

As Clinton prepares new pretext for war: Congressmen call for sabotage and assassination

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The response of the White House and Congress to the UN-brokered deal with Iraq has been to intensify US provocations against Iraq, complete with public demands for sabotage of the country's infrastructure, covert action to topple the regime in Baghdad, and a concerted effort to assassinate Saddam Hussein.

Since the announcement of the agreement on February 22, the bitter opposition within the American ruling class has taken essentially two forms. Clinton administration officials have officially endorsed the pact, while all but announcing their intention to subvert it, place the blame on the Iraqi regime, and proceed with their plans for a massive bombing attack.

On Monday the US pushed a resolution through the UN Security Council warning of "serious consequences" should Iraq do anything deemed to be in violation of its pledge to allow unfettered UN inspections. This resolution, as far as Washington is concerned, is a *carte blanche* for a military assault.

Among a considerable section of Congress, Democrats as well as Republicans, there has been even less of an attempt than in the White House to conceal the prevailing mood of anger at having been thwarted in showing off US firepower and demonstrating Washington's readiness to use it against a civilian population.

Within hours of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's announcement of the agreement, Arlen Specter (R-Penn.) took the floor of the Senate to demand that the US officially adopt a policy of covert action, sabotage and intensified sanctions to "bring Saddam Hussein to his knees." He proposed that the US set up an Iraqi government-in-exile, expand its no-flight zones to cover the entire country and establish a naval blockade.

Specter's basic theme—that no agreement with the Iraqi regime is possible, and the US should openly set about installing its own puppet government—was echoed with increasing stridency in the ensuing days. Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) on February 25 accused Annan of "appeasement," and denounced Clinton for capitulating to Hussein. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, compared Annan's mission to Baghdad to British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's cave-in to Hitler in Munich in 1938. Gerald Solomon (R-N.Y.), the chairman of the House Rules Committee, said, "Kofi Annan really sold us down the drain."

The public response of the Clinton administration to Republican criticism was to suggest that the UN-brokered agreement will assist Washington in rallying international support for a military strike in the not-too-distant future. The White House has already proclaimed that the US has the right to launch immediate and unilateral military strikes in the event of an alleged Iraqi violation of the agreement, and Clinton officials have made it clear they expect the agreement to break down.

"If this does not work," Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said last Thursday, "then the whole world will have seen Saddam Hussein renege on an agreement that he made and we will have more support for using other methods—military force."

Albright said the White House agreed with proposals, mainly but not exclusively from Republicans, to set up a "Radio Free Iraq" and step up support for Iraqi oppositional forces on the CIA payroll. In Congress, Representative Ike Skelton (D-Mo.), the senior

Democrat on the House National Security Committee, defended the administration's policy with the declaration: "We'll see if [Saddam Hussein] complies. If not, we'll thump him."

Administration sources also leaked reports to the press of a new CIA plan for subverting the Hussein regime, which called, among other things, for enlisting Kurdish and Shiite agents to destroy utility plants and broadcast stations. "This is a major campaign of sabotage," an unnamed senior administration official told the *New York Times*.

By last weekend the calls for sabotage and subversion against Baghdad had grown even shriller. On the Sunday news interview programs, Senator John McCain (R-Ariz.) and Senator Bob Kerrey (D-Neb.) both declared that the official policy of the government should be the removal of Saddam Hussein from power. Arlen Specter suggested that the US press for Hussein to be tried as a war criminal by the international tribunal in the Hague, Netherlands. He argued that such a move would provide a legal pretext for American efforts to topple his regime.

In a further gesture of belligerence, Lott told Annan he could find no time to meet with the UN official. Annan had previously scheduled meetings with Republican leaders for this week in Washington, aimed at convincing them to approve payment of long-standing American arrears to the UN treasury. In the face of Lott's provocation, Annan canceled his trip to the capital. "The environment in Washington was less welcome than one might have wished," said Assistant UN Secretary General John Ruggie.

Meanwhile, Senator Sam Brownback (R-Kan.), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee on Near Eastern and South Asian affairs, opened hearings on the subject: "Can Saddam Hussein be overthrown?" Among those slated to testify was Achmed Chalabi, president of the Iraqi National Accord, who received some \$15 million from the CIA in the early 1990s.

An undertone of much of the debate within Congress is the possibility of assassinating Hussein. Democratic Senator Charles Robb of Virginia last month proposed that the Clinton administration change an executive order dating from 1976 that outlaws US government efforts to assassinate foreign leaders.

No other government in the world indulges in such

open discussions of murder and terrorism against foreign governments and leaders. One need only consider what the US response would be to a public debate within the Iraqi political leadership—or that of any other country—on the merits of subversion and political murder directed against the US.

Indeed, in June of 1993 Clinton ordered the launching of 23 cruise missiles on Baghdad, supposedly in retaliation for an Iraqi plot to assassinate George Bush during the former president's visit to Kuwait the previous April. The only pieces of evidence ever brought forward for the existence of such a plot were confessions extracted by Kuwaiti torturers. The American missiles hit a residential area and killed eight civilians.



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