

# Why we oppose a war on Iraq

## 1 A disaster for civilians

The United States, with the support of the Australian government, is threatening all-out war on Iraq that will cost thousands of innocent lives and further destabilise the Middle East. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan says that "... modern estimates show that civilians make up 75 percent of all war casualties."

We must not inflict another war on the people of Iraq and neighbouring states, with ecological and humanitarian devastation, and a flood of new refugees.

## 2 Too much suffering already

The people of Iraq suffered through war against Iran from 1980-88. Under the 88,500 tons of bombs (the equivalent of seven Hiroshimas) that followed the launch of the air war in Iraq in January 1991, and the ground attack that followed, 150,000 Iraqi troops and 50,000 civilians were killed. "Smart Bombs" targeted water treatment plants, sewage treatment plants, power plants, schools and hospitals. In addition, the use in 1991 of weapons made from radioactive depleted-uranium (DU) is poisoning and killing Iraqi civilians. Former US Attorney-General Ramsey Clark considers the use of DU weapons a "criminal act". The Pentagon has confirmed that 320 tonnes of DU dust remain in Iraq. Some scientists estimate that there could be as much as 900 tonnes.

## 3 Sanctions are killing Iraq

Over the last decade, economic sanctions mandated by the UN Security Council since 1991 — enforced in part by the Royal Australian Navy — have resulted in the unnecessary deaths of hundreds of thousands of people, especially children and the elderly. A 1999 UN report says one-fourth of Iraqi children under the age of five are malnourished, as many as 70 percent of Iraqi women suffer from anemia and sanctions have contributed to the death of over one million Iraqis. More than 200 people die each day in Iraq; 5,000 to 6,000 die each month. [See Fact Sheet#3 for more information]

## 4 This is not about weapons

This is not about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, which former US weapons inspector Scott Ritter says have been "rendered harmless". In the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War and the subsequent weapons inspections regime, virtually any aggressive military potential by Iraq

has been destroyed. Before the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) was withdrawn, its agents reportedly oversaw the destruction of 38,000 chemical weapons, 480,000 liters of live chemical weapons agents, 48 missiles, six missile launchers, 30 missile warheads modified to carry chemical or biological agents, and hundreds of pieces of related equipment with the capability to produce chemical weapons.

In December 1991, US President George Bush killed the proposed enforcement and verification mechanism for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, after the threat of bioweapons attacks was particularly clear. In March 2002, the United States removed Jose Bustani, head of the Organization to Prevent Chemical Weapons, from office. According to George Monbiot of the *Guardian*, it was because Bustani's efforts to include Iraq in the Chemical Weapons Convention (subjecting it to chemical weapons inspections) would deprive the United States of a reason to launch war.

There is talk about 'evidence' but it is simply a public relations stunt to justify war. US Defense Secretary Rumsfeld recently paraphrased Winston Churchill: "Sometimes the truth is so precious it must be accompanied by a bodyguard of lies."

## 5 This war is about oil

This war is not about Iraq's military strength, which was severely disabled by the 1991 Gulf war and a decade of sanctions, but about oil and the self-proclaimed right of the giant oil corporations and their Texas-based political representatives to control Middle East oil. This is why White House spokesman Ari Fleischer has stated: "The policy of the US is regime change, with or without [weapons] inspectors." Iraq has the world's second largest oil reserves. As far back as 1945 the US government described the region as: "a stupendous source of strategic power and one of the greatest material prizes in world history". America wants to bully its way into controlling them. This is a war about oil, not democracy.

## 6 Rights of nations undercut

When George W. Bush talks about "regime change" he means replacing a brutal dictator he doesn't like with a brutal dictator who will do his bidding. International relations can only be based on the sovereign rights of each nation, including the right to self-determination — to decide one's own destiny, and not to have governments

**"The US has a new credibility. What we say goes."**

— George Bush Senior, 2 February 1991, US military base.

# "The reason we start a war is to fight a war, win a war, thereby causing no more war!"

— George Bush Jnr, the first Presidential debate, October 2000

overthrown by the United States or another power using military force, and all in the name of "democracy".

The United States says it is prepared to start a war unilaterally, and in contravention of the UN Charter. Article 1, Section 4, of the Charter states: "All members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state..." In 1991, the US undermined an agreement brokered by France for Iraq to withdraw peacefully from Kuwait — today it says it will go to war even if weapons inspectors return to Iraq.

## 7 The law is for everyone

UN resolutions on disarmament and human rights will only work if they are applied equally, without fear or favour. People, and countries, rapidly lose respect for the law if they see it applied to some and not to others, and they feel it has become a political instrument. This is also the case with weapons of mass destruction and how we reduce their presence in the world. All the nuclear powers and all Middle East states must abolish their stocks of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons (including Israel, which has over 200 nuclear weapons in its arsenal). Whilst some people are insisting on war against Iraq because of alleged breaches of Security Council resolutions, the USA and Israel have defied UN resolutions on Palestine for decades, and the US has refused to sign, ratify and abide by numerous international conventions on weapons of mass destruction, including the test ban treaty.

## 8 War promotes the arms race

More than three-quarters of US and European arms sales go to the Middle East. The whole region is a tinderbox, and the West is building the bonfire. Concern about weapons of mass destruction means a world-wide move to reduce armaments and arms sales, not selling huge amounts of weapons into Middle East countries and then bombing them to oblivion. Another war on Iraq would be a high-tech massacre, releasing radiation from radioactive, depleted uranium-hardened warheads and perhaps pushing Israel into responding to any attack by using tactical nuclear weapons. Leading Israeli defence writer Seymour Hersh says that: "Should war break out in the Middle East again... or should any Arab nation fire missiles against Israel, as the Iraqis did, a nuclear escalation, once unthinkable except as a last resort, would now be a strong probability." We cannot countenance a Middle East nuclear war.

## 9 Not in Australia's interest

Australia is already supporting this rush to war. Australian warships are in the Gulf, enforcing sanctions. Defence Minister Robert Hill says the Pine Gap intelligence base near Alice Springs "would be utilised in the event of military action against Iraq", as facilities were in 1991.

Australian troops in the Iraqi war zone will, like those who participated in the 1991 Gulf War, face a toxic swamp of insecticides, pesticides and chemical and biological warfare agents released from the bombing of Iraqi facilities; and possibly smoke from burning oil facilities and the effects of experimental preventive medicines. 183,000 veterans, or more than one-quarter of US military personnel from the the 1991 Gulf War war against Iraq were classified as "disabled" by mid-1991, many exhibiting a combination of conditions characterised by muscle aches and joint pain, chronic fatigue, headaches, anxiety, depression, dizziness, sleep disorders, rashes, loss of concentration, kidney damage, birth defects, and wastage and death from cancers and immune deficiency disorders known collectively as Gulf War Syndrome (GWS).

## 10 Waste of precious resources

The US national military budget now reaches \$US437 billion, which is larger than the whole Australian economy. Every minute the United States spends another \$589,802 on the military, 51.3% of the discretionary federal budget. The US government estimates war on Iraq could cost \$US30 billion per month. In contrast, Europe has used the end of the Cold War to produce a "peace dividend" of lower military expenditure and more resources for socially-useful purposes. Military expenditure deprives nations of the capacity to fall a range of urgent social and environmental issues.

[See Fact Sheet#1 for more information]

"A country that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death," said Martin Luther King in 1967.

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