

Oppose US war against Iraq! Build an international movement against imperialism!

World Socialist Web Site Editorial Board

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The *World Socialist Web Site* condemns the US war drive against Iraq and calls on all working people, youth and opponents of militarism in America and around the world to launch a popular movement against imperialist war, in opposition to Bush, the Democrats, and all other representatives of the US corporate and political elite.

In making an assessment of a great historical event—the headlong drive by American imperialism towards global war—it is necessary to call things by their right names, and not be disoriented or overawed by the flood of propaganda which emanates from the White House, Pentagon and Congress, amplified through the American media.

What Bush is proposing, and Congress is preparing to endorse, is a war of plunder by the most powerful nation in the world against one of the weakest. With the second largest oil reserves of any country, Iraq is a rich prize for ExxonMobil, ChevronTexaco and the rest of corporate America. When Bush speaks of “regime change” he means the replacement of an independent Iraq by a semi-colonial regime, headed by an American stooge like Hamid Karzai, the US-installed president of Afghanistan, which would cede effective control of the country’s resources to American and British interests.

No amount of name-calling against Saddam Hussein can transform Iraq into a significant strategic threat to the United States. The apocalyptic warnings by Bush, Vice President Cheney and other spokesmen for the administration—claiming that an Iraqi attack on the United States with chemical, biological or nuclear weapons is imminent—are a cynical attempt to stampede US public opinion. These claims are lies, and Bush, Cheney & Co. know they are lies, but they know they will not be challenged by the corrupt American media or the Democratic Party.

War against Iraq sets the stage for further bloody conflicts, which threaten death and destruction on an unprecedented scale. In a recent commentary in the *Washington Post*, former national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski cautioned that a preemptive attack on Iraq would have a profoundly destabilizing effect on the entire structure of international relations. Its enemies would portray the United States as a “global gangster,” he warned. The term is more revealing than perhaps intended: the Bush administration is preparing to launch what is seen throughout the world as a criminal enterprise.

The US government has embarked on a program of military violence and political provocation on a scale not seen since the days of the Nazis. This comparison is neither far-fetched nor rhetorical. In publicly proclaiming the doctrine of preemptive attack—in other words, war initiated for aggressive purposes, with barely a pretense of self-defense—Bush & Co. are preparing to commit the principal crime for which leaders of Nazi Germany and imperial Japan were placed on trial after World War II, convicted and executed.

There is reason to believe that Bush administration officials are aware that they could face prosecution under the Nuremberg precedent that the Nazis were guilty of the crime of “waging aggressive war” when they carried out the unprovoked invasions of Czechoslovakia, Poland,

Denmark, the Netherlands and other neighboring countries. Hence the strident US campaign to exempt American military and foreign policy personnel from the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court, set up under UN auspices to deal with charges of war crimes.

As the *New York Times* reported in an extraordinary article September 7, “The Bush administration is shifting its emphasis in seeking exemptions for Americans from the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court, telling European allies that a central reason is to protect the country’s top leaders from being indicted, arrested or hauled before the court on war crimes charges, administration officials say.”

US officials cited the legal actions brought against former secretary of state Henry Kissinger in Chilean and American courts, on charges that he was responsible for the mass killings which accompanied the 1973 CIA-backed military coup in Chile that established the dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet. A top US official told the *Times* that the administration was concerned, not about American soldiers who might commit atrocities, “the Lieutenant Calleys of the future,” but about possible war crimes prosecution of “the top public officials—President Bush, Secretary Rumsfeld, Secretary Powell.”

The Bush administration apes the “big lie” technique of Hitler and Goebbels in its attempt to portray Iraq as a deadly menace. This campaign relies on public ignorance of the most elementary facts. Iraq is an impoverished country already devastated by American attack only a decade ago. It is not and cannot be a threat to the United States, the military power which dwarfs any other on the globe.

Iraq is, in terms of population, the forty-fourth largest country in the world. In terms of land area it is only fifty-sixth, ranking on both counts even lower than Afghanistan. The disparity between Iraq and the US in economic power is staggering. Iraq had a GDP of \$57 billion in 2000—less than the personal wealth of a single American, Bill Gates. The \$11 trillion US economy is 200 times larger than that of Iraq, whose economic output places it just below Burma and Sri Lanka and just ahead of Guatemala and Kenya.

As for military power, the gap is even greater. In the 1991 Persian Gulf War, tens of thousands of Iraqi conscripts were incinerated by US bombs, missiles and other high-tech weapons, while only a few hundred American soldiers lost their lives. In the intervening decade, Iraq has been subjected to an economic blockade and bombed repeatedly, and the Iraqi military has shrunk to one third its 1990 size. Meanwhile the Pentagon has been built up to the point where the US military budget now exceeds the combined total of military spending by the next 25 countries in the world.

The fundamental character of a war is defined by the class nature and historical position of the states involved. The United States is the most powerful imperialist country, which seeks to dominate the globe. Its impending attack on Iraq is the culmination of two decades of increasingly reckless and aggressive behavior, in the course of which American forces have bombed, attacked, occupied or organized armed subversion in more than a dozen countries: Nicaragua, Panama, Grenada, Haiti, Somalia,

Sudan, Libya, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and the various states and fragments comprising the former Yugoslavia.

Iraq is a country whose origins are rooted in colonial oppression. It was ruled for decades by Great Britain, which carved the territory out of the disintegrating Ottoman Empire. Since the late 1950s, when the last British-imposed monarch was overthrown, the country has been ruled by a series of military-backed bourgeois nationalist regimes which sought, throughout the Cold War, to balance between the United States and the Soviet Union.

After the 1979 Iranian revolution overthrew the Shah, the key US ally in the oil-rich Persian Gulf, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein offered himself as a potential substitute. His invasion of Iran in 1980 was greeted with enthusiasm by Washington, which established close relations with Baghdad, dropping opposition to arms sales to the regime and supplying the Iraqi military with satellite photographs of Iranian troop movements.

While the Bush administration today cites Iraq's possession of chemical weapons as a *casus belli*, it does not care to discuss the origins of these weapons. The Reagan administration supported the Iraqi acquisition and use of chemical weapons to prevent an Iranian victory. The US even supplied intelligence data used to target thousands of Iranian soldiers for mustard gas attacks.

Administration officials have argued that one of the crimes of Saddam Hussein was to start a war with Iran in which a million people were killed. They know full well that this is a crime for which the US government bears a large share of responsibility—including officials like the current Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, who was then Reagan's special US envoy to the Middle East, egging on Hussein to slaughter as many Iranian youth as possible.

It was not until 1990, with the invasion of Kuwait, that the Iraqi leader came into conflict with the United States. He was then rapidly transformed, through a campaign of demonization by the American government and media which has frequently been employed to turn yesterday's friends into today's enemies—like Manuel Noriega of Panama, Mohamed Aideed of Somalia, Slobodan Milosevic of Yugoslavia, and even Osama bin Laden (yesterday's anti-Soviet "freedom fighter," today's arch-terrorist). Hussein in his turn was portrayed as the beast of Baghdad, the new Hitler who might overrun the entire Persian Gulf region and thereby threaten US control of the oil resources.

Twelve years after the destruction of the bulk of Iraq's military apparatus, the White House can no longer pretend that Saddam Hussein seeks to conquer his neighbors through force. Instead, in the wake of the September 11 attacks, the Bush administration has concocted a new and previously undreamed of rationale for war on Iraq—the possibility of an alliance between the secular Iraqi regime and the Islamic fundamentalists of Al Qaeda who have repeatedly called for Hussein's downfall.

What are Washington's real war aims?

* First, the military occupation of Iraq and seizure of its oil resources

This will provide a massive windfall to the energy monopolies that exert enormous influence over US foreign policy in general, and dominate the Bush administration in particular. Control of petroleum resources provides not only economic benefits, but also enormous political and strategic leverage. By grabbing Iraq's oil, the US will greatly enhance its position against its nominal allies in Europe and Asia, which are greatly dependent on Persian Gulf petroleum exports, as well as against Russia, China and regimes throughout the Middle East and northern Africa. Having extended its political and military reach in Central Asia through the war in Afghanistan, a US conquest of Iraq will give the American ruling elite a position of unrivaled dominance in the two most important oil-producing regions.

* Second, the global extension of US military power

A US protectorate in Iraq would be the staging ground for future wars in the region and beyond. The most immediate target could be Iraq's oil-rich neighbor, Iran. There is an active campaign within the political establishment for eventual military action against Saudi Arabia. Sudan, Yemen, Libya and Syria have all been cited as potential targets.

American troops and warplanes are already deployed in nearly every country between the Mediterranean Sea and the Tien Shan Mountains, which mark the border between the former Soviet Central Asia and China. There can be no doubt that within US military and political circles, the attack on Iraq is seen as the prelude to coming wars against Russia and China, both nuclear-armed powers, with incalculable consequences.

* Third, maintaining domestic political control

Under conditions of growing social and economic inequality and widespread popular disaffection with the political system, the ruling elite seeks to maintain ideological and political control by disorienting and diverting the population and channeling its grievances behind the "war on terrorism." War becomes a critical means for maintaining domestic stability. In the name of national security and the exigencies of war, the government is carrying out a relentless attack on democratic rights, creating the basis for an authoritarian garrison state.

What will the outcome be? Even if one were to accept the likelihood of speedy American military victory, it is clear that to accomplish this goal the administration is prepared, not only to sacrifice American lives, but to kill countless Iraqis. A government which pursues such an action would implicate the American people in a crime of massive proportions, one of the greatest atrocities in modern history.

For the US to topple the Iraqi regime and install a puppet government, even savage bombing on the scale of the first Gulf War will not suffice. US military planners are preparing to devastate Baghdad and every other major city, and combine carpet bombing with urban warfare against soldiers and civilians alike. The death toll could reach into the tens or hundreds of thousands.

Nor is the use of nuclear weapons by the US a far-fetched possibility. According to the new US guidelines for nuclear weapons development and use leaked to the press last March, one scenario for unleashing nuclear weapons is a war with Iraq that results in Iraqi missile attacks on Israel.

Moreover, Iraq will not be the end of American wars of conquest. Those who supported war in Afghanistan and endorse war against Iraq must take responsibility for future US military actions as well. Such wars are already being actively planned by the Pentagon. The most recent US command-and-control exercise, conducted last month, was a war game simulating a US invasion of Iran in 2007.

President Bush's White House meeting with a group of congressional leaders September 4 marked the onset of a concentrated propaganda offensive to prepare the way for a US invasion and military occupation of Iraq. Bush only agreed to allow a congressional vote on military action against Iraq because he was assured in advance of sufficient bipartisan support to pass a war resolution.

The so-called debate takes place under conditions where leading Democrats—from the party's 2000 presidential candidate Al Gore to House Democratic leader Dick Gephardt—have already declared their support for military action against Iraq. Not a single senator or congressman has challenged the foundation of Bush's war policy—that the United States has the right to invade Iraq and overthrow its government.

The premises of any genuinely democratic debate—open and honest information, public involvement, the existence of opposing sides—are lacking in the current discussion. Both Bush and his critics within the political establishment accept a common framework: Saddam Hussein is a monster, Iraq threatens the United States, the US is a force for peace and democracy in the Middle East, American military action is never taken for predatory reasons, only for self-defense, and so on.

But in truth, these propositions collapse under any serious examination:

Saddam Hussein is building weapons of mass destruction —As we have seen, he initially acquired them and used them as an ally and instrument of US foreign policy, against Iran. The vast bulk of these were subsequently destroyed in the 1990s under the UN sanctions regime. Former UN weapons inspector Scott Ritter has categorically rejected the claims that Iraq has significantly rebuilt its capacity in such weapons. If the pattern of other such falsifications holds true—like the notorious Gulf of Tonkin incident which provided the pretext for US intervention in Vietnam—some years from now, long after the war with Iraq, small notices will appear in the American media reporting that there never were any weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and that the issue was manufactured out of whole cloth to provide a pretext for war.

It is a remarkable fact that only the US and British governments profess to believe in the bogeyman of Saddam Hussein's arsenal of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. None of the other European powers gives any credence to the claims that Iraq represents a threat, nor do any of the countries of the Middle East, with the exception of Israel, which has a vested interest in the destruction of an Arab country.

Even if it were true that Iraq still has some weapons proscribed by the UN, since when has the mere possession of such weapons systems been a sufficient basis for invading a country? Since World War II Russia, China, Britain, France, India, Pakistan and Israel are known to have joined the United States in the possession of nuclear weapons. Dozens of countries possess the capability to build chemical and biological weapons in a matter of months. Yet throughout this period, no American government has ever gone to war over the issue. Instead, US policy has been to engage in diplomatic talks over arms control, resulting in treaties to restrain nuclear proliferation, reduce arms stockpiles and ban outright nuclear testing and biological warfare experiments.

Saddam Hussein has no capability to attack the United States directly and no reason to deliver such weapons to terrorists who are his political enemies. Iraq has no long-range missile capability and has never sought to develop one. Nor did it use chemical weapons during the 1991 Persian Gulf War, in the face of the threat of American nuclear retaliation, and assurances from the first Bush administration that its goal was to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait, not to occupy Baghdad. If, in fact, Iraq still retains some chemical weapons, there is only one circumstance in which they might likely be used, with possibly devastating effect: in the event of a US invasion which brought American troops into the heart of the country.

Saddam Hussein is violating UN Security Council resolutions —This may be true, since so many UN resolutions have been adopted on Iraq, legalizing the starvation of the population through blockade, that only a regime of American stooges could comply with all of them. But since when has violation of UN Security Council resolutions been the basis for unilateral US military action? Israel violates UN Security Council resolutions far more flagrantly than Iraq, and there is no White House clamor for war with the state which still occupies the West Bank and Gaza Strip more than 35 years after the Six Day War.

The US government uses the UN when it is convenient, as a screen for its aggressive actions. On other occasions, it ignores the UN with impunity. Thus, for more than a decade, US and British warplanes have bombed targets in the north and south of Iraq, patrolling so-called "no fly" zones that were declared by Washington without any UN sanction. The US government itself subverted the UN inspection regime in Iraq by infiltrating UNSCOM with CIA personnel whose goal was to identify targets for American bombing and study Saddam Hussein's movements to set up future assassination attempts.

The Bush administration insists that its own military actions are *not* subject to the UN Security Council, and that it will not make an attack on Iraq conditional on Security Council approval. The double standard is clear: Iraq must submit to the UN or be destroyed, but the US can do what

it pleases.

Saddam Hussein is a dictator who oppresses his people —Again true, but American foreign policy, in the Middle East and elsewhere, has consisted largely in promoting and propping up such rulers for more than 50 years. Many of them, including the Shah of Iran, the Saudi monarchy, and various military dictators in Turkey, have been arguably as barbarous as Saddam Hussein. The US also systematically funded and built up Islamic fundamentalist groups as an instrument in the struggle against the Soviet Union and secular Arab nationalism.

In its efforts to insure international support or at least acquiescence for the coming US war against Iraq, the Bush administration has given the green light to ruthless military repression by the Russian government in Chechnya, Chinese suppression of Uighur separatist groups in Xinjiang, Turkish oppression of the Kurds, and countless other violations of democratic and human rights.

Far from representing a force for democracy, the United States is intrinsically opposed to the democratic aspirations of the Arab masses, which inevitably conflict with American control of the oil resources of the region, as well as with US support for the state of Israel. A US occupation of Iraq would take on an increasingly savage and repressive character. It would make the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza look almost benign by comparison.

The Bush administration talks incessantly of "regime change" in Iraq. The *World Socialist Web Site*, as socialists and defenders of democratic rights, are implacably opposed to both the bourgeois-nationalist politics and the dictatorial methods of Saddam Hussein. But the removal of this regime is the task of the Iraqi people, not the American government.

Far more ominous for the world is the "regime change" which has already taken place in the United States. The Bush administration represents the coming to power of a criminal element in the American ruling class. This is not hyperbole: in its political methods, social base and foreign policy, the Bush administration is gangsterism personified.

This government is the product of a protracted campaign of right-wing political subversion and conspiracy to destabilize the previous administration, culminating in the Clinton impeachment, followed by the theft of the 2000 presidential election.

The Bush administration draws its leading personnel from the social layer whose systematic corruption has been laid bare in the corporate scandals of the past year. Army Secretary Thomas White is a former Enron executive. Vice President Dick Cheney is under investigation for accounting fraud in his previous role as CEO of the energy construction firm Halliburton. Bush himself made his personal fortune on the basis of insider trading and cronyism. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill are both former CEOs, while other top officials served as lobbyists for the energy, drug and automobile industries.

When he entered the White House, Bush boasted that his CEO-filled cabinet would run the government like a business. This has proved true: the Bush administration embodies in government the methods of Enron, WorldCom, Global Crossing, Tyco and a dozen other high-profile cases of corporate skullduggery.

Bush's domestic policies amount to the systematic plundering of working people to enrich corporate America. He pushed through the largest tax cut for the wealthy in US history, a staggering \$1.35 trillion. His administration has launched attack after attack on the living standards and democratic rights of the working class. Health and safety regulations, environmental safeguards, trade union rights—all are targeted for destruction as part of the drive to remove any restrictions on the accumulation of personal wealth and corporate profit.

The Bush administration's foreign policy is the extension on a global scale of its domestic policy. People who rose to power through fraud and crime are now making decisions on war and peace. They are using the

military and political resources of the American government to further the interests of the most rapacious section of the corporate elite—the energy monopolies, the arms industry, the financial conglomerates—which seek to profit from the plundering of the globe.

Wartime measures will be carried out not only against targets overseas, but against the American people at home. Already the administration has begun to criminalize political dissent. Anti-Bush demonstrators have been arrested, beaten and jailed for voicing their opposition to a war with Iraq. Bush has declared that in the war against terror, “either you are with us or against us.” The logic of this policy is to treat all social opposition to the administration as treasonous.

The fight against the impending imperialist war against Iraq is bound up with the struggle against the entire social and political structure of the United States. In the final analysis the Bush administration and its policies are the product of that structure. War has become the program of the ruling elite in America because it has no way out of the deepening social and economic crisis.

The *World Socialist Web Site* separates itself from all those supposed critics, including a section of the Democratic Party, who seek to advise the Bush administration on the best way to pursue its goals in the Middle East and internationally. As socialists, we don’t approach the policies of the US government as expressing legitimate or honest interests, let alone reflecting the democratic will of the American people. We oppose the policies of the US government and work for the development of a powerful movement of working people, both in the US and internationally, against American imperialism.

Such a movement must be based on a socialist program, because imperialist war is an inevitable product of the contradictions of the capitalist system, above all in the most powerful center of world capitalism, the United States. In contrast to its heyday in the mid-twentieth century, the US is no longer a rising power or one which can veil its global aspirations in democratic trappings.

Two fundamental facts express the historical decay of American capitalism. Internationally, the United States has lost its position of global dominance, facing powerful trade rivals in both Europe and Asia, and gargantuan trade and payments deficits which presage national bankruptcy. At home, American society is afflicted with a social and economic polarization of unprecedented dimensions. The population is divided between a small fraction enjoying unprecedented wealth, and the vast majority of working people whose living standards are stagnating or declining, and who face mounting insecurity in regard to jobs, pensions, health care and public services.

Hence the decay of American democracy, accelerated by the repressive measures enacted in the wake of September 11. It is impossible to maintain democratic forms in a society in which such a tiny percentage of the population controls all the wealth and holds the rest of the people hostage to their profit interests.

The emergence of American militarism on a global scale is a profound confirmation of the Marxist analysis of imperialism. All the classic features of imperialism identified by Lenin at the beginning of the twentieth century—the colonial-style occupation of countries, military struggles to grab sources of raw materials, a domestic policy of “reaction all down the line”—these are the program of the Bush administration.

The US government seized on the tragic events of September 11—in which its own role, either in failing to prevent the attacks or deliberately allowing them to occur, remains to be investigated—to provide the pretext for implementing the foreign and domestic agenda of the most reactionary forces within the political and corporate elite. The war in Afghanistan was only the stepping stone to bigger and even more bloody adventures.

For working people, the struggle against imperialist war and the defense of living standards and democratic rights are two sides of the same fight. The only force that can stop the warmongers in the White House and the

Pentagon is a popular movement against militarism and war that is led by the working class, and directed against the entire ruling elite, and both of its parties. No reliance can be placed on Congress or the Democrats to oppose Bush’s war plans. In the end, these forces represent the same basic social interests and defend the same system as Bush himself.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party are dedicated to developing such an independent working class movement against war and in defense of democratic rights.



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