

The Bush administration wants war

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18 September 2002

If it achieved nothing else, the offer of the Iraqi government to accept without conditions the return of United Nations weapons inspectors has exposed the most essential truth of contemporary international politics: the Bush administration wants war. Its hysterical claims of “weapons of mass destruction” have never been anything else but a means of manufacturing a public justification for war. The Bush administration has responded angrily to the diplomatic note of the Iraqi foreign minister—demanding that it be ignored by the UN—because it knows that Saddam Hussein’s concession deprives the United States of the fig leaf of a pseudo-legal pretext for invading Iraq, destroying its government, seizing its oilfields and reducing the country to what would be, in effect, semi-colonial status.

Last week’s maneuvers by the Bush administration at the United Nations were based on the assumption that Iraq would never be able to comply with the provocative and draconian resolutions that the United States intended to ram through the Security Council. Moreover, the resolutions would leave it to the United States to decide whether or not Iraq was in compliance. The Bush administration was confident that this arrangement would inevitably provide the United States, within weeks if not days, with a *casus belli*. It would simply declare that Iraq was in “noncompliance” and initiate hostilities.

At least for the moment, this scenario has been somewhat disrupted—though there is no reason to believe that the United Nations will not soon bend to American pressure. The Bush administration will get, in all likelihood, both the resolutions and the war it wants.

For more than a half-century every American administration has invoked the specter of Munich 1938—when British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain caved in to Hitler and handed

Czechoslovakia over to the Nazis—to justify its own aggressive imperialist politics. America habitually cloaks its actions in the mantle of resistance to aggression. But this latest attempt to cast Bush as a modern-day equivalent of Churchill, standing firm in the wilderness against those who would compromise with a ruthless tyrant, attains a degree of mendacity that no other administration has ever achieved. For nothing so closely recalls the methods employed by the Nazi regime in its willful fabrication of the Czech crisis and its conduct of the negotiations in Munich in September 1938 than the tactics that have been pursued by the Bush administration in relation to Iraq.

By the summer of 1938, the Hitlerite regime had come to see war as a necessary response to a mass of socioeconomic contradictions for which the Nazis had no rational solution. The crisis that arose over the Sudetenland had far less to do with the specific issues seized upon by Hitler to justify an attack on Czechoslovakia—principally, the alleged mistreatment of the German minority—than to the aim of leading elements within the Nazi regime to find a pretext for war. In fact, as many historians have demonstrated, Hitler was less interested in obtaining concessions from Czechoslovakia than he was in getting an excuse to start a war.

In his masterful biography of Hitler, the historian Ian Kershaw relates that the Nazi leader was distressed that British and French concessions at Munich allowed Germany to seize the Sudetenland without a shot being fired. Hitler signed the documents that allowed the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia with reluctance. “For him, the document was meaningless. And for him Munich was no great cause for celebration. He felt cheated of the greater triumph which he was certain would have come from the limited war with the Czechs which had been his aim all summer” [*Hitler 1936-1945: Nemesis* (New York and London, 2001),

pp. 122-23].

George Bush is not Adolf Hitler and his administration is not the American equivalent of the Nazi regime. But the foreign policy of this government is being shaped by ruthless and reckless sections of the US ruling elite who are aggressively demanding the use of war as a means of realizing the global geo-strategic and economic ambitions of American imperialism. A sampling of articles that have appeared within the last two days in the *Wall Street Journal* reflects the views of the elements within the capitalist class that exercise immense influence within and upon this administration. In a column entitled “Finish the War,” Victor Davis Hanson wrote on Tuesday that the United States “must invade, conquer and pacify” Iraq.

“The liberation of Iraq is more a question of when, not if,” Hanson declared. “Even the delay in reckoning with Saddam has produced some positive effects. The administration has refined its *casus belli* both here and abroad.”

On the same day, George Melloan, the deputy editor of the *Journal*, declared that Bush’s ultimatum to the United Nations “sets the stage for the ouster of Saddam Hussein.” He continued: “How it will be done will be up to the US military. But for now, the situation is well in hand.”

In another article, published on Monday and entitled “Saddam’s Oil,” the *Journal* bluntly asserted that “the best way to keep oil prices in check is a short, successful war on Iraq that begins sooner rather than later.”

The Bush administration—which finds itself confronted with a worsening economic crisis amidst a scandal that is completely discrediting the corporate pillars of American capitalism among the broad mass of the working population—sees in war a distraction from deepening and intractable domestic problems.

If the administration succeeds in getting its war against Iraq, it will prove to be a prelude to bigger and even bloodier atrocities.



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