U.N. Secretary-General, rather than the UNSC, restricting the influence of individual Council members.

But the new resolution kept the basic concept that money from oil sales, instead of going to Iraq, went into a U.N. account to pay international suppliers of goods ordered by Iraq. This prevented Iraq from buying weapons, but it also restricted its economic activity enormously! The cash component, meant to be an exception to this rule, was never operationalized because, say officials, Iraq did not accept monitoring.

The new resolution also continued to allow any member of the sanctions committee, e.g., the U.S., to block a vast range of items on the ground of "dual use" suspicions including parts for water treatment systems and medical, electrical, and communications equipment. It also kept the provision that 30 percent of Iraq's oil sales revenue would be used to compensate parties, including big oil companies, for losses in the Gulf War. Though later reduced to 25 percent, it is a shocking amount given the needs of the Iraqi people.

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Nearly a decade after the imposition of sanctions on Iraq, it is abundantly clear that the Iraq policy of the UN, the US, Canada and other enthusiastic supporters has been a colossal failure on nearly every count. Whether measured against the objective of bringing stability to the Middle East, promoting democratic change in Iraq, or most spectacularly, in helping the ordinary people of Iraq, the sanctions have been an unmitigated disaster.

It is evident, however, that the sanctions go beyond that of a policy failure. They are a gross violation of the political, cultural, social and economic rights of the Iraqi people. Every day that the sanctions remain in place avoidable deaths are compounded to the tragic number who have already died. Lifting the economic sanctions is not an overnight panacea for peace, security and justice in Iraq. But it is a first step in admitting the international community's abysmal failure to achieve a just purpose in Iraq.

—From the conclusion of "Analysis and Perspectives on the Humanitarian Disaster in Iraq: 1990–2000," Inter-Church Action for Development, Relief and Justice (a coalition in which MCC participates), Toronto, Ontario

continued on page 6

## Seeds of Sorrow, Seeds of Hope

The other evening after work I drove to the hardware store, picked out several packets of vegetable seeds, hastily paid for the goods, and hurried home to plant my garden. With my young daughter, I was able to plant the onions, radishes, and cucumber seeds in the remaining daylight.

In the midst of our discussion about giving the seeds a proper spacing she told me about her day at school. As we placed the seeds in the moist warm earth, in anticipation of harvest a few months later, I couldn't help but reflect on my week in Iraq last November. The sanctions affect even the most basic activities of life, such as growing food. An Iraqi farmer is no longer able to access what I could in a matter of a few hours. Transportation is unaffordable for many rural people. New seeds and tools are virtually unavailable. People are barely able to keep food on their table and do not have extra cash. If that isn't enough, nature has not been helpful, either. Three years of drought have hampered agriculture production, putting a strain on the meager irrigation system that farmers are trying to keep operating. Spare parts, plastic sheeting, and irrigation pipes are very difficult to obtain.

As one way of addressing the needs of farmers in Iraq, MCC has funded the construction of greenhouses covered with shade cloth and the importation of hybrid tomato seeds. Seedlings are grown and distributed to the local farmers. Extension workers from the Ministry of Agriculture excitedly follow the project from the planting of seeds to the farmers' fields. From the Minister of Agriculture down to the farmers, there is a sense of deep pride and ownership. With strong, healthy tomato seedlings they are able to get higher production.

*(continued on page 7)*

After this resolution was passed Canadian officials tried to strengthen its positive elements, particularly the list-based approval system, in part because, early in 2000, a Canadian Parliamentary committee recommended unanimously that nonmilitary sanctions be lifted. Also, Axworthy funded *The Sanctions Decade*, a 275-page study by the International Peace Academy, to have the Security Council look more self-critically at the use of sanctions generally. Canada also continued to make diplomatic visits to Iraq. It provided some funding for UNICEF, the Red Cross/Red Crescent, and some NGOs, while urging the Iraqi government to do more to help its people.

Canada also continued its diplomatic support for U.S. actions, including the bombing, and used its naval forces to assist in restricting Iraq's efforts to bypass the sanctions. Canadian officials argue that an "unfettered Iraq" would pose a danger to its neighbors and that despite their concern for the people of Iraq, constraints on its government are needed. They also support the new "smart sanctions" and favor regional disarmament, but say that Iraq must do more first.

On the question of another war, Canada says that the U.N. is the best mechanism for addressing Iraq issues and that if a war became imminent, it would make a decision taking all legal, political, and security concerns into account.

*Bill Janzen is director of the Ottawa office of MCC Canada.*

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## Iraq: A Looming Invasion?

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by John Rempel

### Introduction

Recently I found myself in the same room as a top official of an American media giant. "Seize the moment!" I told myself, and I approached him. I asked if his organization would consider running views on Iraq sanctions other than those it features, which are in total support of the U.S. government. The executive countered, "What's the problem? People in Iraq are no longer dying. What are you after?"

That is the argument the government, most media, and popular opinion in the U.S. make. Now that food and medicine are sufficiently available to ward off malnutrition and epidemics, sanctions are no longer "the problem." What is keeping Iraq's people from normalcy is its government, despotic within and bellicose without.

How do other actors on the international stage assess the situation? United Nations reports during the past year confirm the minimal nutritional adequacy of the food package. But they add two disturbing factors. One, child mortality and morbidity have not gone down but even increased slightly. Two, the devastation wrought on the civilian infrastructure (water, electricity, health, education, agriculture) leaves Iraq without the capacity to recover from its losses.

The question concerning the Iraq sanctions regime has always been whether it accomplishes the goals of the U.N. Security Council (UNSC), eliminating Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) while supplying Iraq's civilian population with humanitarian aid. U.N. inspection and monitoring agencies report that Iraq's storage of and capacity to produce WMD have been reduced to the extent that Iraq cannot threaten other countries. Contrary to U.S. popular opinion, UNSC resolutions do not dispute this claim; they call for the resumption of inspections to solidify Iraq's incapacity to produce WMD.

The majority view is that hundreds of thousands of Iraqis died because of the direct impact of sanctions. Even the most conservative estimates are above 250,000. This death rate was greatly reduced when the Oil for Food (OFF) program began to work. But OFF cannot reverse the devastation of the civilian infrastructure; its goal is short term, to stop people from dying of malnutrition and immediately treatable diseases. As a consequence civil society in Iraq remains paralyzed. Sanctions prevent Iraq from controlling its own economy, including profits from the oil it sells legally. It cannot import many goods and services essential to the building up of an economy. The consequences for the Iraqi people's health are staggering. Childhood diarrhea is endemic because most public sources of water were bombed during the war and have never been rehabilitated.

## The Stalemate

Is there a possible compromise to allow the Iraqi government to meet the UNSC conditions for the lifting of sanctions, chiefly the readmission of weapons inspectors? Or is the U.S. determined to invade Iraq and depose its government regardless of how Iraq responds?

In order to respond to these questions I will sketch out the position held by the international community (as represented in the UNSC), by the U.S., and by Iraq. Almost all states in the region as well as the Permanent Five members of the UNSC insist on inspections. Western and Arab countries alike fear the ambitions of Saddam Hussein. Members of the Secretariat and moderating forces on the UNSC say they have warned Iraq that its intransigence on inspections may become a self-fulfilling prophecy, giving the U.S. arguments for an invasion.

Most U.N. members, including most UNSC members, believe sanctions will be lifted per Council resolutions if Iraq accepts inspections and destruction of any WMDs. The U.S. rejects that view. Resolution 1284 was framed ambiguously, thus leaving Iraq unsure of what it would get in exchange for weapons compliance. At the same time, the Council has taken no responsibility for the consequences of imposing sanctions on Iraq's people. Starving a civilian population for military gain, the embargo's effect if not intention, contravenes the Geneva Conventions. Thus, the U.N. has grievously violated the very humanitarian and human rights norms it promulgated. No country has stepped forward to press this matter.

The U.S. is taking a two-pronged approach to Iraq. It is not the only country with a high strategic and commercial interest in Iraq, but its superpower status permits it alone to operate outside international conventions in a way that other states cannot risk. This staggering defiance of international norms is happening on several fronts, including Iraq-related ones. The U.S. has forced Jose Bustani, the head of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, out of office. This action is widely perceived as a preemptive strike against someone who might act independently of U.S. wishes should weapons inspectors return to Iraq.

At the same time, the U.S. has not formally abandoned U.N. processes as regards Iraq. In fact, it is determined to keep the sanctions regime intact, with no alterations to address the infrastructural devastation of the country. It has invested enormous diplomatic initiative recently in gaining agree-

ment to the Goods Review List (GRL), the new mechanism for regulating the flow of goods into Iraq.

In May, Resolution 1409 was passed. It took the initial review of contracts away from the sanctions committee and gave it to less directly politicized U.N. bodies, the International Atomic Energy Agency and the U.N. Monitoring, Verification, and Inspection Commission. Only if a contract contains an item from the GRL will it be turned over to the sanctions committee. Otherwise, basic humanitarian goods should be processed much faster.

A second improvement in humanitarian delivery is the promised release of almost all of the US\$5.3 billion dollars in frozen commercial contracts. Russia and China accepted the GRL on this condition. They and France (which did not press for this arrangement) are the biggest beneficiaries of this undertaking by far, since their businesses have most of these contracts.

Which festering problems of the humanitarian crisis does 1409 not address? There is no reference to a humanitarian impact assessment long sought by the Secretary-General. The Council rejected the preparation of the regular 180-day report to monitor the distribution of humanitarian aid. In fact, there is no mechanism in the new arrangement to monitor the distribution of approved goods. Thus, the government of Iraq is no longer held to account for what it gives to its people or withholds from them. (Is this seeming act of respect for Iraq's sovereignty intended to shift the blame for the humanitarian catastrophe totally off the Council and onto Iraq?)

Also not addressed is the astounding US\$1.3 billion deficit of the Oil for Food account, caused by low oil prices and unscrupulous contractors. Approved applications have no income against which urgently needed supplies could be purchased. In June France introduced a draft resolution to address the above problems.

## Conclusions

In sum, there is no fundamental change in the sanctions regime. The mounting crisis for civil society in Iraq remains unaddressed. According to some analysts the only gain for Iraq is the release of the US\$5.3 billion worth of contracts now on hold. It will allow the acquisition of a one-time host of civilian goods essential to the functioning of a modern society. But Iraq is still under embargo.

## Seeds of Sorrow, Seeds of Hope (continued)

We learned that more than 85 percent of the seedlings had been distributed to the farmers. Other benefits were mentioned. A local company makes the seedling trays, and some seed companies are looking into producing their own hybrid seeds. Other vegetable plants are being considered for this seedling generation method under shade cloth. The excitement was even shared in the capital. In the World Trade Exposition held that week in Baghdad, we came across the tomato seedling/greenhouse display in the Iraqi section.

One afternoon we drove to a remote area south of Baghdad. There was an oasis fed by a deep well. The farmers proudly showed us their new tomato plants. I enjoyed walking over the drip-irrigated fields, admiring their tomatoes, cucumbers, and other luscious green plants. Soon a curious crowd gathered. I displayed wallet photos of my family and told how I grew up on a farm of potatoes, tomatoes, and dairy cows. I said I was sorry for what the sanctions were doing to them over the last 11 years. As the sun was going down, a thin small boy passed around a giant flat bread. We stood in a circle talking and sharing bread. Through mouthfuls of cucumbers and bread, Mennonite and Muslims had common union together.

MCC continues to respond to the needs of the people in Iraq through our partners there. Thanks to the generosity of our donors, since 1994 MCC has provided over \$3.4 million worth of food, seeds, tools, school supplies, medicines, and other critical supplies. While ending sanctions is the only long-term solution, providing seedlings, school notebooks, and sutures continues to bring hope to Iraqis in the midst of such despair. Now is the time to plant. For soon it may be getting dark.

—Kevin King, material resources manager in the MCC Food, Disaster, and Material Resources Department

continued on page 8



There is a substantial lack of clarity and credible sources on the actual nature of the Iraqi threat to the US. A wider debate on US policy toward Iraq is imperative, especially in light of increasing war talk out of Washington. Rather than relying on information from dubious sources, let's put all the facts on the table. The conclusions from such a debate could pull us back from the brink of an unnecessary and costly war.

—Scott Ritter, former chief, Con-  
cealment Investigations Unit,  
U.N. Special Commission on Iraq,  
*Christian Science Monitor*, Janu-  
ary 23, 2002

At the same time the U.S. has controlled Iraq by diplomatic means, it is openly threatening an invasion to overthrow its government. These threats are not rumors; they are being openly made by U.S. officials responsible for such policy making. There is wild speculation as to when and how such an action might be carried out. Analyzing who Washington's allies might be is a most inexact science: every time someone in a Western or Arab capital expresses a view, it is claimed that this was said only for public consumption.

Given the spiral of violence in Israel and Palestine, Israel's reoccupation of Palestinian Authority territory, and U.S. acceptance of Israel's policies, it is hard to imagine any Arab country openly supporting a U.S. invasion. The U.S. was clearly not counting on chaos in the Middle East when it planned its aggression against Iraq. A recent rumor in New York is that the U.S. has already shifted its invasion staging plans from Saudi Arabia and Turkey to Romania and Bulgaria. Some speculate that the U.S. is now seeking allies in Europe rather than the Arab world because of the pro-U.S. shift in Russia and the rightward tilt of France. Still, analysts find it hard to imagine UNSC support for a U.S.-initiated invasion of Iraq, especially if Iraq admits weapons inspectors.

This year top Iraqi officials have held high-stakes negotiations with the Secretary-General. Officially, the only card in Iraq's

hand is a low one, that of signing on to the unconditional return of weapons inspectors. But, in fact, the Iraqis hold other cards. One of them is that Iraq can refer to early UNSC resolutions on weapons inspections, insisting that Iraqi disarmament be undertaken as part of the regional disarmament mentioned in these resolutions. Second, they are protesting the "no fly" zones, which were never mandated by the Council. A third card is that for the first time since 1994 Iraq has admitted the U.N. human rights rapporteur, allowing him some access to problem areas. A fourth card is the long-term support Russia has given Iraq in pressing for more clarity in Resolution 1284, which addresses the lifting of sanctions. The wild card in the Iraqis' hand is Israel's rejection of two recent U.N. resolutions. If the Council takes no action to compel Israeli compliance, it will have fewer moral grounds to pressure Iraq. But Iraq will forfeit any temporary gain if it does not quickly admit arms inspectors—its ace of spades in retaining the sympathy of key Secretariat members, key diplomats, and public opinion in key countries.

The great question is whether the Council will find a compromise or whether the Americans and the Iraqis will harden their positions to the peril of the Iraqi people.

*John Rempel is the MCC liaison to the United Nations in New York City.*

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## "Please Go and Tell the Truth"

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by Esther Epp-Tiessen

Teachers told our group that children often faint in school or look younger than their age, because they are malnourished.

**W**e were in the midst of a meeting with the headmistress of the Rahmaniyya Girls' School in Baghdad. Several young teachers had gathered in the room to listen to the conversation with our group of foreigners. I was struck by the beauty of one young teacher who sat in a far corner, taking in every word.

Later on, two of us spoke privately to her. She told us her name was Majida, that she had been teaching English for eleven years, and that she was still single. I wondered if perhaps she had delayed marriage because of the difficult times. We chatted some more. As we prepared to leave, she whispered to us, "You are a message of peace. Please go and tell the truth about the sanctions."

A plea for truth-telling from a young Iraqi woman. Jesus also called for truth-telling.

These are the truths about sanctions as I have come to understand them.

1. *The sanctions have had a devastating impact on the people of Iraq.* This impact has been borne disproportionately by children and the sick and elderly.

Hunger and malnutrition abound because of lack of food and the right kinds of food. Roughly a quarter of the children suffer from malnutrition, including one-third of children under the age of five (UNICEF). Sanctions-approved rations are provided to each family monthly, but they do not supply sufficient calories, and are seriously lacking in protein foods. Not only that, some families resort to selling their rations because they need the cash so badly. Teachers told our group that children often faint in school or look younger than their age, because they are malnourished.



Illness, disease, and death are rampant. According to conservative estimates, 250,000 children died as a direct result of sanctions between 1990 and 1999 (UNICEF). Infant mortality, due to poor maternal nutrition, now is one of the highest in the world.

Much of the illness and consequent death is related to the destruction and deterioration of water, sanitation, and electrical systems. Bombed during the Gulf War and denied repairs because of sanctions, these systems function at less than 50 percent capacity. Only 40 percent of the population has access to potable water. Water-borne diseases and diarrhea are commonplace and kill many.

Mental illness has increased astronomically as a result of the stresses of war and sanctions. Rates of childhood cancer, congenital deformities, and blindness have also risen alarmingly. Many medical professionals blame this on depleted uranium in munitions used in the 1991 Gulf War. Radioactive dust released by the explosions may well have contaminated much of southern Iraq, with the effects to be felt for generations.

Health problems are compounded by the sad state of the health-care system. Hospitals and clinics are in disrepair, doctors and nurses are overworked and drastically underpaid, and medicines and supplies are simply unavailable. Although the Oil for Food (OFF) program allows for medical imports, there are never enough. Children with cancer, who require a combination of drugs over time, are virtually condemned to death.

The education system is also in shambles. Seventy percent of school buildings need major rehabilitation; almost all of them are overcrowded, even with two or three shifts of classes daily. We visited one school that had no electricity, running water, or supplies. Most of the windows and doors were broken and the bathrooms were off limits. The principal who showed us around said, "We love our school but . . ." He could not complete his sentence.

The entire economy has suffered a devastating blow. Although OFF permits oil exports, revenue must be used for imported goods. It cannot be used to pay workers, purchase goods locally, or stimulate the Iraqi economy in other ways. Virtually any foreign exchange in Iraq is earned through smuggling.

*2. The sanctions have scapegoated an entire people for the actions of its government.* Sanctions were applied initially to punish Iraq for invading Kuwait in 1990. They have

remained in place, ostensibly, to force the dismantling of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Behind the WMD rhetoric, however, it seems the motive of the U.S. and Britain—the two countries holding out for the continuation of sanctions—is the humiliation and ruin of the current regime. But the sanctions have not succeeded in bringing down this government; if anything, they have strengthened it, for people are much too preoccupied with simple survival to offer political opposition. The sanctions have only succeeded in bringing death and devastation to an entire people.

*3. The sanctions violate international law.* For the people of Iraq, the Gulf War has never ended. The memories of the U.S.-led Desert Storm in 1991 are still very fresh and painful. Continuing to the present, the U.S. and Britain have continued to bomb the no-fly zones in the northern and southern parts of the country. Moreover, the sanctions have prolonged a warlike state and are a violation of international law. Article 54 of Protocol I of the Geneva Conventions states: "The starvation of civilians as a method of warfare is prohibited."

*4. The West bears significant responsibility for the impact of the sanctions.* The U.N. sanctions regime was initially supported by a broad cross-section of nations. At this point the two main countries insisting on the sanctions are the U.S. and Britain. Canada has supported the sanctions in principle while calling for changes that address Iraqi concerns. Canada was behind the 1999 move to remove limits on oil exports. At the same time, Canadian Marines patrol the Persian Gulf to enforce the sanctions.

Though Western governments may protest that the Iraqi government is blind to the needs of its own people and bears responsibility for their suffering, that should not divert our attention from the moral imperative that is upon the international community. By supporting comprehensive sanctions, our governments are complicit in the death and destruction that those sanctions have brought upon the Iraqi people.

Jesus said, "You will know the truth and the truth will set you free." My hope and prayer is that we in the West may know the truth, so that Majida and her people may be set free.

*Esther Epp-Tiessen is peace ministries program coordinator for MCC Canada in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She traveled to Iraq with an MCC delegation in February 2002.*

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[The Iraqi government's policies] should not divert our attention from the moral imperative that is upon the international community. By supporting comprehensive sanctions, our governments are complicit in the death and destruction that those sanctions have brought upon the Iraqi people.

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# Iraq Sanctions: Immoral from the Very Beginning

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by Bob Herr

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Sanctions against Iraq present a moral dilemma to the Christian community. They reflect brokenness, suffering and insecurity within the human family. The United Nations (UN) Security Council's desire to contain and control the Government of Iraq is grounded in a recent and difficult experience with conflict and war. However the mechanism for this containment, comprehensive sanctions, inflicts an indiscriminate cost on innocent Iraqi citizens. An end to these sanctions is urgent.

... We believe that lasting peace can only be nurtured by respectful dialogue, truth-telling, mutual respect, restorative justice, and human safety. The Iraqi people must be allowed a safe space for human flourishing. . . .

We call for immediate and meaningful steps toward ending the sanctions against the people of Iraq. Such steps require close NGO monitoring of the UN Iraq Sanctions Committee and of the countries which shape UN Security Council decisions. Until sanctions are ended, we call for the United Nations to implement the Oil-for-Food Program in ways that provide the greatest possible benefit to the people of Iraq.

—Excerpted from “Ending Iraq Sanctions: A Mennonite Central Committee Statement to Guide Advocacy Ministries,” adopted by the MCC Executive Committee on April 20, 2001

Economic sanctions are put in place to force compliance on international standards of behavior. Sometimes they are called nonviolent, but more accurately we should probably refer to them as nonmilitant. They aim to restrict a country's activities and are intended as an alternative to military invasion. There are times when MCC has lent support to such “coercive” instruments, such as with South Africa in the 1980s. But in the case of Iraq, MCC has from the beginning questioned the legitimacy of Iraq sanctions, and by 1998 called them immoral.

Economic sanctions against Iraq were designed to counter the August 2, 1990, Iraq invasion of Kuwait. The first U.N. Security Council (UNSC) sanctions resolution came on August 6, 1990, and at that time it was intended to convince Iraq to stop the Kuwait invasion and withdraw. The hope was to avoid war, and so sanctions were seen as a nonmilitary expression of the will of the international community of nations.

At the time some encouraged MCC to join in support of these sanctions, as a way to speak against both the invasion of Kuwait and the growing call for international military action. However, because this first sanctions resolution was not clear about exempting food and medicines, the MCC Executive Committee, on September 6, 1990, raised a concern about using food as a weapon. The committee called on the international community to ensure that food and medical supplies not be included in any embargo. It appealed to both the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights and the Geneva Conventions to suggest that access to food is a basic human right and withholding food should not be used as a tool of international coercion. These U.N. sanctions did exempt “supplies intended strictly for medical purposes, and, in ‘humanitarian circumstances,’ foodstuffs.” However, in August 1990 the UNSC stated that it believed no “humanitarian circumstances” existed, so foodstuffs were not exempted. This position held until April 3, 1991, by which time a major humanitarian disaster was unfolding.

## Voices against Sanctions

Following early reviews of the human impact of the Gulf War, voices against the sanctions regime gained momentum. Iraq

sanctions were designed to be comprehensive. Because Iraq's economy relied almost exclusively on the export of oil, control of the Iraqi oil industry was placed in a Paris-based international trust. Policies to manage this trust were decided on by the UNSC, which is controlled by the Permanent Five members: Russia, the U.K., France, China, and the U.S. The U.N. made the economy of Iraq the leverage point for forcing its compliance. Between 1991 and 1996 military disarmament took center stage, and the growing humanitarian crisis took a deep and heavy toll on the Iraqi people.

MCC's awareness of this crisis was informed by occasional visits to Iraq and by a small program to assist Iraqi refugees. By 1996, due to the worsening humanitarian situation, MCC determined to increase emergency relief efforts. But humanitarian activity, it was decided, needed to be complemented by advocacy ministries in Washington, Ottawa, and New York. These two, advocacy and relief ministries, were to go hand in hand in a more deliberate way than is often the case in MCC as this crisis was so uniquely created by Iraqi governmental and international policy. Sanctions were a policy tool of the United Nations. Also Iraq's government authorities were often more preoccupied with frustrating U.N. policy than with responding to the humanitarian crisis.

On June 26, 1998, following extensive consultation among all MCC Iraq program, advocacy, and administrative staff, the MCC Executive Committee passed the statement “Iraq and Sanctions: An MCC Comment,” saying that sanctions against Iraq present a moral dilemma to peace-loving Christians: “we believe the current sanctions policy is ill conceived and immoral.” This was among the first church statements to go beyond calling for adjustments to these sanctions, to accuse the sanctions regime as being basically flawed and immoral. Although many believe Iraqi leaders have not acted in the best interests of their people, the UNSC also contributed to the humanitarian disaster in Iraq. Best estimates at that time were that at least 250,000 people had died prematurely due to the sanctions. Moral responsibility for the plight of these innocent people, the statement holds, rests not only with the Iraqi government but also with the UNSC.

Between 1998 and 2000 MCC made numerous humanitarian shipments to Iraq. An extensive advocacy ministry was carried out in New York, Washington, and Ottawa. MCC staff were placed in Baghdad to oversee this work and monitor the deteriorating situation. MCC delegations were hosted in Iraq for greater awareness and communication. Early in 2000 the MCC Executive Committee passed a second statement called "Ending Iraq Sanctions," stating that comprehensive sanctions inflicted an indiscriminate cost on innocent Iraqi citizens. The statement held that "an end to these sanctions is urgent."

We now know that the sanctions regime against Iraq was in many ways a fluke of the late twentieth century. In 1990 members of the UNSC were living in a time of great end-of-Cold-War euphoria. There was a unanimity that never existed before and has not existed since. In this brief period of time, a decision was taken to place drastic

comprehensive sanctions on Iraq. Since that time sanctions on Angola, Serbia, Liberia, and Afghanistan have been imposed with considerably more care and reflection, brokering different perspectives and agendas. However, once the Iraq sanctions regime was in place, with the supporting weight of international law, changes became complicated and difficult. Only one Permanent Five country needed to object to derail changes or adjustments. So Iraq has lived with unusually aggressive sanctions plus difficult, almost impossible, rules for changing or lifting them.

The crisis in Iraq started with the Gulf War but has persisted due to a very poorly designed sanctions regime. It now threatens to lead yet again back to military invasion, with the loss of more life and another round of increased suffering for the people of Iraq.

*Bob Herr is co-director of the MCC International Peace Office.*

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## Halting the Free Fall

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by Edward Miller

In Baghdad, a dusty sprawling city casually sliced up by the meandering Tigris River, few clues reveal the present decade.

Weary cars from the 1980s pack the wide streets, wreathed in blue smoke. Women in flowing black *abayaat* (*burqa*-type long dresses) dodge horse-drawn carts and puddles of sewage along downtown lanes. Only the odd flash of a brand-new Mercedes or a glistening shop façade offers a glimpse of the twenty-first century.

Yet this is a country with the second-largest oil reserves in the world. For Majeed Waleed, an Iraqi employee of the relief organization CARE, the difference between the Iraq of the '80s and the present Iraq is huge.

Waleed and his coworker Judy Morgan have spent the last eleven years watching U.N. sanctions erode a way of life. These comprehensive sanctions, a first for the U.N., were implemented after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. U.S. veto power in the U.N. Security Council has resolutely kept them in place.

Morgan pointed out that pre-1990, Iraq's oil wealth meant it could import whatever was needed: "Before sanctions, Iraq had state-of-the-art water treatment plants and two water systems in the cities—one for raw water, one for potable water."

Iraq used to spend \$100 million a year on maintaining the water and sanitation infrastructure. From '91 to '96, the country spent only \$8 million, said Morgan. Not surprisingly, most urban sewage-treatment plants broke down in the early '90s. Untreated sewage, said Waleed, simply went back into the river. The downward spiral started there.

"It's terrible," he said. "Children die from diarrhea they get from contaminated water—simple." At least 250,000 people have died as a direct result of sanctions, according to international analysts.

In 1996, faced with a famished, impoverished population of 22 million, the Iraqi government agreed to the Oil for Food (OFF) program: the country could export oil in exchange for humanitarian goods.

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We encourage North American Christians to speak out against military invasion [of Iraq]. Invasion is drastic and unpredictable. Many lives will be lost. Many communities will be disrupted or destroyed. In addition, we highlight the following concerns:

- 1) Invasion would likely ruin an already collapsing civilian infrastructure, putting the most vulnerable members of the society at risk.
- 2) Invasion is likely to increase the divide between the West and the Arab world, in part because the Iraqi government's record is not the only one in the region that is troubling. Many will see a double standard.
- 3) Because of Sunni, Shia, Kurdish and other divisions within Iraqi society, military invasion might well cause a fragmentation of the country and contribute to regional instability and perhaps other wars.
- 4) By implying that military force is crucial for political control, international military invasion gives permission to other governments in the region to develop similar policies.
- 5) When societies go to war they experience intense pressures to solidify national identity. This has worrisome implications for the Christian minorities in Arab societies and for Muslim minorities in the West.

—Excerpted from "Rumors of a US/Western Allies Invasion of Iraq: an urgent message from MCC to Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Congregations, and all Christian brothers and sisters," adopted by the MCC Executive Committee on April 20, 2002

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continued on page 12





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Waleed admitted that OFF improved medicine and food supplies. "Before in the hospitals you would see one cough medicine bottle being rationed out," he said. "We saw a burn patient who could not even get aspirin."

Just like the dilapidated water and sanitation infrastructure, the health and education sectors are limping. Morgan gave an example: "One visiting ophthalmologist said thousands of Iraqis are going blind just because the sanctions committee has blocked lasers that are needed for surgery."

Certain educational books and journals cannot be imported under the embargo. "People are using antiquated technology," said Morgan. "One med school student showed us copies of textbooks that have been photocopied so often they can hardly be deciphered."

According to Waleed and Morgan, only an end to sanctions will reactivate an economy in free fall. "In the last 12 years, average government salaries have gone from \$1,000 to \$5 per month" due to currency devaluations, said Waleed. "The majority of the population does not have the cash to make the economy move."

Many sell old goods and have two or three jobs just to survive. In Baghdad, children quit school to work. "People are busy just keeping their heads above water," said Morgan. "The lack of hope among the youth is the worst thing."

Waleed suggested that North American groups help by sending in specialists who can shed light on specific areas, like the ophthalmologist. But most importantly, they must understand what is happening.

"No one would support U.S. actions if they knew the reality in Iraq," he said.

After September 11, Americans were understandably upset, but "here for ten years people have been bombed by the U.S.," said Waleed, referring to U.S. and U.K. air-patrol attacks in the "no-fly zones" in north and south Iraq. The most recent bombing was in mid-April 2002.

Morgan posed a simple question: "Who has the right to deny Iraqi children their childhood?"

*Edward Miller coordinates the MCC Iraq program, based in Baghdad.*