

Clinton's brief for war in the Persian Gulf

The truth behind the White House lies

The WSWS Editorial Board
18 February 1998

The Clinton administration is preparing a cowardly attack on the people of Iraq in which countless innocent lives will be sacrificed to further the interests of American big business. This is the reality behind the efforts of the president and his top advisers to create the illusion of a popular consensus for savaging an already shattered nation.

The onslaught against Iraq was decided long ago behind the backs of the American people, and a massive military strike force has already been assembled to carry it out. The White House and the military are counting on the lack of opposition in Congress, the subservience of the media and the distracted and politically disoriented state of mind of a misinformed public to block the emergence of any organized opposition.

Clinton's February 17th speech defending his war policy was delivered not to a prime time television audience, nor from the traditional setting for a major address to the nation, the Oval Office. Rather it took the form of a midday speech to the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the Pentagon. Vice President Gore made a point of introducing Clinton as the Commander In Chief.

The choice of venue was no accident. It underscored the determination of the US to ride roughshod over diplomatic conventions and use its military might to bully and intimidate not only Iraq, but any nation that might in the future stand in the way of American imperialist aims.

It reflected, moreover, the concern of the administration over the president's poor standing among the Pentagon brass, and its efforts to assuage doubts within the military over the efficacy of Clinton's policy in the Persian Gulf. The fact that the speech would be seen by a relative handful of people was considered of little consequence.

It is a measure of the contempt for democratic processes that this address, given primarily for the benefit of the officer corps, the corporate and political elite, and the media, was passed off as the high point of the public "debate" over whether the country should launch a full-

scale air war.

In so far as the address was an attempt to justify the impending assault on Iraq, it consisted of a series of half-truths and outright lies. It began with a fantastic depiction of America and the world on the eve of the 21st century. The cold war was over, democracy was on the rise, peace and prosperity for all were around the corner. Only one obstacle stood in the way—what Clinton called "outlaw nations and an unholy axis of terrorists, drug traffickers and organized international criminals."

He continued: "We have to defend our future from these predators of the 21st century they will be all the more lethal if we allow them to build arsenals of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and the missiles to deliver them. There is no more clear example of this threat than Saddam Hussein's Iraq."

Reality at the end of the 20th century is, of course, a far cry from the idyllic picture painted by Clinton. Aside from the very small fraction of the American people who have reaped unprecedented wealth from the boom in share values and corporate profits, the bulk of the population enters the 21st century burdened by falling living standards, worsening economic insecurity and all of the scourges of a society in decline—crime, poverty, homelessness, disease. The growth of social inequality is, moreover, not simply an American, but rather an international phenomenon.

No less implausible is the attempt to blame the ills of the world on a conspiracy of evil tyrants and terrorists. This tactic of creating a political bogeyman to justify US aggression is nothing new. The same device has been used in advance of every military intervention of the past fifteen years—from Grenada, to Panama, to Somalia to Iraq.

But there was something particularly sinister in Clinton's opening remarks last Tuesday. He did more than present a rationalization for attacking Iraq. He presented a brief for a Pax Americana in the next century,

to be policed by a US military machine that assumes the right to attack any nation that interferes with Wall Street's definition of America's "national interest" and international "law and order."

When Clinton declared Saddam Hussein's Iraq to be an example of the "rogue states" that must be isolated and crushed, he was making the case for a whole series of military interventions in the coming months and years, which must inevitably lead to full-scale wars, military occupations and, ultimately, a new global conflagration.

The secret behind Washington's hostility to any diplomatic settlement is precisely its desire to set a precedent that will be used to intimidate both its enemies and its current allies abroad, and to inure the American people to acts of mass murder carried out in their name.

While Clinton declared that he was acting in defense of the US "national interest," nowhere in his speech did he explain the meaning of this phrase. But National Security Adviser Samuel Berger spelled it out in a speech February 13. Washington was intervening in the Gulf, he said, "to protect the free flow of oil."

In other words, the US is going to war to reaffirm the domination of corporate America over a region which accounts for 75 percent of the world's proven oil reserves, on which Washington's economic rivals in Western Europe and Japan depend. A permanent military presence in this region provides US imperialism with a vital strategic advantage.

Clinton boasted that the continuing economic embargo has cost Iraq \$110 billion in oil revenues over the past seven years. This exultation over the economic havoc wreaked by the sanctions gives the lie to US claims that its policies are directed against Saddam Hussein and not the Iraqi people. What does \$110 billion mean in human terms? It translates into food, medical supplies, drinkable water, access to electrical power—the rudiments of civilized life for 23 million people.

The impending bombing raids will likewise target the entire population of Iraq. All those familiar with US war plans predict massive civilian casualties. Only a few hours after Clinton's speech, NBC News suggested that Saddam Hussein might move kindergarten classes into his biological weapons factories—an attempt to prepare the American public for the sight of hundreds of Iraqi children murdered by American bombs. The same news broadcast reported that targets will include dairies, pharmaceutical plants and breweries situated in densely populated urban areas. ABC News reported that the initial bombing raids will last anywhere from four days to

several weeks.

As Clinton made clear in his speech, these attacks may be only the beginning. "We will be prepared to strike him again," he declared.

In concluding his remarks, Clinton said, "Saddam Hussein's Iraq reminds us of what we learned in the 20th century and warns us of what we must know about the 21st."

What, indeed, does the 20th century have to teach us? Twice the world was plunged into global wars which cost the lives of millions. In the five decades since the end of the Second World War, millions more have died in innumerable conflicts, most notably in Korea, Vietnam and the Middle East. These wars have been launched, not by "the people," but by rival cliques of capitalist rulers seeking to gain strategic and territorial advantages and control of raw materials and markets.

We call on workers throughout the world, and first of all in the United States, to oppose this brutal aggression against a defenseless people.

The Iraqi people are not your enemy. They are not responsible for the downsizing, wage-cutting and gutting of social programs that have slashed your living standards. They have not made profits off of the social distress of working people.

The entire working class must take a warning from the brutality of American capitalism. Only the independent struggle of the international working class against the profit system can put an end to militarism and war.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:
wsws.org/contact