

Iraq: Ground for an 'October Surprise'?

by Hussein Al-Nadeem

In the last week of August, the American media were reporting on an imminent new crisis with Iraq, an "October Surprise" to occur within the context of the re-establishment of a new UN weapons-inspection team, the United Nations Monitoring, Verification, and Inspection Commission (Unmovic), which is preparing to go to Iraq to begin its "business" there. The Iraqi government announced in very clear terms, that it will not allow Unmovic into the country, because Iraq does not recognize UN Resolution 1284, which gave birth to this new team.

In this context, the U.S. Army made an extraordinary announcement that it has placed a Patriot missile air defense battery at the U.S. Army base in Frankfurt, Germany, on high alert, to be deployed to Israel in case of a "possible or perceived threat to Israel from Iraq." This report took everyone, including the Israelis, by surprise. This came one week after the release by the German intelligence agency BND, of a report stating that it had "discovered" an Iraqi factory producing "short- to medium-range" missiles.

Given the rhetoric of U.S. Presidential candidates Al Gore and George W. Bush (who have boasted of their intention to use military means to overthrow Saddam Hussein's government in Iraq), a new military standoff with Iraq prior to the November elections could become the theme of contest of the "two-headed monster," Gore and Bush.

Is this latest revelation that the Pentagon is readying Patriot anti-missile batteries for deployment to Israel, a move by Gore, who is desperate to boost his position in the polls? A recent commentary in the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz*, entitled "Who's Going To Be Surprised in October," citing discussions in Washington with senior military, intelligence, and political figures, reported that Gore could pressure President Clinton to create an Iraq crisis in order to boost his election prospects.

The author of the *Ha'aretz* story told *EIR*, according to his reading of the Patriot deployment, "Gore is signalling his moves. A lot of people are preparing October surprises." From his discussions in Washington, he found that, because many top officials in the U.S. State and Defense Departments are "not keen" on giving Gore such a boost, Gore and his backers couldn't launch a military operation against Iraq without a credible pretext, such as Iraq's refusal to "cooperate" with Unmovic, or a provocation on the Iraq-Kuwait border.

The reemergence of the issue of UN weapons inspections in Iraq is characteristic of the kind of pretext that could be pulled out of the hat to create a major confrontation. Hans Blix, the Swedish diplomat who was chosen by the UN Security Council to lead Unmovic, was ready to start his work. However, he was advised by the United States and other Security Council members to delay presenting his report, because they don't want a confrontation over Iraq when the world heads of state gather in New York in September for the UN General Assembly's Millennium Summit. Therefore, he has to wait until October-November.

Richard Butler, the Provocateur

The fact that the "rogue state" Iraq refuses to work with the weapons inspectors, has always been an easy pretext to stir up a major crisis prompting military operations against Iraq. The most outspoken person on this coming crisis is Richard Butler, former head of the UN Special Commission inspector's team. He recently told international press that "Iraq has reestablished its arsenal of weapons of mass destruction," and that Saddam Hussein "is about to challenge the world." He told the Italian daily *Corriere della Sera* recently, "If Saddam does not let them [the inspectors] in, we will have a very serious global crisis at hand." Butler, a former Australian agent now working for the New York Council on Foreign Relations, was the instrument used by Britain and the United States to launch Operation Desert Fox in 1998.

Although, the danger of military escalation against Iraq does exist, there are certain aspects of the strategic-political situation in the Middle East and the world that play a major role in determining the development and outcome of such a crisis.

Political and military facts on the ground in the region, work against the Anglo-American forces launching more than a repetition of the December 1998 devastating and useless air-bombardment campaign Operation Desert Fox. Furthermore, it led three other permanent members of the Security Council—Russia, China, and France—to closer cooperation with Iraq. So, one can ask: What would Gore benefit from a repetition of such an insane act? An attack against Iraq would even further provoke Russia, which is still exploring the possibility that the sinking of its submarine, the *Kursk*, was a hostile act committed by Britain or the United States.

In light of the great difficulty through which the Middle East peace process has gone recently, especially the stalled Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, a new operation against Iraq will detonate a popular revolt in the Arab countries, especially in the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza, and Jordan and Egypt. Under such circumstances, the peace process will come to a complete dead end. The question is, whether the Clinton Administration will attempt a positive October Surprise, on the basis of a breakthrough in the peace process, or will it be drawn into bloodshed, in an attempt to save Gore's sinking campaign?