

A neutral, impartial and independent approach: key to ICRC's acceptance in Iraq

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Deskripsi Lengkap: <https://lib.ui.ac.id/detail?id=20496749&lokasi=lokal>

Abstrak

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The article describes the context of the ICRC's operations in Iraq, where the Iran Iraq War in the 1980s, the Gulf War in 1990-1 and the effects of sanctions preceded the 2003 conflict and the spread of sectarian violence. The many serious attacks, including the bombing of the ICRC delegation in Baghdad in 2003 and continuing threats to the ICRC delegates, led to a low visibility presence and required a new modus operandi in which a real presence on the ground was backed up by remote control mechanisms for assistance activities in the most insecure areas. Projects to cover essential needs by ensuring water supplies and sewage disposal and supporting health facilities exemplify this new ICRC operational framework. Whereas remote control and support operations enabled programmes of increasing scope and size to be implemented, they could not replace a direct physical presence on the ground, and acceptance building had to be reinforced through networking and communicational aspects. The authors argue, however, that there is still room for independent, neutral and impartial humanitarian action in Iraq despite inherent security risks.