Clinton's speech on Iraq: A litany of deception

The WSWS Editorial Board
18 February 1998

The argument for military action against Iraq presented in Clinton's address was a combination of distortions and outright lies. To take only the most important:

Washington has substituted ultimatums, threats and provocations for diplomacy and negotiations. The US has thus far rejected all offers by Iraq to allow the inspection of sensitive sites by UN arms inspectors. Washington has likewise opposed a plan supported by other members of the UN Security Council which would have representatives of the Council's five members escort the inspectors. Plans brokered by Russia and France have been torpedoed as soon as they were announced.

In the days before Clinton's speech, the State Department was engaged in maneuvers to block a proposed trip by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to Baghdad, lest this deprive the administration of its desired opportunity to drop bombs on the Iraqi capital. As the US representative to the UN put it, "We are not interested in any compromise."

The truth is that the "people of the world" have in no way expressed support for a war against Iraq. Throughout the Middle East, popular demonstrations against the threatened US military attack have been staged despite government bans on such protests. US embassies from London to Jakarta are being fortified for the expected anti-American backlash in the event the air strikes go ahead.

Clinton does not even have the fig leaf of international support obtained by Bush in 1990-91, when a combination of threats and bribery lined up dozens of bourgeois governments to participate in the Persian Gulf War. Only a handful of allies are supplying token forces for this round of the American vendetta against Iraq. For all practical purposes the United States is acting unilaterally, while citing UN resolutions as the pretext for military actions.

While referring to the well-known fact that Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons in the Iran-Iraq War and against Kurdish rebels within Iraq, Clinton failed to note the equally well-established fact that it was the United States government, together with Britain and Germany, which equipped the Iraqi government to make these weapons. The US government instigated Saddam Hussein's attack on Iran and supported his suppression of Kurdish and Shi'ite rebels at home. There were no American protests over the methods of Saddam Hussein, so long as US imperialism believed it could make use of the regime which it now demonizes.

As for the present-day existence of "weapons of mass destruction" in Iraq, no one has presented a shred of evidence that they exist. The most that weapons experts can claim is that Iraq "has the potential" to rebuild such weapons. The same could be said for any nation on the face of the earth. Eliminating that potential is possible only through complete destruction of Iraqi society or the outright military occupation of the country.

These inspectors represent not the "civilized world," but rather the CIA and other intelligence agencies of the countries which waged war against Iraq in 1991. The vast majority are still on the payroll of their respective governments and provide Washington with information used to target Iraq for military attack.

While Clinton called on Iraq to allow the UNSCOM inspectors to "complete their mission," the present crisis was provoked in part by the growing realization by Iraqi officials that the real "mission" of the inspections was to provide a pretext for the US policy of maintaining economic sanctions on Iraq indefinitely.

As for the "civilized world," the sanctions imposed on Iraq have already caused the premature death of an

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estimated 1.5 million civilians, more than half a million of them children, in the seven years since the end of the Persian Gulf War.

This represents an expansion of the US aims, from curtailing alleged “weapons of mass destruction” to eliminating Iraq’s remaining, and poorly equipped, conventional military forces.

Curiously, none of Iraq’s neighbors appear to share the perception that they are threatened. Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Jordan, Syria and Iran — all the countries bordering Iraq, with the exception of the Kuwaiti monarchy — have publicly expressed opposition to a US war. Even as Clinton was preparing his speech, the Gulf state of Bahrain, a key US military base, announced that it would not allow offensive military action from its soil, further complicating US preparations. Far from protecting their interests, these states fear that another US attack on Iraq will destabilize the region and provoke unrest among the peoples they rule.

One obvious threat which is posed to Iraq’s “neighbors,” however, is the stated US intention to destroy chemical and biological weapons by means of aerial bombardment. In the event such weapons exist and are hit by bombs or cruise missiles, the result could be catastrophic, not only for the Iraqi population, but for those in adjoining countries as well.

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