

ENVIRONMENTAL WARFARE

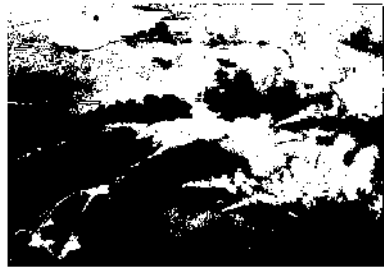
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It is the middle of day, and the sky is plain black. Smoke is everywhere—black, smothering smoke. The earth is spewing burning fire that bathes the darkness with bright orange-red. Drops are falling from the sky, but not rain drops. A scene from a science fiction movie? Or maybe an artistic take on what hell might look like? No, these are the Kuwaiti oil fields burning after being set on fire by the retreating Iraqi forces following the end of the Persian Gulf War. It was an act of sabotage that was aimed to impair the Kuwaiti oil production and subsequently their economy, but it ended up causing an environmental disaster of devastating consequences. One billion barrels of oil burned to flames over the course of around 10 months.



Oil lakes in Kuwait set aflame
fields.



Satellite picture of burning Kuwaiti oil

Today, many years later, Kuwait is still struggling with the aftermath of the catastrophe. Reports have been coming out of Kuwait over the last two decades of increased rates of lung diseases, cancers, and breathing difficulties. Johnathan Lash, who once was the president of the World Resource Institute, said with regards to the incident: “What many recall as a short-lived conflict resulting in the liberation of Kuwait was an environmental disaster -- one from which the region and its people have yet to recover.”

Around the same time period, another war-related disaster hit the region: the Gulf War oil spill. Described as the largest oil spill in history, the spill was an act of strategic sabotage that caused around 4,000,000 to 6,000,000 US barrels of oil to leak into the gulf. Recovery was slow, and the effects of the spill lingered for over a decade.

These two cases of ecological assaults were probably more concerned with inflicting an economical damage rather than an environmental one. But, that is not always the case. In 1988, 5000 people from the city of Halabja in southern Kurdistan, Iraq, were killed, and another 10,000 were injured in what is described as one of the worst genocidal massacres in history. The attack was carried using internationally prohibited chemical weapons that continued to cause damage for years to come. To this day, children are born with deformations and congenital defects as a result of the chemical genocide.



Jian Aziz Ali was born the day of the attack. She studies Sport Education at Halabja University and plays volleyball in the Halabja microcephaly, and is unable to walk or speak. Here she's holding her son, Arish Aziz Ali, who was born with a congenital malformation of the right foot. (I.B.Times).



Aram Karim Hama Hussein (left) and Ana Karim Hama Hussein, who were born with

The more recent Iraqi war of 2003 is itself not devoid of environmental devastations. The purported use of depleted Uranium and white Phosphorus in military assaults by the U.S. army has led to the manifestation of birth defects and cancers in afflicted areas—most notably Fallujah and Basra. Dr. Samira Alani in the city of Fallujah reported: *“it's common now in Fallujah for newborns to come out with massive multiple systemic defects, immune problems, massive central nervous system problems, massive heart problems, skeletal disorders, babies being born with two heads, babies being born with half of their internal organs outside of their bodies, Cyclops babies literally with one eye -- really, really, really horrific nightmarish types of birth defects.”*

A September 2012 study published in the Bulletin of Environmental Contamination and Toxicology reinforces Dr. Alani's assertions: *“Between October 1994 and October 1995, the number of birth defects per 1,000 live births in Al Basrah Maternity Hospital was 1.37. In 2003, the number of birth defects in Al Basrah Maternity Hospital was 23 per 1,000 livebirths. Within less than a decade, the occurrence of congenital birth defects increased by an astonishing 17-fold in the same hospital.”*

These sickening war crimes and war consequences point to a vitally weak link in the international policy that falls short when it comes to dealing with the environmental consequences of warfare. When the UN's Special Commission was set up to eliminate Iraq's WMDs after the 1991 Gulf War, it did not succeed in removing the chemical weapons that were subsequently used in the Halabja massacre. All these warning signs call for the immediate need of an international environmental policy overhaul to make amends that take in consideration all possible consequences when forging external policy.