

Campaign Against Sanctions on Iraq: why and what?

“the toughest, most comprehensive sanctions in history” - James Rubin, US Department of State spokesman, December 1, 1997.

“We are in the process of destroying an entire society. It is as simple and terrifying as that. It is illegal and immoral.” - Denis Halliday, former UN Assistant Secretary General and Humanitarian Coordinator in Iraq, October 15, 1998.

What is CASI?

The Campaign Against Sanctions on Iraq (CASI) is a registered society at the University of Cambridge. It was founded in 1997 by students concerned about the humanitarian crisis created in Iraq by the economic sanctions imposed after Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait. CASI's concern is exclusively humanitarian: it campaigns only for the lifting of the non-military sanctions. CASI neither supports nor seeks to topple the Iraqi regime; it does not take a position on the ongoing US/UK bombing of Iraq or on human rights abuses committed by the Iraqi government.

What does CASI believe?

Much of Iraq's infrastructure was bombed in the 1991 Gulf War. The subsequent sanctions have not only prevented its repair but have reduced people's access to many of essentials of life.

A lack of reliable data often makes exact statements about the humanitarian disaster in Iraq difficult. However, in August 1999, Unicef surveyed 40,000 Iraqi households to determine the extent to which infant and under-five child mortality had changed since sanctions' imposition (“Child and Maternal Mortality Survey”, Unicef, 55 Lincoln's Inn Fields, London WC2A 3NB or <http://www.unicef.org/newsline/99pr29.htm>). They concluded that an additional half million children under the age of five had died between 1991 and 1998. Unicef's survey used the internationally accepted method of collecting mortality data. They also took care to guard their data against manipulation by the Iraqi government. Unicef's caution and integrity, and the similarity between their figures and those from other sources, have prevented anyone from seriously questioning their results. All other UN organisations and humanitarian organisations working in Iraq present similar pictures of a collapse in living conditions for ordinary Iraqis.

This humanitarian tragedy is a direct consequence of the sanctions, not an accidental side-effect. Sanctions are used when words alone are felt to be insufficient: they are meant to force governments to change their behaviour by

hurting the sanctioned country. Economic sanctions hurt by reducing the availability of goods; this drives up prices and attacks the economy. For this reason economic sanctions were originally known as economic warfare. Broad economic sanctions, such as those on Iraq, therefore tend to target the poor. If their government cares about their well-being, it may comply with the sanctioners' demands and try to get the sanctions lifted. Unfortunately, the Iraqi government is primarily interested in its own survival. It has therefore insulated itself from the effects of the sanctions, and has even taken advantage of the smuggling opportunities created by the scarcity: US and British politicians know this, regularly describing the palaces, amusement parks and cases of whiskey to which the Iraqi government has access.

While the Iraqi population, which is not responsible for the decisions of its government, has been the sanctions' chief victim, the Iraqi government seems stronger than it was in 1991 when it nearly fell in a civil war. Punishing ordinary Iraqis for the actions of their dictator is unjust. Furthermore, over a decade of sanctions have shown that this is an ineffective way of trying to sway the Iraqi government. CASI therefore believes that the non-military sanctions on Iraq must be lifted (this can be done while still maintaining controls on Iraq's military capabilities). Any steps short of this continue to hold the Iraqi population hostage to the political struggle between their government and ours and continue to harm the Iraqi people. Two former UN Assistant Secretary Generals with responsibility for humanitarian affairs in Iraq, Denis Halliday and Hans von Sponeck, have resigned their posts to advocate this position. Former UN chief weapons inspector Scott Ritter, France, China and Russia also hold it. Even the two countries with most immediate experience of Iraqi aggression, Iran and Kuwait, are now contesting the embargo. The US and the UK, alone among the Security Council's permanent members, oppose de-linking the humanitarian and political issues, apparently for fear of not appearing “tough on Saddam”. Ironically, lifting the non-military sanctions may expose the government of Iraq to more popular discontent as it will no longer be able to blame the US and the UK for Iraqis' suffering.

What does CASI do?

CASI works to lift the non-military sanctions on Iraq primarily by distributing accurate information about the situation in Iraq. It does this because it believes that policymakers in the US and the UK know that the sanctions have had disastrous consequences and have not achieved their aims but that the British and American public have yet to put enough pressure on them to reverse their support for the sanctions.

CASI maintains the largest electronic discussion list on the sanctions in the UK. Some 250 individuals, including politicians, journalists, activists, academics, NGOs, Iraqi expatriates and members of religious communities, subscribe to this. This has allowed CASI both to learn from and to advise people around the world. Its website is a good source of information, including UN documents and links to other anti-sanctions organisations; it is linked to by the online versions of *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, *The Economist* magazine and yahoo.com. The website's *Guide to Sanctions* provide a comprehensive introduction to the main issues of concern.

In its newsletters, CASI compiles news updates, information about humanitarian developments, and analyses of other pertinent issues. Past editions have, for example, examined US and UK claims that the Iraqi regime is deliberately warehousing medical supplies; Unicef's and other mortality figures; reasons that Iraqi Kurdistan is better off than South/Centre Iraq; 'holds' on contracts under 'oil for food'; and the status of compensation payments.

CASI's first briefing was prepared for a Member of the House of Lords. Subsequent briefings have addressed Ministerial statements in the House of Commons and UN Security Council Resolutions (At least one MP used CASI's press release on the December 1999 Security Council Resolution on Iraq as the basis for his own statements to the press). In July 2000, CASI delegates were invited to speak at a conference in Versailles organised by business intelligence firm CWC Group, and provided information about the humanitarian situation in Iraq. Please contact CASI if you have any questions about the situation in Iraq: CASI is happy to prepare briefings for anyone interested.

CASI is also eager to advise journalists, news agencies and the broadcast media, and has frequently done so in the past. On 9 November 1999 *The Guardian* featured an article by CASI committee members; CASI has also published invited articles in *Peace News* and the *Labour Left Briefing*. Committee members have published letters in the *Financial Times*, the *Economist* magazine, *The Independent*, *The Guardian* and the *New Statesman* magazine and have spoken at meetings in the House of Commons as well as at public meetings and televised discussions. CASI is happy to recommend or to provide speakers to individuals and groups across the country.

In 1999 CASI organised two major public events on the sanctions. In January, it organised Denis Halliday's UK tour after his 1998 resignation. In November, CASI held a weekend conference on the sanctions. Eighteen speakers from four countries addressed over 150 delegates. The speakers included authorities on issues such as Iraqi mortality and public health, non-conventional weapons, and depleted uranium. Prominent

members of NGO, political and diplomatic communities also presented papers. The conference proceedings were cited in a working paper by International Law Professor Marc Bossuyt in a working paper transmitted to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. They are available on the CASI website and have been published as a book.

On 10-11 March 2001, CASI held its second international conference, entitled *Policy Alternatives to Sanctions on Iraq*. Fifteen expert speakers and 170 delegates examined how the international community could feasibly lift economic sanctions without jeopardising regional or international security, and discussed the effects an end to economic sanctions would have on Iraq's internal humanitarian situation. Audio recordings of the speakers' presentations are available on our website.

CASI also plays an active role in fostering co-operation and communication among the UK's many diverse groups concerned with Iraq. In December 1998 CASI and Voices in the Wilderness UK (another group with similar concerns), held the first National Co-ordination Meeting. These have continued at roughly six week intervals and allow various groups from across the country to plan together and share information: previous projects of the NCM have included two national petitions, collecting over 30,000 signatures.

Supporting CASI

Lifetime membership of CASI costs £5.00 and entitles one to receive CASI's newsletters by post if desired. Email versions are free.

CASI derives all of its income from membership fees and private donations. Upon disbanding, CASI's remaining funds will be distributed to charities working in Iraq. CASI committee members are elected annually; they have always been students and volunteers. Cheques can be made out to CASI at the address below; please contact CASI for direct transfer details.

Contacting CASI

As much as anything else, CASI exists as a resource for equipping concerned people to work more effectively for improvements in British policy towards Iraq. If you would like to know how you can do this, or have questions about CASI or Iraq more generally, please contact CASI at any of the addresses below:

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http://www.casi.org.uk
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