

Baghdad conference documents genocidal effect of U.N. embargo

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

While the United Nations Security Council in mid-September was drawing together its members, to decree yet another extension of the four-year-old embargo against Iraq, several hundred delegates from 25 nations gathered in Baghdad to take stock of the effects of the blockade on all aspects of life—and, increasingly, death—in the country.

The picture that emerged from the three-day International Symposium of Non-Governmental Organizations on the Effects of the Embargo against Iraq, held Sept. 12-14, was blood-chilling. Although it was facts and figures which spelled out the toll taken on the population in impersonal statistical coldness, the heart-rending drama of the personal suffering which each statistic quantified was played out in casual daily contact with average Iraqi citizens. Whether they were in the once-luxurious Rashid Hotel, in taxis and buses, walking along the streets in the market, or visiting the Saddam Children's Teaching Hospital, delegates were confronted with the unspeakable conditions under which the embargo regime has forced the Iraqi population to live.

Streets are littered with garbage, inviting the rodent and insect population to proliferate, and to spread disease. Untreated waste water gushes into the Tigris River, and along its banks a few hundred meters away, children swim or fish. Dilapidated autos pitter along the streets, sporting broken windshields which have no hope of being replaced. Bus stops are crowded with hundreds of people waiting to be taken home or to work. The few buses still running are packed like sardine cans, passengers standing up in the open doorways, hanging onto bars within. In makeshift garages along the street, repaired used tires, a luxury commodity, are on sale for 35,000 Iraqi dinars. (A very good monthly salary is 4,000 dinars.) Children who should be in school or at home helping mother, are on the streets, hawking chewing gum or simply begging. Normal stores, which used to carry imported goods or were part of the national distribution network, are closed. In their stead, peddlers sit on the sidewalks in front of a blanket on which their goods are offered at impossible prices. Money changers lurk everywhere, seeking foreigners.

In the hospital, overworked, overstressed doctors point out case after case of infectious disease, and explain laconically that unless this child receives antibiotics within the next few days, it will die within three weeks. While one doctor is talking about one cancer case, an infant in the same ward

dies. Incubators do not function.

What follows here is a synopsis of the effects of the embargo on all major aspects of life in Iraq, as compiled from the dozens of speeches presented by doctors, public servants, professors, engineers, and other professionals.

Public health. The breakdown of public health facilities caused by bombings in the war and the continuing embargo has ushered in a new wave of infectious diseases. Cases of cholera, a disease which was rare before the war, zoomed up in 1991 to 1,217, and leveled off in 1992 and 1993 to 976 and 825, respectively. Worsening conditions with the water supply and sanitation will mean higher figures for 1994. Typhoid cases increased from 1,812 in 1989, to 2,224 in 1990, and shot up to 17,524 in 1991. Infectious hepatitis, which had 89 recorded cases in 1989, affected 16,801 in 1993. Due to the lack of vaccines, preventable diseases are reappearing, among them polio, diphtheria, tetanus, measles (see **Figure 1**). Pneumonia and malaria are widespread.

The number of hospitals in 1989 was 258, including 26,000 beds, 132 health centers, and 102 laboratories. In the war, 88 hospitals and 473 medical centers were bombed. Due to the lack of medicine and medical equipment, many doctors have left the country.

Caloric consumption. The leading cause of disease is malnutrition (see **Figure 2**). In 1993, caloric consumption dropped 163% compared to 1988-89, which means that the average consumption is 1,600 calories. Iron deficiency has increased, and is evident in 55% of all pregnant women. Food shortages lead to malnutrition in pregnant women, who do not gain enough weight, bearing weaker children. Mortality in childbirth has increased.

Food in the first two years of life is critical because it affects brain development. A tin of milk costs 600 Iraqi dinars, out of the range of a most mothers. In adolescence, if girls are underfed, puberty is delayed, which affects future pregnancies. There are more miscarriages, more malformed children, and more low birthweight babies (see **Figure 3**).

Cancer among children. Negative factors affecting children's health have increased under the embargo. The factors studied are nutrition, prevention, diagnostics, therapy, and psychological. In the case of leukemia, after three years' treatment, the child needs health support to survive. "Healthy" children, who have responded positively to che-

FIGURE 1
Impact of economic sanctions on the incidence of some communicable diseases in Iraq
 Increase times 1989

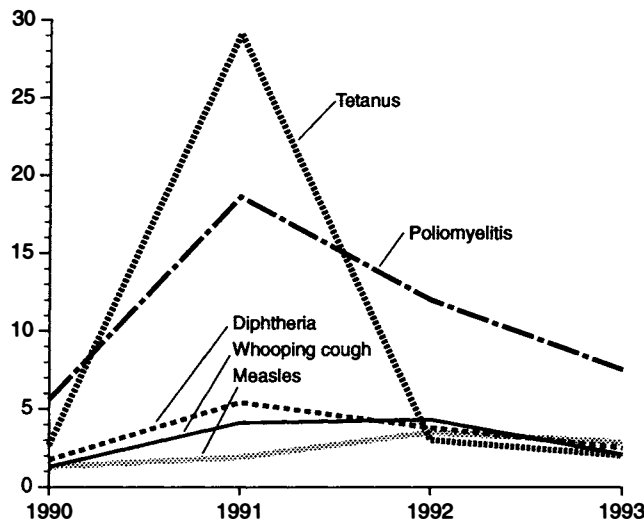
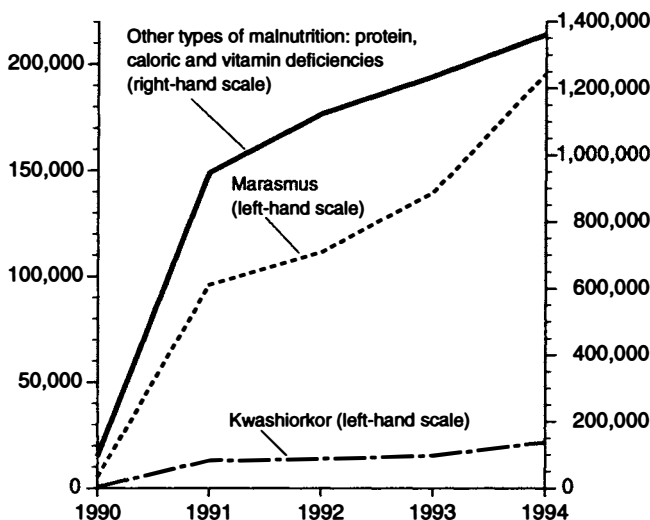
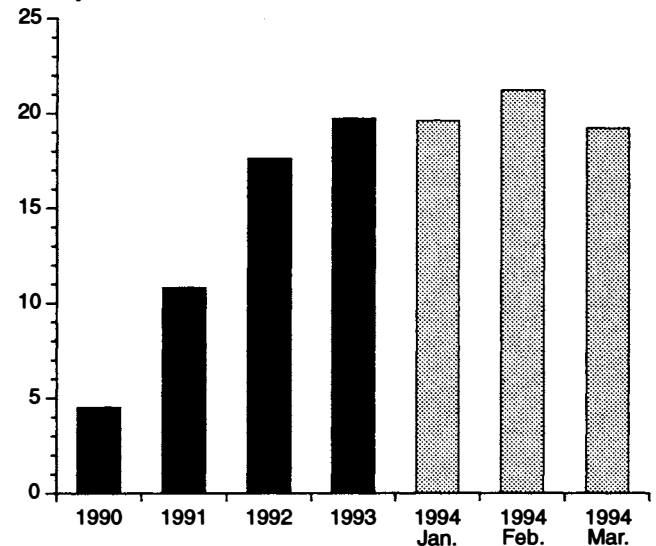


FIGURE 2
Impact of economic sanctions on the nutritional status of children under five
 Number of cases



motherly, get the disease again if they do not have drugs. There has also been an increase in the number of new leukemia cases nationally. The figures given for one hospital show that whereas in 1990 there were 10 cases; in 1992, there were

FIGURE 3
Low birth weight babies (2.5 kg) as percentage of total births reported by Iraqi health institutions in post-sanctions years
 monthly rate %



47 cases; in 1993, there were 75 cases; and for the first six months of 1994, there have been 47 cases registered. Relapses are on the rise, with the resulting increase in mortality rates (see Figure 4).

At the Saddam Children's Teaching Hospital in Baghdad, 1,300 children a day are treated on an outpatient basis, and admissions are at 120 a day. The mortality rate of patients was 20-25% before the war, and is now at 80-90% among cancer patients. If cancer protocols are stopped, they must start again from scratch. This hospital, the largest of its kind, has more facilities than others, because it is a teaching hospital. However, it has not had medical journals for four years.

Cancer patients. There has been an increase of colon cancer from 1985 to 1993, from 1.6% to 2.6%, which may be related to the change in food habits forced by the embargo. There has also been an increase in breast cancer among women under 30. Screening for breast and cervical cancer is impossible because of lack of X-ray slides, film, and spatules. In 1989, some 1,800 sets of Polaroid film were received; eight have been received thus far this year.

The machines used for radiotherapy are old and spare parts are lacking. There have been no radiation sources delivered since 1990. Maintenance contracts for medical machines have not been respected, for example, by Siemens, because of the blockade. No new machines have been imported since 1990. In chemotherapy, 20 of 31 drugs are not available, so chemotherapy has been restricted to radical cases. There is a lack of injection facilities and of anti-emetics. Hormone therapy has been abandoned.

FIGURE 4

Total number of deaths due to sanctions for selected reasons

(number of deaths)

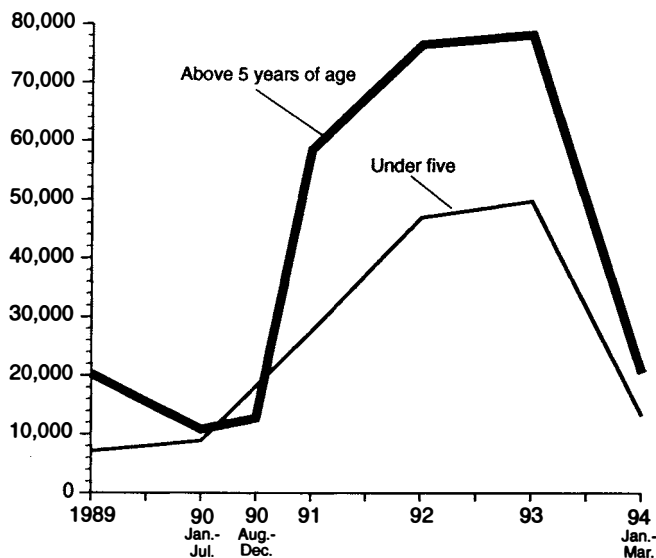
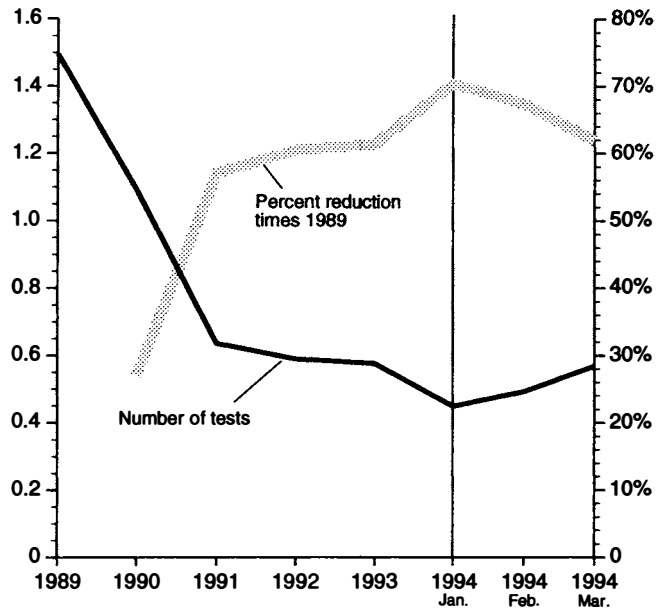


FIGURE 5

Impact of economic sanctions on laboratory tests

Number of tests per month, millions

Percent reduction



Diagnostics. Due to the lack of materials for routine diagnostics, laboratory testing has been severely curtailed. Whereas in 1989, over 1,494,050 lab tests were performed per month, in June of this year, the figure was 450,000 (see Figure 5). There is a total lack of ultrasound and CAT scan facilities, because of lack of spare parts. Magnetic resonance imaging is a dream. As a result, doctors have reverted to traditional methods of diagnoses, with accompanying delays and errors. Following diagnosis, a doctor will prescribe drugs. They are rationed, to secure supply. Minimum doses are given for cardiovascular diseases, bronchial asthma, etc. If a patient has acute heart failure, there are no drugs. Antibiotics are prescribed for three days instead of seven.

Pharmaceutical supplies. Before the war, Iraq imported hundreds of millions of dollars worth of pharmaceuticals for its vast public health system. Since the embargo, despite the fact that medicines are officially excluded, the lack of hard currency has prevented the import of life-saving drugs. Even medicines contracted and paid for before the war have not been delivered. Iraq paid \$56 million between January and August 1990 to one pharmaceutical company in Austria. At a 1992 meeting in Vienna, to discuss delivery of these supplies, the company representatives said they would be happy to supply the goods, but they were being blocked by governments.

Surgery. There has been an increased need for ulcer and thyroid operations, and post-operative treatment, which are hindered by lack of facilities. Only emergency operations are performed, for example, for peritonitis. Surgical instru-

ments, anaesthetics, even surgical threads are not available. Threads normally used for external wounds are being used for sewing intestines. There is a lack of intravenously administered drugs, of gauze, gloves, and sedatives. As a result, the number of surgical operations per month has plummeted: From 15,000 in 1989, there has been a decrease of 43% in 1990, of 57% in 1991, of 63% in 1992, of 65% in 1993, and in the current year, 70-73% (see Figure 6). As for infant surgery, life-threatening tumors simply cannot be operated.

Nuclear medicine. Everything required here is banned by the embargo. Of 16 gamma cameras, 4 are working. The installation of two new gamma cameras was stopped in 1991. Nuclear medicine materials are lacking, so testing has been reduced. All nuclear medical training has been discontinued.

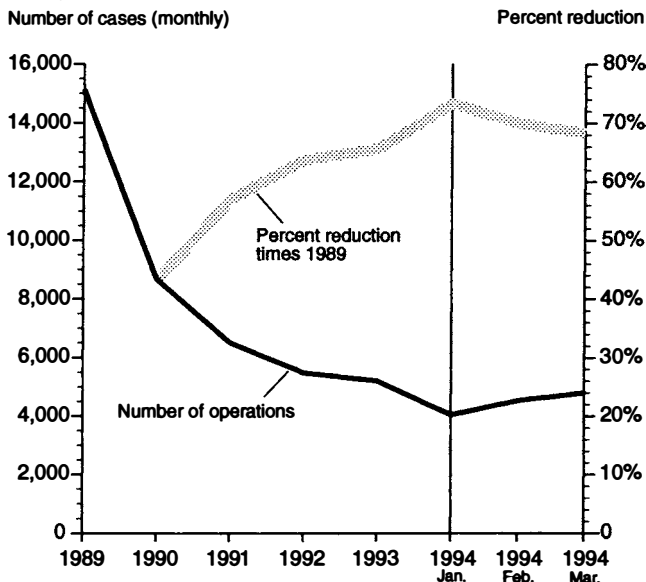
Internal medicine. Cases of gastroenteritis have increased at Yarmuk Hospital, which serves a community of 1 million. Peptic ulcers have increased, due to stress. Total ulcer cases increased from 1,075 in 1989 to 2,033 in 1992. In treatment of duodenal ulcers, a change in the nature of the illness has been noted, in the sense that chronic active ulcers have increased. Cases of healed ulcers dropped from 24.6% of those treated to 4.9%. The same pattern has been noted in Baghdad and Mosul. Treatment is irregular, and ulcers heal with scar formation, which creates further problems.

Disabled. There is a chronic lack of hearing aids, audio cassettes for the blind, crutches, and wheelchairs. In 1993, the supply of hearing aids was suspended due to shortages.

Water supply. The increase of infectious diseases is directly linked to the lack of clean drinking water. Concern-

FIGURE 6

Impact of economic sanctions on major surgical operations



ing the bacteriological failure of drinking water supplies, before the war less than 5% of the water was inadequate, whereas now 20-30% of water sampled is below standard. This varies from region to region, with some governates, such as Wasit and Basra, registering 40% and 50%, respectively, of inadequate water, according to World Health Organization standards. The case of Baghdad is exemplary.

Sanitation. In Baghdad, untreated refuse is being dumped into the river, encouraging the increase of the rodent and insect population. Whereas advanced sector countries recycle refuse, Baghdad, a city of 900 square kilometers and a population of 4.5 million, had an efficient refuse disposal system, whereby refuse would be collected and taken to dumping areas. Since the embargo, this system has broken down. Vehicles are old, they lack tires and batteries. Of a fleet of 800 sanitation vehicles, now only 300 are left, and have to be used double time. Technicians who worked in this sector have left the country, and qualified labor is being replaced by unqualified. Current facilities allow for the removal of 2,000 tons per day, of the 2,500 tons which should be disposed of. The 500 tons per day remainder accumulates and is left on the streets. Plastic bags cannot be produced, so people are forced to throw their garbage into the streets.

Water purification. Bombs dropped during the war damaged countless pumping stations, and the city was without electricity for four months. Chlorine was unavailable for one year, and is now in short supply. Before the war, 500 liters of water were available for each of Baghdad's 4.5 million citizens daily. After 40% electricity had been re-

stored, to allow pumping stations to function, 125 liters per day were available. Although 40,000 tons of chlorine would be required to supply water to Baghdad, only 10,000 have been available under the sanctions regime.

The city sewage drainage system network, which is 600 kilometers long, continues to suffer from the lack of maintenance, aggravated by the exodus of trained foreign workers. Rather than the pre-war 4-5 breakdowns per week, Baghdad's system now experiences 450 breakdowns per week. The system, which covered 70% of Baghdad, was to be extended to the whole area, but the war interrupted plans.

Environment and agriculture. Factories are discharging water which could and should be treated but is not for lack of spare parts, motors, and filters. Chlorine production facilities are hampered by the same. Lack of filters prevents gas emissions from factories from being cleaned. Soil was destroyed during the war, as were pumping stations and draining systems. Dams and storage systems were targeted, on which agriculture depends for planting. The destruction of three dams and six pumping stations paralyzed the 1992 planting. Agriculture under the embargo has been hit by lack of seeds, pesticides, pumps, machinery, and veterinary medicine. Although some pesticide spraying was carried out in 1991 with the help of the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), by 1992-93, hundreds of thousands of acres had been destroyed. Date production in 1993 was severely hit by damage done in the aggression to date palm trees. Diseases cut into orange production, and new diseases hit crops. Agricultural production was drastically reduced, in cereals, potatoes, fruits, and vegetables.

This has led to dramatic reductions in the share of animal production that each Iraqi has for consumption. Whereas before sanctions, the kilogram per person per year figure for eggs was 63, after sanctions it dropped to 10. Similarly, red meat went from 13 to 2.8, poultry from 12.5 to 1.5, fish from 3.5 to 1.0, and animal protein from 23 kilos per person per year to 17.8. Animal protein consumption is now at 3 grams per day, on average (Table 1).

Livestock in the country has been decimated. Of 8.6 million sheep before sanctions, there remain 6.3 million; there were 1,521,000 cattle, now there are 1,120,000. Buffalo herds have dropped from 129,000 to 98,000; and goats, from 1,351,000 to 1,050,000. Smuggling is taking place, with the result that animals are being sold outside Iraq. Fish production, which was at 50,000 tons per year before the embargo, has dropped to 15-20,000 tons.

Food. The crisis in agriculture has aggravated food shortages. Before the aggression, total imports and rations totalled \$3 billion, which represented 34% of allocations. Some \$22 million was allocated for storage of food, \$300,000 for production of milk and cooking oil, \$400 million for agriculture and seeds, \$5 million for special food for children. Food, though officially excluded from the sanctions, cannot be imported in required quantities because Iraq has no foreign

TABLE 1

Composition of quantities supplied (kg) per person per month

Food Item	Before sanctions	After sanctions
Wheat-flour	15	9
Rice	3.288	2.500
Sugar	3.409	1.500
Tea	0.249	0.500
Cooking oils	1.283	0.625
Detergents	0.533	0.250
Soaps	0.448	0.150
Baby milk	3.060	1.800

Note: Quantities were further reduced in September by about 40% for flour, cooking oil, rice, and sugar. Prices shown in Table 2 have shot up accordingly.

currency with which to purchase it, and its assets in foreign banks remain frozen. People are dependent on rationing cards, which provide them barely 75% of their caloric requirements and 33% of protein requirements. Before the war, children consumed 3 kilos of milk per month, now it is half that figure. Storage facilities were destroyed in the war, as were 47 bakeries and silos.

Prices. Inflation is 4,000% in 1994 over 1990, especially for meat, fruit, and vegetables. A chicken which cost 200 dinars in January 1994, now costs 1,000 dinars (see Table 2). There has been a decline in the production and quality of flour, a decline in animal production. Animal vaccines and fertilizers, formerly imported, are unavailable. An FAO delegation to Iraq in 1993 examined the status of crops and seed production. It ascertained that Iraq needs 5 billion tons of goods, costing \$2.5 billion, for this sector. Unless the embargo is lifted, there is a danger of starvation.

Social aspects. The impact on the family structure, the unit of society which develops values, has been dramatic. The institution of the Iraqi family goes back to the ancient civilization of the Sumerians. The advent of Islam introduced new family values, and the policies of the post-revolutionary Iraqi governments have aimed at protecting the family. Family growth is important in Iraqi society. Rates of population increase have been very high. In 1989, the reproductive rate was 6.5; in 1991, it was 5.7; in 1994, it will be much lower, despite government support for marriage and families. Basic services are maintained through government subsidies.

There is a decrease in local productivity and high increases in food prices, which burdens the family. Fathers spend more time at work, mothers are forced to sell their belongings, children are falling into the grip of crime. Social relations should be governed by understanding and love, but the burdens placed on the family by the embargo have undermined social values, altering the understanding of moral principles—what is right and wrong, what is correct and aberrant behavior. Honest dealing is no longer a value. Social

TABLE 2

Food prices per kilogram before and after sanctions

Food Item	Prices before sanctions (July 1990) in dinars	Prices after sanctions (July 1994) in dinars	Increase times
Wheat-flour	0.060	57	950
Rice	0.240	37	154
Sugar	0.200	164	820
Tea	2.000	450	225
Cooking oils	0.600	182	303
Baby milk	1.600	680	425

solidarity has been destroyed, selfishness is on the rise. Intersocial relations are shattered, families and friends no longer can afford to visit, or to host others.

Huge wealth is being accumulated by a few (in the black market) at the expense of the masses. Black market economics has meant that people can engage in trade without any qualifications. There is a lowering of the level of training overall. The only aim is to earn money. This is coupled with a drop in the trend toward creative work, with a resulting decrease in the level of genuine performance. Disputes are frequent, crimes are multiplying. Farmers used to live comfortably, with government assistance for housing, for example. Now, their relationship to the rest of the community has been changed; they are selling even subsidized commodities, instead of using them, with production cuts resulting. Farmers fail to take produce to the central markets, to help regulate prices, and rather take their produce to the free market where they can get higher prices. As the central food outlets disappear, a new phenomenon of small shops has emerged.

In crime, car theft is the most frequent. The high cost of cars prompts thieves to steal cars, strip them, and sell the parts. Murder cases are also on the rise. Smuggling is increasing, especially of gold and livestock. This affects the Iraqi currency. There is an increase of items being sold outside the normal outlets, including medical supplies; medicines whose expiration date has passed, are being sold.

Housing. The right to decent, secure housing, with adequate lighting and ventilation, is being denied by the conditions imposed through the embargo. The government had a plan to provide housing for all by the year 2000, in four stages, beginning in 1980, but it was stopped by the war. Three million housing units are desperately needed. Although the government has given land to citizens, they have no means to construct homes. The government is trying to encourage private sector activity here, through tax breaks.

Communications. Before the war, there was a telephone for every 5.5 persons, and 3 million units were planned for installation by the year 2000. The project was halted by the

embargo.

Iraq had 2,033 kilometers of main rail lines and 356 kilometers of sub-lines prior to 1990, and serviced 4.3 million passengers. Planned expansion, which was scheduled to increase this to 6.4 million passengers and 3 million tons of goods, has been made impossible by the embargo. Bus transportation, which is vital for students and low-income families, has also been affected. Four hundred buses exist, out of a projected fleet of 1,570. Lack of functioning public transportation also means delays in arriving at a hospital. Air traffic has been eliminated completely. The Iraqi airlines fleet, which carried 1.2 million passengers and 31 tons of cargo per year before the aggression, has been grounded. The planes, idle for four years, are nearly useless.

Social services. Roughly 60% of services are free of charge to the population. These include streets, drainage, water, garbage collection, parks, playgrounds, and traffic regulation. After the war, 61 projects planned nationally were frozen. In 1991, some 14 projects, and, in 1994, three more projects, were stopped. Thus, of the 13,000 kilometers of paved roads planned, only 400 km were built, due to the shortage of vehicles required for construction. Only 3,600 public service vehicles, out of 5,000 before the war, are running, and an estimated 12,500 are needed. This means cities cannot provide normal services. Those vehicles which still exist are old and out of order.

There is also a reduction in manpower. Whereas in 1990 there were 27,915 staff engineers and technicians, in 1994 there are only 19,000. Construction costs, due to post-embargo inflation, have increased from 50 dinars per square meter of pavement, to 1,000 dinars, a jump of 2,000%.

Higher education. Iraq used to import \$50 million worth of teaching materials before 1990, to supply its colleges and universities, which were among the best in the world. Forty-five cultural exchange programs were stopped. Students have no longer been able to study abroad for their masters and doctorate degrees, both due to the lack of hard currency to finance studies and to the political ban constituted by the embargo. Students already studying abroad at the time of the aggression were sent back. Foreigners in the education field left the country, because of the lack of hard currency and the devaluation of the Iraqi currency. Scientific materials and books have been kept out by the blockade. The 7,000 magazines which reached educational institutions by subscription from abroad previously, were cut. The lack of paper has made publishing books and periodicals a luxury.

The impact of the blockade on education has been devastating. School buildings are deteriorating, some flooded with sewage. A plan to build 3,500 schools by 1995 has been scrapped. Desks are in short supply—there is about one-third of what is needed. Air conditioning in schools has been cut, leading to increasing cases of bronchitis and other respiratory ailments. No health care is available in schools. Transportation difficulties have contributed to the rising number of student dropouts, numbering 27,000. About 2,000 teachers

have also left the profession since the war.

Computer programs have been suspended, the national program for the propagation of the Islamic faith has been stopped. Due to the lack of paper and of money to import it, students must recycle their notebooks, and textbooks are loaned out for the school year. Notebooks which used to cost 150 fils (there are 1,000 fils to the dinar) now cost 150 dinars. Pupils do not have pencils. Five million pencils would be required, but the U.N. Sanctions Committee blocked the delivery of pencils from a Pakistani company.

Culture. When the Mongols sacked Baghdad in 1258, the Tigris River, which runs through the city, was dubbed the “black river” because of ink from the books that were taken out of the magnificent libraries and thrown into the river. The B-52s which dropped the bombs during the aggression repeated the same operation. Although Unesco documents assert that “culture has a dignity which must be respected and preserved,” and that it is the “right of peoples and individuals to enjoy culture, which cannot be abrogated,” the war and embargo have violated that right.

Before the war, according to Unesco statistics, Iraq’s newspaper production of 1 million papers a day allowed one paper for only 1 out of 10 people. Some of these were 16-page dailies. Now, production has been cut to 100,000, and will fall to 50,000, with four-page issues. Dailies now appear only a few times per week. Of the 45 foreign correspondents Iraqi publications had abroad, there have remained 7.

Printing of children’s publications has also suffered. The popular *Majalati*, which used to have a 150,000 run weekly, was a government-subsidized color magazine for children, which sold for 50 fils. In 1992, the run dropped to 15,000, and now, in 1994, it appears only fortnightly, and the run is to be reduced to 10,000. Next year, it, along with a broad range of children’s books, will cease. The thousands of imported books which filled newsstands and libraries, have not been seen since 1990. The magazine *Arab Culture*, which was renowned in Egyptian, Moroccan, and Jordanian literati and student milieux, is being phased out by the embargo. The 160-page journal, which had a run of 100,000, was cut to 10,000 copies in 1992, and now appears in a reduced format of 84 pages and a 5,000 run.

Cultural organizations are prevented from sending artistic exhibits abroad, because they will not be allowed back into the country. Despite these constraints, the Iraqis have restarted the famous annual Babylon cultural festival. In 1992, invitations were sent out to artists throughout the world. One Japanese pianist, who had received his government’s authorization to attend, was told one day before departure that the U.S. embassy had to be consulted. The verdict was that the artist’s security “could not be guaranteed.”

Theft of national art treasures has been massive since the war. When one Sumerian piece was announced for sale at an auction in London, the Iraqi authorities intervened, on the basis of Unesco regulations, to prevent its sale, but the British argued that Iraq had no “right” to have the piece returned.