

# Introduction

The years between two wars, 1991 to 2003, were not years of peace for the Iraqi people. A dictatorship at home and a divided UN Security Council abroad brought Iraqis fear, deprivation and suffering.

The Arab League, the Organisation of Islamic Countries and the European Union all failed to play a role in this conflict because of their own internal ineptitude and weakness. The international public, citizens in all parts of the world, displayed a sense of justice and took over the role governments should have played in the Iraq crisis in supporting peaceful solutions based on human rights and international law.

Much has been written on this period, often with great insight and value in contributing to the debate about the international structures needed to prevent a recurrence of a conflict of such a kind and origin. However, most reviews look at Iraq from the vantage point of disarmament and international security.

As an insider who became an outsider, I cannot accept the politically convenient notion that the desolate state of Iraq can be explained in simple black and white terms. It cannot.

My interaction with the Government of Iraq, with the UN Security Council, with the UN Secretary General, with an intricate system of UN agencies, programmes and units and with non-governmental organisations confirmed an unusual complexity of participation in the Iraq crisis. This complexity needs to be explained in order to fully understand the causes of the conditions in Iraq as they evolved from 1990 onwards.

More than three decades in the United Nations, including my time in Baghdad, made it almost mandatory that I should contribute to such an understanding. Many UN colleagues at senior levels and others no longer in the organisation were persistent in reminding me to do so.

From the beginning I knew that an analysis of the causes of the Iraq crisis would not be enough. In order to contribute to the pressing debate about the reform of the multilateral machinery created in 1945 to prevent

conflicts, the canvas needed to be broader. The review had to deal with the intractable issue of the options that the Government of Iraq, the UN Security Council and the wider international community had in dealing with this crisis. The question which must be answered is: why were these options forfeited at the expense of the people of Iraq, the standing of the United Nations and the wider Middle East peace process.

The picture which emerged in the course of a year of reflecting, consulting and writing did not come as a surprise. All parties to this conflict, including the UN Secretariat, had options. The fate of a nation could have been different – more humane and consistent with internationally defined standards of life – had the protagonists opted for dialogue and honest intentions. The United Nations could have emerged as a winner by helping to solve a crisis. International law would have been confirmed as the universally acceptable basis for international relations. The world would have been less confused and a more secure place today.

This was not to be. Narrow national interests, rather than the needs of the international community for security, peace and development prevailed.

A dictator has been removed, economic sanctions have ended, weapons of mass destruction have not been found. The aftershock of this turbulent time, however, continues to be felt with far reaching consequences for the people of Iraq, for peace in the Middle East and for global political stability.

The investigation of the \$64 billion UN Oil-for-Food Programme is part of this aftershock. It was a wise decision by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to appoint an independent commission headed by Paul A. Volcker, the former chairman of the US Reserve Bank, to look into allegations of UN corruption but allocating \$35 million of Iraqi funds to finance this investigation was a serious impropriety, which will not be forgotten by the Iraqi population.

The Volcker commission's 2005 findings point to weaknesses in the UN Secretariat's management of the humanitarian programme but not institutional misuse of entrusted resources, or corruption. Unfortunately, the role played by the UN Security Council in the conduct of the Oil-for-Food Programme was outside the remit of the commission. I consider this a serious omission because ultimate oversight of the Programme rested with the UN Security Council and not the UN Secretariat.

The failure of the UN to protect the people of Iraq cannot be explained by the commission's findings. Political manipulation and fundamental shortcomings within the UN Security Council, however, would have been proper subjects for the investigation.