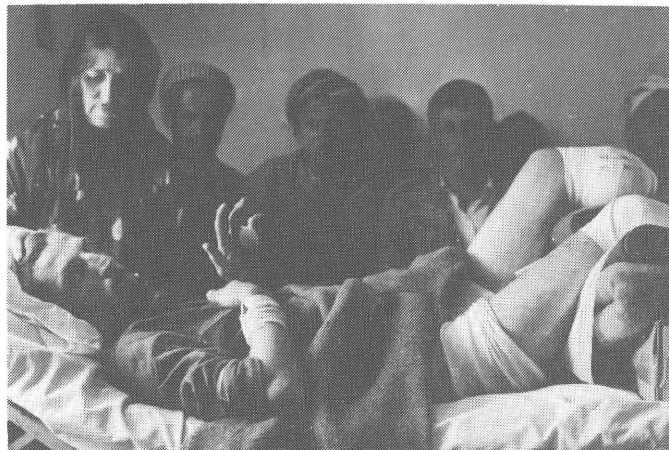


Middle East : Northern Iraq

SEPTEMBER 1994



Sulaimaniya/Handicap International - Photo Yann Morvan

Four to five thousand families were driven from their homes following fighting between rival factions in Northern Iraq.

NORTHERN IRAQ : A CRISIS WHICH DEFIES RESOLUTION

SINCE the establishment of a " regional administration of Iraqi Kurdistan " following elections orderly held in May 1992, the situation has, if anything, deteriorated. The region continues to be the target of a blockade imposed by Baghdad and has, moreover, most recently (between the beginning of May and the end of June this year) witnessed violent factional confrontation between the two main political parties in the region, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) led by Mr Jalal Talabani and the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) led by Mr Massoud Barzani. Fighting, which erupted in a dispute over land possession at Qaladiza, left several hundred dead. The two factions ceased hostilities only in the face of a threat by the international community to withdraw humanitarian relief workers on 8 June if the situation was not brought under control.

Northern Iraq has also been regularly subjected to ground attacks or bombardment by heavy mortar or ground-launched multitube rockets. The civilian population has been the chief victim of such attacks and the number of persons displaced as a result of the destruction of villages has risen. Between 4 000 and 5 000 families have had to flee their homes following the most recent clashes. Consequently the general morale of the population is low and people have become desperate because they cannot see an end to an apparently hopeless situation. As their reliance on humanitarian aid increases, work has become the commodity most valued and sought after. It is not unusual in the larger towns to find people who have had to sell their houses in order to survive.

This is all the more a matter of concern since it is estimated by our on-the-spot representative Dr Rietveld that it will require another year of humanitarian aid in order to overcome the crisis caused by the events of 1991 (flight of 2 million into the mountains following Iraqi measures to repress an uprising of the people of Northern Iraq). The infrastructural rehabilitation programmes begun in December 1993 (mine clearance, rehousing of displaced families, artificial limb centre for the disabled, restoration of health and education systems, *etc.*) must take precedence over strictly humanitarian aid programmes (food distribution, *etc.*) even though the latter continues to be as necessary as before. This fact is very important because it is vital that the economy of Northern Iraq be given a boost in order to create employment for the population, without which there can be no long-term hope of burying the trauma generated by the events of 1991.

In view of the blockade imposed by Baghdad on Northern Iraq, the bulk of humanitarian aid must enter the territory through other channels, primarily through Turkey. For some time, however, the regular frontier checks have been stepped up. This merely complicates the task of the non governmental organizations (NGOs) trying to assist the people of Northern Iraq. Turkey has, nevertheless, expressed its willingness to facilitate the transit of strictly humanitarian aid.●

Zakho/Action Nord Sud/Medical aid - Photo Bettina Servan



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ON THE KURDISH QUESTION IN IRAQ

In 1970, Baghdad concluded an agreement providing for the creation of autonomous institutions in Northern Iraq.

THE fact that the Kurdish question remains such a burning issue in Iraq despite the presence in that country of several other minorities is because the Kurdish population (approximately four million in the North) is alone in having been offered autonomous status in the region in which it constitutes a majority (Northern Iraq). In fact, each time progress has been achieved on the question of autonomy for the Kurds, this has coincided with the granting of more democratic rights or with a weakening of Baghdad's centralized authority in the country as a whole.

In July 1958, when the Hashemite monarchy was overturned by General Kassem, the provisional constitution, whilst affirming Iraq's membership of the Arab world, specified also that the Iraqi nation was the result of an association of Arabs and Kurds. This liberal beginning did not, however, last long because the Kassem regime quickly turned into a dictatorship. In 1966, another attempt was made by the Bazzaz government which offered a truce to the Kurdish combatants as well as recognition of their "national rights" in the constitution. Unfortunately, Bazzaz was repudiated by his own forces before he could implement this project. The revolt continued.

In March 1970 an agreement was concluded between Kurdish representatives and Baghdad on autonomy for Iraqi Kurdistan. This agreement provided for Kurdish participation in government and for a census to

determine precisely the boundaries of the Kurdish regions. Autonomous institutions were to have been established within a period of four years. During the "truce", the USSR gave its backing to Iraq (1972) whilst Iran did the same for the Iraqi Kurds. In March 1974 Baghdad unilaterally promulgated a "law on the autonomy of Iraqi Kurdistan", within the framework of the 1970 agreement. This was rejected by the Kurds who, in a massive majority, took up arms again. However, in March 1975 the Shah and Saddam Hussein signed in Algiers an agreement on the demarcation of the Shatt el-Arab. In exchange, Iran abandoned the Iraqi Kurds to their fate. The revolt collapsed and fearful repressive measures were set in train in Northern Iraq. Guerilla warfare did not resume until 1977.

With the onset of the Iran/Iraq war (1980s), the autonomy question became a secondary issue. Throughout this conflict, the Kurds were in practice a pawn in the hands of the two combatants. Apart from the fact that the regions in question became a huge battlefield, the two States supported their neighbour's Kurdish populations with the reciprocal aim of weakening the enemy. One of the most dramatic outcomes of the war was without doubt the terrible repression which took place at Halabja in March 1988 (and at Zakho in September just after the truce), when the Iraqis deployed chemical weapons against the civilian population on a massive scale. By the time the war ended, Saddam Hussein had the country well in hand and there was no question of any talks on Kurdish autonomy.

In August 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait. In response to this aggression, the United Nations Security Council, in Resolution 660, authorized the coalition which had formed around the United States to use all necessary means to re-establish international peace and security. The hostilities lasted six weeks and ended, in March 1991, with an

overwhelming victory for the coalition partners and liberation of Kuwait. The Iraqi army had been annihilated, with the exception of the elite presidential guard...

In the belief that their hour had come, the people of Northern Iraq, encouraged by outside parties, staged an uprising and took possession of all the towns of Northern Iraq. The Shiites did the same in the South. Their victory was short-lived because Saddam Hussein sent his presidential guard and used his attack helicopters to reestablish his authority over the two regions. The inadequately armed fighters were shown no pity and the heavy killing extended also to the civilian population. In panic reaction, fearing the repeat use of chemical weapons, the people sought refuge in the mountains close to Turkey and Iran. The flight of refugees totalled over two million and the conditions in which they sought their escape were shocking. This created a humanitarian crisis which was without precedent in the history of our times. ●

CHRONOLOGY

- 1958 : Coup d'Etat led by General Kassem and proclamation of Iraq as a republic. Talks between the new government and Kurdish representatives.
- September 1961 : Uprising in Northern Iraq. In 1964 a truce was signed but rejected by a section of the insurgents. Fighting resumed in the following year.
- 11 March 1970 : Iraqi/Kurdish agreement on autonomy for Kurdistan providing for the participation of Kurds in government and bringing to an end the long-lasting guerilla war.
- March 1974 : Baghdad unilaterally promulgates a "law on the autonomy of Kurdistan", excluding many of the provisions made in the 1970 agreement. This sparked off further guerilla warfare on a massive scale, supported by Iran.
- 5 March 1975 : Algiers agreement. Iran's claims in a border dispute with Iraq are conceded and, in exchange, Iran withdraws support from the Kurds. The uprising collapses to resume in the form of guerilla warfare in 1977.
- September 1980 : Commencement of eight-year war between Iran and Iraq.
- March/April 1991 : Uprising in Northern Iraq in wake of defeat of Saddam Hussein. Massive and bloody reprisals by Iraqi forces, causing exodus of more than 2 million people.
- 5 April 1991 : The Security Council adopts Resolution 688 condemning the repression of the Iraqi civilian population and demanding that Iraq do nothing to impede the supply of aid.
- 8 April 1991 : The European Council, meeting in Luxembourg, decides to provide emergency aid totalling ECU 150 million to refugees and displaced persons in Iraq.
- April/June 1991 : The allies implement operation "Safe Haven" in order to assist the people in question and impose a "No-Fly Zone" to guarantee military protection on Iraqi territory.
- May 1992 : Creation of a regional administration in Iraqi Kurdistan following democratic elections.
- May/June 1994 : Bloody confrontations between combatant factions of the PUK and KDP.



Zakho/Action Nord Sud/Medical aid - Photo Bettina Servan

OPERATION " PROVIDE RELIEF "

AT the beginning of April, half a million persons, leaving all possessions behind, fled from their homes up into the mountains along the Turkish frontier where they set up camp just below the snowline ; at the same time, a million others headed towards Iran. This situation, involving such huge numbers of persons seeking refuge in the mountains, engendered a deep emotional reaction among the public worldwide and pressure was brought to bear in Western capitals, particularly in Washington, to intervene with humanitarian aid.

On France's initiative, the Security Council adopted Resolution 688 (5 April 1991) which condemned the repression of the Iraqi civilian population and demanded that Iraq cease its repressive actions forthwith, insisting that it allow the immediate access of international

humanitarian relief organizations to all those in need of assistance, wherever they be in Iraq.

In April 1991, on the initiative of the United Kingdom, the allies launched Operation " Safe Haven " with the purpose of helping refugees and displaced persons to return to their homes through the establishment of a humanitarian security zone which the Iraqis would be forbidden to enter. For

its part, the United States issued a warning to Iraq, prohibiting any movement beyond the 36th parallel (*i. e.* a line 50 kilometres south of Mosul). By such means, an air exclusion zone, known as Operation " No-Fly Zone ", which is currently still in force, was imposed. Some 20 000 soldiers from a dozen countries

were deployed in Operation " Safe Haven " and participated in humanitarian relief, whilst a " No-Fly Zone " was also imposed in the south of Iraq during 1992.

On 3 April 1991, the European Community (EC) allocated ECU 5 million to finance relief aid. On 8 April the

European Council, meeting in Luxembourg, decided to grant ECU 150 million in emergency aid for displaced persons and refugees in Iraq. It was also decided that two thirds of this sum would come from the EC budget and be administered by the Commission. The money was used to finance projects implemented by some 24 NGOs, UN agencies, the International Red Cross and other organizations. Over 300 humanitarian relief flights were financed by the EC. Huge quantities of blankets, footwear, tents, clothing and medical supplies as well as over 50 000 tonnes of food were made available within a very short space of time. This operation was successful in encouraging the refugees to begin leaving their makeshift shelter to return to their towns and villages. Relief workers accompanied them into Iraq. By mid-June, when the soldiers left the region, water and electricity had been restored to a number of urban communities. By the end of August, almost 90% of the refugees had returned to Iraq.

Between September and December 1991, the UN, which had taken over the administration of humanitarian relief operations in Iraq, revealed that 60 000 families were still living in tents in the mountains, either because their homes had been destroyed, or because they had fled from areas of fighting (Iraqi and Kurdish combatants endeavouring to regain control of their land). A new large-scale operation was launched by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to provide shelter, before the beginning of the winter, for some 350 000 refugees from the " vilayets " (provinces) of Sulaymaniyah, Arbil and Dohuk. The Community and its Member States supported this action. The refugees began to return home once the Kurdish combatants had regained control, in November, of the main towns of Iraqi Kurdistan.

The humanitarian relief operation for the refugees and displaced persons in Iraq absorbed a total of 1 424 billion US dollars, of which 605 million dollars were provided by the Community and its Member States. This was the first time that Europe had allocated such large funding in a humanitarian crisis. Europe, with the scale of its contribution, assumed the position of principal donor within the international community. ●

At the beginning of April, approximately 500 000 Kurds, leaving all possessions behind, fled into the mountains along the Turkish frontier where they set up camp.

European Community aid donations to the people of Iraq in 1991, 1992, 1993 and 1994

-1991	Humanitarian and food aid :	ECU 105 million
-1992	Humanitarian aid (ECHO) :	ECU 5 million
-1993	Humanitarian aid (ECHO) :	ECU 21.5 million
-1994 (to 31 August)	Humanitarian aid (ECHO) :	
-3 February 1994 (ECHO representatives) :		0.125 MECU
-24 June 1994 (sundry aid) :		4.69 MECU
-5 August 1994 (food aid) :		1.7 MECU
-17 August 1994 (food aid) :		2 MECU
Million ECU		
Sub-total :		ECU 8.515 million
TOTAL :		ECU 140.015 million

HUMANITARIAN AID FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION

Financial assistance from the European Union to the Iraqi population totals ECU 140.015 million since the beginning of the humanitarian relief operation.

SINCE the end of 1991, humanitarian relief operations have had to continue because of the effect on the people of Northern Iraq of the dual embargo. As well as the continued economical embargo (excluding medicines, food and first aid supplies) imposed under Security Council Resolution 687 to persuade Iraq to fulfil its international obligations, and which applies to the whole of Iraqi territory, the population of Northern Iraq has also had to face a total blockade imposed by the Baghdad army in October 1991 following its withdrawal from the region. This dual embargo has resulted in an unprecedented economic crisis in the region.

Security Council Resolution 706 (August 1991) set up an escrow account (controlled by the UN), to be composed of revenue from the sale of Iraqi petroleum, with a view to financing the purchase of medicines, food and supplies for essential civilian needs for the Iraqi population suffering the effects of the embargo. Resolution 778 specified that this account was also to finance the implementation of humanitarian activities in Iraq. The EC accordingly contributed to its funding. Baghdad, for its part, refused to finance the account through the sale of petroleum on the grounds that it had no control over the account. The international community and the EC have therefore maintained a humanitarian presence in Northern Iraq, independent of any links with Baghdad, in order to provide the people concerned with the aid refused them by the central authorities.

In 1992, the year in which it was set up, ECHO provided

ECU 5 million in humanitarian aid to the people of Iraq. In 1993, its contribution for the people of Northern Iraq affected by the dual embargo and subjected to regular attacks by the Iraqi army, and for the Shiite population in the South which was constantly under repression from the armed forces, totalled ECU 21.5 million. This humanitarian aid was used primarily to provide housing, heating and food for the displaced population and to set up small-scale rehabilitation projects. It was implemented by NGOs whose staff, being close to the combat arena, were frequently required to work in hazardous conditions. For example, a British NGO, AMAR (Assisting Marsh Arabs and Refugees), provided food and medical aid to those living in the southern marshes along the frontier with Iran.

Since the beginning of this year,

ian aid provided by the European Union), this decision included an allocation of ECU 1.38 million which *inter alia* made it possible to extend the mine clearance programme begun in July 1992 by the British NGO, Mines Advisory Group (MAG), at Diyana and Chowman, plus an allocation of ECU 220 000 for the supply of orthopaedic equipment to Handicap International, an NGO working in collaboration with MAG.

This mine clearance programme is of crucial importance because hundreds of thousands of anti-personnel mines were laid in the region by the Iraqi forces in their efforts to put down the Kurdish rebellion. Anti-personnel mines are not intended to kill but to maim and to do so in such appalling fashion as to demoralize the enemy or prevent access to certain areas. The mines are



Kurdistan/MAG - Handicap International/Mine clearance team - Photo Yann Morvan

ECHO has provided ECU 8.515 million in humanitarian aid to the Iraqi people. These funds cover projects in spheres such as education, health, agriculture, family settlement, food distribution and mine clearance.

The largest volume of funding this year followed a decision on 24 June to grant ECU 4.69 million in humanitarian aid to the people of Northern Iraq. In addition to financing two ECHO representatives in Sulaymaniyah (*in situ* since 1992 for the purpose of coordinating and monitoring humanitar-

placed indiscriminately, without visible sign, in the vicinity of villages. Their deterrent effect is such that the civilian population is unable to make further use of its land. Unfortunately, mine clearance is dangerous and delicate work which occupies an enormous amount of time and is even more costly in terms of money. It is, however, vital that the job be done if the peasant farmer is to regain his one means of livelihood — his land. The European Union will therefore continue to support this type of project as long as is necessary. ●