

# a new Gulf War: the real cost

War on Iraq could have a devastating impact on the lives and health of combatants, Iraqi civilians and people in neighbouring countries, on the environment of Iraq and on the rest of the world.

## CASUALTIES

- Possible deaths on all sides during a 'conventional' conflict and the following three months range from 48,000-261,000
- If civil war breaks out within Iraq and nuclear attacks are launched, the range is 375,000 to 3,900,000
- Deaths from other indirect and longer-term adverse health effects of the war in Iraq and beyond could total an additional 200,000

## THE WEAPONS

- War, sanctions and UN weapons inspections have reversed and retarded but probably not eliminated Iraq's chemical, biological and long-range missile capacities
- The US has developed and stockpiled many new weapons of all kinds, such as earth-penetrating nuclear missiles known as 'bunker busters'

## THE ENVIRONMENT

- Widespread damage to the environment of Iraq and possibly neighbouring countries
- Oil wells fired, creating oil spills and toxic smoke
- Troop movements and landmines destroy fragile desert ecology
- Bombardment destroys cities and topsoil
- Chemical, biological and possibly radiological pollution of land, sea, rivers, atmosphere

## GLOBAL IMPACT

- Refugees escaping the conflict die in large numbers and put strain on neighbouring countries; emergency relief costs billions
- Destabilisation of other Middle Eastern countries including domestic unrest, repression
- Likely increase in acts of terrorism
- Possible US and world recession, with greatest impact felt by poorer countries – oil prices up, trade down, markets unpredictable
- The cascade effect: from the effect on an individual combatant to the effect an injury on one combatant has on other combatants, to their families, to their community, to society in general and then to the state and internationally

## A COUNTRY IN RUINS

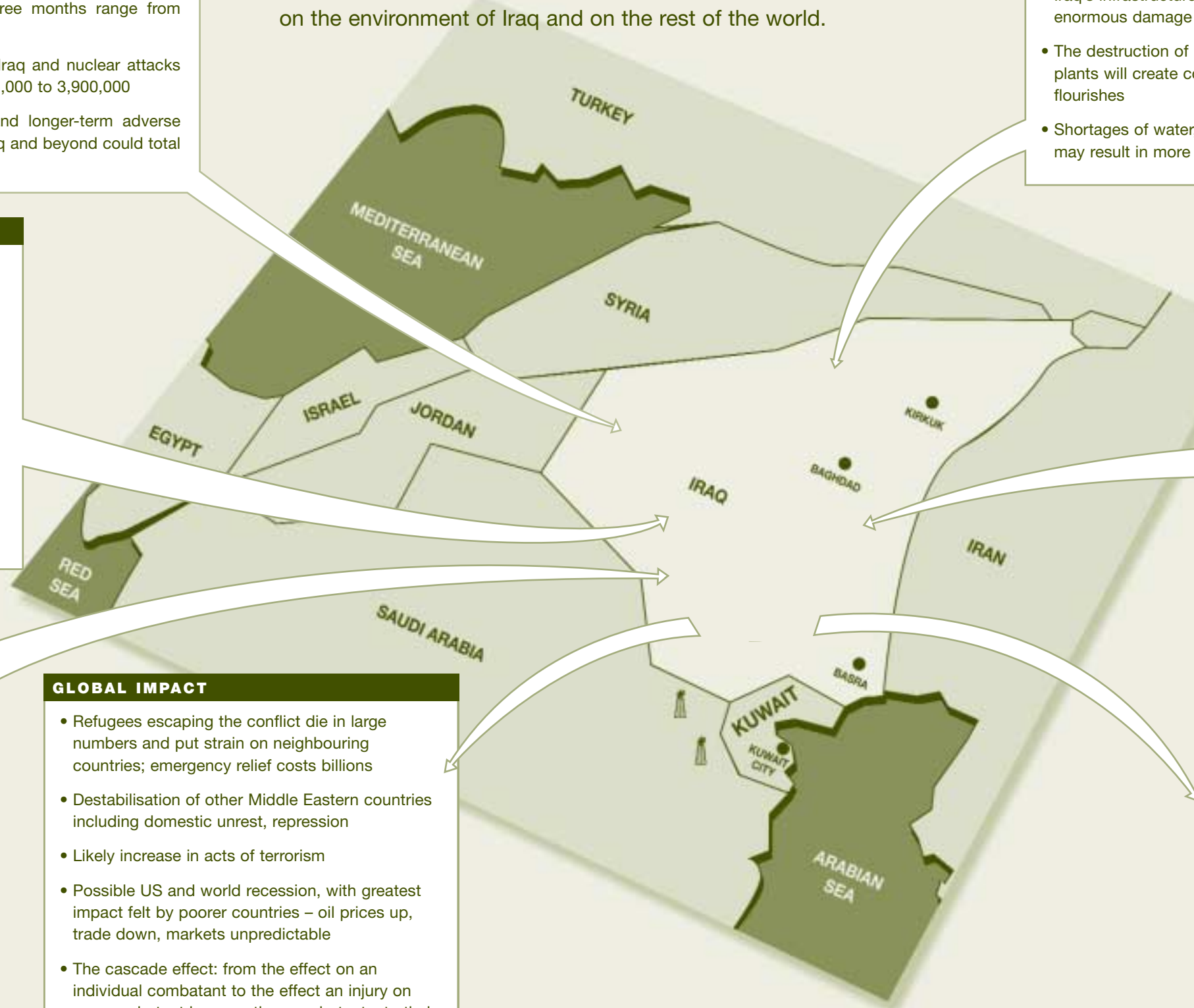
- Iraq's infrastructure, already seriously damaged by the earlier war, will suffer enormous damage in initial air attacks and subsequent urban conflict
- The destruction of roads, railways, homes, hospitals, factories and sewage plants will create conditions in which the environment is degraded and disease flourishes
- Shortages of water, food, and energy resources lead to epidemic diseases that may result in more deaths than those caused directly by the conflict

## HEALTH OF IRAQIS

- Humanitarian catastrophe engulfs already weakened and unhealthy Iraqi civilians – refugees, displaced persons, war-wounded, vulnerable groups especially young children
- People suffering from the immediate impact of war are more susceptible to further health hazards and less able to mobilise their own resources for survival and reconstruction
- Physical health effects include disability, infectious diseases, stillbirths, underweight new-borns, diseases of malnutrition, possibly more cancers
- Mental health effects include post-traumatic stress disorder, long-term psychiatric illness, behavioural disturbance
- Health services, already running well below capacity, cannot cope with immediate demands or offer longer-term rehabilitation or preventive health care

## FINANCIAL BURDENS

- All sides will pay a heavy financial cost, including arms spending, cost of subsequent occupation of Iraq, relief and reconstruction, possibly exceeding \$150-200bn
- The US is likely to spend \$50-200bn on the war and \$5-20bn annually on the occupation
- Total economic collapse in Iraq
- A projected war cost of \$100bn would fund about four years of health expenditure to address the health needs of the world's poorest people



All information drawn from references cited in *Collateral Damage: the health and environmental costs of war on Iraq*, Medact, London, 2002.

Chart adapted with permission from one on pp 18-19 of the *New Internationalist*, No. 236/October 1992.