

Military review reveals more government lies

US launched air war against Iraq in 2002

James Conachy
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In a briefing to military commanders last week, US Air Force Lieutenant General T. Michael Moseley acknowledged that the Air Force launched offensive operations against Iraq in June 2002. Three months before President Bush appeared before the United Nations to present a case for “disarming” Iraq, five months before the adoption of UN resolution 1441 threatening “serious consequences” if Iraq did not cooperate with weapons inspectors, and a full nine months before the war was officially announced, the Bush administration had already ordered combat operations to begin.

In the midst of closed-door congressional inquiries and media speculation over whether the Bush administration went to war on the basis of “manipulated” or “faulty” intelligence, the response to Moseley’s statements has been a deafening silence. Apart from news reports of Moseley’s briefing in the weekend *Washington Post* and *New York Times*, nothing has been said about what amounts to an admission that the Bush administration lied to the American people for months about its intentions and operations in Iraq.

Even as US planes were systematically destroying Iraqi air defenses and communications grids in preparation for a land war, under cover of patrolling the so-called “no fly” zone in the south of the country, Bush was repeatedly insisting that he had made no decision on invading Iraq and was “hoping for peace.” Moseley’s briefing exposes the entire effort to secure United Nations backing and resume weapons inspections as nothing more than a cynical charade, behind which Washington carried on an air war to facilitate the rapid introduction of ground troops once war was publicly proclaimed.

According to Moseley, the Air Force received its

orders from the White House to begin the preparations for a war on Iraq in late 2001—following the September 11 attacks.

American and British ground forces were able to move quickly into southern Iraq when the invasion began, Moseley told the military commanders, because the preceding months of air strikes had crippled Iraq’s southern air defenses and communications infrastructure. The US had complete air superiority and had disrupted the ability of Iraqi forces to coordinate a defense.

During the period of the quasi-secret air war—of which the American media was well aware—the Bush administration repeatedly insisted that the US was merely enforcing the “no-fly” zone over southern Iraq. The “no-fly” zones in the north and south of Iraq were imposed in the early 1990s by the US and its European allies, without UN sanction, supposedly to prevent the Iraqi Air Force from carrying out attacks on the Kurdish and Shiite populations in those areas of the country.

In another example of systematic lying to the American people and world public opinion, Washington maintained that the sole purpose of US flights over Iraq was to monitor the “no-fly” zones to make sure that no Iraqi aircraft were operating in that air space. In December 1998, the US expanded the rules of engagement to permit American pilots to take “self-defense” action against Iraqi air defense batteries when the latter established radar locks on US jets or actually fired on them.

Washington repeatedly denied Iraqi claims that US war planes were using the patrol of the “no-fly” zones as a cover for carrying out offensive strikes against a wide range of targets, civilian as well as military.

Moseley outlined that the intense US air activity over

southern Iraq from June 2002 had virtually nothing to do with enforcing the “no-fly” zone, but instead was a carefully planned offensive campaign. It involved unprovoked attacks on key Iraqi installations as well as concentrated surveillance by low altitude spy planes and unmanned Predator reconnaissance aircraft to pinpoint targets for destruction before or during an invasion.

In total, the US flew 21,736 sorties over southern Iraq between June 2002 and the start of the invasion in March 2003. British aircraft also took part. In all, 391 targets were attacked.

One of main targets was the fiber-optic communications networks that linked Baghdad with Nasiriya and Basra. Crucial cable-repeater stations were bombed, and then bombed again when they were rebuilt. Other targets included civilian airports in Basra and western Iraq.

Moseley’s briefing confirms that the political, military and ideological architects of the war on Iraq are indictable under existing international law on the same charge brought against leaders of the German Nazi regime at Nuremberg: that they planned and carried out a war of aggression.

Iraq repeatedly reported the air strikes to the Security Council and appealed for UN action against the US and Britain. In a letter to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in December 2002, for example, Iraqi Foreign Minister Naji Sabri described the escalating attacks as “blatant aggression and flagrant state terrorism.” He informed the UN that Iraq would carry out “legitimate self-defense under the UN Charter and international law” and appealed for the UN to abide by the charter and intervene to stop the “ongoing aggression.”

The UN took no action against the US and Britain using the “no-fly” zones as the cover for an air war against Iraq. It took no action when ground forces invaded and, in its final act of appeasement, legitimized the overthrow of the government of one its member states and Iraq’s colonial takeover by the US. For all the antiwar rhetoric of the European, Russian, Chinese and Arab ruling elites, they facilitated what they all knew was a war crime.

Moseley’s briefing on July 19 provided one significant factual detail that would appear prominently in a future war crimes trial. American, British and Australian aircraft carried out over 20,000 air strikes

during the three-week invasion. US planners estimated in advance the number of civilians that each attack was likely to kill. Any proposed strike likely to kill more than 30 civilians had to be personally approved by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. The US defense secretary was presented with more than 50 such requests and authorized every one of them. With premeditated intent, the Bush administration signed the death warrant of at least 1,500 Iraqi civilians.



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