

US preparing full-scale invasion of Iraq

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Recently leaked Pentagon documents as well as reports on strategic preparations by the US military indicate that the Bush administration is preparing a massive invasion of Iraq within the next several months.

Such a war would rank as one of the great imperialist crimes of the century—an unprovoked attack by the world’s biggest military power against a nation that has been ravaged by more than a decade of sanctions and subjected to unceasing military and political provocations. Washington’s basic war aims, behind the rhetoric about “weapons of mass destruction” and the “war on terrorism,” are entirely predatory. The US wants to seize control of Iraq’s oilfields and turn the country into an American protectorate.

President Bush again threatened military action against the Arab nation at a July 8 White House press conference, declaring, “It is the stated policy of this government to have a regime change ... and we’ll use all the tools at our disposal to do so.”

These “tools” are being readied. The Pentagon has placed record orders for precision-guided munitions, the so-called “smart bombs” that allow US forces to rain death and destruction on virtually defenseless peoples from many miles away.

Washington has also built up a string of military bases and airfields throughout the Persian Gulf region, deploying thousands of troops there and stockpiling weaponry for the anticipated war. At least 2,000 US Special Forces and other troops have been sent covertly to Jordan, according to the Lebanese newspaper *Al Safir*, which added that Washington plans a major armored invasion along the Amman-to-Baghdad highway. The Jordanian regime has denied the US presence, but a sure sign of a quid pro quo arrangement is the Bush administration’s proposal to at least double its aid to Jordan.

Military sources report that the First Marine Expeditionary Force at Camp Pendleton, California, the major assault unit to be used in an invasion, has begun intensive drills in preparation for battle. US warplanes, meanwhile, are carrying out increasingly frequent strikes against Iraqi targets under the pretext of responding to Iraqi challenges to the enforcement of the “no-fly zone” in the south of the country.

Pentagon war plans leaked to the *New York Times* earlier this month indicated that at least 250,000 troops and hundreds of warplanes are to participate in the planned invasion. The

military action would begin with a devastating air war directed at thousands of targets, both military and civilian.

The leaking of the document detailing US invasion plans provoked little controversy in Washington, with Bush merely cautioning against “speculation.” A war between the United States and an Iraq still devastated from the last US invasion 12 years ago would be so unequal that the Bush administration sees little need for secrecy.

It would be in keeping with the new policy of “preemptive attacks” that Bush unveiled at a West Point graduation ceremony last month. This policy arrogates to the US the right to launch unprovoked aggression against any country in the world that Washington deems to be part of the “axis of evil.”

According to most military and government sources, the attack on Iraq would begin next spring, allowing time for the military buildup and timed for warmer weather to create better conditions for desert warfare. Political exigencies, however, could override military considerations. If the administration sees the Republican Party going down to defeat in the mid-term elections in November, Bush could very well opt for an “October surprise,” launching an attack with the aim of creating a war-fever atmosphere and rallying the electorate around his government.

The series of corporate scandals that have drawn growing attention to the role of Bush, Vice President Cheney and other administration officials in criminal business practices make the launching of an early war all the more probable a means of diverting popular anger.

To politically prepare and justify the coming slaughter, the Bush administration is sounding a drumbeat about an alleged threat from Iraqi “weapons of mass destruction,” hinting darkly that the regime of Saddam Hussein could provide biological, chemical or even nuclear devices to terrorists for attacks on US soil. Coupled with constant vague public warnings about alleged terrorist threats, this campaign amounts to a form of psychological warfare against the American people.

There exists no credible evidence that Iraq is pursuing any program to develop such weapons. Scott Ritter, the former US Marine who headed United Nations weapons inspections until 1998, when the inspectors were withdrawn at Washington’s request, has affirmed that Iraq had effectively disarmed in the wake of the Persian Gulf War.

For more than a decade, Washington has used the weapons

inspection issue as a means of launching provocations and espionage against Iraq. At the same time it has seized on Iraq's inability to prove the unprovable—that there exist no weapons of mass destruction, or the means to produce them, on any inch of Iraqi soil—as a pretext for war.

The Pentagon official who spoke to the *Times* about the document outlining the invasion plan acknowledged that it included a vast number of targets for US bombardment. “The target list is so huge it’s almost egregious,” this source told the newspaper. “It’s obvious that we’ve been watching these guys for an awfully long time.”

Many of these targets were mapped out by US intelligence agents and military personnel working undercover as UN inspectors. Washington has insisted that these same elements be allowed back into Iraq with no restrictions, under conditions in which the Bush administration has also leaked instructions to the CIA to prepare for the overthrow of the Iraqi government and the potential assassination of the country’s president.

The real aim of the “regime change” demanded by Bush is the installation of a US puppet regime in Baghdad, assuring Washington a further stranglehold over the region and the US-based oil corporations a monopoly over its oilfields.

A group of fanatical right-wing militarists within the administration, led by Vice President Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Assistant Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, reportedly are in agreement with the Israeli regime of Ariel Sharon that US military force can effectively subjugate Iraq, providing the US with an alternative to Saudi Arabia as a source of oil and a site for military bases.

That there exists no popular support in Iraq itself for turning the country into a colonial-style US protectorate is tacitly acknowledged in Washington. While the US administration was scheduled to bring together a group of Iraqi “dissidents” in Washington July 9 and to hold another such meeting in London later in the month, no one in the administration has voiced any serious belief that these elements are capable of rallying significant forces against the Hussein regime.

CIA Director George Tenet has reportedly warned Bush that there is little or no chance of a successful coup against the Iraqi leader, counseling that only an all-out US military assault can realize American aims.

Meanwhile, Wayne Downing, the retired US general brought into the administration to plot the “war on terrorism,” resigned suddenly late last month. Downing had reportedly favored an “Afghan-style” campaign in Iraq, using US air power and special operations ground units in conjunction with indigenous forces akin to the Afghan Northern Alliance.

Whatever the crimes carried out by the Hussein regime, the Iraqi people have no reason whatsoever to see Washington as a liberating force. The war launched by Bush Senior claimed the lives of tens of thousands of Iraqi soldiers, most of them incinerated in their bunkers or killed from the air while fleeing down the “highway of death” from Kuwait. Thousands more

civilians died in cruise missile attacks and bombing raids.

The US aerial bombardment also effectively destroyed Iraq’s industrial and social infrastructure, leaving masses of workers unemployed and depriving the country of the most essential medical and sanitation services, as well as electrical power and communications. The result was unprecedented poverty, hunger and disease.

In the 12 years since, the US has presided over the enforcement of a brutal regime of economic sanctions that have inflicted a horrifying toll on the population. According to a 1999 UNICEF study, one out of every seven Iraqi children dies before the age of five, resulting in 5,000 more child deaths every month than occurred before the US war and sanctions. In addition, it found that 22 percent of the country’s young children are chronically malnourished.

For more than a decade, US imperialism has tortured the Iraqi people. Now it is preparing to deliver an even crueler punishment. Military planners have warned the Bush administration that any invasion could end in house-to-house street fighting in Baghdad, leveling much of the ancient Arab capital and leaving many of its citizens dead.

Unlike his father in 1990, Bush has shown no inclination to build up an “international coalition” to give a US invasion of Iraq a veneer of legality. While the Blair government in Britain appears once again ready to toe Washington’s line—reportedly offering some 30,000 troops for an invasion—other European powers have expressed strong opposition to a unilateral use of force by Washington. These governments see increasing US military appetites in the Middle East as a direct threat to the oil supplies upon which Europe, far more than North America, depends.

Just as with its repudiation of the International Criminal Court and its arrogant demand for blanket immunity from war crimes prosecution for all US personnel, Washington is prepared to defy Europe over a war with Iraq. In its conduct on the world arena, the Bush administration exhibits the same combination of recklessness and criminality that has become the hallmark of the US corporate elite’s dealings on the financial markets. Both can ultimately produce only tragedies and disasters, at home and abroad.

Among other potentially catastrophic consequences, a US invasion of Iraq is pregnant with the possibility of nuclear warfare. The Pentagon position paper on US nuclear policy leaked to the press earlier this year listed as one of the scenarios for an American nuclear first-strike an Iraqi attack on Israel carried out in response to an American assault on the Arab country.



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