Amid signs of dissent within military circles

Bush employs lies and maneuvers to pave way for war against Iraq

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With the preferred D-Day for a US invasion of Iraq barely three months away, there are growing signs of unease within sections of the US ruling elite over the implications of the Bush administration's plans for a preemptive war of conquest and a protracted military occupation of the Arab country.

Expressing the gravest public concern are former senior military officers, whose views unquestionably reflect the current uniformed command's anxiety over the war policy elaborated by the Pentagon's right-wing civilian leadership, headed by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and his deputy, Paul Wolfowitz.

Among those who have spoken out most directly is Marine Corps General Anthony C. Zinni (ret.), who preceded Army General Tommy Franks as head of the Central Command, the unit that would oversee an invasion. "War and violence are a very last resort and we have to be very careful how we apply it, especially now, in our position in the world," Zinni told a meeting organized by the Middle East Institute in Washington earlier this month. "I'm not convinced we need to do this now."

Another telling indication of dissension at the top was the appearance this week of several articles in the major US dailies exposing the Bush administration's stated pretexts for war against Iraq as boldfaced lies.

The *New York Times* published a piece Monday demonstrating that the Czech government had warned the Bush administration some months ago that claims of a meeting between the alleged ringleader of the September 11 suicide hijackings, Mohamed Atta, and an Iraqi intelligence agent were bogus. Nonetheless, the administration continued to repeat the charge.

On October 22, the *Washington Post* carried a front-page article detailing a series of lies by President Bush aimed at justifying an invasion. Entitled "For Bush, the facts are malleable," the article made a detailed examination of the president's charges, including his claim in an October 7 televised speech in Cincinnati that Iraq had developed unmanned aircraft capable of striking the US, and his allegation last month that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) had determined that Iraq was "six months away from developing a nuclear weapon."

"We have discovered through intelligence that Iraq has a growing fleet" of unmanned aircraft, Bush said in his Cincinnati speech. He added that there was concern that these drones would be used for "targeting the United States."

On the issue of Iraq's alleged nuclear weapons program, the president claimed that in 1998 "information from a high-ranking Iraqi nuclear engineer who had defected revealed that despite his public promises, Saddam Hussein had ordered his nuclear program to continue."

In each case, Bush either invented or deliberately distorted the evidence. In the case of the unmanned aircraft claim, the CIA issued a report earlier this month stating that the Iraqis were conducting an "experiment" with the device that could prove "a serious threat to Iraq's neighbors and to international military forces in the region" but had no capability of crossing the Atlantic and striking American targets.

As for the Iraqi nuclear defector, his name is Khidhir Hamza and he retired from Iraq's nuclear program in 1991 and defected in 1994. The shifting of the date up to 1998 was apparently an attempt to present as current claims that he made about a program he was involved in more than a decade ago—before the first Persian Gulf War shattered Iraq's infrastructure.

In regard to the IAEA, it made no allegation about Baghdad being within six months of obtaining a nuclear weapon. On the contrary, its last report, issued in 1998, before Washington demanded the removal of all weapons inspectors in advance of a US air war on Iraq, declared: "Based on all credible information to date, the IAEA has found no indication of Iraq having achieved its program goal of producing nuclear weapons or of Iraq having retained a physical capability for the production of weapon-usable nuclear material or having clandestinely obtained such material."

On October 23, the *Wall Street Journal* published an article on its front page indicating that the administration has lied about the alleged connections between Iraq and Al Qaeda. The article quoted a speech delivered by Bush last week in which he described Iraqi President Saddam Hussein as "a man who we know has had connections with Al Qaeda. This is a man who, in my judgment, would like to use Al Qaeda as a forward army."

Based on its own investigation, the *Journal*, by no means an opponent of the current administration, concluded: "There's no evidence of contact between Al Qaeda and the Iraqis, according to current and former intelligence officials."

Significantly, the article indicated that the administration's attempt to establish a link between Iraq and Al Qaeda began almost as soon as Bush was installed in the White House. "When the Bush administration took office in 2001, officials at the Pentagon immediately began peppering intelligence agencies with requests for studies on Baghdad's links to terrorism," the article stated. "At a meeting of senior administration officials in April 2001 to discuss Al Qaeda, a top Defense Department official asked Mr. Clarke [Richard Clarke, the National Security Council's counterterrorism coordinator] about whether Iraq had connections to Mr. bin Laden's group. Mr. Clarke said no, according to two people in the room."

The administration's demands led to a concerted drive to link Iraq to the 1993 World Trade Center bombing," the *Journal* reported, adding that these efforts "have come up empty."

Thus, while Washington portrays its military buildup against Iraq as a response to September 11 and a defense of the US against an imminent terrorist threat, it now emerges that top Bush administration officials were desperately seeking evidence to tie Iraq to terrorism—and specifically to Al

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Qaeda—at least five months before any planes crashed into World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

The administration clearly came into office with a pre-existing plan for a war to establish US control over Iraq. It saw a link to terrorism as the ideal pretext. The obvious question posed by the *Journal*'s account is whether top officials were anticipating—or had prior knowledge of—an impending Al Qaeda attack months before it happened.

The growing public opposition to war and the unease within the top echelons of the military and sections of the ruling elite have led the Bush administration to engage in another form of dissimulation to advance its military plans—United Nations diplomacy.

In the past several days, the media has proclaimed that the administration is stepping back from war, has postponed its invasion timetable and is considering the option of pressing Iraq to comply with UN resolutions on weapons of mass destruction.

Involved here is a combination of deceit, double-talk and Bush's proclivity to lapse into non-sequiturs. "We've tried diplomacy," Bush said at a Monday press conference. "We're trying it one more time. I believe the free world, if we make up our mind to, can disarm this man peacefully."

He followed up this remark with the conflicting assertion that his administration's policy remained "regime change—because we don't believe he is going to change." Bush continued, "However, if he were to meet all the conditions of the United Nations, the conditions that I've described very clearly in terms that everybody can understand, that in itself will signal the regime has changed."

Asked at a subsequent briefing whether Bush's remarks indicated that Washington would allow the Iraqi regime to remain in power if it complied with the resolution that the US is attempting to push through the UN Security Council, White House spokesman Ari Fleischer smirked and said: "I can't imagine a situation in which Iraq would do these things. When these steps are taken to observe the peace and honor the UN resolutions, at Saddam Hussein's direction and under his leadership, give me a call to discuss it."

Fleischer "can't imagine" Iraqi compliance with the UN resolution, because Washington has deliberately crafted conditions that no regime could ever meet. The so-called "compromise" plan that it presented to the five permanent members of the Security Council this week is intended not to further weapons inspections in Iraq, but to preempt them and provide a pseudo-legal pretext for a US invasion.

The US proposal states repeatedly that Iraq is in "material breach" of its obligations to comply with UN resolutions, language that is designed to justify military action. The draft would give Iraq seven days to surrender totally to the conditions of the resolution and another 23 to present the UN with a "an acceptable and currently accurate, full and complete declaration of all aspects of its programs" for weapons development.

Only after that would inspections begin.

Failure to make a full disclosure would open Iraq up to "serious consequences," according to the latest US draft resolution. In other words, it would provide Washington with the pretext for war. The Bush administration has indicated that while it would "consult" with the UN before attacking, it would not seek its sanction.

As the Iraqi regime has denied that such programs even exist, and Washington has insisted against all evidence that Baghdad is on the verge of obtaining a nuclear bomb, the resolution gives the US the option of simply claiming that the Iraqi regime is lying and launching its invasion.

In the unlikely event that inspections were to begin, the US has declared a policy of "zero tolerance" for Iraqi non-compliance. The White House and the Pentagon reserve the right to judge for themselves whether Baghdad is failing to cooperate, and punish it accordingly.

The resolution also includes provisions that no government on the face of the planet would accept, including giving the UN the right to abduct Iraqi scientists and their entire families and take them out of the country for interrogation.

It also maintains a controversial section included in a previous draft that would allow the establishment of no-fly/no-drive zones and exclusion zones anywhere in Iraq, which would be "enforced by UN security forces or member states." This clause would in effect allow for an invasion of Iraqi territory by US troops under the guise of enforcing weapons inspections.

Those in charge of the weapons inspection agencies have expressed the opinion that neither of these US proposals is necessary to complete their work.

No one either in Washington or at the United Nations is under any illusion that Bush is forswearing war for diplomacy. Behind the nonsensical phrases and double-talk of the American president, what is being demanded is a UN license for a predatory war to conquer Iraq and establish US control over its extensive oil reserves.

Meanwhile, the US is continuing its military preparations for an attack on Iraq without any let-up. US and British warplanes carried out air strikes for the second straight day Wednesday, bombing both military and civilian targets in the two "no-fly zones" that Washington imposed over Iraq in the wake of the Persian Gulf War. These attacks, portrayed as responses to anti-aircraft fire, have become increasingly frequent over the past months. Their purpose is to degrade Iraqi air defenses in advance of a US invasion, creating safe corridors for warplanes to carry out attacks on Baghdad and other cities.

The US military is also loading cargo ships in the ports of San Diego and Charleston, SC with military vehicles, arms and munitions bound for the gulf region. And the Pentagon confirmed that it is proceeding with the redeployment over the next few weeks of over 600 staff members of the US Central Command, which covers the entire gulf region, as well as headquarters personnel from the Army's V Corps and the Marines' 1st Expeditionary Force, two units that would play key roles in an Iraqi invasion. The headquarters staffers are to set up mobile command posts in Kuwait and Qatar that would be used to direct a war once it begins.

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