

U.S. readies pretext to bomb Iraq again

by Joseph Brewda

The U.S. government is preparing to bomb Iraq again, and possibly as early as the end of July, statements by the British, U.S., and French heads of government indicate. The pretext for the assault this time, if it comes, will be Iraq's supposed nuclear-bomb project. In early July, Iraq disclosed a previously unreported nuclear research program, which NATO country officials have insisted is intended to build a bomb. On July 10, Bush told a Washington press conference that he was "deadly serious" about enforcing United Nations demands that Iraq eliminate its non-conventional weapons, referencing the disclosure. The Iraqis insist that the program is for peaceful purposes.

The claim that Iraq was building a bomb was first made by Bush last November, shortly after public opinion polls showed that the claim would be one of the few justifications which Americans would accept for going to war. In mid-June, the claim was revived after Iraqi officials initially refused to allow a U.N. inspection team to visit a nuclear research site; the team provocatively demanded to visit the site on the Islamic holiday that starts the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. By June 29, Bush was already telling journalists to "stay tuned," when asked whether the U.S. would soon bomb Iraq in response.

But on July 18, the inspection team from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) issued its report, concluding that coalition bombing raids had destroyed Iraq's uranium enrichment facilities before they produced any weapons-grade uranium.

Get ready for war

Immediately following Bush's warning that he was deadly serious, propagandistic and diplomatic preparations for a war option rapidly accelerated.

On July 11, Bush, British Prime Minister John Major,

and French President François Mitterrand held widely publicized telephone discussions on ending the supposed Iraqi nuclear threat. According to British press accounts on the Bush-Major talks, both leaders pledged themselves to take "whatever means necessary" against Iraq. The *Guardian* reported the next day that the U.S. had plans "to carry out air strikes against up to 100 nuclear related targets" using Stealth bombers and air carrier groups still stationed in the area.

On July 12, the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council—the U.S., Britain, France, Russia, and China—warned Iraq's ambassador to the U.N. that there would be "dire consequences" if Baghdad did not make complete disclosures on its nuclear activities by July 25. The date of July 25, it seems, is playing a similar role to that earlier played by Jan. 15 as a deadline for war. Following the delivery of the threat, Britain's Ambassador to the U.N. Sir David Hanney told the press that "the bottom line is that we are going to get rid of that nuclear program one way or another."

On July 13, France publicly joined with the Anglo-Americans in the new call for military action, two days after the Bush-Mitterrand phone discussions. Appearing on national TV that day, French President Mitterrand said that "if it's a question of protecting people who are martyred, persecuted or massacred by the government of Saddam Hussein, if it's a question of seeing that country, Iraq, arming itself with nuclear weapons, then military action will be just."

The annual meeting of the Group of Seven biggest industrial powers in London on July 16 allowed for further preparations for the possible assault. The Group of Seven nations—the U.S, Britain and its former colony Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan—all played key military, logistical, or financial roles in the last war, reluctantly or otherwise.

Although preparing for a new strike was not a public part of the agenda, U.S. Secretary of State James Baker told the

London *Times* on July 17 that a G-7 agreement on Iraq did occur, following “discussions on the fringes” among the leaders of the seven nations. “We think we have strong support for taking the steps required in order to see compliance with United Nations resolutions,” Baker told the paper. The paper also reported that Bush “won the unanimous support of his G-7 colleagues for the renewed use of military force if President Saddam Hussein continues to defy the cease-fire agreement and the resolutions demanding the destruction of all Iraqi nuclear weapons.”

Murderous sanctions continue

Whether or not the Anglo-Americans ultimately go to war, such war-talk also serves other ends. “It required something as controversial and sensational as the nuclear question,” Royal Institute of International Affairs Mideast expert J. Philip Robins bluntly told the *Washington Times* on July 1, to “to give the Americans and the British the ammunition to persuade others” not to relax the U.N. sanctions against Iraq.

Over June and July, several international fact-finding teams have called for lifting or relaxing the sanctions. On July 12, Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, the U.N. commissioner on humanitarian assistance to Iraq and Kuwait, reported on a fact-finding mission he had just completed in Iraq. Iraq, he said, faces a “major catastrophe” as a result of the continuing sanctions, which must be made known.

One month earlier, a Harvard medical team which had traveled to Iraq projected that at least 170,000 Iraqi children under five will die as a result of the war and continuing sanctions. The team, which conducted the most systematic investigation of Iraq since the war, also reported that cholera and typhoid fever had begun to reach epidemic proportions, and that famine is threatened. Many of these deaths, they concluded, could be avoided through massive deliveries of food and medicine, and especially the lifting of sanctions to allow for the shipment of spare parts to rebuild Iraq’s shattered infrastructure.

Sweeping aside such concerns, the Group of Seven demanded the continuation of sanctions, in effect, indefinitely, in its final communiqué released July 16. It reads, “We intend to maintain sanctions against Iraq until all the relevant resolutions of the Security Council have been implemented in full and the people of Iraq, as well as their neighbors, can live without fear of intimidation, repression, or attack. As for the Iraqi people, they deserve the opportunity to choose their leadership openly and democratically.”

The Security Council resolutions on Iraq are so elaborate and complex, vague and ambiguous, or impossible to meet, that the demand that they be fully complied with prior to the lifting of sanctions means that the sanctions may never be ended. The allusion to overthrowing Saddam Hussein as a precondition for ending the sanctions, as contained in the second part of the statement, sets a new condition not pre-

viously made by the various U.N. resolutions on Iraq. On July 14, Bush told the French press that “the United States will not lift sanctions as long as Saddam Hussein remains in power.”

That the sanctions are intended to hurt the people of Iraq, and foster the conditions for the destruction of the Iraqi state, was explicitly stated by former British ambassador to the U.N., Sir Anthony Parsons, on July 13, in an interview with BBC. Parsons said of the sanctions, “they are becoming increasingly effective. The fact is they are hurting the ordinary people, the 75% of Iraqis who are against Saddam Hussein. We are punishing the people, not the leadership. But we must do it. Iraq must not be allowed to become prosperous again, as long as its government is repressing its populations, as long as its government is cheating and not complying with United Nations resolutions.”

NATO into the Mideast

Simultaneous with the war-talk that accelerated in early July, the Anglo-Americans began quietly implementing longstanding plans to extend NATO (which now de facto includes France) into the Middle East. One purpose of the propaganda, it would appear, is to prepare the climate for this plan.

On July 11, the Bush administration announced that it would go ahead with a plan to deploy a joint 5,000-man Anglo-American/French infantry force in Silopi, Turkey, on the border with Iraq, supposedly to protect the Iraqi Kurds. Although Turkey is a NATO member, it had previously restricted foreign military presence to merely air facilities, and these air facilities had the sole mission of use in war with the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies. The new base, which officially targets Iraq, but also could be used against newly defined enemies through the region, is designed to project NATO’s land presence directly south into the Middle East.

Meanwhile, U.S. Ambassador to Italy Peter Secchia told the nationally circulated daily *Corriere della Sera* on July 14 “that the center of gravity of NATO” has moved from “Berlin to Italy” (article, page 59). The reason offered by Secchia in explaining this purported shift is that “the Arab world begins on the other side of Sicily.” The Arabs and Africans, it seems, have replaced Russia as the ultimate enemy.

One week earlier, Italy invited Israel to join the European Community—an invitation never even extended to the European nation of Turkey. The integration of Israel into the EC has military implications. The previous month, U.S. Defense Secretary Richard Cheney announced that the U.S. would pre-position unspecified weapons in Israel, supposedly under U.S. control and possibly including nuclear weapons. The decision effectively makes Israel—which continues to defy U.N. resolutions as solemnly adopted as those over which the allies went to war with Iraq, but never enforced—into an extension of NATO.