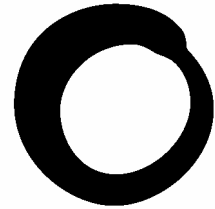


# MEDIA BRIEFING

13th February 2003



**Friends of  
the Earth**

## WAR IN IRAQ: WHY FRIENDS OF THE EARTH IS OPPOSED

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*Friends of the Earth strongly condemns the looming war against Iraq and deplores the humanitarian and environmental impacts that will result from such a war. Given the likely impacts, Friends of the Earth believes that the proponents of war against Iraq have failed to justify military action. Friends of the Earth supports global treaties, diplomacy, and negotiation to resolve disputes and to promote human rights, environmental protection, and sustainable societies. Under the prevailing circumstances, pre-emptive military action contradicts such an approach, and risks furthering a vicious circle of terrorism and violence that would be inimical to sustainable development in and beyond the region.*

*It appears that a major motivation for the proposed war, led by the US and the UK, is a perceived need to safeguard access to oil in the region. Friends of the Earth believes that the only solution to the problem of oil dependency by highly industrialized countries is an increased reliance on clean and sustainable energy sources. Military action to secure oil supplies – on the other hand – threatens to increase environmental injustice. It would concentrate control over resources amongst the richer over-consuming nations, and worse, it would increase the rate of consumption of fossil fuels, and thus emissions of climate-changing greenhouse gases, with the most severe impacts being felt in poorer developing nations.*

*In no way does Friends of the Earth's present opposition to a war against Iraq equate to and kind of support or endorsement for the policies or actions of the Iraqi regime.*

## OIL AND CLIMATE

The US and Britain are now on the verge of war with Iraq. The pretext for war is to prevent Iraq making 'weapons of mass destruction' and to destroy any stocks of such weapons it already possesses. But many commentators allege that another US aim is to open up Iraq's vast oil reserves for exploitation. What happens next in this crisis may determine what happens to Iraq's oil, where it goes and who makes the resulting profits. It will also significantly affect the world price of oil and thus the balance of incentives to burn oil or invest in energy saving and renewable energy technologies to protect the world's climate. Fossil fuel combustion is the primary source of emissions of climate-threatening greenhouse gases.

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Iraq has the second largest proven oil reserves of any nation - at least 112 billion barrels, along with 220 billion barrels of probable and possible resources, and large remaining unexplored areas (US Energy Information Administration "Iraq Country Analysis Brief": <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/iraq.html>). This is over a tenth of the world's entire known oil reserve. Iraq's production costs are amongst the lowest in the world at approximately \$1 per barrel, compared to \$4 in the US and North Sea, and \$2.5 in Saudi Arabia. Iraqi oil is also desirably low in sulphur.

Current production is low. Much of Iraq's infrastructure is wrecked and some oil reservoirs may have been damaged by over-pumping, water injection or flooding. Most pipelines and transfer facilities are also damaged. Experts suggest a "sustainable" production capacity would be no more than a billion barrels a year, an increase of about a quarter on current production levels.

However, 417 new wells are planned. That's a lot of new business for someone. If Saddam's regime survives this crisis, these wells will be drilled by Russian, Chinese, Iraqi and Romanian companies. Some commentators suggest that, for about £20 billion in investment, production levels could be increased to reach two and a half to three billion barrels a year within five years. In the long run the potential may be even greater, as 55 of Iraq's 70 proven fields remain undeveloped.

US Secretary of State Colin Powell has said that Iraq's oil will be held "*in trust for the Iraqi people*" in the event of any invasion. But on who will get paid to take the oil out of the ground, and where it will go next, he has said nothing.  
([http://www.cmonitor.com/stories/news/recent2003/0123iraqoil\\_2002.shtml](http://www.cmonitor.com/stories/news/recent2003/0123iraqoil_2002.shtml))

Although hampered by UN sanctions, Iraq has been busily signing contracts for the development of its oil resources. French and Russian companies have been particularly favoured. Major companies with deals in Iraq include TotalFinaElf, Russia's Lukoil, Zarubezneft and Mashinoimport, the China National Petroleum Company and Eni. This business would be threatened by the overthrow of Saddam's regime.

US oil companies do not hold development contracts in Iraq. Neither, with the exception of some potential small deals by Shell, do UK companies. As long ago as 1998, Chevron Chief Executive Kenneth Derr was enthusing about getting access to Iraq's reserves (Paul J (2002) "Iraq: the struggle for oil": <http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/oil/2002/08jim.htm>). Now, both France and Russia are worried that the Americans are talking to Iraqi dissident groups about scrapping existing contracts and providing preferential access for US companies. John Browne, the Chief Executive of BP-Amoco, recently expressed fears that the US would carve up Iraqi oil resources once the war is over.  
(<http://www.observer.co.uk/iraq/story/0,12239,825105,00.html>)

A recent Deutsche Bank report ("Baghdad Bazaar: Big Oil in Iraq," 21 October 2002: <http://www.foe.co.uk/pubsinfo/infoteam/pressrel/2003/20030126184336.html>) suggested a potential conflict of interest amongst the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council over the commercial implications of war in Iraq. A regime change in Iraq would benefit US and UK oil companies while a peaceful resolution would benefit oil companies based in Russia, France and China.

These issues are vital to US national interests because the US economy remains an oil junkie in bad need of a fix. Industrialised countries consume almost 50 million barrels of oil each day, with the USA alone accounting for two-fifths of this (US Energy Information Administration <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/international/petroleu.html#IntlConsumption>). The US Energy

Information Administration forecasts that world demand for oil will rise by between 37% and 90% by 2020, depending on the rate of economic growth. The US alone is forecast to need another two to three and a quarter billion barrels a year over the same period (President of the USA 2001 "National Energy Policy: report of the National Energy Policy Development Group" <http://www.whitehouse.gov/energy/National-Energy-Policy.pdf>). US net oil imports more than doubled between 1985 and 2000 as US production fell and consumption rose. More than half the oil used in the US is now imported. By 2020, this dependence could rise to two-thirds. If the US were to get control of all or most of the product of Iraq's planned 417 new wells, total Iraqi production would be more than enough to meet the predicted increase in US consumption.

Two weeks after gaining power, President Bush asked Vice President Dick Cheney to review US energy policy. Cheney is one of many Administration officials, including the President, to have a background in the oil and gas industries. Others include National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice and two cabinet secretaries. Not surprisingly, in May 2001, Cheney's report concluded that "*energy security must be a priority of US trade and foreign policy*" (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/energy>). The report set out a global strategy to enhance US national energy security, with detailed recommendations for almost every oil-producing region. The Middle East is forecast to supply between a half and two thirds of the world's oil by 2020. It will "*remain vital to US interests*" and "*will be a primary focus of US international energy policy*".

In 2001 Tony Blair also ordered a review of energy policy. The review stated that "*the UK will be increasingly dependent on imported oil and gas*", and that "*increased reliance on imports from Europe and elsewhere underlines the need to integrate our energy concerns into our foreign policy*". In January this year, Foreign Secretary Jack Straw outlined the UK's seven strategic priorities for foreign policy to senior staff from Britain's embassies abroad. Bolstering "*the security of British and global energy supplies*" was number six on the list (<http://politics.guardian.co.uk/foreignaffairs/story/0,11538,869868,00.html>).

It would be simplistic to describe a new Gulf War as merely "a war about oil". There are many other domestic and international policy considerations involved. But oil and energy security is clearly a prime consideration in US foreign policy. Abject dependence on fossil fuels distorts US policy, prevents it from dealing rationally with countries from Venezuela to Saudi Arabia, and constitutes a major threat to global security and peace, as well as to the global climate.

The need for the world in general and the US in particular to cut dependence on fossil fuels has never been greater. Not the least of the political errors of President Bush has been to review energy policy, and then, like an SUV driver with his eyes closed, put the pedal to the metal and head resolutely in completely the wrong direction. The consequences may be seen in a new war in the Gulf, and in the international conflict and turmoil that would surely follow.

## **GENERAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

So far, there has been official silence on the possible environmental and social implications of an invasion of Iraq. Yet the possible damage to the environment, to communities and above all to civilians deserves urgent practical and moral consideration before any decision for war is taken. Neither the British nor the US Governments have made any published effort to assess these risks, or to show why they are outweighed by the alleged benefits of invasion.

Of course, it is impossible to be certain what will happen in any war. No-one knows if it will be

short or long, an easy victory for the US or a painful and bloody struggle. All attempts to assess risks are difficult and tentative at best. But we must still look carefully at what happened in previous conflicts, including the damage done by the 1991 Gulf War.

First, targeting industrial and military sites such as armaments factories and oil refineries is likely to lead to acute chemical pollution. A report on the Kosovo war by the United Nations Environment Programme concluded that military action resulted in no general 'ecological catastrophe', but resulted in "*some serious hot spots where contamination by hazardous substances released during the air strikes poses risks for human health and the aquatic environment*" (<http://www.grid.unep.ch/btf/final/>).

The UK Government has named nine sites in Iraq as involved in the production of biological and chemical agents. It can be assumed that these would be early targets for air strikes in the event of war.

During the 1991 war devastating damage was done to the oil industry in Kuwait. Iraqi forces destroyed more than seven hundred oil wells in Kuwait, spilling sixty million barrels of oil. Over ten million cubic metres of soil was still contaminated as late as 1998 (<http://www.gci.ch/GreenCrossPrograms/legacy/Kuwait/kuwait7years.html>). A major groundwater aquifer, two fifths of Kuwait's entire freshwater reserve, remains contaminated to this day. Ten million barrels of oil were released into the Gulf, affecting coastline along 1500km and costing more than \$700 million to clean up.

During the nine months that the wells burned, average air temperatures fell by 10 degrees C as a result of reduced light from the sun. The costs of environmental damage were estimated at \$40 billion. About a thousand people were estimated to be likely to die as a result of air pollution (<http://www.american.edu/projects/mandala/TED/ice/kuwait.htm>). Since Iraq has the second largest proven oil reserves of any nation on earth, the potential environmental damage caused by destruction of oil facilities during a new war must be enormous.

Other environmental effects of the 1991 Gulf War included destruction of sewage treatment plants in Kuwait, resulting in the discharge of over 50,000 cubic metres of raw sewage every day into Kuwait Bay (<http://www.iucn.org/themes/marine/pdf/gulfwar.pdf>).

Secondly, specific weapons likely to be used against Iraq will also create environmental damage. Top of the list of concern are depleted uranium (DU) projectiles.

Depleted uranium is very dense and is used in projectiles designed to pierce armour, reinforced bunkers and other similar targets. Depleted uranium projectiles create fragments and dust which release uranium oxide into the air. Estimates of the amount of depleted uranium used by allied forces in the first Gulf War range from 290 tonnes to 800 tonnes (<http://www.antenna.nl/wise/uranium/dhap99.html>).

Decontamination requires removal of contaminated soil and treatment as radioactive waste. Thousands of hectares of Iraqi land could be contaminated. Decontaminating just 200 hectares at a US Army proving ground cost \$4-5bn.

According to a 'threat paper' on Kuwait produced in secret by the UK Atomic Energy Authority and subsequently leaked, 50 tonnes of DU inhaled could cause up to half a million additional cancer deaths over several decades, a calculation based on International Committee on Radiological Protection risk factors. Internal DU exposure is acknowledged to cause kidney damage, cancers of the lung and bone, respiratory disease, neurocognitive disorders, chromosomal damage and birth defects.

([http://www.totse.com/en/bad\\_ideas/guns\\_and\\_weapons/duinfo.html](http://www.totse.com/en/bad_ideas/guns_and_weapons/duinfo.html)).

Thirdly, a new war would pose a serious threat to the biodiversity of the region. Data on Iraq's biodiversity is limited. There is little information on fish, amphibians and reptiles. No major surveys have been conducted since 1979. But Iraq's wetlands have been of major international significance, especially for birds. Thirty-three Iraqi wetlands were included on a 1993 provisional list of wetlands of international importance in the Middle East. They supported substantial numbers of at least seven species of mammals and birds listed in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Animals, and were of international importance as a staging and wintering area for more than sixty species of waterfowl and nine species of birds of prey. They were also of great cultural significance, having provided a home for the Ma'dan or Marsh Arabs for at least five thousand years

(<http://www.wetlands.org/inventory&/MiddleEastDir/Title1.htm>).

Other species would be seriously threatened. According to the Global Environment Facility, the Gulf and Sea of Oman region is "*one of the most important marine turtle habitats in the world ... and plays a significant role in sustaining the life cycle of the marine turtle populations in the whole North-Western Indo Pacific region*" due to its shallow depth and high water temperature. Of the seven species of marine turtles in the world five are found here. Four are 'endangered' and one 'threatened'.

In the 1991 Gulf War, fallout from burning oil products produced a sea surface microlayer that was toxic to plankton and the larval stages of marine organisms (<http://www.iucn.org/themes/marine/pdf/gulfwar.pdf>). Sea temperatures also fell. The World Conservation Monitoring Centre states that acute effects were experienced by birds and marine life such as otters and dugong. Prawn fisheries were dramatically affected in the years immediately after the war. In 1991-92 spawning biomass in the Saudi Arabian prawn stock dropped to less than one tenth of pre-war levels, and total biomass to a quarter. Landings in the Bahraini prawn fisheries dropped by a half (<http://scilib.ucsd.edu/sio/guide/zgulfwar.html>).

Of course, it would be absurd to worry about what war could do to animal species without also setting out the worst likely effects of all: the deaths, injuries, loss and grief the war will cause to civilians. The destruction of communities and the displacement of populations are just as much an issue for environmentalists as the damage war does to fragile ecosystems.

Since the Second World War, more than four fifths of the people killed in war have been civilians. Globally there are already 18 million international refugees from war, and another 24 million people are displaced within their own countries. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, four fifths of displaced people are women and children. Wars typically cause the break-up of families, the collapse of education systems and consequent widespread social and psychological damage to civilians.

The first Gulf War in 1991, the devastating effect of economic sanctions and Saddam's repression of his own people have already created five million Iraqi refugees and displaced up to one million people inside the country, particularly Kurds and Ma'had Marsh Arabs ([http://www.merip.org/iraq\\_backgrounder\\_102202/iraq\\_background2\\_merip.pdf](http://www.merip.org/iraq_backgrounder_102202/iraq_background2_merip.pdf)). Likely civilian casualties in a ground invasion of Iraq have been estimated at between thirty and forty thousand. The most vulnerable communities are likely to be Kurds and Shi'a Moslems.

## **A VICIOUS CYCLE OF UNSUSTAINABILITY**

Analysts suggest that war in Iraq would create several further risks: triggering regional destabilisation, setting a precedent for a doctrine of unilateralism, and stimulating retaliatory violence.

One scenario involves Iraq again targeting Israel (as during the Gulf war), and Israel responding with military force (in the worst case with nuclear weapons). Under several post-war scenarios, Iraq could split into three potentially conflicting parts: Shi'a, Sunni and Kurdish (<http://www.observer.co.uk/Print/0,3858,4505605,00.html>). The Turks have already threatened a military response should an independent Kurdistan emerge in northern Iraq. Similarly Iran wants to see an end to Sunni Iraqi support for the Iranian opposition movement. Jordan has indicated its intent to use armed force if necessary to prevent any large influx of refugees ([http://www.merip.org/iraq\\_background/iraq\\_background2\\_merip.pdf](http://www.merip.org/iraq_background/iraq_background2_merip.pdf)). The risks of escalating and spreading conflict across the heavily armed region are real and present.

Friends of the Earth campaigns in favour of international law and institutions to protect human rights and the environment and to support sustainable development. The future of our global environment depends on the agreement of, and respect for, effective international law. The emerging US doctrine of unilateralism runs directly counter to this need, and sets a worrying precedent for other states.

War against Iraq also risks creating a further cause for fundamentalist and terrorist movements, facilitating recruitment and fundraising, and thus continuing a cycle of violence and retaliation. In such circumstances the promotion of sustainable development to deal with pressing regional and national needs such as poverty, high rates of child mortality, dependence on oil exports and scarcity of water will inevitably be hampered.

## **Conclusion**

None of the expected consequences of war on the environment and people can be accurately predicted. However, our assessment is that the consequences would be grave. We do not answer the question of whether war against Iraq can ever be justified. But one of the tests of a just war is whether the likely damage outweighs the possible benefits. And in a democracy we have a right to demand that our leaders consider the possible risks as well as the possible gains, publish the evidence they have taken into account, and show us why the risks are worth taking.

The evidence outlined above leads Friends of the Earth to conclude that war against Iraq has not been justified. Where is the reasoned response to this evidence from the US Administration, the UK Government and the advocates of war?

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This briefing has been prepared by Duncan McLaren, Roger Higman and Ian Willmore of Friends of the Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland.