

US officials threaten military action against Iraq

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Citing an alleged buildup of Iraqi military forces, US officials have issued statements suggesting that the Clinton administration is considering military action against the Persian Gulf country.

An article posted on the CNN website September 6 was headlined "Pentagon Says Attack on Kurds Would Prompt US Military Response." It cited US Defense Department sources who said the Pentagon had developed plans for "three days of intense attacks against Iraqi military targets." The proposed US assault would include both cruise missile attacks and air strikes against Iraqi targets "including military sites and Iraqi infrastructure associated with Saddam's military machine."

The article said the recent decision to prepare a Patriot missile battery for possible deployment to Israel had been taken out of concern that Iraq might launch Scud missiles at Israel in retaliation for a US attack.

The justification given for the US military preparations was threadbare. An official said Washington was closely monitoring troop maneuvers in the northern part of the country, part of annual exercises conducted by the Iraq military. "It could just be normal troop rotation," he said.

CNN noted that a US and British proposal to bomb Iraq for refusing to admit a newly reconstituted UN weapons inspection team was blocked due to opposition from Saudi Arabia.

The US aircraft carrier George Washington with an air wing of 75 planes is currently on patrol in the Persian Gulf. In addition, the United States and Britain have ground-based aircraft in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Turkey.

In September 1996 the Clinton administration launched a cruise missile attack on Iraq in response to Iraqi military exercises in the Kurdish region in the

northern part of the country. The White House at the time claimed the Iraqi maneuvers were a cover for military operations against the Kurds.

In a September 12 address to the United Nations General Assembly US Secretary of State Madeline Albright called on delegates to "stand up to the campaign launched by Baghdad against the UN's authority and international law." Speaking afterward to reporters Albright warned that Iraq could face military action if it crossed "red lines" set by the United States.

On September 14 an Associated Press report quoted an unnamed US official who alleged that an Iraqi jet had flown into Saudi Arabian air space the previous week. The Pentagon refused to confirm the report, but Rear Admiral Craig Quigley said there were two Iraqi planes in southern Iraq on September 4.

The latest militaristic rumblings by the Clinton administration take place as the US and Britain find themselves increasingly isolated internationally. A new setback came September 14 when Egypt, an important US ally in the Middle East, issued a statement through its foreign minister saying it was time to end the sanctions against Iraq.

An estimated one million Iraqi men women and children have died as a result of the economic blockade, which has cut off vital supplies including food, medicine and water purification equipment. Much of the infrastructure of Iraq lies in ruins nearly a decade after the 1991 Gulf War.



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