Bush aides push war with Iraq

Joseph Kay
20 October 2001

In the wake of the terror attacks of last month, a section of the Bush administration is working hard—overtly and covertly—to create a pretext for an American invasion of Iraq. The events of September 11, and more recently the anthrax scare, are being exploited by high-level operatives within the American government to promote a program that has long been sought by the military and intelligence establishment: the ousting of the Ba'athist regime of Sadaam Hussein and the transformation of Iraq into a state subservient to American interests.

As with all the policy decisions of the American government since the attacks last month, these Bush aides and their supporters in the media and foreign policy think tanks advance the argument that an attack on Iraq is necessary in order to root out terrorism, with complete disregard to the actual evidence at hand.

They voice speculation and suspicion that Iraq may have been involved in providing travel documents for one or more of the September 11 hijackers. They revive past claims of Iraqi attempts to develop germ warfare weapons, without establishing any link to the current incidents of anthrax. On this basis they manufacture a justification for a course of action that was actually the starting point of their argument: that the US should go to war with Iraq, occupy Baghdad, and overthrow the regime of Saddam Hussein.

It is generally acknowledged within the American intelligence community that no evidence exists connecting Iraq to any of the recent attacks. Both Secretary of State Colin Powell and Vice President Dick Cheney have said as much, as have intelligence officials in Israel and Jordan, two governments strongly opposed to the Iraqi regime. Even those most vehemently advocating the extension of the current military campaign to Iraq acknowledge that no direct ties have been established.

It is impossible to say with certainty who is behind the anthrax attacks, or if indeed they all come from the same source, particularly because so little information has been made available to the public. Iraq is, however, one of the more unlikely suspects, particularly given the Ba'athists well-known hostility to the Taliban. In any case, it is clear that whether Iraq was actually involved is largely irrelevant to the American ruling elite—this merely provides a pretext for pursuing its long-held strategic and material interests in the region.

It is not a fringe element within the Bush administration that is arguing for a full-scale invasion of Iraq, but rather involves the civilian leadership of the Pentagon, an unknown proportion of the military brass itself, and a coterie of former national security officials, cheered on by the most right-wing sections of the media, such as Fox News and the *Wall Street Journal*.

The efforts are being coordinated by the Defense Policy Board, a high-level advisory committee to the Pentagon whose members include former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger; James Woolsey, director of the CIA under Clinton; David Jeremiah, former deputy chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Harold Brown, former secretary of defense under Carter; former Vice President Dan Quayle and former defense and energy secretary James Schlesinger. The board has close ties to current Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, as well as Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, a fact that has led some within ruling circles to refer to it as the "Wolfowitz cabal."

The *Wall Street Journal* has been especially vociferous, publishing in a span of three days two major editorials and one op-ed piece by Woolsey arguing for an invasion of Iraq. After asserting that the leading suspected supplier of anthrax is Iraq, an editorial in the October 15 *Journal* declared, "The best defense against anthrax attacks isn't passing out Cipro to every American. It is to go on relentless offense against the terrorist sources.... The government has to do everything possible to destroy the anthrax threat at its state-sponsored source."

Attempts to implicate Iraq began immediately following the September 11 attack. These were initially centered on an alleged meeting last year between an individual on one of the hijacked planes, Mohamed Atta, and Ahmed Samir al-Ahani, who was then a consul and second secretary at the Iraqi embassy in Czech Republic. According to those advancing the theory of Iraqi involvement, al-Ahani provided Atta and his fellow hijackers with documentation and other aid, which was used to carry out the September attack.

Running into opposition from within the Bush administration itself, particularly from Secretary of State Colin Powell, the faction led by Wolfowitz is seeking to breathe new life into the drive by exploiting the hysteria whipped up around the incidents of anthrax exposure. The difficulty of producing anthrax capable of being used as a weapon has been cited, according to one CIA official, as "prima facie evidence of the involvement of a state intelligence agency," with Iraq as the chief suspect. This fact, assuming it is true, might just as well suggest that the anthrax was obtained from laboratories within the United States itself.

At the same time, attempts are still being made to connect Iraq with the original September events. Woolsey, the CIA director from 1993 to 1996, has been trying to resurrect charges of Iraqi involvement in the first attack on the World Trade Center in 1993. Woolsey visited London shortly after the September 11 plane hijackings to "firm up" evidence for this theory, which could then be used to imply Iraqi involvement in the attack last month. "[Woolsey's investigation] should be pursued without any further delay," argued Richard Perle, a former assistant secretary of defense and a strong advocate of Iraqi conspiracy theories. "And if Iraq was indeed involved in 1993, then it is another piece of circumstantial evidence to link them to this attack."

All of this is meant to justify military invasion of Iraq. While it can not be determined in advance exactly what actions the American government will decide to take, it is clear that the Pentagon is already drawing up plans for such an invasion. The British newspaper *The Observer* reports, "Plans have been discussed among Pentagon strategists for US air strike support for armed insurrections against Saddam by rebel Kurds in the north and Shia Muslims in the south, with a promise of American ground troops to protect the oilfields of Basra."

Further confirming that the US government is considering such an attack is an extraordinary exchange between the recently confirmed US ambassador to the United Nations, John Negroponte, and his Iraqi counterpart. On October 9, Negroponte warned Iraq that the US would launch military strikes against the country if the regime in Baghdad tried to assist anti-American forces in Afghanistan or moved against its

© World Socialist Web Site

domestic opponents.

Negroponte told the Iraqi envoy, Mohammed Douri, “There will be a military strike against you and you will be defeated.” The same day Negroponte sent a letter to the United Nations Security Council stating: “We may find that our self-defense requires further action with respect to other organizations and other states.”

The question of invading Iraq has exacerbated divisions within the Bush administration and the American political establishment as a whole. On the one hand, there is the “Wolfowitz cabal,” which has long sought to remove Hussein from power. This section is prominently represented in the Bush administration, particularly in the Pentagon.

This group has largely operated outside of and in opposition to the State Department and its head, Secretary of State Colin Powell. The Defense Policy Board’s strategy to target Iraq was discussed at a two-day seminar in September, of which Powell had not been informed. Even officials in the State Department responsible for Iraq policy were not briefed on the meeting, which was attended by both Wolfowitz and Rumsfeld.

Woolsey’s trip to Britain was financed by the Defense Department, behind the backs of the State Department and the current CIA leadership. Powell was reportedly not consulted in regard to the statements made by Negroponte to the UN. According to a senior administration official, “Powell was surprised to find out about it and he was quite distressed.”

An editorial column by Richard Lowry in the right-wing *National Review* makes clear how bitter the conflict is. Lowry writes: “Colin Powell helped save Saddam Hussein during the Gulf War, and seems bent on saving him again. If Saddam escapes the full wrath of the U.S. war on terrorism, he will once more have Powell and the dictates of a great international coalition to thank.” One of the main journals of the far right, with close connections to the Bush White House, is launching a McCarthy-style attack, accusing Bush’s own secretary of state of being soft on Saddam Hussein.

Lowry spelled out the perspective of those favoring invasion of Iraq: “At the very least, Iraq should be allowed to be dismembered by its perpetually warring factions, or, ideally, invaded and occupied by the American military and made into a protectorate.” The goal “would be a pro-Western and reasonably successful regime, somewhere between the Shah of Iran and the current government of Turkey.... It would guarantee the West’s access to oil, and perhaps break up OPEC.... And it would be a nice economic benefit to the United States.”

A letter to Bush from the Defense Policy Board in late September outlining its recommendations directly attacked Powell’s focus on securing international support for the American assault on Afghanistan. After stating, “Failure to undertake such an effort [the overthrow of Hussein] will constitute a decisive surrender in the war against terrorism,” the letter argued, “Coalition building has run amok. The point about a coalition is ‘can it achieve the right purpose?’ not ‘can you get a lot of members?’”

The two sections within the political establishment and the administration do not differ on what the interests of the American ruling elite are. Powell, after all, was chairman of the Joint Chiefs during the first Bush administration’s Gulf War, and has supported the ongoing air raids against Iraq, the most recent of which took place earlier this month. The differences are on the best way to achieve these interests. Powell and those around him are concerned that an invasion of Iraq will dissipate support from Arab and European states, including some of the closest collaborators of the United States.

Turkey, for example, is worried about the effects a war on Iraq will have on its internal stability, as well as the costs that it would entail for its already devastated economy. The 56-nation Organization of the Islamic Conference, which includes many countries that the United States has recruited in its current campaign, recently issued a statement condemning the terror attack on the US but rejecting any attacks on Arab countries under the pretext of combating terrorism.

An invasion of Iraq would also be certain to run into opposition from Russia and China, as well as many of the European countries in the NATO alliance. United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan noted that Security Council members had expressed “anxiety” over the Negroponte letter. Under pressure from France and other states, NATO this week said it needs further evidence before it extends to other countries its endorsement of the US and British attacks on Afghanistan. French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin said last week that he did not want the response to the September 11 attacks to drift out of control.

Even Britain, America’s staunchest European ally, has balked at extending the “war against terrorism” to Iraq, fearing the conflicts that such an action would engender. British pressure is partially responsible for the fact that the war has remained confined to Afghanistan thus far. UK Foreign Secretary Jack Straw recently told the BBC that the US and UK governments were agreed that, for the present, no action would be taken against other countries, particularly Iraq. He suggested that the calls for new fronts in the military campaign were coming from “people on the fringes of the [Bush] administration.”

Thus far, Bush has not followed the course advocated by those within the cabinet desiring an invasion of Iraq regardless of opposition from European and Arab states and regardless of the instability that such an attack would inevitably generate. This course, however, could very well change over the coming months.

What is clear is that a powerful faction within the US government, including top officials in direct contact with the military brass, are pressing for a war against Iraq regardless of the admitted lack of evidence that Baghdad played any role in the September 11 attack. This cynical utilization of the World Trade Center tragedy for the purposes of warmongering applies to more than just Iraq. The war against Afghanistan is the product of the same method: using anti-terrorism as a pretext for realizing the military, political and economic aims of American imperialism in Central Asia.

A new war with Iraq would have devastating consequences for the Iraqi people, who have already experienced two bombing wars conducted by the American government during the past decade, in addition to ongoing economic sanctions and periodic bombing raids by American and British planes. The Iraqi state, whose repressive character does not differ fundamentally from that of American allies such as the Egyptian regime of Mubarak or the semi-feudal monarchy of Saudi Arabia, has up until last month been the principal bogeyman of American foreign policy. A continuation of this policy in the coming years will only exacerbate the enormous burdens placed on the Iraqi population.

The dishonest attempts to associate Iraq with biological terrorism on American soil have particularly far-reaching consequences and dangers for the rest of the world’s population as well. During the Gulf War, the first Bush administration made the implicit threat towards Iraq that any use of biological weapons against the US-led coalition would be met with nuclear retaliation. Certainly this is one of the considerations in the minds of those advancing the anthrax-Iraqi connection: such a claim could be used to justify any and all forms of military response in the pursuit of the interests of the American ruling class, including the use of nuclear weapons.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site