

Telling admissions contradict US war propaganda

Two noteworthy press reports

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11 March 1998

There are occasions, increasingly rare, when the establishment press reports facts that run counter to the official version of events, and shed light on the economic, social and political interests that underlie US government policy. Two recent articles dealing with Washington's war buildup against Iraq and the great power diplomacy surrounding the Persian Gulf crisis fall into this category.

The first is a commentary by Youssef M. Ibrahim that appeared in last Sunday's *New York Times*. The author cites unnamed Iraqi, Jordanian and United Nations officials, as well as foreign diplomats, who generally agree that the Iraqi regime successfully parleyed its improved relations with France and Russia, as well as many Middle Eastern regimes, to outmaneuver the US in the latest round of Pentagon saber rattling.

In the course of the article, Ibrahim reports a three-year-old discussion with a CIA official stationed in Amman, in which the agent spelled out the ulterior motives behind the weapons inspections, as well as the supposedly humanitarian food distribution programs pushed by the US and administered by the UN.

"Four years after the end of the gulf war," Ibrahim writes, "a Central Intelligence officer stationed in Amman mused in a long evening conversation about the American plan to bring down Mr. Hussein. It was, he said, premised on 'usurping' the President's authority in the eyes of his people through food distribution programs and a permanent system of monitoring entirely controlled by foreigners. The idea was to chip away at the edifice of leadership."

Ibrahim goes on to note, "This policy proved successful episodically, provoking the kind of impetuous reactions from which the Iraqi leadership had to back down or be punished with military attacks or more sanctions.

"But in the latest instance, things played out differently."

There could be no more frank acknowledgment that the overriding aim of the weapons inspections and food programs was neither the elimination of some dire threat from Iraqi "weapons of mass destruction," nor the alleviation of civilian suffering. These programs were conceived and implemented for the purpose of violating Iraqi sovereignty, humiliating the Saddam Hussein regime and provoking it into actions that could be used to justify military reprisals. Washington instigated repeated confrontations in order to undermine the ruling clique in Baghdad and justify the continued presence of large-scale US military forces in the region.

Suggesting that the threat of a US air war is far from over, Ibrahim goes on later in the article to cite the remarks of a "senior adviser" to King Hussein of Jordan: "He also said Iraq's greatest challenge would be resisting what he called 'provocative behavior' by United Nations weapons inspectors."

The second noteworthy report appeared on the front page of the March 10 *Detroit Free Press*. Written by John Walcott of the *Free Press* Washington staff and headlined "Iraqi oil deal cut to quiet Russia, France on strikes," the article illuminates the economic interests that underlie the military and diplomatic maneuvers of both the US and the European powers.

Claiming confirmation from unnamed US and UN officials, Walcott reports that Washington agreed to let French and Russian oil firms control expanded Iraqi oil sales as well as extensive repairs of the country's oil industry, in return for the two governments' acquiescence in possible US strikes against Iraq in the coming weeks or months.

The deal was struck last month after UN General

Secretary Kofi Annan reached an accord with Saddam Hussein to resume weapons inspections at Iraqi presidential sites. The US accepted a US\$2.4 billion expansion in the amount of oil the UN would permit Iraq to export, and agreed that Elf-Aquitaine and Total in France and the Russian oil giant Gazprom, once headed by Russian Prime Minister Victor Chernomyrdin, would receive the major share of the new outflow.

UN officials also said French and Russian companies were expected to perform the bulk of the hundreds of millions of dollars in renovations that will be needed if Iraq is to pump the additional oil. Contracts for this work must be approved by the UN Security Council sanctions committee.

Turkey, another country that was reluctant to support US air strikes last month, will also benefit handsomely from the deal. Turkey could take in as much as \$700 million a month in revenues from a pipeline linking Iraq's northern oil fields to the Turkish port of Ceyhan. US planes enforcing a UN no-fly zone in northern Iraq are based there, and it will be interesting to see how Ankara reacts to the next eruption of US war mongering against Iraq.

Such backdoor horse trading over petrol profits—Iraq has the world's second largest reserves of oil and natural gas, topped only by Saudi Arabia—exposes the mercenary calculations that stand behind the rhetoric of all of the imperialist powers about peace, stability, democracy, etc. That this story ever saw the light of day is no doubt bound up with the anger of US oil industry officials, who, also on condition of anonymity, complained to the *Free Press* of being cut out of the profit bonanza to be reaped from the exploitation of Iraq's oil deposits.



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