 Should the United States continue to employ sanctions against Iraq?

**By John Curley**  
CRUSADER NEWS EDITOR

"As the presidential transition progresses, it is clear that the sanctions regime currently employed by the United States on Iraq will not do. Broad import and export restrictions have failed to accomplish the policy goals of the US-led coalition in the post-Gulf War world. Iraq has not permitted arms inspections since 1998, and it is no closer to doing so now than three years ago. The United States refuses to remove the sanctions without being allowed to inspect Iraq for weapons, and Iraq will not admit inspectors while sanctions are in place. Thus a deadlock exists that continues today, even as thousands of Iraqi citizens suffer. President Bush recognizes that there must be a change, but there are limits to what he can do.

The new administration correctly realizes that there are numerous problems with the current situation. The sanctions regime was initially created with international support. Ten years later, the United States is hard-pressed to find more than a handful of nations willing to continue to isolate Iraq. Additionally, widespread oil smuggling is rendering the sanctions useless, while at the same time making a mockery of the U.N.’s efforts to condemn Iraq president Saddam Hussein’s dictatorship.

Most importantly, the sanctions currently in place are devastating Iraq’s civilian population. According to figures released shortly after the last explosion of UN weapons inspectors in 1998, one in five Iraqi children are malnourished. The World Health Organization says Middle Eastern nations should spend close to $30 per capita on medicine. The oil-for-food program monitored by the UN allows Iraq to spend just $2-3 per person.

Though it is apparent that change is necessary, it is unlikely that the Bush administration will get rid of sanctions altogether, and for an important reason. The foremost concern of the US is the extent to which Iraq could alter the safety and stability of the Middle East.

Three years have passed since last time the United Nations has been able to verify that Iraq was free of weapons of mass destruction. Defense policy makers in the US must assume the worst possible case. In Iraq, the worst likely scenario is that Mr. Hussein has been able to rebuild an arsenal of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, along with the missiles to deliver them. Unreported revenue from oil smuggling could have easily supplied the capital to finance rearming. Given the time and the money available to Iraq, it is very possible that the United States is dealing with an extremely potent power in a volatile area.

These facts make it easier to understand why President Bush has made Iraq a foreign policy priority. He recognizes that preventing Iraq from developing the capacity to wage war is vital to the security interests of the United States. This is especially important in a region that is already marked with controversy and anti-US sentiment.

Since the end of the Gulf War, the US government has linked the issues of economic sanctions with the issue of arms inspections. If Iraq would not permit inspections, there would be no end to the embargo. The stalemate situation that has caused so much strife can only deter the United Nations, which cannot search for weapons, and the Iraqi people, who are suffering while Mr. Hussein tests Washington’s resolve.

During his confirmation process, Secretary of State Colin Powell indicated that the United States may be planning to move toward de-linking these issues. Instead of requiring a green light from UN inspectors, the US could focus on making narrower sanctions, on military equipment and dual-use goods, more effective. Selective sanctions would allow more oil money to be used for medicine and food. The idea here is to lessen the human suffering in Iraq, while at the same time prevent a weapons buildup.

To be sure, even making the more selective sanctions effective is no small task. But Bush and Powell should be applauded for recognizing the need for change. The sanctions regime of the last decade has not only failed to force Iraq to allow inspections, but it also wreaked havoc on innocent populations.

By distancing the two issues, the US seeks to alleviate the burden on ordinary civilians, while at the same time ensuring Middle Eastern security. To do this, it must maintain sanctions on military goods. It has apparently given up hopes of renewed inspections, and is taking the next best step.

Sanctions as a foreign policy tool have come under heavy criticism in recent years. Many of these criticisms are accurate, and it should also be noted that sanctions, as they have in Iraq, have failed many more times than they have succeeded. However, in this case, sanctions on military goods may be the best way to stop suffering among the civilian population of Iraq and at the same time keep Mr. Hussein’s military check.