

# Exploiting Suffering

The Iraqi regime is skilled at seizing – and creating – opportunities to undermine the international community’s resolve to maintain UN sanctions. And one of its most effective tools for accomplishing this goal is the systematic creation of hardship and suffering for the Iraqi people. While devoting massive resources to opulent palaces and huge weapons programs, the Iraqi government makes food and medicine scarce for average citizens. It then shifts the blame for the suffering of the Iraqi people from Saddam’s policies to the United Nations, which established the sanctions. The real reasons for the suffering are quickly overwhelmed by the emotional weight of crying or emaciated children, doctors lamenting the lack of medicines and supplies, and parents pleading for relief.

Saddam Hussein’s government uses tragic images to influence world opinion, and particularly to support the false allegation that the United Nations is killing Iraqis. These images include:

- Exploiting sick and malnourished children for international television cameras;
- Staging mass funerals;
- Providing selective tours of empty markets and dilapidated hospitals;
- Showing Iraqis with obvious diseases and blaming the sicknesses on the absence of modern medical tools, due to sanctions; and
- Censoring television footage and restricting movement of journalists and television crews.

In a particularly shocking practice, the regime is known to collect the bodies of dead babies and store them for months at a time, so that they can stage mass funeral processions and create the impression that UN sanctions are killing small children.

The Iraqi regime has diverted to its weapons program or to luxuries for the regime’s elites many millions of dollars that were intended for food, medicines, and other necessities. Under the UN sanctions exceptions, Iraq is explicitly allowed to import food and a wide range of medicines and other necessities, and the UN Security Council has expanded the list of allowable items several times in response to humanitarian and infrastructure needs. The regime either deliberately caused medical scarcity and malnutrition or simply saw that the suffering of the Iraqi people caused by its policies could be exploited for its propaganda value.

In either case, weapons for the armed forces and luxuries for ruling elites took priority over food and medicines for the people, and the regime found it more useful to continue the hardships and blame them on the sanctions than to meet its obligations and end the suffering. In 2000, Forbes magazine estimated Saddam Hussein’s personal wealth at \$7 billion, acquired primarily from oil and smuggling.

## Blaming Sanctions for Regime Failure

In a total of 29 separate resolutions,<sup>6</sup> the UN Security Council has stated clearly its reason for imposing sanctions: to force Iraq to comply with previous UN resolutions. But Saddam Hussein refuses to comply. In 1990, under UN Security Council Resolution 661, the UN permitted food and medicine imports. Beginning in 1991, the Security Council attempted to create an Oil-for-Food Program that would allow Iraqi oil to be sold, with proceeds deposited in an UN-controlled