

TALKING POINTS: IRAQ

1- For almost 11 years, the Iraqi civilian population has been suffering from the most draconian and prolonged economic sanctions imposed by the United Nations and supported by the US government:

- ❑ "Smart Bombs" dropped by the U.S. 11 years ago targeted water treatment plants, sewage treatment plants, power plants, schools and hospitals.
- ❑ One-fourth of Iraqi children under the age of five are malnourished. [UN Report, March 1999]
- ❑ There has been a 160 percent rise in Iraq's infant mortality rate since 1991. Iraq has the highest increase in child mortality during the period 1990-99 of 188 countries surveyed. [UNICEF, December 2000]
- ❑ As many as 70 percent of Iraqi women suffer from anemia. [U.N. Report, March 1999]
- ❑ Sanctions have contributed to the deaths of over one million Iraqis. More than 200 people die each day in Iraq; 5,000 to 6,000 die each month. [UNICEF and Denis Halliday, UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq]
- ❑ Access to potable water, relative to 1990 levels, is only 50 percent in urban areas and 33 percent in rural areas. The overall deterioration in the quality and quantity of drinking water has contributed to the rapid spread of infectious disease. Raw sewage often flows into streets and homes. [World Food Program]
- ❑ School enrollment for all ages (6 - 23) has declined to 53 percent. [UN Report, March 1999]
- ❑ Per capita income fell from \$3,416 U.S. dollars in 1984 to less than \$1,036 in 1998. Other sources estimate a per capita decrease as low as \$450 U.S. in 1995. [IMF and UN Report, March 1999]
- ❑ Iraq experienced a shift from relative affluence to massive poverty. [UN Report, March 1999]

2- Instead of ending the economic sanctions against Iraq, the United States and Britain have come up with so-called "Smart Sanctions", which is basically meant to institutionalize (and justify) the ongoing suffering of the Iraqi people. The smart sanctions policy does not improve the desperate situation in Iraq, since:

- ❑ There are still too many banned items in the new proposal. The current version of the Smart Sanctions proposal has a 23-page list of banned items, which highly

restricts Iraq's access to new technology and spare parts badly needed for the reconstruction of the ruined economy.

- ❑ The "Smart Sanctions" proposal would allow more commodities into Iraq, but would not address the fundamental problem of the low purchasing power of the vast majority of Iraqis. Presently, and also under the "new" sanctions, Iraqi people who are employed are paid low wages, with a greatly devalued currency. The present "oil for food" program results in annual revenues of less than \$120 per person.
- ❑ Smart sanctions do not lift the almost complete ban on foreign investment, necessary because Iraq's infrastructural and reconstruction needs are so severe: "The deterioration in Iraq's civilian infrastructure is so far reaching that it can only be reversed with extensive investment and development efforts." (Human Rights Watch, and others, August 2000).
- ❑ The "Smart Sanctions" proposal would increase the amount of money taken for the UN compensation commission. Currently, 25% of the proceeds from Iraq's oil sales are diverted to the UN Compensation Commission, which processes claims for damages by victims of Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait. The new British proposal would restore the UNCC's cut to 30%. This would be taking away revenue desperately needed by Iraq for reconstruction and basic needs.
- ❑ And finally, "Smart Sanctions" call for a total closure of the Iraqi border. If this happens, the Iraqi government will not have the supplemental income it now derives from commerce with neighboring countries and uses to pay civil servants such as teachers and doctors.

3- After the September 11th attack, many high ranking officials as well as the media asked for a military attack against Iraq similar to the ongoing US military operations in Afghanistan, even though so far there has been no evidence linking the Iraqi regime to the terrorist operations in New York and Washington. Although they argue that Saddam Hussein's regime is a constant source of threat to global peace and security, and hence should be eliminated, the fact is that any military strike against Iraq can destabilize the whole Middle East and create more problems for the international community, including the United States;

- ❑ Attacking Iraq will result in more civilian deaths and casualties in a population who have already suffered greatly as the result of 8 years of bloody war with Iran (in which about half a million Iraqis died), the 1991 Gulf war (with over 100,000 casualties) and 11 years of economic sanctions (that have so far caused nearly one million civilian deaths).
- ❑ A military operation to topple the Iraqi regime will surely plunge Iraq into a civil war. In the absence of any meaningful political alternative for Saddam Hussein (as well as the lack of any powerful or popular opposition group), the most likely scenario will be an endless cycle of violence and bloodshed

among different religious and ethnic groups (Shiites in the South, Sunnis in the middle and Kurds in the northern part of the country).

- The war against Iraq will have an immediately destructive impact on the whole region and can potentially lead to a military standoff between Iraq's neighbors. While the fundamentalist Iran will do anything to bring the Iraqi Shiites into power, the nightmare of having another Islamic Republic in the region will cause Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Jordan to counter Tehran's attempt. Also Turkey might want to take advantage of the vacuum of power and annex the oil-rich Iraqi Kurdistan, a move which will put the NATO member at the verge of war with neighboring Iran (which has a sizable Kurdish population) as well as Arab countries (who can not tolerate the partition of an Arab nation).
- Targeting another Muslim country will portray the US as an interventionist and expansionist country and cause a new wave of anti-American and anti-Western sentiment among Arabs and Muslims. This will in turn help the Muslim extremists receive more sympathy and support from the average person in the Middle East and eventually make future attacks against the United States and its regional allies quite likely.
- US intervention in Iraq will even jeopardize the peace process between Israelis and Palestinians. Such a unilateral military move can alienate moderate Arab governments in the region (who are already critical of unconditional US support for Israel) and make them more skeptical of US policies in the Middle East. The resultant mistrust will not only undermine the US credibility as a peace-broker, but also will put the existing global coalition against terrorism at risk and significantly reduce the likelihood of further cooperation between Arab countries and the US to combat terrorism.