

**KUWAIT'S "STOLEN" INCUBATORS:
THE WIDESPREAD REPERCUSSIONS OF A MURKY INCIDENT**

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Nearly a year after Middle East Watch thought the allegations had been laid to rest, a controversy has resurfaced over whether or not Iraqi troops robbed incubators from hospitals in the early days of their occupation of Kuwait, deliberately causing scores or even hundreds of premature babies to die.

After the country's liberation on February 26, 1991, journalists and human rights organizations, local and foreign, satisfied themselves that the story was baseless. Although the occupiers were responsible for many atrocities, this particular claim was widely dismissed as propaganda, aimed at persuading Western public opinion that "the rape of Kuwait" had to be stopped, by force of arms. Some recalled the World War I claims by Britain and France that German soldiers had bayoneted Belgian babies - claims later acknowledged by the allies as having been false.¹

However, in a surprising new twist, Kuwaiti officials and U.S. firms currently or formerly employed by the Kuwaiti government have maintained in recent press interviews and statements that the sensational story was accurate after all. In a February 4 cable, the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait added its voice in support of this story. In light of these developments, Middle East Watch has decided retrospectively to publish the results of its own investigations over the past sixteen months into the alleged stolen incubators. We are motivated to do so by the belief that the apparently deliberate propagation by the Kuwaiti government of false accounts of atrocities has done a deep disservice to the cause of human rights and diverted the attention from the real violations of human rights committed by Iraqi forces in Kuwait.²

¹ An unfortunate result of the false accounts of atrocities in World War I was that they contributed to skepticism about reports during World War II about Nazi death camps – which turned out to be all too true.

² In addition to hundreds of extrajudicial killings committed by Iraqi forces in Kuwait, Iraqi occupying authorities detained more than ten thousand of Kuwait's citizens and residents, many of whom are still missing.

Introduction

First reports about the alleged incubator atrocity in occupied Kuwait began to circulate in September 1990. Alarming accounts of widespread abuses by Iraqi security forces were circulating; but Iraq had refused to allow any independent body to visit Kuwait. On October 4, Taha Yassin Ramadhan, the Iraqi deputy prime minister and a senior member of the ruling Revolutionary Command Council, threatened "to cut off the leg of any person" who entered Kuwait without permission to conduct such an investigation.³ In October, Middle East Watch representatives went to the neighboring states of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, as well as to Jordan and Egypt, where many Kuwaiti exiles had gathered, to interview newly arrived refugees.

Over the next four months, dozens of doctors and other health professionals who stayed on in Kuwait after the August 2 invasion, but one after another eventually got out, were interviewed by Middle East Watch either in person or by telephone. Most were Kuwaiti citizens, others foreign nationals. Most had had first-hand knowledge of conditions at those hospitals with major maternity units. By late 1990, Middle East Watch felt that the allegations about the deaths of new-born infants as a consequence of the looting of their incubators were, at best, highly exaggerated. No one had provided credible testimony as to the death of any premature infant in this fashion; and most witnesses denied categorically that such incidents had occurred.

In December 1990 and January 1991, Middle East Watch publicly pointed out that it could not independently confirm the allegations of incubator deaths. Without access to Kuwait, however, it was not possible to reach a definitive conclusion.

Although Middle East Watch found no credible evidence to support the charge of incubator killings, it has found ample proof of other serious violations by the Iraqi government in Iraq and in Kuwait. Well before the invasion of Kuwait, Middle East Watch attempted to call attention to the human rights atrocities of the Iraqi government.⁴ Our own research on the occupation of Kuwait documented hundreds of gross abuses committed by Iraqi forces.⁵

Immediately after liberation, a Middle East Watch mission travelled to Kuwait in a bid to reconstruct Iraq's actual human rights record in the country over the previous seven months. From March 12 - 31, 1991, a team visited all the hospitals from where it had been claimed that incubators had been removed. We interviewed dozens of hospital administrators, doctors, nurses and technicians at their workplaces, and we examined hospital and morgue records. We also interviewed cemetery workers and inspected cemetery records.

³ Nora Boustany, "Iraqi Rebuffs Suggestions of Pullout," *Washington Post*, October 5, 1990.

⁴ See, e.g., Middle East Watch, *Human Rights in Iraq*, first published in February 1990.

⁵ During the seven-month occupation, Middle East Watch issued the following reports on Iraqi violations of human rights in Kuwait: "Iraq's Practices Towards Foreigners in Kuwait," August 1990; "The Conduct of Iraqi Troops in Kuwait," September 1990; "Deteriorating Human Rights Conditions Since the Early Occupation," November 1990; "Iraqi Human Rights Violations in Kuwait: an Update," December 1990; and "Human Rights in Iraq and Iraqi-Occupied Kuwait," testimony before the House Foreign Relations Committee, January 8, 1991.

In an interview with ABC Television on March 15 in Kuwait City, Middle East Watch felt confident enough about its findings to be able to announce that, while much medical equipment had been removed by the Iraqi authorities, there was no evidence to suggest that incubators had been taken or that premature babies had died as a direct consequence of actions taken by the occupiers.⁶

The much-repeated claim made during fall 1990 that "premature babies had been removed from incubators and left on the cold floor to die" appeared to be false. This conclusion was buttressed by further interviews during March with senior Kuwaiti medical personnel in London and Cairo by Middle East Watch. Western journalists conducting their own parallel investigations came to similar conclusions.⁷ Later, so too did other human rights organizations such as the U.K. and U.S. branches of Physicians for Human Rights. Amnesty International, which had credited the original claim during the occupation⁸, found "no reliable evidence" to support the allegation when its investigators visited Kuwait after liberation.

Nonetheless, it appeared that there *had* been an unusually large number of burials of new-born babies in Kuwait during August 1990. One possible explanation was that there had been a higher than usual infant mortality rate due to shortages of vital medicines or of medical staff in post-natal units. Another theory was that the stress pregnant women were under, due to the invasion and occupation, had led to spontaneous abortions or miscarriages.

Another explanation that was more easily verified by Middle East Watch was that the uncertainties and dangers provoked by the invasion had led to a natural backlog of dead infants and fetuses in hospital morgues, awaiting burial. The Middle East Watch mission to Kuwait came up with concrete evidence to support this theory. At the al-Rigga cemetery -- one of only two graveyards in the country, and the only one mentioned in connection with incubator deaths -- a Middle East Watch representative interviewed the cemetery workers who had been there throughout the occupation. He also examined the cemetery records for the entire period of the occupation. These records had been carefully maintained and appeared to be complete.

There was one entry in the cemetery record on which it appeared the accounts of incubator deaths might have been erroneously based. On August 24, thirty infants were buried at al-Rigga, including four who had been stillborn and two fetuses from abortions. This was by far the largest number of burials for one day, and more than the monthly average. An examination of the records explained the aberration: nineteen of the thirty infants had died between June 27 and August 1, 1990 -- prior to the Iraqi invasion. The remaining eleven died at different hospitals on different dates during the first three weeks of August. There was no indication that any of them had died as a result of being pulled out of incubators.

⁶ At the end of its mission to Kuwait, Middle East Watch gave the same conclusion to *Washington Post* reporters in Kuwait. See, William Branigin and Nora Boustany, "Groups Probe Iraqi Torture in Kuwait," *Washington Post*, April 2, 1991.

⁷ See, e.g., Chris Hedges, "Freed Kuwaitis Tell of Iraqi Abuse Including Some Cases of Torture," *New York Times*, February 28, 1991; William Clairborne, "Kuwaiti Doctors Charge Torture, Killings by Occupiers," *Washington Post*, March 1, 1991.

⁸ Amnesty International, *Iraq/Occupied Kuwait: Human Rights Violations Since August 2, 1990*, December 19, 1990, pp. 57-8.

By August 24, it therefore appeared as if there was a backlog of babies at hospital morgues, primarily in the morgue of the Maternity Hospital. Kuwaiti Red Crescent officials and hospital administrators confirmed to Middle East Watch that this had been the case. In the mass flight to Saudi Arabia of native Kuwaitis and foreign residents, in some cases families were unable to claim the bodies of their new-born infants, and therefore left them in the hospital morgues. Hospitals themselves were very short-staffed; the majority of their nurses had been foreigners, primarily Asian women, and, in the wake of the invasion and reports of rapes, most nurses chose either to stay at home or try to leave the country. For native Kuwaitis, many of whom had good reason to fear arrest, ubiquitous Iraqi checkpoints along the roads to the hospitals and cemeteries presented a grave risk.

Apart from the entry for August 24, the al-Rigga cemetery records showed no other mass burials of infants. Middle East Watch also investigated the records of the second large cemetery called al-Sulaibekhat, and these records showed no mass burial of infants at any time during the seven-month occupation. Al-Sulaibekhat cemetery workers, who were interviewed by Middle East Watch, also testified that there were no such burials.

The Propaganda Campaign

The origins of the lurid allegations about stolen incubators and dead infants are obscure. Did those responsible for propagating the story genuinely believe that the incidents had taken place in the manner, and on the scale, they described to Western governments and the media? Or did they knowingly manufacture the larger claim out of a number of half-truths and unchecked assertions made by persons still inside Kuwait, for propaganda purposes? Whatever the reality, it is unarguable that the alleged atrocity was a perfect vehicle for enraging Western public opinion. At a time when opinion in the United States, and the West as a whole, was divided over the merits of sticking with economic sanctions against Iraq or pressing forward to war, the incubators story served the interest of those attempting to tip the balance toward war.

The key audience to be courted by the Kuwaiti government-in-exile was that in the United States. Within a few weeks of the invasion, Citizens for a Free Kuwait (CFK) was established in Washington, D.C.; similar groups were set up in European capitals. CFK became a lobbying group with intimate ties to the Kuwaiti embassy in Washington and drew almost all of its funds from the Kuwaiti government.⁹ CFK, in turn, contracted to hire the services of one of the largest and most powerful U.S. public relations firms, Hill & Knowlton. According to press reports, Hill & Knowlton was paid \$5.6 million between August and December 1990 and had 75 employees working on the Kuwait project. They included Craig L. Fuller, who had served as chief of staff to George Bush when he was vice president; and Robert K. Gray, founder of Gray & Co. which merged with Hill & Knowlton in 1986, and who served as President Ronald Reagan's 1981 inaugural committee co-chairman.¹⁰ Hill & Knowlton, according to other press reports, had a long-established, close

⁹ About 95 percent of CFK's funds came directly from the Kuwaiti government, according to its disclosure documents filed with the U.S. Department of Justice.

¹⁰ Gary Lee, "Kuwait's Campaign On the PR Front," *Washington Post*, November, 29, 1990; Gary Lee, "Kuwaitis Pay \$5.6 Million to Publicity Firm," *Washington Post*, December 19, 1990.

relationship with the U.S. Congressional Human Rights Caucus.¹¹

Hill & Knowlton spearheaded the public relations effort of the Kuwaiti government-in-exile during the fall of 1990; much of its efforts were devoted to disseminating reports of human rights abuses inside occupied Kuwait -- including the incubator allegations.

On October 10, for example, the Congressional Human Rights Caucus held a hearing during which a 15-year-old Kuwaiti girl identified only as Nayirah said that she saw Iraqi soldiers take babies from incubators at al-Addan Hospital, south of Kuwait City, causing them to die. She said:

The second week after the invasion, I volunteered at the Al-Adan hospital in Kuwait City, with 12 other women at the hospital who wanted to help. I was the youngest volunteer. The others were 20-30 years old. While I was there, I saw the Iraqi soldiers coming into the hospital with guns, and go into the room where 15 babies were in incubators. They took the babies out of the incubators, took the incubators and left the babies on the cold floor to die. It was horrifying. I could not help but think of my nephew, who if born premature, might have died that day as well.¹²

On November 27, the United Nations Security Council held a rare public session, to address the human rights situation inside Kuwait. In the course of lengthy testimony, Dr. Ibrahim Bahbahani, who identified himself only as a surgeon at a Kuwaiti hospital, said:

The hardest thing was burying the babies. Under my supervision, 120 newborn babies were buried the second week of the invasion. I myself buried 40 newborn babies that had been taken from their incubators.¹³

Both of these hearings and a press conference held after the Security Council meeting were organized from the Kuwaiti side by Hill & Knowlton and received widespread publicity. Two days after its human rights hearing, on November 29 the Security Council adopted Resolution 678, authorizing the use of war to drive Iraq out of Kuwait.¹⁴

¹¹ John R. MacArthur, "Remember Nayirah, Witness for Kuwait?" OpEd, *New York Times*, January 6, 1992. A detailed account of the relationship between Hill & Knowlton and the Congressional Human Rights Caucus was reported by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, *The Fifth Estate*, "To Sell a War," broadcast on January 6, 1992.

¹² "Testimony by Nayirah," before the U.S. Congressional Human Rights Caucus, Washington, D.C., October 10, 1990, pp. 2-3.

¹³ UNSC, Provisional Verbatim Record of the 2959th Meeting, New York, 27 November 1990, S/PV. 2959, p. 37. Ambassador Muhammed Abulhasan, Kuwait's permanent representative to the UN, presented Dr. Bahbahani to the Security Council as Dr. Issah Ibrahim.

¹⁴ Article 2 of UNSC Resolution 678, "Authorizes member States cooperating with the Government of Kuwait, unless Iraq on or before 15 January 1991 fully implements...the foregoing resolutions, to use all necessary means to uphold and implement Resolution 660 (1990) and all subsequent relevant Resolutions and to restore international peace and security in the area."

Lobbying efforts of this nature could be treated as legitimate acts on the part of the exiled Kuwaiti government, to garner maximum attention for its point of view, if it were not for the later discovery that key witnesses had either misrepresented themselves or deliberately omitted salient information.

Nayirah, it was recently confirmed, is the daughter of Kuwait's Ambassador to the United States, Shaikh Saud al-Nasser al-Sabah, a central figure in the pre-war diplomatic efforts and a member of the ruling family. No proof has so far been publicly presented that Nayirah was in fact present at al-Addan during August and September. On her behalf, Hill & Knowlton has recently said that she was working at the hospital but under an assumed name; if so, this was a dangerous activity for an al-Sabah, all of whom were being vigorously hunted by the Iraqi secret police at the time. It was especially risky in light of the fact that there were numerous Iraqi checkpoints she would have had to negotiate to reach al-Addan hospital, located some twelve miles south of Kuwait City, in the main oil-producing area which was heavily patrolled by Iraqi forces.

As for Dr. Bahbahani, his professional expertise is as an orthodontist, not a general surgeon as was implied by his testimony before the Security Council. More seriously, his testimony was flawed by repeated self-contradictions. On November 30, 1990, he told Middle East Watch that he had had direct knowledge of only forty babies, not 120, whom he and other Red Crescent colleagues had buried in August. They were told, he said, that the corpses had come from the Maternity Hospital, the largest such facility in the country. Dr. Bahbahani acknowledged that the bodies had been buried without being examined to determine their time and cause of death; as an orthodontist, he admitted he would not have had the expertise to conduct such examinations. In a March 18, 1991 interview with ABC News, Dr. Bahbahani backtracked still further, saying:

I buried around thirty. But my group, as a whole, they buried around 120. Now, from where these babies were taken, I don't know. Are these babies stillborn, or they are babies who died because of negligence? Are they babies who were taken from incubators? They could be a mix.

As a senior officer of the Kuwaiti Red Crescent Society, Dr. Bahbahani was a Kuwaiti government employee, as was another witness, Dr. Ali al-Huwail. At a November 11, 1990 press conference organized in Dhahran (Saudi Arabia) by the Kuwaiti Ministry of Information, Dr. al-Huwail stated that on August 20 the Iraqi occupying authorities had dismantled the premature babies unit at the Maternity Hospital and shipped all the incubators to Iraq. As a result of their removal from incubators, he said, between sixty and seventy babies had died. Dr. al-Huwail also said that he and his colleagues had buried over fifty babies, most of them premature.

Middle East Watch learned that Dr. al-Huwail did not have first-hand knowledge of the subject. By training, Dr. al-Huwail was a neurosurgeon who, prior to the invasion, had been in charge of outpatient clinics at the Military Hospital. During the occupation, he was appointed by the Iraqi authorities to a supervisory position at the "Health Directorate of the 19th Province," the name Iraq gave to the Kuwaiti Ministry of Health. He also worked for some time at the al-Razi Orthopedic Hospital, which did not have a maternity section.

Dr. Abdel-Rahman al-Sumait, another member of the Kuwaiti Red Crescent Society's executive committee, also testified to burying babies who had been removed from incubators. In its report issued

during the occupation, Amnesty International quoted an anonymous source as saying:

Premature babies at the Maternity Hospital died after Iraqi soldiers took them out of the incubators. This happened in August in the early days of the invasion. A total of 312 babies died this way. I personally took part in the burial of 72 of them in al-Rigga cemetery.¹⁵

In a December 1990 interview arranged by the Kuwaiti foreign ministry-in-exile with Middle East Watch, Dr. al-Sumait confirmed having been the source of this information, except that he denied having provided the 312 figure. Dr. al-Sumait told Middle East Watch that he could only vouch for the seventy two babies that he said he and others from the Kuwaiti Red Crescent had buried at al-Rigga around August 16.¹⁶ As to the source of his belief that they had died after being pulled from incubators, this was based partly on information provided by the drivers of vehicles transporting the bodies to the al-Rigga cemetery and partly on visual inspection. Many, perhaps the majority, looked as if they had been born prematurely, he said. It should be noted that Dr. al-Sumait is an internist and not a pediatrician or obstetrician.

In contrast to his colleague, by January 1991 Dr. al-Huwail had raised his initial November 11, 1990, estimate of sixty to seventy dead babies to ninety-two. Asked by the London *Sunday Times* about the claim of 312 incubator deaths, Dr. al-Huwail said that while this was a possibility, he knew of only ninety- two deaths. He claimed that after being alerted to the theft of incubators from the Maternity Hospital, he arrived there to find fifty babies dead. "It was brutal murder. Babies, tiny little babies, were simply thrown here and there," he said, adding that he and a colleague took the dead babies in two vans to al-Rigga cemetery. He added that he knew of forty-two other babies who died in the same way at al-Jahra and al-Addan hospitals, in satellite towns.¹⁷

Leaving aside the inconsistencies in accounts provided by the key witnesses, the central charge was implausible. Pre-invasion Kuwait had a resident population of about 2.1 million; on August 2, this figure must have been much lower, it being the height of the summer holidays when hundreds of thousands of Kuwaitis and better-off foreign residents were accustomed to vacationing abroad.

A typical North American city hospital serving a community of this size would have had only a fraction of the 312 incubators which Dr. al-Sumait implied were fully occupied when the Iraqi troops marched into the country. Even allowing for regional differences and the Kuwaiti government's generous spending on health services, it should have been apparent that the number was a considerable exaggeration. In fact, during the occupation, exiled Kuwaiti Health Ministry officials put the total number of incubators at about 200.¹⁸

¹⁵ Amnesty International, *Iraq/Occupied Kuwait*, pp 57-58.

¹⁶ The identity of Amnesty's source was reported to Middle East Watch by a Western journalist based in Canada.

¹⁷ Andrew Alderson, "Violation of Kuwait", *Sunday Times*, January 13, 1991.

¹⁸ In January 1991, Dr. Abdalla al-Rashid, the Assistant Deputy Minister of Health who was also president of the Kuwaiti Medical Association and a pediatrician, put at approximately 200 the number of incubators in Kuwait at the time of the Iraqi invasion, with about 120 at the Maternity Hospital. See, Physicians for Human Rights (U.S.), *Iraq-Occupied Kuwait: the Health Care System*, March 1991, p. 19

As became clear during Middle East Watch's March 1991 mission, the actual number was around 200, some of which may have been less sophisticated infant "warming beds" rather than true incubators. Most tellingly, judging by the situation at the Maternity Hospital -- the largest and most advanced post-natal facility in Kuwait -- the incubators' occupancy rate in early August was probably not much over twenty percent. Over the following weeks, this figure dropped to even lower levels, according to health workers at the hospital, as demonstrated in the section below on the Maternity Hospital.

These readily ascertainable facts did not prevent the allegations from gaining widespread credibility worldwide. President George Bush repeatedly referred to the allegation in the months leading to the start of the war on January 16, 1991. Several U.S. senators also cited the incubators story to justify their support for the Joint Congressional Resolution of January 12, 1991, authorizing war against Iraq.¹⁹ The resolution passed by a majority of six votes.

It was not only in the United States that the incubators story had far reaching political consequences. In Australia, several Labor Party senators reportedly changed their minds and reluctantly supported then Prime Minister Bob Hawke's proposal to join the allied coalition, citing this alleged atrocity as their reason for doing so, giving the Prime Minister the majority he needed. Other Western parliaments, such as those in Britain and Canada, heard similar emotional references to the babies as grounds for abandoning the sanctions squeeze on Iraq and going to war.

The Kuwaiti government-in-exile appears to have worked hard behind the scenes to support the allegations. This can be judged from the fact that during the occupation a number of Kuwaiti health professionals told Middle East Watch they had been contacted by groups affiliated with the government and told they should not speak out if they were not going to endorse the allegation of incubator deaths.

The incubators story was by far the most dramatic example of what was clearly wartime propaganda (although hostilities had not yet broken out between Iraq and the U.S.-led coalition, Kuwait was clearly at war with its neighbor at the time). But it was not the only example. In the Arab world, the Kuwaiti official media chose to emphasize stories of thousands of executions, tens of thousands of detentions and the widespread rape of women -- a particularly emotive issue. These accounts themselves proved to be exaggerations. Kuwaiti officials contacted by Middle East Watch during the occupation admitted privately that these figures were not fully substantiated; they believed the real figures for killings and for detainees were probably much lower. These officials felt that they were under no obligation to state publicly the more conservative estimates. They believed that psychological and public information campaigns were legitimate tools in combatting a flagrant act of violence and naked aggression.²⁰

¹⁹ By authority of section 2(a) of the Joint Resolution, "[t]he President is authorized, subject to subsection (b), to use United States Armed Forces pursuant to United Nations Security Council Resolution 678 (1990) in order to achieve implementation of Security Council Resolutions 660, 661, 662, 664, 665, 666, 667, 669, 670, 674, and 677."

²⁰ Citizens for a Free Kuwait, which assiduously issued a stream of reports about the unfolding situation inside Kuwait, was responsible for one particularly egregious claim. In January 1991, it said that Nasser al-Farrage, a prominent labor union leader, had died in detention the previous month, after torture at the hands of the Iraqi secret police. In reality, Middle East Watch learned that Mr. al-Farrage had died of cancer in hospital, a fact known at the time to his wife and numerous others. Middle East Watch found that Mr. al-Farrage had not been arrested by the Iraqi occupying forces; the only time he had ever been arrested was by the Kuwaiti government itself.

The Maternity Hospital

Most of the accounts of incubator deaths center around the Maternity Hospital, a 500-bed specialized hospital that is part of the al-Sabah Medical Complex run by the Kuwaiti Ministry of Health. It is located about six miles west of the center of Kuwait City and, prior to August 1990, housed about ninety incubators -- close to half of the estimated 200 incubators in the country.

i. Middle East Watch's visit

Middle East Watch visited the Maternity Hospital twice in March 1991. It found that all of the hospitals' incubators were accounted for. There were close to eighty incubators in two main neonatal wards (Special Care Units 1 and 2), seven in the Intensive Care Unit, and four in operating rooms. Dr. Ibrahim Abdel-Hadi Lanjawi, hospital director, flatly denied the claim that babies had been thrown out of incubators at this hospital by Iraqi forces. So did Dr. Samira al-Awadhi, the registrar of the neonatal section, Dr. Suad al-Issa, a pediatrician, and five other doctors, nurses and technicians closely associated with neonatal care at the hospital. All these witnesses were working at the hospital during the occupation.²¹

Maternity Hospital administrators as well as doctors and nurses working in the neonatal wards told Middle East Watch that the total number of babies in incubators was quite small during the occupation. By the second or third week of August, according to an Egyptian neonatologist who was senior registrar at the neonatal Intensive Care Unit, there were only eighteen babies in incubators in the hospital and the rest of the incubators were empty.²²

Another doctor, Dr. Fawziyya al-Qattan, a Kuwaiti obstetrician/gynecologist who worked at this hospital until mid-November when she left the country had also denied the allegations. She told Middle East Watch that all the incubators were still in the hospital at the time of her departure -- long after the incidents were alleged to have taken place. Dr. al-Qattan said that the staff hid Intensive Care Unit (ICU) incubators to protect them from the Iraqis because these incubators were expensive and difficult to replace. The staff also hid about forty other, non-ICU incubators from one of the two neonatal wards. She said that a larger than normal number of babies had died during the period in question, noting a development she attributed to the departure from Kuwait of trained staff needed to care for the newly born.²³

²¹ Middle East Watch relied primarily on the testimony of Kuwaiti health workers who were working during the occupation at the hospitals in the relevant departments.

²² Physicians for Human Rights (US), *Iraq-Occupied Kuwait: The Health Care System*, March 1991, 20-21. By the third week of August, the same doctor also reported to PHR, the Maternity Hospital was short of staff and medicine, and sanitary conditions had so deteriorated that she saw two cases of neonatal tetanus, an unusual occurrence at that hospital.

²³ Middle East Watch interviews, December 10 and 21, 1990.

The Maternity Hospital staff provided Middle East Watch with a detailed list of equipment and supplies taken by Iraqi troops, including most of the contents of a genetics laboratory. They explained that because of a shortage of staff and a dwindling number of patients one of the two neonatal wards had been shut down. They also showed where some incubators had been hidden, in a partitioned-off office, to prevent them from being removed. None had been stolen. The reason they hid the equipment, they said, was that all Kuwaiti hospitals were ordered to provide lists of all their equipment. Iraqi experts were sent to Kuwait to take complete inventories of equipment at public hospitals and other government institutions. This, and the fact that Iraqi occupying forces had begun their appropriation of Kuwaiti government property, including hospital equipment, induced health workers to hide instruments and medicines to prevent them from being taken by Iraqi forces.

The staff at the Maternity Hospital described how the Iraqi occupation interfered with the provision of health services by using part of the hospital as an officers' dormitory. This necessitated the placing of armed guards at the entrance of the hospital. As such, it probably discouraged some people from coming to the hospital. Considering the many checkpoints patients and their families had to negotiate to get to the hospital, they felt it was likely that many pregnant women chose to forgo prenatal care or gave birth at home.

Doctors at the Maternity Hospital corroborated Dr. al-Qattan's earlier account, saying that a combination of the flight of health personnel and the shortage of supplies had contributed to deaths of new mothers and newborn babies which under normal circumstances could have been prevented.

Some of the staff was familiar with the story of incubator deaths. When asked, they indicated that while it had not happened at their hospital it may have at the al-Addan, al-Jahra or al-Farwaniyya district hospitals.

ii. Dr. Ahmed Abdel-Aziz al-Hajeri's Account

In December 1990, Dr. al-Hajeri of the Kuwaiti Medical Office in Cairo told Middle East Watch that he had been an eyewitness to a large-scale theft of incubators at the Maternity Hospital by Iraqi troops, a theft that caused the deaths of scores of premature babies. He told Middle East Watch:

At the time of the invasion, the hospital had a total of 120 incubators, all of which were occupied. Because we had heard that the Iraqis were going to take the incubators we notified the families to come and take their babies from the incubators. Only sixty five families came and took their newborns. By the third week of August we still had fifty five in incubators. It was during that week that the Iraqis came fully armed and took out all the babies who were in the incubators and tossed them on the floor. They loaded the incubators in two military cargo vehicles and drove off. While they were loading them, they trained their guns on the doctors and nurses and prevented us from helping the dying babies. They took sixty five incubators in total, including fifty five that were occupied with premature babies. As a result, close to fifty babies died on that day.²⁴

²⁴ Middle East Watch interview, January 1991.

Dr. al-Hajeri's testimony is considerably flawed. He was unable to explain, for example, why Iraqi troops would take incubators that were occupied rather than the fifty five he said were empty at the time. Nor was he able to explain why medical staff did not try to save the lives of the infants by putting them in the remaining incubators once the troops left the hospital.

The fact that Dr. al-Hajeri was at the time working for the Kuwaiti Embassy in Egypt weighed against his uncorroborated testimony for two other reasons. Independent Kuwaiti doctors who were at Maternity while this event allegedly took place denied that it had happened. Moreover, other reports Dr. al-Hajeri provided to Middle East Watch turned out to be not based on checked facts.²⁵

iii. Dr. Abdalla al-Hammadi's Account

Dr. al-Hammadi has given several widely differing accounts of his knowledge of these allegations. In March 1991, he was asked by a team visiting Kuwait from Physicians for Human Rights (UK) about Iraqi atrocities. He told the team that he had seen tortured patients; he also reported missing equipment. But he did not mention either the incubator deaths or the theft of incubators.²⁶

But in an August 1991 hearing organized by the Congressional Human Rights Caucus on Iraqi war crimes, Dr. al-Hammadi gave this account of the atrocity:

I personally visited the Kuwaiti Maternity Hospital, which includes neonatology service, in September 1990, and met with its director Dr. Motawa. He indicated that there were 50 newborns in the mortuary of the hospital due to the fact that Iraqi officers had orders to remove the babies of their incubators in order to clear the ward for possible military use. Furthermore, by preventing doctors, nurses and other highly qualified hospital staff from entering the hospital they caused an increase in mortality rate from 1% prior to the invasion to 10-12% during the invasion. The incubators were subsequently taken by the Iraqis to Iraq.²⁷

It is noteworthy that Dr. al-Hammadi's appearance before the Caucus was arranged by the then recently formed Kuwait America Foundation, the new name under which Citizens for a Free Kuwait had

²⁵ For example, he claimed knowledge of the reason why Dr. Hesham al-Obaidan, a Kuwaiti obstetrician, had been executed by Iraqi forces. According to Dr. al-Hajeri, Dr. al-Obaidan concocted a poisonous solution which he then convinced Iraqi soldiers at checkpoints to drink, and that as a result one hundred Iraqi soldiers died after drinking this concoction. There has been no evidence to suggest that Dr. al-Obaidan was involved in such a scheme or that any such event ever took place in Kuwait.

²⁶ Physicians for Human Rights (UK), "Kuwait 1991: Human Rights Abuses and Effects on the Health Care System," pp. 11, 19, 20, 23.

²⁷ "Prepared statement of Dr. Abdulla al-Hammadi," before the Congressional Human Rights Caucus hearing on Iraqi war crimes, August 1, 1991, p. 4

been re-organized.

In mid-January 1992, after doubts were raised again in the Western media about the incubators story, the public relations firm Hill & Knowlton suggested to Middle East Watch that Dr. al-Hammadi would be a good source of information. A January 17, 1992, statement by Hill & Knowlton read:

Dr. Abdullah Al-Hammadi, a neurologist at the Al-Sina Hospital, which serves the maternity wards, said that he had spent the entire time of the occupation -- except for one day to visit his home -- inside the hospital on a 24-hour basis.²⁸

According to the statement, "Dr. Hammadi said that he washed 38 babies, all of them premature, who had died for many reasons, including 'robbery of medical supplies, interruption of oxygen and electrical services' as well as from a direct order 'to evacuate all maternity wards' in preparation for treatment of Iraqi battlefield casualties."

When Middle East Watch questioned a Hill & Knowlton executive about the statement, he only reiterated what was in the public record, and suggested an interview with Dr. Hammadi.²⁹ On January 22, 1992, Dr. al-Hammadi gave Middle East Watch the following account.

He said he believed that around thirty-eight babies died at the Maternity Hospital because of the occupation. This knowledge was based on conversations he had had with the acting director of that hospital in early September 1990. Dr. Hammadi said that he did not work at the Maternity Hospital but rather worked as a neurologist at Ibn Sina Hospital, a specialized hospital for neurological disorders, neurosurgery, corrective surgery and cosmetic surgery. But he said that as part of his rounds, he visited nearby hospitals, including the Maternity Hospital.

On one such visit, the Maternity Hospital director told him that the hospital morgue had about thirty-eight babies who had died as a result of several factors. Some died because there were shortages of supplies necessary to sustain them. Others died because of shortage of oxygen, malfunction in oxygen-supply equipment or interruption of electricity. The rest died because the hospital received an order from Iraqi authorities to remove babies from the incubators in order to ship the incubators to Iraq. Hospital staff then removed babies from their incubators causing them to die, he said. However, the Iraqis never came to take the incubators, Dr. al-Hammadi said.³⁰ On another occasion he was told that the babies who had been in the hospital morgue were taken for burial at al-Rigga cemetery, he said. He suggested that all the necessary information was available at the cemetery.

A January 21 Associated Press dispatch from Kuwait gave yet another account. It reported that Dr. al-Hammadi, whom the agency described as a physician who worked at the Maternity Hospital, said he

²⁸ Hill and Knowlton's statement is wrong when it indicates that the Maternity Hospital is a part of what it calls al-Sina Hospital. Ibn Sina Hospital, where Dr. Hammadi told Middle East Watch he worked during the occupation, has no maternity wards. See below for more details on this hospital.

²⁹ Middle East Watch interview with Tom Ross, vice-president of Hill and Knowlton, January 20, 1992.

³⁰ This directly contradicts his statement before the August 1991 Congressional Human Rights Caucus hearing on Iraqi war crimes. Then Dr. al-Hammadi said that Iraqi troops had taken the incubators to Iraq. As Middle East Watch ascertained when it visited the hospital in March 1991, the incubators were all still at the Maternity Hospital.

"helped dispose of the bodies of 35 babies who died for lack of incubators."

Not only is Dr. Hammadi's information secondhand and self-contradictory, but it is also directly contradicted by Maternity Hospital staff who had firsthand knowledge of the incubators, including the director of the hospital and doctors at the neonatal wards. Nor is there any evidence to support his claim that medical staff at the Maternity Hospital removed babies from incubators on orders from the Iraqis to clear the wards for Iraqi wounded or in order to steal the incubators.

The al-Addan Hospital

Al-Addan is a 560-bed general hospital run by the Kuwaiti Ministry of Health. It is located twelve miles south of Kuwait City, in the oil-producing region. It was the only hospital that sustained a direct hit by allied bombers during the air war, resulting in several casualties. The largest hospital in the south, it was put under the control of the Saudi army upon its liberation from Iraqi forces.

Middle East Watch visited this hospital three times in March 1991. During this period, it was under the control of the Saudi Arabian Army Medical Units, but was being run by its Kuwaiti administrators. It was at al-Addan that Nayirah, the daughter of the Kuwaiti Ambassador to the United States, said she had worked as a volunteer in the early days of the Iraqi occupation.

After the October 10, 1990 hearing before the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, Middle East Watch interviewed doctors and administrators who had been working at al-Addan Hospital at the time the atrocity allegedly took place. They discounted the story at the time, suggesting that the fifteen-year-old might have confused their hospital with another medical facility. After liberation, Middle East Watch was assured by the hospital staff that no such incident ever took place there. Dr. Adel al-Asfour, the Kuwaiti director of al-Addan Hospital, who was on duty from the time of the Iraqi invasion until December, told Middle East Watch that no baby was thrown out of any incubator in his hospital. However, as with those interviewed at the Maternity Hospital, he did say that he had heard second-hand reports of such incidents taking place at the Maternity Hospital or the Mubarak al-Kabir general hospital in Kuwait City.

A Middle East Watch representative visited the maternity ward at al-Addan where there were some twenty five incubators, the same number as at the time of the Iraqi invasion, according to health workers. Dr. Mustafa Abdalla (pediatrics), Dr. Muhammed al-Hajji (obstetrics/gynecology), and Dr. Alaa al-Mansour all denied the story of stolen incubators and dead premature babies.

Al-Addan Hospital staff provided Middle East Watch with a detailed account of the hardships they and their patients had to endure during the occupation. They related an incident that took place in September 1990, when two employees of the hospital and five young volunteers were executed by Iraqi forces on suspicion of armed resistance.³¹

³¹ The hospital employees were Adel Dashti, a records clerk, and Ahmed Hamza, a sanitation supervisor, according to hospital officials.

They recounted heroic effort to keep the hospital running despite the shortages and the threat of drugs and equipment appropriation by the Iraqi occupying forces. To safeguard their supplies, they hid large quantities of medicines and some of the equipment in storage rooms out of the way, in false ceilings and in private homes, at grave risk of harsh retribution. Despite their efforts, some equipment, other than incubators, was stolen.

Other Hospitals

During March 1991, Middle East Watch interviewed staff working at other hospitals from which there were reports of incubator deaths. Dr. Yousef al-Nusf, the director of Mubarak al-Kabir hospital, and Siham al-Mutawwa, head nurse at the same hospital, both testified that no babies died at their hospital as a result of being removed from incubators. Similarly at the al-Farwaniyya district hospital, Dr. Sulaiman al-Falah, the director, Dr. Ali al-Fauderi, deputy director, and Issa Ashkenani, the hospital administrator, told Middle East Watch that no incubator deaths occurred in the hospital.

Dr. Ahmed al-Sebai`i, who headed the al-Ahmadl hospital before Iraqi forces converted it to a military hospital for their exclusive use, denied that any babies died there as a result of being removed from incubators. Health workers at al-Jahra, al-Sabah General and al-Amiri hospitals reported the same.

During the occupation, on October 29, 1990 Dr. Hussein Basha, an Egyptian anesthesiologist from al-Sabah General, told Middle East Watch that seven out of eleven incubators at the hospital were taken by Iraqi forces. In December 1990, he told Middle East Watch that "four or five" babies died as a result of being removed from incubators.

By the time of his second interview, Middle East Watch had learned that Dr. Basha was actually working for the Kuwaiti Information Office which was part of the Kuwaiti embassy in Cairo. In that capacity, Dr. Basha wrote a polemical book for the embassy entitled, *I Was with Saddam*, in Arabic. That fact made his testimony unusable without corroboration from independent sources. His testimony was later contradicted by other doctors at the same hospital.

Conclusions

Based on its own exhaustive investigations conducted in Kuwait, other parts of the Middle East, Britain and the United States, Middle East Watch concludes that it has found no basis to the allegation that Iraqi troops took babies from incubators in Kuwaiti hospitals, causing them to die. Testimony taken by Middle East Watch after the liberation of Kuwait, from Kuwaiti doctors, nurses and administrators is clear and consistent in refuting the charge. Careful examination of hospital and cemetery records produced the same results.

Other human rights investigators reached similar conclusions after they had conducted missions to Kuwait after its liberation. In March 1991, a team from Physicians for Human Rights (UK) visited Kuwait and interviewed health workers in most Kuwaiti hospitals. The team concluded that "no evidence was found to substantiate the widely publicized claims of premature infants being taken out of incubators and

left to die."³² That same month, a team from the Boston-based Physicians for Human Rights (US) visited Kuwait. Its delegates concluded that "none of the more than two dozen physicians, nurses and other medical personnel interviewed in Kuwait in March 1991 reported that babies had been removed from incubators by Iraqi government or military personnel."³³

On April 19, 1991, following its own visit to Kuwait, Amnesty International issued a news release stating in part, "In the highly publicized issue ... of the baby deaths, Amnesty International said that although its team was shown alleged mass graves of babies, it was not established how they had died and the team found no reliable evidence that Iraqi forces had caused the deaths of babies by removing them or ordering their removal from incubators." The statement added, "Once we were actually in Kuwait and had visited hospitals and cemeteries and spoken to doctors at work, we found that the story did not stand up."³⁴

If Kuwaiti doctors and other health professionals who worked in Kuwaiti hospitals throughout the occupation are near unanimous in denying the charge of killing infants being nursed in incubators, why has the rumor spread and persisted?

To this day, the Kuwaiti government and its former public relations firm, Hill & Knowlton, maintain that such incidents did take place during the occupation, and on a large scale. Last month, the Kuwaiti Ambassador to the United States went so far as to state that the incubators human rights workers and journalists saw in Kuwaiti hospitals shortly after liberation were not the original ones; the Kuwaiti government had to buy replacement incubators and ship them to Kuwait after liberation, he claimed in a Canadian television interview.³⁵ It should be noted that no such suggestion was ever made in Kuwait itself during March 1991.

Similarly, during the occupation, when the original story had been challenged by reports that journalists had seen incubators in Kuwaiti hospitals, the response from Kuwaiti officials was that the Iraqi forces had brought them back from Iraq to Kuwait, so as to display them to journalists. Both claims do not appear to be based on facts as they are known to health workers in Kuwait.

Reports by doctors who said that they had buried premature babies may have grown out of the August 24, 1990 incident when thirty infants were buried at al-Rigga Cemetery. This is the only entry in cemetery records on which such reports might have been based. Because the doctors handling the burials failed to examine the bodies or read the death certificates, they might have genuinely believed at the time that these infants died as a result of being removed from incubators by Iraqi soldiers. After all, the accounts of widespread looting of other medical equipment were factual.

Those doctors with first-hand knowledge of burials might have left Kuwait without inquiring at the

³² PHR (UK), "Kuwait 1991," pp. 7, 8, 20-24.

³³ From a statement issued by Physicians for Human Rights (US), January 1992.

³⁴ Amnesty International, "Kuwait: Amnesty International calls on Emir to intervene over continuing torture and killings," a news release, London, April 19, 1991.

³⁵ Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, *The Fifth Estate*, "To Sell a War," broadcast on January 6, 1992.

hospitals from which the bodies came. Had they inquired, they would have been told that most of these babies had died before the invasion and that none died as a result of being removed from their incubators by Iraqi troops. Once outside Kuwait, the doctors were unequivocal in their public statements that the babies had died as a result of being removed from incubators; although in interviews with Middle East Watch the same doctors admitted they had no way of knowing the causes of death of the babies they buried.

What is inexplicable is how the burial of thirty infants on August 24 became seventy in testimony by Dr. Ali al-Huwail in November 1990 and ninety two in January 1991; 120 in testimony by Dr. Ibrahim Bahbahani before the November 27, 1990 Security Council hearing; seventy two by Dr. Abdel-Rahman al-Sumait in an interview with Middle East Watch, or 312 by Dr. al-Sumait himself in an interview with Amnesty International. We do not know whether these doctors, all employees of the Kuwaiti government, might have become part of that government's wartime public relations effort; or whether they were influenced by the rumor-mongering that often accompanies cataclysmic events; or whether there is some other explanation for their accounts.

While reports of the burial of large numbers of infants might have emanated from a germ of truth, the eyewitness claims by Nayirah and others about the removal of premature babies from incubators by Iraqi troops do not appear to have any basis. Health professionals who stayed behind in Kuwait, working at the same hospitals where such incidents allegedly took place and supervising the incubators throughout the occupation vehemently deny that such incidents occurred in the hospitals where they worked.

Health workers in Kuwaiti hospitals have kept careful records of their equipment and gave Middle East Watch lists of missing equipment that they either knew or presumed had been taken by Iraqi forces. There was only one report of two incubators missing. Even in this incident the head nurse who reported the theft, Siham al-Mutawwa' of Mubarak al-Kabir Hospital, was sure that they had been unoccupied at the time.³⁶

It is understandable that ordinary Kuwaiti citizens in Kuwait or in exile could have believed the rumors of incubator killing. The Iraqi government record in Iraq itself is that of one of the most egregious violators of human rights in the world. Moreover, the Iraqi occupation forces were ruthless in punishing those suspected of opposition to their rule over Kuwait.

Communications inside Kuwait during the occupation were extremely restricted; many did not venture out for fear of being arrested. With the sole exception of *al-Nida'*, the occupation mouthpiece, all newspapers were closed; Kuwaiti television ceased operation on the first day of the invasion and Kuwait Radio became an outlet for Baghdad radio. In this atmosphere, rumors became a primary source of information. These rumors were based partly on facts and partly on exaggerated tales fueled by the Kuwaiti government-in-exile media in neighboring countries.

³⁶ In interviews with Middle East Watch in March 1991, Kuwaiti health workers ridiculed assertions by Kuwaiti government-in-exile spokesmen that incubators were first taken to Iraq then brought back to Kuwait merely to show them to journalists who visited Kuwait in October 1990 during the occupation.

APPENDIX

Cable from the U.S. Ambassador to Kuwait, Edward W. Gnehm, to U.S. Department of State, Washington, D.C., dated February 4, 1992, (Ref: Kuwait 579) reproduced textually. Each paragraph is followed by Middle East Watch's comments.

1. DOS: An incredible twist to press stories looking at Kuwait one year after the invasion is the rather smug and cynical casting of doubt on accounts of atrocities. The story that newborn babies had died after being removed from incubators by Iraqi soldiers has in particular been dismissed by some "revisionist historians". There have even been claims that such stories were fabricated deliberately for political ends. We would like to make a straightforward contribution to any discussion of this issue. Officers who have served at this post since the liberation of Kuwait are convinced that premature and newborn babies died when Iraqis removed life support systems from Kuwaiti hospitals. Whatever other twists this unseemly debate might take, their deaths and the pain of their families should not be in question.

MEW: Our Embassy itself appears to be engaging in "revisionist historiography" when it insists, without producing concrete evidence, that the story of widespread incubator deaths is fundamentally accurate. In March 1991, when Middle East Watch visited Kuwait for the first time after liberation, there was a consensus that there was no basis to the story. That consensus was shared by human rights investigators and foreign reporters and was based on the unanimous opinion of Kuwaiti health workers who worked during the occupation at the hospitals where incubator deaths had allegedly occurred.

On March 21, Middle East Watch visited the U.S. Embassy and met with Ambassador Gnehm and other members of his staff. Our preliminary conclusion, that we could find no basis to the incubators allegation, was presented in the course of a broader discussion about our documentation of Iraqi atrocities during the occupation, as well as ongoing human rights abuses in Kuwait. Those conclusions were not contested by Embassy staff at that time or in subsequent meetings with Middle East Watch in March and May 1991.

2. DOS: In our view, the most outrageous aspect of the recent media reports casting doubt on the "incubator story" is that at least two human rights groups, as well as a number of journalists affiliated with reputable organizations, at some point have claimed that after "investigating", they found no evidence of babies dying as a result of Iraqis taking incubators from Kuwaiti hospitals. We believe claims not to have found such evidence are either false or else the "investigation" was so cursory and biased that no other conclusion was possible. Our own experience simply allows no other conclusion.

MEW: In March 1991, Middle East Watch researchers systematically interviewed doctors, administrators and nurses at all the hospitals at issue in Kuwait. Some hospitals were visited more than once: al-Addan was visited three times, Maternity and Mubarak al-Kabir twice each. Middle East Watch relied primarily on health personnel who worked at the hospitals throughout the occupation and who were well placed to give informed testimony. All those interviewed were unanimous in denying that incidents of throwing babies out of incubators took place in *their* hospitals. They buttressed their oral testimony with written records kept in the neonatal wards that recorded the names of newly-born babies and their mothers, as well as the dates on which they either left the hospital or else died, noting the causes of death. These records were deemed reliable because they were maintained by doctors and nurses inside the maternity wards where Iraqi troops rarely ventured.

To eliminate potentially biased accounts, Middle East Watch relied primarily on the testimony of native Kuwaiti doctors, administrators and nurses. These witnesses demonstrated understandable loathing of the practices of the Iraqi occupation. They confirmed a wide range of atrocities committed by Iraqi forces, and provided Middle East Watch researchers with photographs they secretly took, at great personal risk, of victims of torture and executions. It strains credulity to believe that these dedicated Kuwaiti health workers, interviewed individually at various hospitals, could be biased in favor of the Iraqi occupation.

In addition to the hospitals, we visited cemeteries. Al-Rigga was visited twice in March and al-Sulaibekhat once. Cemetery workers were interviewed and grave inscriptions were inspected. Records were thoroughly checked and death certificates examined. Information gathered in the cemeteries substantiated many of the reported killings during the occupation, but not the incubator deaths. While cemetery workers were of different nationalities, the supervisors of both cemeteries, who were interviewed at length by Middle East Watch, were Kuwaiti nationals who had no sympathy towards Iraq.

Research into this story by other human rights groups that visited Kuwait, and whose work is known to Middle East Watch, has not been either cursory or biased, as alleged by the U.S. Embassy.

3. DOS: Officers at Embassy Kuwait are not professional investigators and we have not systematically pursued accounts of the incubator atrocities to compile the evidence that would stand up in a court of law. Nevertheless, since March 1991, we have had hundreds of conversations with Kuwaitis about their personal experiences of life in Kuwait during the occupation. In the course of these conversations, the "incubator story" has at times come up. Often it is told as a second-hand account – something that happened to a neighbor or a relative. The stories track generally with the accounts we all heard in August and September of 1990.

MEW: Middle East Watch, too, has heard numerous second-hand accounts of incubator deaths, and some accounts that purport to be first-hand. But these accounts have to be weighed against those of disinterested and better-informed witnesses in positions to confirm or deny such allegations.

It is noteworthy that in August and September 1990, when these atrocities are alleged to have occurred, U.S. Embassy staff were confined to the premises of their Embassy compound and therefore unable to conduct first-hand checks on what was taking place in the city.

4. DOS: Occasionally though, chance encounters have placed an Embassy officer face to face with a Kuwaiti who relates a first-hand account of something he or she personally witnessed that supports the stories about the removal of incubators from the hospitals. Sometimes the story is of the death of their own child.

MEW: The Embassy does not provide examples or details about these families. Middle East Watch would be pleased to interview these families if they were to come forward, and will seek the Embassy's help to contact them. To date, no source attempting to defend the credibility of the allegations has provided a single name of a dead premature infant or a bereaved parent.

5. DOS: It is hard to convey the impact on the listener of eyewitness accounts of atrocities. You are told of the insignificant details of a sadist's accent or a father's idle thoughts the moment before he discovers his son's mutilated body on the doorstep. You hear something horribly true even though your own experience provides no context. Most of all, you feel you are speaking with someone whose life has been altered by the wound they carry inside. Something very real has happened.

MEW: This section is not related to the subject at hand, but is generally accurate if it is meant to illustrate the manner in which many extrajudicial killings of Kuwaitis were carried out. Middle East Watch has documented in its published reports numerous examples of such executions.

6. DOS: In support of the incubator story, we have heard such eyewitness accounts from nurses and doctors, morgue attendants, ambulance drivers, and cemetery caretakers. Thus we believe that a number of premature and newborn babies died as a direct result of orders given or actions taken by Iraqi officers and doctors. We are not referring blandly to an increased infant mortality rate due to shortages of equipment, medicine, medical staff, or power although that is a crime that can undoubtedly be laid at the feet of the Iraqis. We are speaking about babies who died when nurses were forced to remove them from life support systems or when Iraqi soldiers removed key components of the life support systems.

MEW: This section is probably referring to the material elaborated on by the Embassy in paragraphs (8) and (9) below.

7. DOS: We cannot say how many babies died this way. We hope one day the government of Kuwait and human rights groups will have an answer to that question. We have been told that approximately two hundred and fifty bodies of babies were buried in several mass graves in Riggae during August and September of 1990. The Kuwaiti ambulance driver who delivered the bodies and the caretaker who buried them kept track of the numbers but cannot say how or where the babies died. A woman who washed and wrapped the remains tells of receiving a container with nearly fifty bodies from one hospital morgue one evening in the latter half of August. Many of the bodies were of premature babies. She knew something extraordinary was taking place. Halfway through her grim task she found one baby still alive. She tried to save it but the baby died after twenty minutes.

MEW: It is regrettable that the Embassy repeats without checking the preposterous claim that about 250 babies were buried in mass graves in al-Rigga cemetery during August and September 1990. This figure is much higher than the total number of all children under five who died in Kuwait of all causes and who were buried at al-Rigga during the entire seven-month occupation.

As for the "nearly fifty bodies" buried one evening in the latter half of August, the account is probably referring to the burial on August 24, 1990 of thirty babies and fetuses, a large number indeed for any one day or even a month. The main body of our report discusses this incident, which figured prominently in a number of eyewitness accounts of a mass burial of babies at al-Rigga. The records of the cemetery show no other mass burials. As we point out in the report, nineteen of the thirty had died before the invasion and the remaining eleven died at different places and times over a three-week period. There is no indication that any of them died as a result of being removed from incubators on orders of Iraqi soldiers.

The testimony of the "woman who washed and wrapped the remains" is erroneous when it states that the bodies came from one hospital; the al-Rigga cemetery record is quite clear that they came from different hospitals. The statement that the health workers and Kuwaiti volunteers who transported bodies from the morgue to the cemetery would put "nearly fifty bodies" in a container and make the mistake of including among them "one baby still alive" strains credulity.

8. **DOS:** Sources at Al-Adan hospital, argued with a group of Iraqi soldiers who demanded that babies be removed from fifteen ventilators and incubators. (Not all of the incubators were in use.) The Iraqi officer, growing angry, reached out and disconnected the tube carrying oxygen to a ventilator. She began to scream. Another nurse ran into the ward and together they moved the babies onto cots. One baby died almost immediately. A total of four died within twenty-four hours. The ventilators and incubators were moved by the soldiers to another room in the hospital and locked away. Two weeks later, the equipment was brought out of the room and lined in the hallway to be filmed by a news crew.

MEW: Middle East Watch's extensive information on al-Addan Hospital is summarized in this report. The incident to which the Embassy source refers is uncorroborated, and we would welcome an opportunity to interview this source. We visited this hospital three times during March 1991, when it was still under the control of the Saudi Arabian Army Medical Units but run by Dr. Adel al-Asfour, the hospital's Kuwaiti director. Dr. al-Asfour, the medical staff in the maternity ward, and other hospital workers responsible for equipment during the occupation emphatically denied the allegation that babies died in this hospital as a result of being removed from incubators by, or on orders of, Iraqi occupying forces. They were familiar with the story, but believed it might have happened at other hospitals (where first-hand witnesses interviewed said it did not occur). These same sources gave a detailed list of all equipment and medication that disappeared during the occupation from al-Addan. Incubators were not among them.

It is noteworthy that the U.S. Embassy accounts contradict that of Nayirah, the volunteer at the scene who testified before the U.S. Congressional Human Rights Caucus (*see* p.5).

9. **DOS:** Sources at Al-Jahra hospital relate supporting accounts of the Iraqi doctor placed in charge of the hospital. His name was Colonel Khalil. He announced to the staff that three of the four pediatric wards of the hospital would be closed. He said the state should not spend valuable time and resources on those who should have died anyway. On the morning of August 26, the source was forced by the Iraqis to move twelve babies from the neo-natal intensive care unit (Ward Eight) to the regular pediatric ward. Eight of the babies were removed from incubators, two of the babies were disconnected from life support ventilators. A doctor tried to keep the babies alive but without the ventilators, two babies died that day. A third baby also died. Six of the eight incubators in Ward Eight were removed (the doctors did not witness by whom) and the doors were chained shut by order of Colonel Khalil.

MEW: When Middle East Watch visited Kuwait in March 1991, al-Jahra Hospital was not functioning. The hospital had been converted by the newly restored Kuwait government into a temporary processing center for Kuwaiti POWs and civilian detainees returning from Iraq. We were nevertheless able to interview four health workers who had been working in this hospital during the occupation, including its director, as well as a pediatrician and a nurse who had worked in the maternity ward. The four agreed that the hospital had had close to twenty-five incubators at the time of the invasion. Only "one or two" babies

were being nursed in incubators at that time, they recalled.

They reported that the Iraqi invading forces took over this hospital earlier than other hospitals and divided it into two clearly defined sections, reserving one for the use of Iraqi troops. The Iraqi side was run almost completely by Iraqi military staff and was off-limits to most of the hospital's original employees. In the process of dividing the hospital, several adult patients were discharged prematurely.

Fearing for the loss of their equipment the hospital staff stowed away twenty incubators. Middle East Watch was told that "four to five" incubators were available at all times; this number was adequate for the by then much reduced needs. At no point did they see or hear of babies dying because they were removed from incubators by, or on orders of, Iraqi forces. Nor did they notice any incubators missing.

The information provided by DOS about the al-Jahra hospital appears at odds with Middle East Watch's own investigation and we would welcome an opportunity to interview the sources to whom the Embassy refers.

10. **DOS:** Supporting these accounts, we have in our possession a number of official Iraqi documents ordering Iraqi officials in Kuwait to remove equipment from hospitals, labs, universities, and research centers. The documents do not mention incubators but other medical equipment is listed specifically. We know of course that the Iraqis systematically removed computers, engineering equipment, laboratory equipment, and other machinery wherever (*sic*) they found it in Kuwait. (Stripped labs at the University actually had written on the walls the names of the institutions in Iraq to which the trucks were to deliver the looted goods.)

MEW: There is no dispute that the Iraqi government ordered the removal of much Kuwaiti government property, including school and hospital equipment. Middle East Watch researchers visited several institutions that had been completely stripped of their equipment, and others, including hospitals, where staff provided detailed lists of missing equipment. It was usually the same staff who stated that incubators had not been taken.

11. **DOS:** We also have seen photographs of the bodies of the babies from the hospitals. These sad photographs of course do not have anywhere near the impact of the first-hand accounts.

MEW: Any photographs of the bodies of premature babies removed from incubators *under these circumstances* would be welcome.

12. **DOS:** It is astonishing, sad, and ultimately unbelievable that an "investigator" could come to Kuwait and fail to find evidence supporting reports of this particular atrocity. A call to any one of several Kuwaiti organizations attempting to record the accounts of atrocities would have led to strong evidence and important leads. A chat with somebody in our Embassy would have directed them to some of the people we have met who can shed light on the stories. Any journalist or human rights investigator who asks will of course find us prepared to point them in the right direction on this story.

MEW: Middle East Watch is unaware that there are "several Kuwaiti organizations attempting to

record the accounts of atrocities." Since March 1991, Middle East Watch has been in close and regular contact with the Kuwaiti Association to Defend War Victims, the first, and so far the only, independent human rights organization in Kuwait. With reference to contacts with the Embassy, note our response to paragraph (1) above. The invitation by the Embassy to facilitate future cooperation with local human rights investigators is appreciated. We shall utilize it the next time Middle East Watch sends a mission to Kuwait.

13. **DOS:** In conclusion, we should note that when one examines all the accounts of Iraqi brutality in occupied Kuwait, the story of the incubators begins to look relatively mild. It is abundantly clear that Iraqi policy was to terrorize and brutalize the population of Kuwait into a state of absolute fear and submission. Total disregard for human life has kept Saddam Hussein and the Baath Party in power in Iraq and he clearly believed terror was the key to exerting his power over the population of Kuwait. Kuwaitis will not forget that the liberation of their country ended a reign of terror; from time to time we should recall that fact ourselves.

MEW: Middle East Watch agrees with the Embassy's statement that "Iraqi policy was to terrorize and brutalize the population of Kuwait into a state of absolute fear and submission." But it does not accept the contention that murdering babies is mild compared to other atrocities. Had it actually happened, killing babies by removing them from incubators would never have been mild in relation to the other crimes Iraqi occupying forces committed. It was because this reported violation was so egregious that Middle East Watch from the start decided to investigate it so thoroughly.

This report was written by Aziz Abu-Hamad, senior researcher at Middle East Watch, and edited by Andrew Whitley, executive director of Middle East Watch. Christina Derry, Middle East Watch associate, provided invaluable assistance in the production of this document.

Middle East Watch was created in 1989 to monitor human rights practices in the Middle East and North Africa and to promote respect for internationally recognized standards. The chair of Middle East Watch is Gary Sick, the vice chairs are Lisa Anderson and Bruce Rabb, the executive director is Andrew Whitley, the research director is Eric Goldstein, the associate director is Virginia N. Sherry, the senior researcher is Aziz Abu-Hamad, and the associate is Christina Derry.

Middle East Watch is a division of Human Rights Watch, a non-governmental organization which is also composed of Africa Watch, Americas Watch, Asia Watch, the Fund for Free Expression and Helsinki Watch. The chair of Human Rights Watch is Robert L. Bernstein, the vice chair is Adrian W. DeWind, the executive director is Aryeh Neier, the deputy director is Kenneth Roth, the Washington director is Holly J. Burkhalter, and the press director is Susan Osnos.

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