

U.S. Military Burn Pits Resulted in Ongoing Air Pollution and Lead Poisoning in Iraq

Residents whose locales are contaminated by depleted uranium are not the only ones at risk of environmental illnesses. In 2016, [researchers](#) revealed that Iraqi folks who merely lived *near* U.S. military bases had significantly higher levels of lead in their systems. The culprit? Military [burn pits](#). Although doing so is against regulations stipulated by both the Environmental Protection Agency and the Pentagon, the U.S. military has established numerous, large-scale pits throughout Iraq to incinerate its own military waste.

Throughout the course of the ongoing “war on terror” in Iraq, U.S. military personnel have reportedly created approximately two hundred and seventy burn pits throughout the country. Some span up to ten acres and burn up to fifty tons of waste per day, many of which are comprised of ammunition, explosives, pesticides, pharmaceuticals, and toxic heavy metals.

The researchers found that, among the Iraqi population, there is indeed a correlation between the disturbingly high levels of lead and the increased rates in premature births and miscarriages. For example, in a study of deciduous teeth, a sample taken from an Iraqi child with birth defects had [fifty times](#) the amount of lead of those donated from Iran and Lebanon.

Prior to the 2003 invasion, Iraq passed several pieces of regulatory legislation [in response](#) to air pollution that had been caused by earlier U.S. invasions. However, because the most recent invasion forced the Iraqi government to allocate most of its funding to military defense—rather than environmental—spending, such laws proved ineffective.

The U.S. Pushed for Sanctions that Led to a Large-Scale Shortage of Drinkable Water in Iraq

Perhaps the cruelest of the U.S.’s attacks against Iraq is its knowing facilitation of water contamination throughout the country. According to a 2007 [article](#) published in *The Progressive*, partially declassified documents from the Pentagon show that, after the Gulf War, the U.S. pushed sanctions against the importation of water treatment chemicals to Iraq. These sanctions led to the hyper-degradation of the country’s water supply and were in direct violation of the [1979 protocol](#) to the Geneva Convention, which states, in part:

It is prohibited to attack, destroy, remove, or render useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as foodstuffs, crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies, and irrigation works.

The report’s original author, Professor Thomas J. Nagy, cites a Defense Intelligence Agency document entitled “Iraq Water Treatment Vulnerabilities.” The document acknowledges that Pentagon officials were aware of the litany of diseases—such as cholera, diphtheria, hepatitis, measles, meningitis, and typhoid—that would likely result from the U.S.-led sanctions. The document, dated January 22, 1991, states, in part:

Iraq will suffer increasing shortages of purified water because of the lack of required chemicals and desalination membranes. Incidences of disease, including possible epidemics, will become probable unless the population were careful to boil water.

The ongoing internal displacement caused by the 2003 U.S. invasion has only made drinkable water more inaccessible within Iraq. Those who have been displaced are left to stay with host families or in camps, which has in turn led to infrastructural chaos. Although [31,000 tons](#) of waste are produced in Iraq per day, only 4,000 are collected by waste management. As a result, Iraqi civilians are forced to dispose of their sewage into streets and natural waterways. Currently, approximately half of the households in Iraq lack access to drinkable water.