

Iraq – January 2004 – the impacts

The most recent conflict in Iraq exacerbated the situation in an already battered country and its people. The eight year war with Iran, the 1991 Gulf War and the subsequent 12 years of sanctions all took their toll on the nations infrastructure and its people.

There has not been a fully comprehensive study on the human and environmental consequences of the war on Iraq. The United Nations Environmental Programme has only managed to carry out a desk study¹ and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) was only allowed to assess one site in a very controlled manner.

Other UN bodies and NGO's have done some work but it is fragmented and not a comprehensive assessment. The recent UN/World Bank reports² only look at how much it will cost to put the country back together again.

Below is a brief summary of what Greenpeace has managed to glean from publicly available sources and our work in Iraq.

Casualties

There has been no comprehensive count of the Iraqi civilian or military deaths and injuries caused as a result of the last Iraq war. Estimates vary. According to Iraq body count reported Iraqi civilian deaths could be as low as 8,100 or as high as 9,300³. An associated Press survey estimated that 3,420 civilians died during the conflict itself whilst the Los Angeles Times put the figure at 1,700 civilians dead and more than 8,000 injured in Baghdad alone⁴. The US government estimate that 2,320 Iraqi military personnel were killed as of April 15, 2003 and that a total of 160 US, British and Canadian military personnel and 12 journalists were killed⁵. Whereas, a study by MedAct places Iraqi military casualties at somewhere between 13,500 and 45,000⁶

Displaced people

The Croissant Rouge today estimates that 175 to 250,000 people are displaced within the country. The situation of these displaced populations is particularly precarious since they are not covered by any governmental programmes. Thousands of families live in great difficulty in unhealthy shelters: unused barracks, temporary dwellings made of earth or branches, abandoned schools⁷.

Unexploded ordnance

Unexploded ordnance from the most recent war is another huge problem. The US military estimated that they dropped 10,782 cluster bombs containing 1.8 million submunitions on Iraq during the war with the British using over 2,000 that contained over 110,000 submunitions. The UN estimate that in Baghdad alone there are 800 sites where munitions have been dumped or cluster bomb munitions⁸ – all of which will require clearing.

“... I have never seen as much explosive ordnance especially the stockpiles of ammunition ever before...”⁹

In just one month in one region of Iraq 250 casualties caused by unexploded ordnance were reported¹⁰. One example given by the Mines Advisory Group is that in Kirkuk, northern Iraq in just one week fifty-two people were killed and sixty-three injured by landmines and unexploded ordnance.

For many poor people landmines and UXO are a vital economic resource in spite of the danger they pose. The metal can be sold as scrap, providing a little cash for people unable to produce a surplus harvest for sale. The explosive content of mines and ordnance is sometimes used for fishing or is sold at market.

¹ Available at <http://www.unep.org/Documents/Default.asp?DocumentID=307>

² available at <http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/vID/BC80591D3D5A8F66C1256DC2003D947A?OpenDocument>

³ Count as of February 2, 2004 see <http://www.iraqbodycount.net/bodycount.htm>

⁴ “Off Target: The Conduct of the War and Civilian Casualties in Iraq”, p.13, Human Rights Watch, December 2003

⁵ “Casualties of the war in Iraq”, CBC News online, April 15, 2003, see

http://www.cbc.ca/news/iraq/issues_analysis/casualties_iraqwar030328.html

⁶ “continuing collateral damage: the health and environmental consequences of war on Iraq 2003”, MedAct, November 2003 available at <http://www.reliefweb.int/library/documents/2003/medact-irq-11nov.pdf>

⁷ see <http://www.premiere-urgence.org/OurProgrammes/IrakFrameEng.htm>

⁸ <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/iraq.html>

⁹ International Committee of the Red Cross mine clearance expert Johan Sohlberg audio interview available at <http://www.icrc.org/web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/html/5NUGVN!OpenDocument>

¹⁰ “The revised humanitarian appeal for Iraq, 1 April – 30 December 2003”, the United Nations, June 2003

“The victim data made available for the seven week period ending on 1 August 2003 indicates that an extremely hazardous environment exists for many Iraqis. The 324 victims recorded in the southern four governates is an extremely high figure compared to other highly impacted countries (for example 150 victims per month are recorded in all of Afghanistan). Based on this data, and the information that is available, Iraq is the most EO [Explosive Ordnance], UXO [unexploded ordnance] and landmine impacted country in the world.”¹¹

Water and sanitation

Although degraded by years of neglect in the 1990s, water and sewage treatment services were largely functional in Iraq before the war.

According to the UN/World Bank report:

“As a result of the 2003 conflict, the situation... has deteriorated... by 50% compared to the pre-war situation. In addition there was serious damage to the water networks, resulting in contaminated water supply... This was exacerbated by the collapse of the sewage network... and the collapse of the sewage treatment plants... This situation was further exacerbated by the direct damage of power supply stations, office buildings, and other infrastructure. In addition to this, widespread looting, the collapse of management systems and operations and lack of maintenance all contributed...”¹²

Sanitation treatment plants were systematically looted in the aftermath leaving a large percentage of the populace without access to clean water and sanitation. Huge quantities of raw sewage are being dumped into the Tigris and the Euphrates, the two major rivers that flow through the country. One estimate is that around 300,00 tons of raw sewage a day was being dumped into the Tigris as it flows through Baghdad – the cities main water source¹³.

“The already deteriorated water and sanitation system in Iraq collapsed as a result of this latest war. In Baghdad, around 40 per cent of the network was damaged leading to loss or contamination of piped water. Sewage treatment facilities are not operating due to the breakdown of the fuel supply line, the lack of maintenance and looting¹⁴.”

As a result cholera is endemic, cases of typhoid are increasing and there is a threefold increase in cases of diarrhea.

Many of the water and sewage treatment plants are dependent on electricity for their normal operations. Some back-up generators exist but many of these systems are plagued by the lack of spare parts and normal maintenance, vandalism, and lack of fuel.

Over the next four years as much as \$USD 11 billion may need to be spent to rebuild and refurbish Iraq’s water and sanitation infrastructure.

Health

The UN estimate that 75% of all health-care structures in Iraq were affected pre- and post war and as a result of the looting, the collapse of the institutional framework and the irregular supply of electricity and water.

The national drug supply system broke down as a consequence of the war and its immediate aftermath. Computerized and paper inventory management systems were destroyed.

“The damage done to the Iraqi health system by years of under investment, economic sanctions and most acutely by weeks of conflict is clear to see.”¹⁵

According to Khudair Abbas, the Iraqi health minister:

“The system "completely collapsed" during the war, Abbas said. The World Health Organization has reported that two central laboratories were destroyed, while four out of seven medical supply warehouses were looted. The 850 patients in the country's

¹¹ United Nations/World Bank Joint Needs Assessment Working Paper on Mine Action, October 2003

¹² United Nations/World Bank Joint Needs Assessment Working Paper on Water and Sanitation, October 2003

¹³ see http://www.careaustralia.org.au/Media_Releases/2003/MR_300103.htm

¹⁴ <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/iraq.html>

¹⁵ “A simple but ambitious plan: \$20 million to jump start the Iraqi health system”, World Health Organisation press release, May 2, 2003

only mental hospital were simply missing after the war, Abbas said, and 50 percent to 60 percent of the hospital equipment that should have been in place had been looted or just didn't exist, victim of the Hussein-era policy of channeling all funds into security at the expense of everything else.”¹⁶

Iraq's healthcare system has been slow to recover and ten months later Iraq's hospitals are still a “breeding ground for disease”¹⁷.

At the Central Teaching Hospital in Baghdad, there is open sewage on the premises mixing with drinking water. Rubble from pre-war maintenance remains inside the building and there are only two bathrooms per floor of the four floor building for all patients, nurses, doctors and family members. The hospital building - built in 1985 - is in total disrepair. There are metal girders everywhere. Water and sewage pipes lie torn up from the floors. Half the hospital has been closed because of poor pre-war and post-war maintenance. There are no air conditioning units. Over the summer, temperatures rise as high as 50 degrees Celsius¹⁸.

The UN/World Bank study estimates that close to \$USD 6 billion will need to be spent over the next three years to start getting an adequate healthcare system functioning in Iraq.

Agriculture

“After almost 14 years of wars, international sanctions and government's stranglehold, the sector has virtually collapsed save for the lifelines of food and input studies. The food subsidy given out as monthly ration to the entire population, did stave off mass starvation...”¹⁹

The war resulted in the complete collapse of technical support such as animal health centres and seed production facilities as well as the national distribution infrastructure. The two main fertiliser plants that supplied more than a half a million tons of fertiliser to farmers are out of commission. Damage to water pumps by bombing and subsequent looting as well as the lack of a sustained electricity supply are affecting the much needed irrigation of crops.

Concerns are now being raised about this year's crop unless there is serious technical and financial investment in the industry²⁰.

The World Bank estimates that US\$1.2 billion will be needed in 2004 to start rebuilding the Iraqi agricultural infrastructure and to provide its people with food security and that the total bill between now and 2007 will be close to \$USD 11 billion²¹.

Electricity

While some of the extensive damage caused by the last Gulf war to the electricity infrastructure was repaired prior to last years war the situation was precarious. Sanctions led to a shortage of spare parts and an inability to carry out major maintenance. Damage caused by the war and the subsequent looting to generators and transmission lines means that Iraq is currently only able to generate half the electricity its population actually needs and power cuts and blackouts are a daily occurrence in most areas.

There was also the complete destruction of the administrative side of this sector.

“In the present generation system in Iraq, the lack of normal environmental protection schemes poses a serious threat. Uncontrolled power station emissions and thermal pollution of waterways severely affect the local ecosystems and are among the problems that need addressing.”²²

The World Bank estimate that \$USD 20 billion will need to be invested between now and 2010 to repair the damage and that generation capacity will not meet demand until 2006²³.

¹⁶ Punish Hussein's Mutilating Doctors, Iraqi Health Minister Says, UN wire, December 17, 2003

¹⁷ Iraq: Hospitals become breeding ground for disease”, UN Office for the coordination of humanitarian affairs Integrated Regional Information Network, January 28, 2004 available at <http://www.cidi.org/humanitarian/hsr/iraq/ixl145.html>

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ United Nations/World Bank Joint Needs Assessment Working Paper on Agriculture, Water Resources and Food Security, October 2003

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ *ibid.*

²² United Nations/World Bank Joint Needs Assessment Working Paper on Electricity, October 2003

²³ *ibid.*

Nuclear material

A small Greenpeace team went to Iraq in June 2003 to discover the true extent of nuclear contamination that had resulted from the extensive looting of the nuclear facility at Tuwaitha near Baghdad. They found serious nuclear contamination in a village near the Tuwaitha nuclear facility.

When presented with some of the findings, a US forces health physicist said he would recommend that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) get involved and conduct an assessment as soon as possible.

The radioactive material found by the Greenpeace team was taken from the facility by scavengers from the local community who were unaware of its dangers but were seeking useful material for private purposes such as building material, scrap metal recycling, or for use as storage containers.

Some of the material has been confirmed to be yellowcake, a slightly- radioactive uranium powder that is dangerous if inhaled, which was taken from the IAEA-monitored store near Tuwaitha known as Location C.

