Un Sanctions In Iraq Essay, Research Paper

United Nations sanctions against Iraq, which were put in place after the Persian Gulf War, are hurting the people of Iraq rather than Saddam Hussein himself. Hussein is using the money he receives from illegal trade and programs to help the people of Iraq for his own personal use. The sanctions were originally created to force Hussein to stop building weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Hussein, however, still maintains these weapons and uses black-market money to develop them. With lack of a better plan, the sanctions are still in effect.

The economic sanctions against Iraq began over ten years ago when the Iraqi army began to occupy Kuwait in 1990 (1). These sanctions were created so that Saddam Hussein would pull his troops out of Kuwait. But the UN forces, led by the United States, were able to rid Kuwait of the Iraqis prior to the sanctions having been fully enacted. Since Hussein continued to possess weapons of mass destruction, the sanctions were not lifted until he permitted UN inspectors to verify that he had destroyed these weapons. Hussein has yet to let the UN inspectors into Iraq, therefore, the sanctions are still being imposed.

The original embargo banned all trade with Iraq and froze all Iraqi assets that existed overseas. Food and medical supplies were exempt from this embargo, but Iraq was unable to afford these products because it did not have any income from exports. The impact of the sanctions was magnified greatly because of the terrible infrastructure in Iraq. The infrastructure was damaged by war with Iran and the Persian Gulf War (1).

The sanctions being imposed on Iraq are hurting the people rather than Saddam Hussein. For example, Basra is Iraq s second largest city and the electric power, when available, flickers on and off. It can take up to ten minutes for a telephone call to be connected. There is a thick layer of smoke covering the city because of jury-rigged generators and vehicles (1). Pools of poisonous muck have penetrated the surface of the town because so many sewers have broken down. As a result, most of the fish in the Shatt al-Arab river have been killed and the rest have become unsafe to eat.

In 1991, to assist Iraq with all the trouble that the sanctions have resulted in, the United Nations Security Council approved a plan that allow Iraq to export a small portion of its available oil. The profit from this oil was to be used to purchase food and medical supplies for the people of Iraq. But Saddam Hussein, who was waiting for the sanctions to be completely lifted, refused to cooperate with the UN for five years. As a result, the oil-for-food operation, as it is better known, did not actually begin until December 1996 (1).

In the beginning, the Security Council authorized Iraq to sell $1.32 billion worth of oil every six months. However, this sum provided just more than a dollar a month to cover food and medication for each person in Iraq (1). This money did not even cover the costs that were required to repair the infrastructure of the country. Because of the inefficient bureaucracy of both the Security Council and Iraqi officials, it took more than three months for the first shipment of food and medical supplies to arrive in Iraq (1).

Faced with many problems, in 1998 the Security Council increased the limit on humanitarian purchases to $3.4 billion every six months. However, this only improved the situation slightly. By 1998, the oil pumps and pipelines in Iraq were in such disrepair that the looser sanctions did little. As a result, Iraq could not export enough oil to satisfy its new allowance even though Iraq has the second-largest oil reserves in the world (1).

Saddam Hussein is manipulating the oil-for-food program for the benefit of himself and his regime. The UN rarely monitors the profits that the program acquires once it enters Iraq. As a result, Hussein has built many new palaces for himself and has acquired a new set of cruisers for his police force. Finally, Hussein and his friends have new computers that contain the Pentium III processing chip. All of these products, which Saddam Hussein purchased with funds from oil exports, are not permitted under the oil-for-food program.

The United States and Great Britain are also hindering the prosperity of the oil-for-food program. By using their power to block suspicious imports, America and Britain have put nearly $1.7 million worth of oil-for-food contracts in limbo because the goods might be used for military rather than humanitarian purposes. (1). Even though Saddam Hussein has proven that he is unable to be trusted, some of the threatening purchases in question were ambulances, pumps for oil mining, and even soap. All of these items were stopped from being shipped to Iraq by the United States for fear that the Iraqi armed forces might appropriate them as they please (1).

In theory, the Security Council should be aware of all the goods that enter and exit Iraq. This is not the case. Iraqi authorities are able to ship out oil through Turkey and Iran and import whatever they want with the money they make. Iraq does this by paying Iraq and Turkey to transport through their territorial waters; waters that US warships are not allowed to enter. By the time they exit these littoral waters, it is almost impossible for these Iraqi ships to be found. It is estimated that for every legitimate load that enters Iraq from Turkey, as many as 200 pass through without the UN knowing. This clandestine trade may not be enough to raise the living standards of ordinary Iraqis, but it certainly puts soap within Mr. Hussein s reach, not to mention more luxurious or sinister items (1).

The use of sanctions against a country is an example of the realist perspective of international relations. Since Iraq is not doing what the countries of the UN, especially what the United States, wants, it feels that it has to punish Iraq in some manner. By doing so, there is always the possibility of war, however, the dominant force (in this situation, the United States) is willing to take that risk because it is superior militarily and economically. The UN, realizing that the people of Iraq are being punished more than Saddam Hussein himself, established the oil-for-food program because the UN did not intend on hurting the Iraqi people so bad. However, because the sanctions have forced Hussein to Destroy most of his lethal armory and constrained his ability to use the biological weapons he is surely developing the sanctions have not been lifted. In addition, Any relaxation of the sanctions regime will almost certainly help him [Hussein] a bit, at least in his presumed ambitions to wage biological war (1).

Many people in the UN and the United States would like the sanctions to be lifted and the liberal perspective to international relations be enacted. This perspective allows free trade for all nations. Instead of war, there is free trade and all nations are satisfied and successful. The problem with the liberal perspective as applied to the UN sanctions in Iraq is that Saddam Hussein, it is feared, will not act rationally. It is thought that given the opportunity, Hussein will use the money from trade to rebuild his country militarily instead of helping his people. As a result, the UN refuses to take the liberal perspective.

The sanctions in Iraq are not doing their job. They are affecting the residents of Iraq more than their target Saddam Hussein. Meanwhile, Hussein and his associates are exploiting holes and using all available funds for their own personal gain. People argue that the liberal perspective would help the Iraqi people, but the UN sticks with the realist perspective for fear of Hussein. Until he allows UN inspectors into Iraq, the sanctions will remain in place. They are the only leverage the UN has against the tyrant.