

VENRO'S POSITION ON THE IMMINENT MILITARY INTERVENTION IN IRAQ

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Many of the member organizations of VENRO provide humanitarian aid for people who suffer hardships by war and sanctions, which also includes the people of Iraq. With great concern we observe the preparations for war against Iraq. Based on our experiences and expertise as development and relief non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as well as on the assessment of our partner organizations in Iraq as well as in the surrounding region, we are afraid that a new war will further aggravate the already existing humanitarian crisis in this country. Even after Iraq accepted Resolution 1441 of the UN Security Council, the danger of war is in no way averted.

The threat by the Iraqi leadership must be taken seriously and the international community must react accordingly. Iraq has repeatedly and strongly violated human rights during the last two decades, and in the year 1990 they attacked Kuwait. An effective control and disarmament of Iraqi weapons is urgently necessary. However, the embargo imposed by the UN Security Council has not proven to be effective in terms of political pressure on the Iraqi government; instead the civilian population has been suffering from the results of the embargo.

We support the position of the German Federal Government resisting possible military intervention in Iraq and we ask the responsible government officials to exhaust all diplomatic means in order to avert military intervention and to contribute to a peaceful solution to this conflict.

For the following reasons we reject a preemptive attack on Iraq:

The current humanitarian situation

We are especially concerned about the serious humanitarian consequences which an attack on Iraq would entail. As a result of two wars within the last two decades, domestic persecution and repression of the Kurds in northern Iraq and in the country's Shiitic south, as well as many years of sanctions imposed by the United Nations, the Iraqi population is already suffering from an

extremely difficult humanitarian emergency. Especially affected by it are the children, who compromise almost half of the Iraqi population, as well as widows, old and poverty-stricken people. The health care system and the water supply in major parts of the country are no longer in the position to cover the necessary basic needs. Since the 1980's when Iraq succeeded to considerably lower childhood mortality, the rate has risen 160 % as a result of the sanctions. According to estimates by UNICEF, some 500.000 children under the age of five have died between 1991 and 1998 as a result of the sanctions. According to UN statements, 5.000 to 6.000 children die each month as a result of the embargo. Approximately two-thirds of the Iraqi population are dependent on food aid. A further aggravation of the humanitarian situation would be unbearable for most of the people in Iraq.

Civilian victims

Innocent civilians in the congested urban areas would become innocent victims to air raids as well as ground troops. Estimates from VENRO member organizations active in Iraq assume a possible 200.000 fatalities and injuries by one initial military attack. It is assumed that there would be 100.000 victims in Baghdad alone. Beyond that it is to be feared that the regime would not stop to use civilians as live shields for strategic facilities.

Threat to food security

An extended military conflict would cause the already current situation of insufficient food supplies for the civilian population to completely collapse. This would particularly hit the Kurdish population in the north as well as in the center and in southern Iraq, who are dependent on imported food rations from the "Oil for Food" program of the United Nations. A dramatic rise in malnutrition could be expected. According to UNICEF statements, already 30 percent of the children are chronically malnourished.

Threat to the infrastructure and primary care

By the planned war large portions of the civilian population's vital infrastructure would also be destroyed. Resulting from military actions such as during the Gulf War, electrical outages are to be expected, without which pumping stations, purification plants and hospitals cannot work. The poor water quality is already today the primary reason for sickness and death among children. With a disruption of water supplies or further deterioration of water quality, a considerable rise in illnesses is to be expected.

Refugee movements

Today Iraq already has some 700.000 refugees; hundreds of thousands of Iraqis have fled the country because of persecution and repression by domestic policies. A military conflict could lead to additional immense refugee movements within the country, which would have catastrophic consequences in case the food accommodations cannot be provided. The same applies to the case if refugees are held back at closed borders. A confidential UN report estimates that 1.5 million people would try to flee from Iraq, for the most part to Turkey and Iran. The heavily mined borders of Iraq hold further dangers for the refugees, and aid organizations face serious problems in providing humanitarian aid to these people. In addition, enormous logistical problems would come with approaching winter.

Humanitarian and political impacts in Iraq and in the region

A war in Iraq would have a destabilizing effect on the entire region and could bring about a humanitarian catastrophe of enormous magnitude. A forced collapse of the regime in Baghdad could trigger a civil war between the numerous religious fractions as well as the different political, ethnic and religious groups, resulting in a great number of civilian victims.

Furthermore, there is a threat of incalculable political rejection from the entire Near and Middle East or of a military expansion to neighboring countries. A war against Iraq would further intensify the Arab world's rejection of the western world.

Implications for peace and stability

With the new unilateralism of the U.S. since 11 September 2001 as well as the so-called Bush-Doctrine, which makes a military preventive attack into an active instrument of American foreign policy, the Bush administration has clearly allowed the use of violence as a means of international politics. A deployment of military force as a means of preventive self-defense is not legitimized by international law. A military attack on Iraq without approval by the UN Security Council would infringe on the prohibition on the use of force of the UN charter, which forbids any act of violence except for individual and collective self-defense. Without proven direct threat, a military intervention in Iraq cannot be referred to as an "act of preventive self-defense", but rather only as a war of aggression. According to Article 26, the German Constitution classifies a war of aggression as unconstitutional. To respond to Iraq's infringement on existing obligations and eventual breach of armament requirements with a military attack would also infringe on the principles of commensurability. The conflict with Iraq concerning the presumed production of weapons of mass destruction and the breach of armament controls must be solved politically, i.e. by exhaustion of all non-military means. Appropriate political pressures must also be exerted on other nations which are in possession of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons.

Weakening of the global legal system

A pre-emptive strike against Iraq would not only be a breach of international law, but could also set a dangerous precedent. For even now under the guise of fighting terrorism, military intervention is being misused as a substitute for foreign policy initiatives, and existing international standards of law are being ignored, such as in Chechenya, Palestine or Kashmir.

Political Demands:

1. Iraq must completely and effectively implement the Resolution of the UN Security Council 1441.
2. As development and humanitarian non-governmental organizations we demand all parties to the Iraqi conflict to avert the escalation of the conflict.
3. The pursuance of political goals, such as a change in the Baghdad regime, may not be mixed up with the war on international terrorism and may not serve as grounds for military intervention.
4. Military means are not the appropriate instrument for combating the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein or international terrorism, as long as all options of non-military actions (primacy of civil conflict resolution) have not been exhausted. This is not the case in the current situation.
5. Germany must not participate in a war against Iraq which is not in accordance with international law and which is politically and ethically unjustifiable. We ask the Federal Government and the German Parliament to continue to exert all efforts to achieve a political solution for the conflict and to deny every direct or indirect support of a military attack against Iraq, because a military preventive attack would not contribute to lasting conflict prevention.
6. A political solution may not be limited to the prevention of war and the control of weapons of mass destruction. The suffering of the Iraqi population under the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, the catastrophic effects of the embargo, but also the serious violation of human rights and the brutal political repression and persecution of the opposition demand an all-embracing political reaction of the Federal Government and the international community. As long as Kurdish refugees from northern Iraq cannot safely return to their homeland, they must be granted asylum in Germany instead of being deported.
7. A solution of the Iraqi conflict must be found under the roof of the United Nations and meet the concerns of the humanitarian consequences as well as political and military considerations. We expect the federal government to actively strive for a peaceful solution to the Iraqi conflict under the roof of the UN, for example in the form of a stability pact for the Near and Middle East, and to plead for a suspension of the sanctions against Iraq. In this position many of the VENRO member organizations will also be supported by numerous partner organizations from the U.S., Europe and the Arabian and Muslim world.

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