

US plans "shock and awe" blitzkrieg in Iraq

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The war being prepared by the White House and Pentagon on the people of Iraq will be characterized by barbarism on a scale not seen since the horrors of the 1930s and 1940s. The level of brutality will recall scenes seared into the collective consciousness of previous generations, such as the bombing of Guernica and the Nazi blitzkrieg against Poland.

Washington is making it clear that it considers nuclear weapons an option in Iraq. In recent days Pentagon sources have let it be known that such "weapons of mass destruction" are being readied for use, and there is a real possibility that the Bush administration will unleash them should American forces find themselves in serious difficulty.

Even without recourse to nuclear arms, the US war plan calls for saturation bombing of Iraq. The Pentagon intends to devastate the country with more missiles in one day than were used throughout the 40-day Gulf War 12 years ago. The World Health Organization is warning that up to half a million Iraqi people will be killed or maimed.

Purely military considerations cannot explain such savagery. Bush's war plans are driven by political aims—to terrorize and demoralize the Iraqi people and the Arab masses and send a message of violence and intimidation to the entire world. In the interests of the corporate and financial oligarchy and the pursuit of global hegemony, the Bush administration is preparing to commit war crimes of immense proportions.

The US is flouting the entire structure of international law, especially that which emerged in the aftermath of the horrors of World War II. Its doctrine of preemptive war makes a mockery of the principles of non-aggression and international legality laid down in the charter of the United Nations, whose resolutions Washington claims to be defending.

It should be recalled that after the defeat of fascist Germany and Imperial Japan, government and military leaders were charged and convicted for planning and carrying out aggressive war—a charge that carried the penalty of death.

Former US army intelligence officer William Arkin reported in the *Los Angeles Times* on January 26, citing US Central Command sources, that a "Theater Nuclear Planning Document" had been prepared for Iraq, listing options and potential targets for the use of nuclear weapons.

According to the unnamed sources, the planning focuses on attacking Iraqi facilities alleged to be deep underground, as well as thwarting any Iraqi use of biological or chemical

weapons. US officials have already accused Saddam Hussein of burying military sites beneath populated areas, establishing a pretext for bombing cities and towns.

It is clear from the documents quoted by Arkin that the nuclear option is also being considered for the possibility that US forces, despite overwhelming firepower superiority, suffer heavy casualties or become bogged down in Iraq. Under a classified Pentagon nuclear posture review, signed by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and issued in final form in early 2002, nuclear weapons could be employed "in the event of surprising military developments."

The White House has significantly lowered the nuclear threshold by removing nuclear weapons from their long-established special category and lumping them with all other military options—such as Special Forces, covert operations, cyber warfare, "strategic deception," psychological warfare and air power.

On December 11, Rumsfeld sent Bush a memorandum asking for authority to place Admiral James O. Ellis Jr., the Strategic Command (STRATCOM) commander in Omaha, Nebraska, in charge of the full range of "strategic" warfare assets, including nuclear warheads. Earlier this month, with almost no discussion inside the Pentagon, let alone the Congress or in public, Bush approved Rumsfeld's proposal.

Admiral Ellis's own proclivities were revealed in a rhetorical question that he posed last month: "If you can find that time-critical, key terrorist target or that weapons-of-mass-destruction stockpile, and you have minutes rather than hours or days to deal with it, how do you reach out and negate that threat to our nation half a world away?"

The nuclear planning is being carried out at STRATCOM's headquarters, by small teams in Washington and at Vice President Richard Cheney's "undisclosed location" in Pennsylvania. Cheney, who heads a secret "shadow" government set up in the wake of the September 11 attack, could well push the nuclear trigger.

Iraq is not the only target for the new nuclear doctrine. STRATCOM's newly created Theater Planning Activity has focused on seven priority target nations—the so-called "axis of evil" of Iraq, Iran and North Korea, plus Syria, Libya, China and Russia. Hence, any crossing of the nuclear threshold in Iraq will signal a new period of nuclear warfare.

While declining to comment on Arkin's report, White House

spokesmen have bluntly refused to rule out the nuclear scenario. “The United States reserves the right to defend itself and its allies by whatever means necessary,” Bush’s chief of staff Andrew Card declared on January 26.

CBS news reported last weekend that the invasion will begin with war planes and ships launching between 300 and 400 cruise missiles on day one. This is more than the number of missiles launched during the whole of “Desert Storm” in 1991. Another 300 to 400 missiles will follow on the second day.

At an average rate of one weapon every four minutes around the clock, missiles will relentlessly rain down on Baghdad and knock out water supplies, electricity services, communications, government buildings, roads, bridges and other essential infrastructure.

To prepare for the bombardment, the Air Force has stockpiled 6,000 satellite guidance kits in the Persian Gulf to convert so-called “dumb bombs” into satellite-guided bombs. In the first Gulf War, the Pentagon’s “smart bombs” were responsible for widespread atrocities. Tens of thousands of Iraqis, civilians as well as soldiers, were slaughtered during the brief 1991 war.

This time, Pentagon officials have declared, the saturation bombing will exceed anything previously seen in history. “The sheer size of this has never been seen before, never been contemplated before,” a Pentagon official told CBS. “There will not be a safe place in Baghdad.”

This co-called “Rapid Dominance” battle plan is based a concept formulated in a report drawn up by the Pentagon-run National Defense University in 1996—that is, under the Clinton administration and well before events of September 11, 2001. The concept is dubbed “Shock and Awe” because it seeks the psychological overwhelming of the enemy, and, by extension, the intimidation of the world’s population.

Speaking to CBS news, one of the report’s authors, Harlan Ullman, drew a direct parallel to Hiroshima. Within two to five days, the Iraqi people would be “physically, emotionally and psychologically exhausted,” he stated. He spoke of having “this simultaneous effect, rather like the nuclear weapons at Hiroshima, not taking days or weeks but in minutes.”

This theme is elaborated in the 1996 report: “The key objective of Rapid Dominance is to impose [an] overwhelming level of Shock and Awe against an adversary on an immediate or sufficiently timely basis to paralyze its will to carry on. In crude terms, Rapid Dominance would seize control of the environment and paralyze or so overload an adversary’s perceptions and understanding of events that the enemy would be incapable of resistance at tactical and strategic levels. An adversary would be rendered totally impotent and vulnerable to our actions...”

“Theoretically, the magnitude of Shock and Awe Rapid Dominance seeks to impose (in extreme cases) is the non-nuclear equivalent of the impact that the atomic weapons dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki had on the Japanese. The Japanese were prepared for suicidal resistance until both

nuclear bombs were used. The impact of those weapons was sufficient to transform both the mindset of the average Japanese citizen and the outlook of the leadership through this condition of Shock and Awe.”

In the next paragraph, the report emphasizes that the use of nuclear weapons cannot be ruled out. In fact, it declares, Rapid Dominance “must be underwritten” by their destructive capacity.

Former UN Assistant Secretary General Denis Halliday, who headed the UN food-for-oil sanctions program in Iraq in 1997-98, has accused the US and its sole major ally Britain of proceeding with plans to “annihilate Iraqi society, a catastrophe that would be heightened by the threatened use of tactical nuclear weaponry.”

A group of more than 100 law professors has warned Bush in a letter that senior officials could face prosecutions for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide if the Iraq war proceeds. Despite the US refusal to ratify the treaty establishing the new International Criminal Court, the letter stated, “US officials involved in committing certain international crimes may nonetheless be held responsible under principles of Universal Jurisdiction and the War Crimes Act.”

Aware of the outrage that its actions will provoke, the US State Department has cabled embassies around the world telling Americans abroad to be ready to evacuate their resident countries quickly in the event of political unrest or “terrorist” attacks. It is the first such blanket warning ever issued by the State Department.

The US onslaught will horrify millions of people around the world. They will rightly condemn the US government for unspeakable savagery and seek political answers. The long-prepared plans adopted by the Bush administration underscore the fact that protest alone will not halt the war. That requires the international mobilization of the working people to end the economic system responsible for this new eruption of barbarism.



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