

US militarism and the media

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Were it not for the existence of an utterly servile media, the US government would have a far more difficult, if not impossible task in pursuing its policy of naked aggression against a small and devastated country. Washington's "case" against Iraq is so paper-thin, so full of glaring contradictions, only a press and broadcast establishment that functions as a virtual arm of the state could swallow it whole and foist it on the population at large.

Throughout the current crisis TV commentators and foreign policy "experts" have almost universally presented as fact Washington's allegations about Iraqi "weapons of mass destruction," without even suggesting that real evidence be advanced to substantiate the charges. Clinton administration spokespeople appear on one television program after another. None of the media pundits asks a challenging question.

While administration officials breeze through encounters with those who are supposedly at the pinnacle of professional journalism, they fare far worse when face to face with the public. Last month's Columbus, Ohio town meeting demonstrated how much damage a few intelligent questions can wreak on the government's campaign of misinformation and deception. Why is it, one questioner asked, if Iraq represents such a threat to the region, virtually none of the countries in the region support your policy? Another inquired: you denounce Hussein's crimes, but how do you justify US backing for other governments—such as Indonesia, Turkey and Israel—that carry out atrocities against their populations or subject peoples?

Confronted with such questions, administration officials stumbled, contradicted themselves and resorted to crude smear tactics against their interrogators. It did not require genius to formulate the questions posed in Columbus. It merely took honesty

and concern. If such qualities existed in the mass media, many other questions would be posed by television and print journalists.

For example:

1. Is there not a fundamental paradox at the center of US policy toward Iraq? On the one hand government officials and leading politicians advocate sabotage, subversion and destabilization against the Iraqi government, and openly discuss the desirability of assassinating its head of state. Then they demand that this same government totally disarm itself!

2. Washington's stated policy is that the sanctions against Iraq, which have caused the deaths of hundreds of thousands, cannot be lifted until the "weapons of mass destruction," or *the capability to manufacture such weapons*, is eliminated. Doesn't this require, in fact, the destruction of virtually every modern manufacturing facility in the country, and the latter's reduction to a pre-industrial state?

3. The US government dropped atomic bombs on Japanese cities and used napalm and Agent Orange against the Vietnamese. How does it have the audacity to accuse another government of crimes against humanity? Is it not a fact, moreover, that US corporations, with the knowledge and permission of the government, supplied Iraq with weaponry in the 1970s and 1980s, and that at the time that Hussein used chemical weapons against the Iranians and the Kurds, Washington was his supporter and ally?



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