

Massive Iraqi casualties foreseen: US Congress brays for war

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The US Congress has given overwhelming bipartisan support to the Pentagon's plans for a massive and sustained bombing attack on the civilian population of Iraq. On Wednesday Democrats and Republicans alike swept aside the latest concessionary proposal from Iraq as well as objections from Washington's allies to the impending bloodbath.

Defense Secretary William Cohen told the Senate Armed Services Committee that the coming attack "would be far more than what has been experienced in the past, certainly since the Persian Gulf war." Cohen's statements only heightened what the New York Times described as "war fever" gripping the Capitol. Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) said, "If we're going to do this, let's go all the way."

This sentiment—for the dispatch of American ground troops to "take Saddam Hussein out" and occupy Baghdad—has definite support on both sides of the congressional aisle. House Democrat John Murtha of Pennsylvania complained that saturation bombing was not sufficient. "You have to put people on the ground if you really want to solve the problem."

The latest reinforcements ordered to the Persian Gulf include ships carrying 2,000 marines. This will complement what is already an armada capable of reducing Iraq to rubble. The US has two carrier task forces in the gulf and a third is expected to arrive by the end of the week. Each of the carriers can launch up to 200 air strikes a day for three or four days. The carriers are accompanied by destroyers, submarines equipped with cruise missiles and other warships.

The US media is bristling with predictions of "overwhelming force" and warnings that Americans must anticipate TV footage of dead and dying Iraqi men, women and children. Reporting from Baghdad, CNN's Peter Arnett gave an indication of what the bombing of so-called presidential sites will mean. He explained that

some of these sites cover huge areas, about the size of Washington DC.

Iraq announced its willingness to allow special teams of UN inspectors to examine for an entire month the eight presidential sites previously named by the UN. But Washington does not want a diplomatic solution. It has opted for war, and its entire policy is calculated to provide a pretext for military action.

That is why the US counters every concession from Iraq with more sweeping demands for unlimited and indefinite access to Iraqi territory. It is not even clear what the US is demanding and what the bombing is supposed to accomplish. At one moment American spokesmen say the aim is to destroy existing biological and chemical weapons. At the next they declare Iraq must prove it has dismantled the capacity to build such weapons.

The US has failed to produce a shred of evidence that such weapons actually exist. Ending Iraq's capacity to build them, on the other hand, means destroying the country's economic and social infrastructure, since even a rudimentary level of industrial development provides the capacity to produce such weapons. In either case Washington is demanding that Iraq prove the nonexistence of something—a demand which by its very nature cannot be met.

The US position amounts to an injunction that Iraq surrender its sovereignty and accept the status of an American fiefdom—a demand that the US knows the Iraqi regime cannot accept.

It is a fact that the world would not be standing on the brink of a major conflagration in the Middle East were it not for the machinations of the United States government. But America's provocative posture in the gulf is by no means an aberration. It is indicative of a more general orientation. American capitalism has concluded that the chief lever for maintaining its economic dominance in the face of mounting challenges from international rivals is

the supremacy of its military machine.

Behind this increasing resort to arms are definite, though unstated, strategic aims. It is instructive to recall a Pentagon document that was leaked to the New York Times in March 1992 entitled: “Defense Planning Guidance for Fiscal Years 1994-99.” The Times published excerpts of a draft of this document, written a year after the Persian Gulf war and soon after the breakup of the Soviet Union. The document stated:

“Our first objective is to prevent the reemergence of a new rival, either on the territory of the former Soviet Union or elsewhere, that poses a threat on the order posed formerly by the Soviet Union.... [T]here are other potential nations or coalitions that could, in the further future, develop strategic aims and a defense posture of region-wide or global domination. Our strategy must now refocus on precluding the emergence of any potential future global competitor.”

Russia has good reason to fear the implications of Washington’s war policy in the Persian Gulf. As the US tightens its military grip on the region, it not only strengthens its hold on strategic oil reserves vital to its European and Asian rivals, it assumes a menacing position within relatively easy reach of the Caucasus and South Central Asia. The ruling clique in Russia is acutely aware that Iraq is only a few hundred miles from the oil and gas fields of the Caspian Sea.

Western Europe and Japan have no less ground for concern. Who are the “other potential nations or coalitions” cited in the Pentagon document, if not, in the first instance, Germany and Japan? Germany is soon to become the strongest power in a European Union, whose common currency will be dominated by the Deutschbank. The US looks on a European trade and currency bloc as a challenge to its global position.

As for Japan, the breakdown of the East Asian economies has only increased Wall Street’s appetite for markets previously dominated by Tokyo. Major US banks and corporations are already moving to take advantage of the collapse of currencies and share values from South Korea to Indonesia to buy up major sections of the region’s finance and industry. At the same time Washington is exploiting the highly exposed position of Japanese banks and the country’s economic stagnation to remove longstanding barriers to the penetration of American capital.

Seven years ago the US assembled its operation in Iraq behind the fig leaf of the United Nations and a grand international coalition, including virtually all of the Arab

regimes in the region. Now it declares that it will act unilaterally, with or without the sanction of the UN and regardless the protests of its ostensible allies.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin denounced the US military buildup, warning that Clinton’s actions could lead to world war. He pointed to the existence of nuclear weapons in many countries and the potential for reprisals by terrorist organizations. The White House all but ignored him.

When the authorities at the Winter Olympics, beginning this weekend in Japan, asked Washington to honor the pledge to abstain from war during the international games, the US flatly refused.

The reckless and violent thrust of American policy poses immense dangers to the working class all over the world. No one has consulted the American people about the impending war. It is being prepared behind their backs, with the assistance of a corrupt, corporate-controlled media, which parrots every lie issued by the government.

The television and press repeat ad nauseum the farcical claim that democracy will be brought to Iraq through the carpet bombing of its cities. This by a government, moreover, that invokes the cause of human rights and the sanctity of human life, and proceeds to execute a young woman, Karla Faye Tucker, despite appeals for mercy from around the world.

As for the American military, its arrogance was amply and tragically displayed Tuesday when a US jet showboating over an Italian ski resort cut the cable of a gondola, plunging 20 vacationers to a horrid death.

We call on workers to reject the war policy of the Clinton administration and Congress, and oppose their plans to implicate the American people in what can only be characterized as naked aggression and mass murder.

Leave the Iraqi people alone! They are not the enemy of the American workers. They are not responsible for the mass layoffs and the assault on social programs that have devastated the lives of millions across the country. The social forces responsible for these crimes—big business and its political representatives—are precisely the forces that are preparing a bloodbath against Iraq.



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