

1991, Iraq: It Wasn't a War it was "a Turkey Shoot"

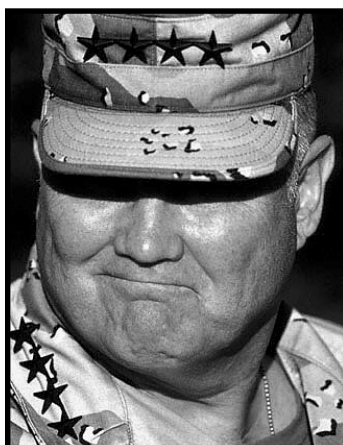
By Paul D'Amato, an associate editor of *International Socialist Review*.

The 1991 Gulf War marked the first time since 1958 that the U.S. launched a full-scale invasion of the Middle East to protect its interests. Up to the day that Iraq invaded Kuwait, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was under the impression that his actions would be acceptable to Washington. Bled dry by the war with Iran, Iraq was angry over Kuwait's dumping of oil on the world market when Iraq needed better oil rev-

U.S. pushed the Gulf states to give \$4 billion to Russia; China, whose brutal suppression of democracy had isolated it internationally, was offered a place at the table; Egypt was forgiven \$14 billion in debt; and Syria was given the green light to invade Lebanon. When Yemen voted against the UN resolution authorizing the use of force against Iraq, the U.S. cut off millions in aid, and Saudi Arabia expelled 800,000 Yemeni "guest" workers.

Yet for all of the fanfare about the war pitting Iraq against the "international community," the war was overwhelmingly fought by U.S. forces,

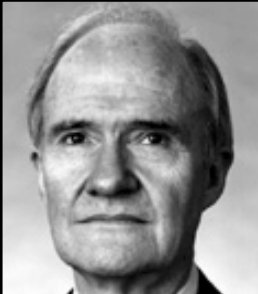
against retreating and defenseless Iraqi soldiers. The road leading from Kuwait to Basra became known as the 'Highway of Death.' Iraqi soldiers fled Kuwait in every vehicle they could get their hands on. Allied tank units cut the Iraqis off. U.S. warplanes bombed, strafed and firebombed the stranded columns for hours without resistance. U.S. pilots described the slaughter as 'like shooting fish in a barrel,' ['a turkey shoot,' and 'they were sitting ducks.'] These callous remarks made the rounds in the Middle East. Thousands [possibly 25,000] Iraqi conscripts were killed on the 50-mile stretch of highway."



Stormin' Norman Schwarzkopf

After overseeing the massacre of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, General Schwartzkopf gave the Iraqi military permission to use helicopters to crush an uprising of Kurds and Shi'ites, that the U.S. had called for.

Former national security adviser Brent Scowcroft said the U.S. wanted a military coup to oust Hussein, not a popular uprising.



enues to pay for the war.

When Iraq began threatening Kuwait, U.S. ambassador April Glaspie told Saddam, "We have no opinion on Arab-Arab conflicts like your border disagreement with Kuwait." But when Iraq invaded Kuwait soon after, the U.S. completely reversed its position. Hussein was a brutal military dictator long before he tried to get control of Kuwaiti oil. The only difference is that pre-invasion, he was a friend of the U.S., whereas post-invasion, he suddenly became the "new Hitler."

The collapse of the USSR and the end of the Cold War created unique conditions that allowed the U.S. to assert its dominance in the region more directly than in the past. Bush took the opportunity to cobble together a military coalition – under UN auspices – that included Britain, France, Germany, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Syria.

The U.S. used bribery and intimidation to create this coalition. The

for U.S. aims, with some backup from Britain and Saudi Arabia. U.S. pilots flew 90% of all combat sorties. The UN was used as a fig leaf to cover what was an U.S.-led and U.S.-fought war.

The Bush administration deliberately sabotaged every effort by European and Arab countries to work out a peace settlement – vetoing, for example, a French peace proposal in the UN Security Council.

Although Hussein, after more than a month of bombing, agreed to the UN resolution Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait, the U.S. dismissed this gesture. Lance Selfa describes the brutal ground war that followed:

"Saddam had essentially cried 'uncle,' but the U.S. wanted a ground offensive anyway. In six days, U.S. and coalition ground troops swept across Kuwait and southern Iraq, forcing Iraqi troops into full-scale retreat. In the last 40 hours of the war, U.S. and UK forces mounted a relentless assault

Protecting Saddam's Regime

The endgame to Bush's war was ironic. After President Bush Sr. called on the Iraqi people to overthrow Hussein, U.S. forces stood by as Iraqi troops put down an uprising of Kurds in the North and Shiites in the South. General Norman Schwarzkopf gave Hussein's generals permission to violate the "no-fly" rule and use armed helicopters to put down the rebellion. Former national security adviser Brent Scowcroft said, in 1998, that the U.S. wanted a military coup to oust Hussein, not a popular uprising: "I envisioned a post-war government being a military government."

In the years following the war, UN-imposed sanctions on Iraq have not only prevented Iraq from rebuilding its infrastructure, but resulted in thousands of children's deaths every month from malnutrition-related diseases. While the war killed some 200,000, the sanctions regime has resulted in more than one million deaths.

At the cost of a few hundred U.S. soldiers, the U.S. demonstrated that it will stop at nothing to exercise its imperial prerogatives over the Middle East. With Russia out of the picture, the sole remaining superpower seemed set to impose its "Pax Americana" on the region.

Source: "U.S. Intervention in the Middle East: Blood for Oil," *International Socialist Review*, Dec. 2000 - Jan. 2001 <www.isreview.org/pdfs/15/blood_for_oil.pdf>

Weapons

● During the 43-day "Operation Desert Storm" 109,876 bombing runs were conducted against Iraq. <americanpeace.eccmei.net/~eccmei/americanpeace/years/1991.html>

● More bombs fell on Iraq during those 43 days than were dropped during the entire 45 months of World War II. <comp.uark.edu/~jbenet/victims.html>

● The Western media reported the massacre in terms of the military technology. Civilian casualties were referred to as "collateral damage." Words like "smart bombs" and "surgical precision" were used to sanitise the conflict.

● In reality, only 7% of the bombs were "smart" and 70% of the bombs missed their targets. [Editor's note: Some argue that if a greater percentage of smart bombs had been used, the massacre would have been less devastating for Iraqi civilians. This ignores the fact that the U.S. deliberately targeted civilian infrastructure. Greater efficiency in the destruction of Iraqi facilities essential to human survival, would have caused *more*, not *less*, devastation.]

● A U.S. missile hit Baghdad's Al-Amiriya shelter incinerating 300 to 400 people (mainly women and children).

● The 90,000 tons of bombs dropped were equivalent to seven nuclear bombs of the size that destroyed Hiroshima.

● Many U.S. projectiles were tipped with Depleted Uranium (DU). This radioactive and chemically toxic metal is pulverised after impact. If inhaled, DU can cause lung and bone cancers, kidney disease and genetic defects in babies (like fused fingers or the absence of a brain). Many Iraqi civilians and U.S. soldiers were exposed. A report by the UK Atomic Energy Authority estimated that there is enough DU in Iraq and Kuwait to cause 500,000 cancer deaths.

● Two Iraqi nuclear reactors were bombed less than a month after a UN resolution prohibited such military attacks. General Colin Powell confirmed that the "operating reactors...are both gone, they're down, they're finished."

● A Human Rights Watch report on the use of cluster bombs in Iraq and Kuwait in 1991, said that of the 24 to 30 million bomblets dropped, between 1.2 and 1.5 million did not explode on impact. These cluster bombs did eventually explode, killing 1,220 Kuwaiti and 400 Iraqi civilian deaths. <www.krysstal.com/democracy_mideast.html>

Colin Powell, the "Moderate"?

● As Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1991, he was the highest ranking U.S. military officer during the massacre. When asked about Iraqi casualties, Powell replied:

"It's really not a number I'm terribly interested in."
(*New York Times*, Mar. 23, 1991)

● In his memoirs (1995), Powell admits warning Hussein one day before the bombing:

"If driven to it...we would destroy the dams on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and flood Baghdad, with horrendous consequences."

Baghdad is home to about four million civilians.

● Powell's memoirs also reveal that he decided to bomb Iraq's biological and chemical arsenals. The Geneva Convention (article 56), "Protection of Works and Installations Containing Dangerous Forces," bans all such attacks. Powell wrote *"if it [the toxic cloud] heads south, just blame me,"* implying that he didn't care if civilians downwind lost their lives, but only if U.S. forces were imperiled. Source: <www.nowarcollective.com/powellbio.htm>



Casualties

● The Jordanian Red Crescent estimated that 113,000 Iraqis were killed, mostly civilians, directly by bombing or by bombing of civilian facilities required for life – water facilities, hospitals, food stores, electricity <americanpeace.eccmei.net/~eccmei/americanpeace/years/1991.html>

● The U.S. targeted Iraq's water purification facilities. The day after the massacre started, the U.S. Defence Intelligence Agency, circulated a document "Iraq Water Treatment Vulnerabilities" to all major allied commands. <www.nowarcollective.com/powellbio.htm>

● A Harvard University study (May 17, 1991) estimated that 170,000 Iraqi children would die from disease and malnutrition due to bombing and destruction of the infrastructure, i.e., electricity, sewage treatment, water purification. <www.janrainwater.com/htdocs/2.htm>

● Estimates of Iraqi deaths vary widely (80,000 to 150,000 troops, and 100,000 to 200,000 civilians).

● Up to three million were displaced from their homes. <www.ppu.org.uk/war/countries/mideast/iraq.html>

● The Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency (May, 1991) estimated 100,000 were killed and 300,000 wounded.

● Five military hospitals were bombed.

● Thousands of Iraqi soldiers were killed by the U.S. First Mechanized Infantry Division, using plows mounted on tanks, to bury men alive in 70 miles of trenches. <digitaljournalist.org/issue0211/sloyan.html>

● Official figures for U.S. casualties were 235 noncombatants, 148 soldiers killed in action, 29 taken prisoner and 20 missing in action. <americanpeace.eccmei.net/~eccmei/americanpeace/years/1991.html>

● 25% of U.S. and Allied deaths and 15% of their injuries were due to "friendly fire," the highest figure for any U.S. war. (*Los Angeles Times*, August 14, 1991)

● In 1997, the U.S. admitted that over 100,000 U.S. soldiers were exposed to sarin gas when the U.S. bombed Iraqi installations. Symptoms include neurological problems, chronic fatigue, skin problems, scarred lungs, memory loss, muscle and joint pain and headaches.

<www.krysstal.com/democracy_mideast.html>