

# Iraq's dying children: 'If this is the new world order, what is Hell?'

by Lydia Cherry

At a press conference in Rome on Oct. 3, former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark and Muriel Mirak-Weissbach of the Committee to Save the Children in Iraq accused the Bush administration of war crimes and the killing of hundreds of thousands of innocent children. The well-attended press conference was convened to publicize a two-day "war crimes" tribunal that followed in Naples, Italy. Clark made the case that the Bush administration and Henry Kissinger had initially set up the conditions which led to the Gulf war, and had then consciously pursued an embargo policy, still in effect, to kill more innocents. Mirak-Weissbach warned of the danger of a Thirty Years' War in the Middle East—an eventuality which the war against Iraq and new operations against the Kingdom of Jordan are designed to unleash.

A third speaker was Mr. Cornu of the U.N.'s Food and Agriculture Organization; he detailed the present crisis in Iraq from the standpoint of the food supply situation and health care.

The tribunal followed an investigatory visit to Baghdad in September by six Italian parliamentarians, led by Roberto Formigoni, a Christian Democrat. Eighty-eight members of the Italian Parliament have signed a resolution against the Iraq embargo. Formigoni has announced that the issue of the embargo would be placed before the Italian Parliament later in October.

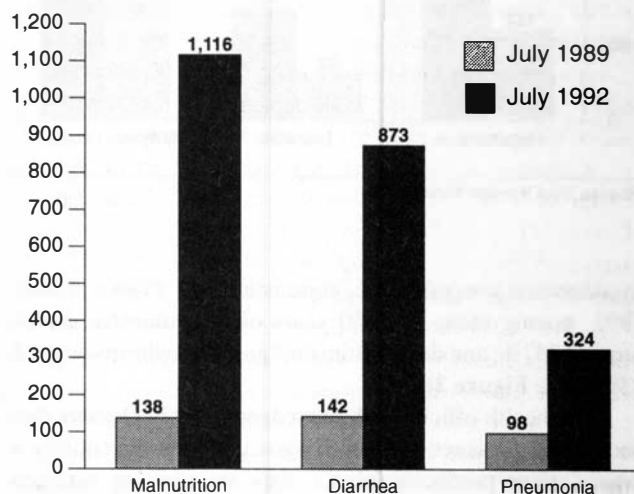
The tribunal opens during the same week that the Anglo-American-controlled U.N. Security Council apparently decided that not enough Iraqis had been killed, and made the decision to impound most of the country's oil-related assets. Iraqi leaders said the action would prevent them from buying any food supplies.

## The view from Iraq

"Life, or rather daily dwelling, is getting harder and harder; we are in terrible need for blood administration sets with filters, sterile, and solution sets, sterile—in any quantity possible, but urgently!" Hisham Tabaqchali, Iraq's ambassador to Malaysia told *EIR* on Oct. 12. "About 1 million children now are severely affected by malnutrition, according to a report I have just received," the ambassador continued. "Now out of every 1,000 live births, 128.8 die [in the first year]; if the embargo is not lifted, it is expected that this figure will rise to 200 by the end of this year."

FIGURE 1  
**Mortality in children under 5, before and after the embargo**

(number of deaths during given month)



Source: Iraqi Foreign Ministry.

Also from the Iraqi Foreign Ministry comes the news that "within the past two years of unjust sanctions, many diseases, such as kala azar, toxoplasmosis, brucellosis, and hemorrhagic fever, which are common diseases in animals, have infected a large number of the population in Iraq and have escalated in numbers of cases due to lack of immunizations and severe shortages in vaccines. These diseases have created an epidemic and are of grave concern."

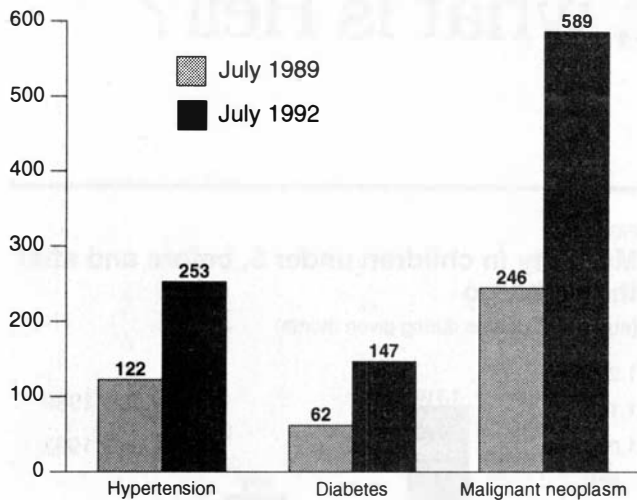
As **Figure 1** shows, mortality figures contrasting July 1992 with July 1989 indicate an 808% jump in deaths from malnutrition among those under five years of age. Deaths from diarrhea increased 515%, with 142 deaths in 1989 contrasted with 873 deaths last July. Pneumonia statistics reveal a 337% jump in mortality.

The older generation in Iraq is not faring much better. "It is the lack of medicine, the ability to perform operations, but also the state of anxiety, the state of horror, and such helplessness," Hisham Tabaqchali surmises. Deaths from

FIGURE 2

## Mortality in adults over 50, before and after the embargo

(number of deaths during given month)



Source: Iraqi Foreign Ministry.

hypertension jumped 207%, contrasting July 1989 with July 1992, among those over 50 years of age; diabetes deaths jumped 337%; and deaths from malignant neoplasms jumped 239% (see **Figure 2**).

Iraqi health officials acknowledged in early October that because of the sanctions and the destruction of the country's main syringe-producing plants, they are re-using syringes and steel needles, even though this may expose patients to disease and infections. "In view of the chronic shortages in disposable syringes, we have turned to the traditional method of disinfecting by boiling water," Iraq's Health Ministry Undersecretary Dr. Shawqi Murqus told newsmen. He noted that Iraq had a modern syringe-manufacturing plant, 60 miles south of Baghdad, but it was destroyed by bombing from the anti-Iraq "coalition." "Iraq needs 30-40 million syringes a year. What we have received in the past two years is a drop in the ocean," Dr. Murqus said. He called what was happening a "health war."

On Sept. 24, the *New England Journal of Medicine* published a study conducted by Dr. Alberto Ascherio of the Harvard School of Public Health and other independent researchers from the United States, Jordan, United Kingdom, and New Guinea, paid for by the United Nations Children's Fund. The most ambitious such study conducted thus far, its conclusion was: In the first seven months of 1991, about 46,900 more children died than would have been expected to die on the basis of earlier statistics. In classic understatement, the doctors concluded: "War is never good for health. But the full effect of war and economic sanctions on morbidity

and mortality is difficult to assess, and the number of civilian casualties caused indirectly is likely to be underestimated. . . . During the Gulf war, it was suggested that by using high-precision weapons with strategic targets, the Allied forces were producing only limited damage to the civilian population. The results of our study contradict this claim."

The study was given 15 lines of type in a wire service report, and wasn't deemed newsworthy by major U.S. press. "But, then, it's old news . . . the parades have ended; the yellow ribbons have been taken down," noted syndicated columnist Mike Royko. Baseball and football stadiums have seating capacities of about 46,900, he notes. "So we might try picturing one of these stadiums with every seat occupied by a child five years old or younger. . . . Now, imagine that somebody pulls a switch and sends a jolt of electricity into the seats and every one of those 46,900 noisy kids dies." "Forty-six thousand nine hundred kids—give or take a few tots," he concludes. "So what color ribbon do we wear for that triumph?"

Hisham Tabaqchali concludes that there is almost no government in the world trying to intervene to keep this ancient country from being razed to the ground. One exception is Sudan, "not a rich country; the Sudanese are having serious problems of their own, but they are trying." U.S. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher on Oct. 7 blasted the Sudanese for exporting beef to Iraq. "We think the government of Sudan should reconsider its transaction in light of the needs of its own people," he said.

"But it is the western countries and the continued actions of the United States whose behavior is unfathomable," Tabaqchali insists. "The U.S. participated in the [U.N.] Summit of the Children two years ago; they adopted the resolution to protect, to take care of, to help children all over the world. What are the Americans doing? It was supposed to be credible. What kind of a new world order are we seeing? If these are the signs for this order—Iraq, Bosnia—what is Hell?"

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## Documentation

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### Harvard team documents devastation of Gulf war

*The most extensive study thus far on the effect of the Gulf war on infant and child mortality in Iraq, was conducted by Dr. Alberto Ascherio of the Harvard School of Public Health and paid for by the United Nations Children's Fund. The following report on the study is excerpted from the New*

Little objective information is available about the effect of the economic sanctions, war, and civilian uprisings on the health of civilians. . . . All previous estimates of the effect of the war on health have been based on studies of selected population groups that may not represent the entire country. We report here the results of a survey of mortality conducted in a nationwide sample of households between Aug. 25 and Sept. 5, 1991. The survey was made independently of the Iraqi government by a team of international researchers. . . .

When the period after the onset of the war was compared with that before 1991, the relative mortality was 1.8 for neonates in the first month of life, 4.1 for infants 1 to less than 12 months of age, and 3.8 for children 12 to less than 60 months of age. When these figures are extrapolated to the entire population of Iraq, a similar increase in mortality would have resulted in approximately 46,900 excess deaths among children under five years of age during the first eight months of 1991.

The probabilities of dying in the first year of life or in the first five years were 32.5 and 43.2 per 1,000 live births, respectively, before January 1, 1991. In a cohort of children who were hypothetically at risk from birth to the age of five years, given the mortality rates prevailing after the onset of the war, the probabilities of dying in the first year of life or the first five years would have been 92.7 and 128.5 per 1,000, respectively.

An increased risk of death in 1991 as compared with the previous years was seen for each region and each level of maternal education, except for children under one month of age in the central region. Regional differences in mortality that were present before the war were maintained or exacerbated by the conflict. . . .

Information on the cause of death was available for 583 children (75.9%). The age-adjusted mortality rate from diarrhea rose from 2.1 per 1,000 person-years before the onset of the war to 11.9 per 1,000 person-years after the onset of the war. The age-adjusted mortality rate from injuries rose from 0.55 per 1,000 person-years before the war to 2.25 per 1,000 person-years after the onset of the war. Before the war, 20.7% of deaths were due to diarrhea and 8.8% to injuries; after the onset of the war, the comparable proportions were 38.0% and 7.2%.

In this survey conducted in a representative sample of Iraqi households, we found that infant and child mortality increased more than threefold in the period from January through August 1991, as compared with the average rates during the previous six years. This increase corresponds to an excess of about 46,900 deaths among Iraqi children under five years of age. . . .

Our data demonstrate the link between the events that occurred in 1991 (war, civilian uprising, and economic em-



*Medics bring a wounded Iraqi child to Germany for treatment, through the initiative of the Committee to Save the Children in Iraq. As the Harvard research team reports, the casualties of the war extend "far beyond those caused directly by warfare."*

bargo) and the subsequent increase in mortality. The destruction of the supply of electric power at the beginning of the war, with the subsequent disruption of the electricity-dependent water and sewage systems, was probably responsible for the reported epidemics of gastrointestinal and other infections. These epidemics were worsened by the reduced accessibility of health services and decreased ability to treat severely ill children. Increased malnutrition, partly related to the rising prices of food, may also have contributed to the increased risk of death among infants and children. The effect of the war has been greater among groups that had higher base-line mortality rates, suggesting that poverty and lower educational level increased children's vulnerability to the crisis. . . .

The hypothesis that the excess mortality caused by the war was due to infectious diseases and to the decreased quality and availability of medical care, food, and water is consistent both with the increase in the proportional mortality from diarrhea and with the shift in the age pattern of mortality, characterized by a lower proportional contribution of neonatal deaths to mortality among persons under the age of five years after the onset of the war. This pattern resembles that observed in the less-developed countries, where diarrhea and respiratory infections account for most deaths in infancy and childhood.

War is never good for health, but the full effect of war and economic sanctions on morbidity and mortality is difficult to assess, and the number of civilian casualties caused indirectly is likely to be underestimated. . . . During the Gulf war, it was suggested that by using high-precision weapons with strategic targets, the Allied forces were producing only limited damage to the civilian population. The results of our study contradict this claim and confirm that the casualties of war extend far beyond those caused directly by warfare.