

Pentagon strategy for nuclear strikes revealed

Iraq—a testing ground for US militarism

Editorial Board

4 March 1998

Brushing aside the objections of virtually all of the members of the UN Security Council, the US has declared that the Security Council resolution passed Monday gives it a carte blanche to unilaterally launch a massive and sustained bombing attack on Iraq, without even informing the UN in advance.

There is a dark irony—which no media commentator will dare to note—in the US defying the United Nations in order to brutalize a defenseless population for the supposed crime of defying the very same institution. Washington, which organized the Gulf War and the subsequent sanctions under the cover of a UN operation, now finds the UN mantle—behind which the interests of rival imperialist powers are also at work—too confining.

The United States has no interest in abiding by any agreements reached between the UN and the Iraqi regime. It wants an air war and will not be satisfied with anything less than a bloody demonstration of *its* weapons of mass destruction. It will provoke the government in Baghdad, utilizing its vast resources, from a corrupt political establishment, to a bribed media, to a force of biased arms inspectors, to incite a standoff that will become the pretext for a US attack.

The US scarcely seeks to conceal its determination to attack Iraq. This single-minded pursuit of military action inevitably suggests that a broader strategy is involved, for which Iraq has become a testing ground.

A report issued Monday sheds significant light on the Pentagon policies that underlie the current crisis in the Gulf. An arms control organization, the British American Security Information Council (BASIC), released a study based on Pentagon documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act. The report cites a highly classified Presidential Decision Directive issued by President Clinton last November which

“allows for the use of nuclear weapons against ‘rogue’ states—those suspected of having access to weapons of mass destruction.”

The BASIC report documents how the US military routinely plans for nuclear contingencies against countries such as Iraq, Libya, Cuba and North Korea. It reveals that nuclear planners headquartered at the Defense Department’s Strategic Command (STRATCOM) have been overseeing the technological changes necessary to redirect the US nuclear force from its Cold War concentration on the Warsaw Pact countries to a “global capability.”

According to a press release issued by BASIC, “The US nuclear arsenal is in the middle of a multi-billion dollar upgrade to make it capable of ‘adaptive planning,’ quickly shifting between a greater number of limited contingencies all over the world. New modifications of a number of US nuclear weapons are underway, which will add new capabilities suitable for targeting potential weapons of mass destruction proliferators.”

As an example, the report notes Pentagon approval in 1996 of a particular modification of the nuclear arsenal as the “weapon of choice” for targeting Libya’s alleged underground chemical weapons plant at Tarhunah.

The report also cites a STRATCOM study from 1995 entitled “Essentials of Post-Cold War Deterrence.” This document recommends that the US wield the threat of nuclear force with an “irrational and vindictive” streak, so as to more effectively intimidate its enemies. It states, in part:

“The fact that some elements [of the US government] may appear to be potentially ‘out of control’ can be beneficial to creating and reinforcing fears and doubts within the minds of an adversary’s decision makers... That the US may become irrational and vindictive if its

vital interests are attacked should be a part of the national persona we project to all adversaries.”

These ideas are not entirely new. Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger employed them in ordering massive air strikes on urban centers in the latter stages of the Vietnam War, including the infamous Christmas bombing of Hanoi in December of 1972.

Such a deliberate posture of irrationality in the use of immense firepower, not excluding nuclear weapons, contains no small measure of genuine irrationality. This type of warmongering has a logic of its own, leading inexorably to the most tragic consequences.

These documents expose the pretense that the war policy which American capitalism is pursuing in the Persian Gulf is a response to Iraqi obstruction of arms inspections. It is, in reality, the implementation of an international military policy that has been discussed and elaborated over many years. The US has seized on Iraq as an ideal test for a strategy of exploiting its military supremacy to bully the rest of the world, enemies and allies alike, in pursuit of the global interests of American banks and transnational corporations.

The consensus among US policy makers is that the collapse of the Soviet Union has provided American capitalism with an unprecedented but transient window of opportunity. US economic predominance is fragile and under constant pressure from powerful rivals in Europe and Asia. Where America retains overwhelming superiority is in the military field, but this too will be eroded over time as rival powers such as Germany, Japan and China build up their own forces. Hence Washington’s determination to make the most of its military power while it can do so with relative impunity.

As early as March of 1992, within a few months of the breakup of the USSR, the *New York Times* published extracts of a Pentagon draft document, *Defense Planning Guidance for Fiscal Years 1994-99*, which declared: “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... Our strategy must now refocus on precluding the emergence of any potential future global competitor.”

The eruption of US militarism is the sharpest

expression of the insoluble contradictions of the capitalist system, not only in America, but on a world scale. The financial meltdown in Asia, growing inequality and sharpening social tensions, intensifying conflicts between the major capitalist powers—these are the conditions that propel the imperialist powers on the road to war.

The only force that can halt the growth of militarism and avert the danger of wider and more bloody conflagrations is the international working class, fighting as an independent and united force and armed with a socialist program.



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