

Bush's War against Iraq Threatens Global Disaster

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October 1, 2002

The relative ease with which George W. Bush browbeat world leaders and the UN into accepting his plans for an invasion of Iraq threatens not only the existence of the despotic regime of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad. It also risks setting into motion one of the most dangerous schemes ever to be projected by a world leader, namely that the U.S. has the "right" to launch preemptive wars whenever and wherever it likes, even if that should involve the use of nuclear weapons.

The green light for a U.S. invasion of Iraq was provided by Bush's speech to the UN on Sept. 12. The anniversary of the September 11 disaster was barely over when Bush moved to shift the focus from Al Qaeda to Saddam Hussein.

In the face of mounting criticism of his "unilateralism," Bush called on Iraq to fulfill all UN resolutions passed over the last 11 years or face military attack. Knowing full well that Iraq would never agree to such conditions, his speech provided the UN with a way to capitulate to U.S. war plans while maintaining the illusion of engaging in "multilateral consultation."

Bush's speech also silenced his critics in the Republican and Democratic parties who had expressed concern at his "go-it-alone" approach. By lining up the support of world leaders at the UN and portraying any criticism of his Iraq policy as a sign of a lack of patriotic fervor, Bush silenced his critics in Congress—a sign of how threadbare was their opposition in the first place.

PREPARATIONS FOR WAR

None of this means that Bush has become a "multilateralist." He is determined to invade Iraq, even if Iraq allows UN weapons inspectors back into the country. His drive for war is part of a new military doctrine that involves nothing short of the propagation of permanent, preemptive war against any real or imagined adversary.

In many respects the war against Iraq has already begun. In March, U.S. forces entered the Kurdish areas of northern Iraq with the aim of training local Kurdish militias for eventual battle against Baghdad.

More recently, on Aug. 6, U.S. and British bombers destroyed an Iraqi air command and control center at al-Nukhaib between Iraq and Saudi Arabia. The center contained advanced fiber-optic networks recently installed by Chinese companies.

A few days later, on Aug. 8, Turkey executed its first major military assault inside Iraq. Accompanied by U.S. and British military forces, the Turkish army seized the critical Bamerni airport in the northern part of the country. Possession of the airbase will allow the U.S. to control much of northern Iraq.

Though its existence has barely been reported on, the Turkish expeditionary force in Iraq now numbers 5,000. U.S. and allied Turkish special forces already control 15% of Iraq, mostly in the northern region.

Most recently, the U.S. and Britain launched a massive air raid over Western Iraq on Sept. 6, with the aim of destroying the first line of Iraq's air force and air defense systems. Similar U.S. operations are occurring almost every day.

The number of countries in which the U.S. has troops and active bases in the area around Iraq is truly astounding. It includes Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Krygstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Yemen, and Kenya. The U.S. has also built a new military command center in the Eritrean port of Assab. Hardly any nation in the region has been left untouched by this unprecedented display of U.S. imperial might.

WHY IRAQ? WHY NOW?

Given this immense military buildup, the question is why Bush is concentrating so much time and energy on confronting Iraq in the first place.

It isn't simply because Iraq, like 60 other nations, possesses weapons of mass destruction. Hussein has known ever since the Gulf War of 1991 that any use of weapons of mass destruction on his part will result in his total destruction. The only conceivable scenario in which he would use chemical, biological or nuclear weapons is if he is totally cornered and has no way out—which is precisely the approach Bush is taking in regard to him.

So why is Bush so determined to overthrow Hussein when it risks bringing so much death and destruction onto the region as a whole?

The answer lies in the U.S.'s effort to project its status as the world's only superpower. No state power can challenge the U.S.; it spends more on the military than the next 20 largest nations and its spending on military research and development alone is larger than the next six-largest powers. The U.S.'s drive for single world domination has given rise to a military machine whose size and power has no precedent in human history.

The fundamentalist terrorists who launched the September 11 attacks played directly into Bush's hands by providing him with an excuse to set this machinery into motion. With its vicious attack against the American populace, Al Qaeda made it easy for Bush to gain support for extending the field of U.S. military operations.

Yet the "war against terrorism" has also run up against some limits. Despite the quick defeat of the Taliban, the "war against terrorism" remains elusive and ill-defined, with no quick and easy victories in sight. War on Iraq, on the other hand, seems to promise something else. Hussein's regime is much weaker today than it was in 1991 when it caved into the U.S. after a 100-hour ground assault. This is not alone because of the inhumane sanctions imposed on Iraq for the past decade by the U.S.-UN, but also because Hussein is so hated by the Iraqi people.

Over 700,000 Iraqis have died in wars or government purges sponsored by Hussein since he took full power in 1979, and the only thing that keeps him in power now is the brutality of his security apparatus. Given Iraq's military and political weakness, the Bush administration thinks it can score a relatively easy victory against Hussein and thereby further solidify its drive for permanent military engagement overseas.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Throughout the buildup for war over the past several months, much has been made of the supposed opposition to Bush's war plans from various state powers. It is true that a number of U.S. allies (aside from Blair's Britain) have expressed grave reservations about the unilateral nature of Bush's actions. But the extent of their opposition has also been much exaggerated.

France, for instance, actually provided Bush with the approach taken in his UN speech, by indicating in early September that it would support U.S. military action so long as Bush went to the UN first to demand an immediate return of weapons

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inspectors. Other U.S. European allies have also dropped or modified their earlier criticisms. The one exception has been Germany which still says that it opposes a U.S.-British invasion.

Russia is a pivotal factor since it has longstanding interests in Iraq. In August Russia and Iraq signed a ten-year, \$40 billion trade pact, and Putin took a hard line against any effort to topple Hussein. That too, however, seems to have now changed.

Russia announced on Sept. 12 that it planned on taking unilateral military action of its own—against Georgia for its supposed failure to root out Chechnyan “terrorists” hiding near its border. The U.S. at first expressed strong support for Georgia where it has based hundreds of troops. Within days, however, the Bush administration softened its position. It now appears that Putin dropped his objections to an Iraq invasion in exchange for being given a freer hand against Georgia.

Russia and France also have economic motives for caving into Bush. Neither wants to be left out of the contracts to rebuild the Iraqi oil industry once Hussein is removed from power. Iraq has proven oil reserves of 112 billion barrels—second only to Saudi Arabia—and there will be much money to be made after a U.S. invasion.

China has signaled that it will not stand in the way of Bush’s effort to go after Iraq. The U.S. recently “rewarded” China by listing some of the groups advocating civil right in Chinese Turkestan as “terrorist.” This has given China a green light to repress the entire movement for autonomy by its Uighur minority in the western part of the country.

Israel is banking on the notion that a U.S. attack on Iraq will completely alter the geopolitical situation in the Middle East. Sharon thinks that by taking down Hussein, the stage will be set for the U.S. to go after other states in the region, like Iran and Syria, thereby enabling Israel to strengthen its position without making a single concession to the Palestinians.

Each state power seems willing to go along with Bush’s war plans, so long as it can use the cover of the “war against terrorism” to pursue its own repressive policies against national minorities and workers’ rights at home.

The one thing that is different from 1991, however, when the elder Bush assembled an international coalition against Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait, is that this time the U.S.’s allies aren’t willing to foot the bill. During the Gulf War over 80% of the \$65 billion cost of the war was born by Saudi Arabia, Japan, and the U.S.’s European

allies. None are interested in financing this one which will cost tens of billions of dollars at a time when the U.S. economy is facing serious problems.

INTERNAL CONTRADICTIONS

The economy is not the only unknown factor in Bush's plans for military intervention. There are also innumerable contradictions posed by the question of what will happen in Iraq once Hussein is deposed.

The U.S. military has been actively training several Kurdish groups in northern Iraq, with the aim of having them do the dirty work in the advent of an invasion, much as it used the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan. Yet the U.S.'s effort to forge tighter military and political links with Turkey, which will have a critical importance in any war against Hussein, places the U.S. in direct conflict with the insistence of the Kurds that they be guaranteed autonomy in any post-Hussein Iraq.

As Paul Wolfowitz, the administration's point-man for attacking Iraq put it, "There is a lot of agreement with Turkey on what we would like to see after Saddam Hussein. We're both opposed to Kurdish states."

Many Kurds now fear that they will end up losing even the limited autonomy they currently enjoy in the northern region of the country if the U.S. has its way. Many are already whispering that in the aftermath of the overthrow of Hussein the U.S. will be compelled to move against the Kurds.

This is not far-fetched given what happened in 1991. At the end of the Gulf War the Kurds and Shi'ites rose up against Hussein, only to be betrayed by the U.S. Faced with the threat of revolution, the U.S. choose to keep Hussein in power. Thousands of Kurds and Shi'ites were massacred by Hussein while the U.S. watched.

The anti-Gulf War movement which had emerged in this period proved totally unable to deal with the situation. It failed to take a firm stand against Hussein or in defense of the Kurds, Shi'ites, and others. The notion that the crimes of Hussein need not be discussed for the sake of focusing everything on a critique of U.S. rulers left the anti-war movement unprepared to deal with the great betrayal that was visited upon the Iraqi people.

That set the pattern for subsequent responses to U.S. imperialist intervention. When Serbia launched its genocidal war against Bosnia in 1992, which led to the murder of 200,000 Muslims, the anti-war movements in the U.S. remained silent. After all, the

U.S. was not directly involved. Many even had illusions about the “socialist” character of Serbia.

The war in the Balkans got the attention of the Left only later, when the U.S. belatedly went to war against Serbia in 1999 over its invasion of Kosova. Once again the idea prevailed that we should focus our attention on a critique of U.S. policy even though a mass movement had emerged in Kosova which was demanding national self-determination from Serbia. As a result, the anti-war movements failed to project a banner of human solidarity with the victims of racism and ethnic cleansing, holding on to a vapid “anti-imperialism” instead.

This set the stage for the response to September 11. As we wrote in our “Marxist-Humanist Perspectives, 2002-2003,”

“What became evident after September 11 is that those in the Left who limited themselves to opposing Bush, while remaining silent about the threat of Islamic fundamentalism, made it easier for the rulers to try to discredit the peace movement. Moreover, by focusing everything on the U.S. as enemy number one, many on the Left have failed to solidarize with the true liberatory forces who have the potential to transform today’s realities—such as the women in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria and elsewhere who have been fighting the repressive force of Islamic fundamentalism for years....the political situation demands a total view rooted in the projection of a comprehensive opposition to both terrorism and war. Without such a total ground of opposition, the movement will not prove able to project a liberatory alternative.”

TOWARDS A NEW MOVEMENT

While we are still in the shadow of September 11, Bush’s drive to war against Iraq also places us in a different situation. Many who refrained from joining in anti-war protests when Bush was pursuing the Taliban and Al Qaeda are worried about the implications of his drive to war against Iraq. There is a growing base for building a movement that is totally opposed to both Bush’s war against Iraq and his effort to plunge this country into permanent military adventurism.

Yet to realize this potential it is essential for anti-war activists not to repeat the mistakes of the past by simply projecting a narrow, knee-jerk reaction to U.S. policies. We cannot afford to ignore the crimes of Hussein just because we oppose Bush. We cannot ignore the suffering of the Kurds just because some of its leaders are being used by the U.S.

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We must totally oppose Bush's drive to war and the brutal sanctions that have killed tens of thousands of Iraqis since 1991, but we must do so by standing on the firm ground of the idea of freedom. We do not defend Hussein, but hope for his overthrow. We give our support to the forces of opposition inside Iraq who aspire for a new society. We project a total opposition, as the most immediate task facing the anti-war movement.

The need for a total opposition flows from the totality of the crisis. That U.S. imperialism is about to wage war to impose a "regime change" is not new. That has been done repeatedly, from its countless invasions of Central America and the Caribbean in the early 20th century to the invasion of Panama and Grenada in the 1980s. What is new today is not that the U.S. is willing to unilaterally invade other countries, but that Bush has declared the right to do so against any country, at any time, at any spot on the globe.

This will bring a holocaust of truly unimaginable proportions, unless we mobilize our minds and bodies to oppose the entire nature of the present crisis.

Originally appeared in *News & Letters*, October 2002