U.S. prepares 'Contra' option against Iraq

by Joseph Brewda

The U.S. government is currently preparing a replay of its failed, and farcical, 1980s Contra policy toward Nicaragua, this time against Iraq, under the aegis of the Iraqi Liberation Act, which was enacted in Congress in September 1998 through the efforts of Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) and former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.). Under the act, the Clinton administration must designate seven Iraqi opposition groups by Jan. 30, to receive $97 million in military aid. By so doing, the bill locks the United States into a senseless military policy toward Iraq, even if President Clinton manages to withstand pressure from British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and the Gore machine within his own administration, to go to war against Iraq in late January.

Although the administration has not yet specified which of the discredited, corrupt, and incompetent opposition groups will be slated to receive the aid, administration sources have told the *Washington Post* that four of the groups will be the Iraqi National Council of London, led by former Jordanian banker Ahmed Chalabi; the Kurdish Democratic Party of Masoud Barzani and its rival, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan of Jalal Talabani; and a comical group of constitutional monarchists led by Sharif Hussein, a claimant from the Hashemite monarchical family that was deposed in the 1950s. A group of former Iraqi military officers running the National Accord in Amman, Jordan, will most likely be chosen. Whether the Iranian-based Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, headed by Mohammad Baqir al-Hakim (SCIRI), and which boasts a 10,000-man Saudi-financed army, will receive funding, is unclear.

The real objective of the bill

Washington analysts who have examined the bill laugh at its stupidity, and emphasize that its stated objective is not its actual one. For one thing, $97 million could never train, equip, and supply the kind of force needed to overthrow the Iraqi regime. In fact, that is not the bill's purpose.

Rather, these sources emphasize, the real intent of the act is to help convey the false perception that there is widespread powerful opposition to the current Iraqi regime within Iraq—which there is not—thereby providing a cover for U.S. commando forces to establish a puppet government in southern Iraq, and to build up the credibility of the already existent, de facto Kurdish puppet statelet in northern Iraq. In other words, these sources say, the bill should be classified under "Public Diplomacy," the Reagan administration's cynical category used for U.S. government media operations meant to deceive the U.S. public over the purpose and effect of U.S. actions.

To this end, the bill also provides for the establishment of Radio Free Iraq, to operate under the direction of former American Israeli Public Affairs Committee executive director Tom Dine, now head of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

Fragmenting Iraq

But that is the not worst feature of the thinking behind the bill. Much worse, is the fact that there are those in the administration who continue to hope to fragment Iraq along ethnic and religious lines, thereby also threatening all of Iraq's neighbors. Arming and supplying such Iraqi and Kurdish riff-raff, who are as hostile to each other as to the Iraqi regime, might not overthrow Saddam, but it would fuel the British-originated geopolitical policy to destabilize the entire region and destroy prospects for cooperation on building the Eurasian Land-Bridge. Fragmenting Iraq is contrary to the repeated, stated policy of the Clinton administration, but, on the other hand, it does conform to the stated policy of the British and Israeli governments which increasingly dominate the actions of the Clinton administration.

One proponent of such games is former CIA Mideast specialist Reuel Marc Gerecht, who, in the Jan. 16 *Washington Post,* called for the United States to play the "ethnic and religious card." According to Gerecht, U.S. policy should be based on the realization that Saddam is "completely dependent on the Sunni Arabs, who only make up 20% of Iraq's population." The United States, Gerecht says, should dispense with the idea of simply waiting for a "Sunni Arab military coup," and instead promote the Arab Shiites and Sunni Kurds.

Toward this end, in September, the United States brokered the so-called "Washington Accord" between the mutually hostile Iraqi Kurdish warlords Barzani and Talabani, who were promised aid in forming a Kurdish state in northern Iraq.

In a public relations stunt, the United States has also established a military academy in the U.S./British-protected Kurdish enclave in northern Iraq. According to the Dec. 20, 1998 *Washington Post,* "The academy, set up last year to train a brand new [Kurdish] army, is one of several signs that the areas of northern Iraq populated by ethnic Kurds are once again becoming a potential staging point for armed opposition to Baghdad." The article added that the new army "will absorb tens of thousands of Iraqi Kurdish warriors." However, behind the army stand some 5,000 Iraqi Kurdish commandos, "Peshmargas," whom the CIA relocated to Guam in 1996 after the Iraqi military retook the Kurdish city of Erbil, but who have since been infiltrated back into the county.