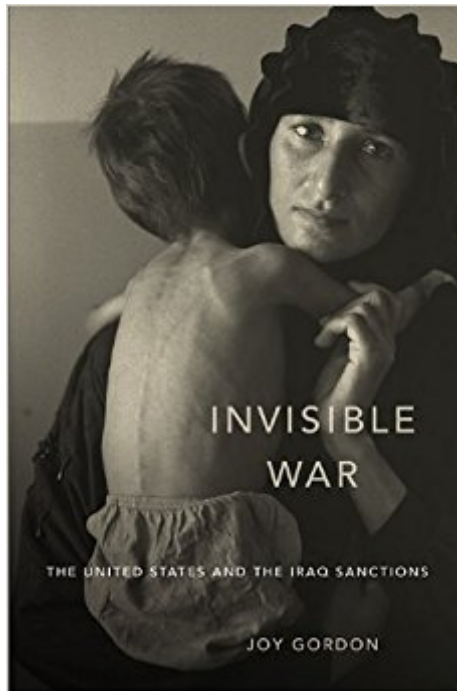


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# Invisible War: The United States And The Iraq Sanctions



## Synopsis

The economic sanctions imposed on Iraq from 1990 to 2003 were the most comprehensive and devastating of any established in the name of international governance. The sanctions, coupled with the bombing campaign of 1991, brought about the near collapse of Iraq's infrastructure and profoundly compromised basic conditions necessary to sustain life. In a sharp indictment of U.S. policy, Joy Gordon examines the key role the nation played in shaping the sanctions, whose harsh strictures resulted in part from U.S. definitions of "dual use" and "weapons of mass destruction," and claims that everything from water pipes to laundry detergent to child vaccines could produce weapons. Drawing on internal UN documents, confidential minutes of closed meetings, and interviews with foreign diplomats and U.S. officials, Gordon details how the United States not only prevented critical humanitarian goods from entering Iraq but also undermined attempts at reform; unilaterally overrode the UN weapons inspectors; and manipulated votes in the Security Council. In every political, legal, and bureaucratic domain, the deliberate policies of the United States ensured the continuation of Iraq's catastrophic condition. Provocative and sure to stir debate, this book lays bare the damage that can be done by unchecked power in our institutions of international governance.

## Book Information

Paperback: 376 pages

Publisher: Harvard University Press; Reprint edition (April 2, 2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0674064089

ISBN-13: 978-0674064089

Product Dimensions: 6.2 x 1 x 9.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 15.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 6 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #811,269 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #82 in Books > History > Military > United States > Operation Desert Storm #194 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > International & World Politics > Trades & Tariffs #313 in Books > History > Middle East > Iraq

## Customer Reviews

In one of the bitter ironies of our time, the UN Security Council--under the influence of the United States--destroyed a country in order to save it from its leader. In vividly portraying and thoroughly

documenting the history of the Western decapitation of Iraq through economic sanctions Joy Gordon fills a huge gap in the literature. Her penetrating research reveals the purposefulness of punishment, complicity, rationalization, and outright deception as standard practice in the role played by the United States, which lacked critical self-reflection and any clear sense of rules or the relationship between means and ends. This book will become a foreign affairs classic. (George A. Lopez, author of *The Sanctions Decade*) In a powerful, original book, Gordon offers the most sophisticated and comprehensive analysis of the origins, administration, and impact of the Iraq sanctions regime. This is a damning account of how international administration was used by the U.S. and the UK for policy ends. Despite the rhetoric of humanitarianism, the sanctions were, in Gordon's term, a humanitarian catastrophe. (Neta C. Crawford, Boston University) For a decade, Gordon has scoured UN and U.S. documents, interviewing officials of all ranks in her attempt to understand the engine rooms of the Iraq sanctions. The result is one of the most extensively researched books on the sanctions, a detailed account of how U.S. officials and diplomats brought about one of the 1990s' worst humanitarian crises. (Colin Rowat, University of Birmingham) This profoundly troubling story about U.S. foreign policy under three administrations reveals the shameful manner in which the United States relentlessly subverted the UN sanctions regime for Iraq, twisting it toward a purpose not approved by the Security Council. It is time Americans knew of the cruelty inflicted on Iraqis in our name behind closed doors at the UN in one of the morally most disastrous foreign policy decisions in American history. Gordon has documented it, calmly, courageously, meticulously, and convincingly. (Henry Shue, University of Oxford, author of *Basic Rights*) Gordon dissects U.S. policies and practices in forensic detail. It is a chilling, and telling, tale of how a complex and sophisticated bureaucracy, given an overriding security remit, could be content not merely to allow a humanitarian tragedy to take place but indeed to help to create it, not by active malevolence but through indifference. (Sir Harold Walker, former British Ambassador to Iraq) A superb critique of the U.S.-led sanctions against Iraq, which were imposed for twelve years, with disastrous humanitarian consequences for the civilian population. This wonderfully researched and written book has profound implications for ongoing assessments of American foreign policy, and deserves to be widely read, its argument absorbed at the highest levels of government. (Richard Falk, Princeton University, emeritus) Sanctions are frequently cast as a humane alternative to war. But in practice sanctions are often politically ineffective blunt instruments that do not conform to the moral principles of discrimination and proportionality. Gordon gives us the Iraq case in all its complexity, showing how international institutions became entangled in an area where the goalposts were moved in mid-game. Many of the weakest, poorest, and most vulnerable paid the price. The

continued use of sanctions in a variety of contexts poses many hard questions. This book provides an excellent place to start the questioning. (Joel H. Rosenthal, President, Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs)[An] excellent book. (Andrew Cockburn London Review of Books 2010-07-22)The devastation of much of Iraqi society between 1990 and 2003 through [UN economic] sanctions, driven by the U.S. and to a lesser extent the UK, is a story that has been buried for the most part under layer on layer of diplomatic technicalities, obfuscation and sheer indifference. Joy Gordon's important book not only sets out the story superbly well, but demonstrates its wider implications for our understanding of economic sanctions, international law and global governance. She shows that a commitment to scholarly rigor and a commitment to common humanity can be mutually reinforcing, and her book deserves to be read and discussed widely...Through careful, nuanced analysis Gordon argues persuasively that international law as it stands is ill-equipped to recognize, never mind prosecute and punish, the horrors that were inflicted through the institutions of global governance. (Eric Herring Times Higher Education 2010-09-23)With this book, Gordon, a philosophy professor at Fairfield University, merits membership in that university's history department as well. This is more than an ethical or legal treatise. It is a solid historical reconstruction of the sanctions imposed on Iraq from 1990 to 2003 and of the persistent U.S. leadership in this effort. Especially impressive is Gordon's combing of the sprawling U.S. and UN records over those 13 years. Her findings are somber. For example, she reports, most studies estimate that "at least 500,000 children under age five who died during the sanctions period would not have died under the Iraqi regime prior to sanctions." She also punctures holes in the argument that the Iraqi suffering was due to the abusive manipulation of the sanctions by the Saddam Hussein regime. She documents a consistent U.S. policy spanning the presidencies of George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush that linked sanctions to regime change, thus eliminating any motivation for Saddam to comply. Moreover, the bureaucracy and the rules governing the sanctions not only gave the United States a virtual veto that not only blocked changes but assured their severely restrictive implementation. In 1995, then UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali described sanctions as a "blunt instrument." In the Iraqi case, as *Invisible War* starkly shows, sanctions can be not just blunt but also ineffective. (L. Carl Brown Foreign Affairs 2010-11-01)Joy Gordon has crafted a well researched and sobering story of the US-led failure of international governance in the case of the 13 years of sanctions on Iraq. The underlying argument made is that the UN Charter's mandate to achieve "health, education and economic development" was fatally compromised by a U.S. policy which was premised on "an ongoing commitment to regime change."...The book speaks with a genuine and well informed anger...Gordon's important

book is a cautionary tale of what happens to a state when the full mechanisms of international sanctions are placed upon it regardless of consequence. Gordon admits that U.S. policy was not calculated to destroy the Iraqi population but rather was "deeply indifferent" to the consequences of its actions. Arguably much of the story of the post-2003 occupation is a legacy of such consequences. (James Denselow Huffington Post 2010-11-18) Gordon, in her meticulous study of the evidence, has produced a classic political-moral tract: the inside story of the U.N. economic sanctions against Iraq, from the invasion of Kuwait through three presidencies, when American obstructionism disregarded the sanctions' original purpose and reduced a once prosperous nation to a primitive state. (Raymond A. Schroth National Catholic Reporter 2010-11-26) While most Americans have largely forgotten the long decade of U.S. led sanctions on Iraq, Gordon forces attention back to their long-lasting effects on the Iraqi state and society. She offers a deeply researched account of American and United Nations policies towards the sanctions which captures the contradictions between an overt focus on forcing Saddam Hussein to surrender his WMD programs and a deeper interest in maintaining containment ("keeping Saddam in a box") and pushing for regime change--contradictions which remain deeply relevant to current debates about Iran. Gordon tracks the effects of the sanctions on Iraqis, which drove international outrage as the decade of the 1990s dragged on but which most of the world now seems eager to forget. (Marc Lynch Foreign Policy blog 2010-12-14)

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For years I hoped that someone would write such a scholarly and well referenced book as this, and it has exceeded my expectations. Meticulously assembled from available sources, including interviews, this book should serve as a starting point for anyone attempting to understand how such a tragedy could have been inflicted and why. The brutality of those 13 years are virtually forgotten, bracketed by over a decade of warfare and destruction before and after. But this additional sad chapter of Iraqi history covers yet another type of war, as the title suggests, and any Iraqi born after 1980 has lived in a country experiencing virtually continuous war. Personally, I lived in Canada during the 1990s, with relatives in Iraq. I thought of them and their suffering every time I put food in my mouth and felt both shame and helplessness. This book helped me understand how the United Nations works, in particular the pernicious flaws of the Security Council, the role of the Iraqi regime, and insight into the heartless policy mercilessly advanced by the American regime. That the sanctions did not achieve their stated goals is a separate topic, the population suffered and the

regime's control of them was strengthened. But the idea of such sanctions on any country should be viewed as the modern equivalent of a medieval siege and should have no place in the modern world.

This is an important read for anyone that is interested in the region or International Affairs. The author is very detailed and uses well sighted evidence to show just how barbaric the sanctions regime was. Despite being seen as the more humane option, it destroyed an entire generation of people. You take away from this book not only an understanding of the sanctions in Iraq, but a clearer thinking process to gauge the benignity of todays affairs, from P2P in Libya to the developing disaster in Syria. But be prepared, if you have any humanity in you that is, you will find yourself fighting to hold back tears as you read through the chapters.

Quite possibly one of the best nonfiction books I've read. It is quite archival which may turn some off but that means that its filled with great information

Excellent succinct and powerful look into an overlooked but crucial part of US history and involvement in Iraq that is more relevant than ever today.

What can possibly sound more benign than "economic sanctions" when talking about a means of projecting national will on another nation? Certainly not "carpet bombing" or "shock and awe". Yet it's possible that the casualties inflicted on Iraq by US-led sanctions caused more death and misery than both military campaigns waged by two Bush Administrations, and an occupation that continues under President Obama. If economic sanctions were a form of taxation, they would be labeled regressive: they hit hardest those who can least afford them. Indeed, it is possible that in excess of half a million Iraqi children died as a result of economic sanctions. In her new book, Professor Gordon leaves no shred of evidence unexamined and amasses an unparalleled body of proof that economic sanctions are every bit as terrible as conventional weapons yet unlike those weapons, they are aimed not at military targets, but at the greater civilian population, and it is that population which endures unimaginable suffering, suffering which inflicted by the military would result in international calls for war crimes tribunals. Instead, this silent, deadly force stayed below the radar of all but the most diligent reporters and analysts and was ignored by the world while a once-functioning nation was ground to near destruction.

This may be the most important book published this year about American foreign policy. Jo Gordon's meticulous research provides a detailed account of how the United States manipulated and controlled the creation and administration of brutal sanctions against Iraq between 1990 and 2003 that according to most credible accounts resulted in the deaths of at least 500,000 innocent children under 5 years old. I can't imagine a more important book for American citizens to read in order to understand the way their country really operates in the world. The evidence does not suggest that American officials intended to kill masses of innocent Iraqi children, but that they were coldly indifferent to the collateral damage caused by their actions. They wanted to totally defang Saddam Hussein and force regime change, even though this was never a stated aim of the sanctions, and simply ignored and suppressed overwhelming evidence of the immense humanitarian damage they were causing. A series of senior career UN humanitarian officials working in Iraq resigned in protest at the carnage the sanctions policy was creating. Gordon's book is particularly valuable because she is able to reconstruct how US officials cleverly and amorally used bribes, threats and inducements to win UN Security Council approval of the extreme sanctions regime in the first place and then to control it for the next 13 years. Yemen, one of only two countries to vote against the program had all its American foreign aid cut off three days later, for example. The Russians, the Chinese and many elected member states of the Security Council at the time received concessions or bribes to win their approval. Gordon also shows how American officials lobbied to create a system in which any of the 15 permanent and temporary members of the SC could veto any contract to bring in desperately needed humanitarian aid, and then repeatedly used its own veto to place holds on billions of dollars worth of contracts, often without providing any explanation, in an obvious attempt to keep Iraq, which they had bombed back to the stone age in 1991, unable to repair its decimated infrastructure, most significantly its destroyed electricity grids and its water treatment capacity, leading to a series of deadly epidemics, as well as widespread malnutrition and anemia. If you love your country this book will make you angry and ashamed of the behavior of both Republican and Democratic administrations responsible for what can fairly be called a genocide. When you combine this information with American financial, military and logistical support for Saddam's 8-year war against Iran in the 1980s, even after he used chemical weapons against the Iranians and his own people, the Kurds, plus the illegal and immoral invasion and occupation of Iraq that began in 2003 and still continues, you will no longer wonder why they hate the United States.

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