Clinton's attack on Iraq

Military aggression and political diversion

Editorial Board
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The launching of US air and missile attacks on Iraq is a measure both of the desperation of the Clinton administration and of the criminal recklessness and bellicosity of American imperialism. Thousands of Iraqi lives are to be sacrificed, for the short-term goal of preserving Clinton's presidency, and for the long-term goal of maintaining US dominance in the oil-rich Middle East.

The timing of the attack, on the eve of the impeachment debate and vote in the House of Representatives, is clearly bound up with the political crisis of the Clinton White House. As he has throughout this political crisis, at every point when his presidency has been threatened, Clinton has sought to appease his right-wing opponents with the threat or use of military force.

In February, after the eruption of the Lewinsky affair, amid a media barrage aimed at forcing his resignation, Clinton seized on a conflict with Iraq over the activity of United Nations weapons inspectors to go to the brink of military action. In August, only three days after his testimony before the grand jury convened by Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr, Clinton launched cruise missile strikes on Sudan and Afghanistan.

After going to the brink with Iraq again on November 15, Clinton was widely denounced by congressional Republicans when he called off planned air strikes, with B-52s already in the air headed for Baghdad. Republican senators openly called for the US government to set as its goal the overthrow and murder of Saddam Hussein. Only a few days ago, House Majority Whip Tom DeLay, who is spearheading the impeachment drive, baited the White House over its failure to oust the Iraqi leader.

If the timing of the attack is based on political expediency, however, the military action flows directly and inexorably from American policy in the region. For nearly eight years, since the end of the Persian Gulf war, the United States has maintained a death grip over this largely devastated and militarily defenseless country. The sanctions regime imposed through the United Nations has killed an estimated half a million children, depriving them of food, medicine and other basic necessities.

The official pretext for the economic embargo, the claim that a country largely without electric power and running water was nonetheless stockpiling nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, is an utter fraud. No evidence that Iraq currently possesses weapons of mass destruction has ever been presented by the US or the US-controlled UNSCOM inspectors. Instead, Iraq has been required to do the impossible--prove the nonexistence of such weapons in a territory the size of Texas with a population of 20 million people. There have even been demands that Iraq rid itself of the 'capability' of producing such weapons, which would mean, given the flexibility of modern technology, that Iraq must revert to pre-industrial conditions.

It is a measure of the cynicism of the American political establishment and the corporate-controlled media that Clinton's lies about a trivial matter, his affair with Monica Lewinsky, have been declared an impeachable offense, while his repetition of gross, obvious and, in the full sense of the word, criminal lies about Iraq is accepted and endorsed. Indeed, if any of Clinton's Republican opponents were the occupant of the White House, the lies would be just as brazen and the military aggression just as flagrant.

In the propaganda of 1998, 'weapons of mass destruction' occupies the same place that the 'domino theory' and the Gulf of Tonkin resolution occupied during the Vietnam War. And the former antiwar protester of the 1960s seeks to save himself through the slaughter of innocent Iraqi people.

The latest confrontation with Iraq was deliberately instigated by UNSCOM, which functions quite openly as an instrument of the US government, regularly reporting on its spying activities to the American CIA. Its most provocative action, taken last week, was an attempt to

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invade the Baghdad headquarters of the ruling Ba'ath Party. Under conditions where the CIA is seeking to organize both the overthrow of the Ba'athist regime in Iraq and the assassination of Saddam Hussein, UNSCOM officials knew that Iraqi authorities would block an inspection, thus creating the pretext for American air strikes.

The real driving force of the US military intervention against Iraq is the effort by American imperialism to assert its strategic interests in the region. Joined only by its most loyal international stooge, the British Labour Party government of Prime Minister Tony Blair, the US government is seeking to secure for American corporate interests the lion's share of the profits in the exploitation of the two greatest reservoirs of oil on the planet, the Middle East and Central Asia.

There is an ominous logic to the American military moves against Iraq. While little information is yet available, there have been reports of 'heavy and sustained bombing' and of air strikes against the positions occupied by Iraq's Republican Guard, the principal conventional military force which survived the gulf war onslaught. Such measures, which have nothing to do with concern for 'weapons of mass destruction,' would be carried out for the purpose of clearing the way for the invasion and military occupation of Iraq by US ground troops. Indeed, no other military action could be envisioned to carry out the declared goal of US foreign policy, which Clinton reiterated in his Wednesday night speech, the establishment of a new, US-dominated government in Baghdad.

In addition to the longstanding US designs on the Persian Gulf, which were the basis for the Bush administration's decision to go to war over Kuwait in 1990-91, the Clinton administration has been deeply involved in jockeying for control of the breakaway republics of the former Soviet Union that surround the Caspian Sea, which are believed to have the largest untapped gas and oil reserves in the world.

A bitter struggle is raging between the major capitalist powers over the location and control of the pipelines that will deliver these resources to the world market. Seeing potential advantages in the dismemberment of Iraq and the stationing of American troops so close to the new oilfields, both the Clinton administration and its Republican adversaries now embrace the goal of overthrowing and removing Saddam Hussein, which was rejected by George Bush in 1991 as both unfeasible and undesirable from the standpoint of US interests.

It is these fundamental economic and strategic considerations, and not Clinton's political maneuvers, which are at the root of the aggression against Iraq. Once again it is being made clear that the basic threat to world peace is American imperialism, and its demented belief that with B-52s and cruise missiles it can do as it pleases anywhere in the world.

Whatever the immediate outcome of the assault on Iraq--and there is no doubt that what is unfolding is a colossal human tragedy--the drive by American capitalism to war must lead ultimately to disaster, not only for its victims overseas, but for the working class youth who will be mobilized to kill or be killed for the profit interests of the corporate and financial elite. Yet the latest US military actions proceed without a single dissenting voice in the political establishment, without any critical examination by the subservient mass media. Working people must oppose these military strikes and demand an end both to the aggression against Iraq and to the continued US/UN policy of starving the Iraqi people.

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