EIRInternational

New war against Iraq would be a strategic disaster

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Following the December air raids against Iraq, threats were issued that the strikes could be resumed, "after Ramadan," the Muslim fasting month. Not only have U.S. military officials already mooted this to be on the agenda, but several other indications exist, pointing to the possibility that the next attack could include a coordinated ground offensive, aimed at setting up a puppet government in Iraq.

Following the Iraqi declaration that it would no longer respect the so-called no-fly zones, on Jan. 5, several skirmishes were reported, as Iraqi and American and British aircraft exchanged fire. In the first direct confrontation since December 1992, two incidents occurred, involving fire between Iraqi and U.S. planes. According to Pentagon spokesman Ken Bacon, U.S. F-15s and F-14s fired six missiles on Iraqi MiG-25s, in two incidents, 15 minutes apart. There were reportedly eight Iraqi violations of the no-fly zone in southern Iraq that day. Following the clashes, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein issued a call in a televised speech, for Arab support: "Revolt, sons of the great Arab Nation . . . revolt and unseat those stooges, collaborators, throne dwarves and cowards," he said, apparently in reference to the rulers of Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait.

The Iraqi decision to defend its air space constitutes a hint that in Baghdad, the threat of a ground offensive under massive air cover, might have been being anticipated.

In the days preceding the skirmishes, radio monitors of air traffic in Europe reported to *EIR* that the number of U.S. military supply aircraft to the Middle East had escalated dramatically, reaching the same levels as those in December, prior to the anti-Iraq aggression. The sources reported that traffic to Israel's Ben Gurion airport as well as the Navetam air base, which usually consists of one plane per week, had increased to dozens, which were flying cargo in and leaving empty. The monitored traffic also included planes carrying

military personnel from Fort Benning, Georgia, most probably paratroopers, as well as tanker aircraft, used for refuelling over the Mediterranean and Red Sea. The intense traffic may be related to ongoing maneuvers being carried out in cooperation with Kuwait, code-named "Intrinsic Action." These maneuvers, which are to last until May-June, and involve 1,250 U.S. Army troops normally based in the United States, could provide a means to put in place the capabilities required for the kind of action Shelton et al. are said to be contemplating.

Intense diplomatic consultations

Even more telling than the military moves per se, are the diplomatic encounters which point to arrangements being made for renewed aggression. The message which emerges is that the Britain and the United States are trying to recreate the appearance of a "coalition" against Iraq—not necessarily military, but political.

First, on Dec. 28, Saudi Foreign Minister Saud Al-Faisal made a not-so-secret visit to Cairo, for talks with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Foreign Minister Amr Moussa. Mubarak announced that the time was not "ripe" for an Arab summit, to discuss the Iraq crisis. Such a summit had been urged by Yemen and the Arab League, and approved by 17 of the 22 states; a preparatory meeting of the foreign ministers was to have taken place on Dec. 29. Instead, the Saudis succeeded in postponing the meeting until Jan. 24, i.e., after the end of Ramadan. The immediate implication was that the Saudi diplomat had been briefed on U.K.-U.S. plans for military action perhaps even *before the end of Ramadan*, with which such a summit should not interfere. The official reason given for the postponement, was that the Saudis did not want to see Arab support for Iraq, nor to witness calls for breaking the embargo.

President Mubarak then shifted gears, and started issuing

a stream of violent attacks against Saddam Hussein. Mubarak's stance had been critical of the Iraqi government, but never so vitriolic. The Egyptian press, from *Al Ahram* to *Al Jumhuriya,* reflected the same shift, and the state radio broadcasts on Jan. 5 referred to Saddam Hussein as "a butcher" and "a destroyer," who would place the lives of his people in jeopardy, just to maintain power.

At the same time, a leader of the Iraqi National Accord, Maad Abdul Rahim, made public that members of his group had met with Egypt's ambassador to Jordan, Hani Riyadh, the previous day. He said his group was grateful to Mubarak for "his stance in support of the Iraqi people." He added in an interview that the Egyptian government's position "will give us huge moral support in our struggle to bring this regime down." The *Jordan Times* reported that Egyptian officials confirmed the fact of the meeting, and said further meetings would follow. This is the first time such meetings have taken place between Egypt and the Iraqi opposition since 1991. The *Jordan Times* noted, "It reflects a major shift in Cairo's policies toward Iraq and could be a sign that Egypt supports U.S. efforts to work with Iraqi opposition groups seeking to overthrow Saddam."

The Egyptian parliament, pouring oil on the fire, said on Jan. 4 that it would investigate charges that Iraq had killed 5,500 Egyptian migrant workers, back in 1988.

On Jan. 4, Mohammad Bakr al Hakim, head of the Supreme Council of the Iraqi Opposition, met with the Emir of Kuwait. Following the meeting, al Hakim called on Arab nations to express solidarity with the Iraqi people, by supporting the drive to overthrow Saddam Hussein. The Supreme Council of the Iraqi Opposition has received financing from the Saudis and Kuwaitis. This visit to Kuwait could signal the decision by the Kuwaitis, to allow the Opposition to mount an offensive inside Iraq, from Kuwaiti soil. The group, is a military organization, which has about 15,000 trained and armed fighters.

Following this, the Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Abdul Aziz Al Dakhil, travelled to Amman, to meet with Crown Prince Hassan, and give him a letter from Kuwait Crown Prince Sheikh Saad Al Abdallah Al Sabah. It is possible that the content of the message had to do with Kuwaiti and Saudi preparations for upcoming anti-Iraq actions. The two princes discussed restoring bilateral ties, which had been severed in 1991. The Kuwaiti prince expressed gratitude for the recent statements by Prince Hassan, further distancing himself from the Iraqi leadership, and calling for the release of Kuwaiti POWs. Prince Hassan had spoken out in favor of "freedom, democracy, and other human rights in Iraq," but had neglected to denounce the military actions against Iraq; the Iraqi response was, that this constituted interference into its internal affairs.

While Prince Hassan was receiving Al Dakhil, Jordan's King Hussein was at the White House, meeting with President Clinton. Few details were released, beyond the terse statement reported in the *Jordan Times,* that the Jordanian Ambassador, who also attended the meeting, had said, "Jordan's position is clear" on Iraq. U.S. National Security Council spokesman David Leavy said, "President Clinton made it clear he continues to believe Iraq is a threat to regional stability and needs to be contained." Reportedly, the talks dealt with plans for increased U.S. aid to Jordan, allegedly to offset the negative economic effects of the anti-Iraq embargo. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright had said during a recent visit to Jordan, that the United States would increase its $225 million aid, by adding $200 million over five years, for "security aid." Considering the context, and the fact that the King—accompanied by the head of Jordanian intelligence, Samih Battikhi—met with several State Department officials, it is probable that the next anti-Iraq offensive was discussed.

Finally, it was announced in the Arabic press Jan. 6, that British Prime Minister Tony Blair would travel to Kuwait on Jan. 9. Reports also appeared on Jan. 8, that Blair had been visited at his vacation retreat in the Seychelles by the Emir of Bahrain, the most important naval base for U.S. operations in the region.

Indeed, Blair did make a stop over in Kuwait, where he met with the Emir and visited an RAF base. Blair delivered a belicose warning to Saddam that the U.K. was fully prepared to take military action against any aggression by the Iraqis.

The catastrophe to be averted

The illusion cherished by General Shelton et al., is that a combined air power/special operations assault on Iraq could be conducted in quick, neat, efficient, bloodless fashion. Commander of the U.S. Central Command Gen. Anthony Zinni, in a Jan. 7 Pentagon briefing, answered questions about the effects of such a mooted operation, by saying, "I think when we look toward a post-Saddam Iraq and one in which the Iraqi people would regain the position they've held before, I would want to see anything that occurs be done in a way that the territorial integrity of Iraq is maintained, that whatever government follows would be one that would be representative of all the ethnic and religious groups in Iraq."

Nice words, in principle, and words that reflect a difference in view with the Blair government, which has no qualms about busting up Iraq into three enclaves—a Kurdish entity in the north, a Shi'ite entity in the south, and a third entity around Baghdad.

But there is no way such an option could be carried out without destabilizing the country and the region. Any idea, that a special operations unit could sneak into Baghdad and remove or assassinate Saddam Hussein without resistance, is insane. It must be recalled that, following plans published by the British in 1997, to mount such an insurgency, the Iraqi leadership responded by arming and training one-half million civilians. This means that any ground offensive, by Iraqi opposition and/or "allied" forces, would encounter massive resistance, and house-to-house combat must be expected. There

would be a bloodbath. Despite assurances to the contrary, there is no guarantee, under such conditions, that Iraq would maintain its territorial integrity. Any breakup of Iraq would destroy the entire region.

In fact, in the January/February 1999 issue of *Foreign Affairs,* the journal of the New York Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), Daniel Byman, Kenneth Pollack and Gideon Rose wrote an article, "Can Saddam Be Toppled?," which debunked the idea that any viable option exists for the overthrow of Saddam. The authors, from the Rand Corporation, the National Defense University, and the CFR, respectively, pilloried the neo-conservative and Zionist Lobby rightists who have cavalierly claimed that Saddam Hussein could be overthrown with minimal bloodshed, in a replay of the Contra and Afghansi fiascos of the 1980s. The *Foreign Affairs* authors equated this insanity with the Bay of Pigs and the U.S. defeat in Vietnam.

Unfortunately, the very neo-con lunatics debunked by the CFR authors are, in some cases, very close to Vice President Al Gore; and, therefore, it cannot be ruled out that one of these insane utopian scenarios is on the table, and would be almost

certain to "go live" were President Clinton to be removed from office.

Finally, it must be emphasized that neither Russia nor China would tolerate such an operation. Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan has reportedly told Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, that China does not believe the United States should be allowed to wear the UN Security Council like a shoe, to discard whenever it pleases. China has said Iraq must remain sovereign over its land. Russia's direct response to the U.K.-U.S. air strikes in December, was vehement, and not only verbal. The deployment of Topol-M SS-27 ICBM announced on Dec. 28, as well as the announced change in Russian military command, creating a separate nuclear command, mean that flexible response is no longer the name of the game. Serious crises would thus generate a nuclear response.

The result of any operation such as that being discussed by Shelton and his British colleagues, "would be the worst catastrophe in U.S. military history," as LaRouche warns, in his article "Why General Shelton Must Retire Now," published elsewhere in this issue.

Who's behind the war drive

The drive for a post-Ramadan resumption of military attacks against Iraq is centered on a grouping within the Clinton administration which includes Vice-President Al Gore, Gore's "security adviser" Leon Fuerth, Defense Secretary William Cohen, and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Henry Hugh Shelton. This grouping sees a new war against Iraq as the testing ground for a new military strategy, which is a combination of air power, special forces operations, and information war tactics. The latter "cyber war" tactics include the disruption and active manipulation of enemy command, control, and intelligence systems and large-scale disinformation operations.

General Shelton has been an enthusiatic proponent of the air power-special forces-cyber war strategic triad, with the "first use" of tactical nuclear weaponery lurking in the background. Shelton has been chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff since Oct. 1, 1997. President Clinton's choice for JCS chairman was Air Force Gen. Joseph W. Ralston. But, a media scandal over an extramarital affair more than a decade earlier was set into motion, which forced Ralston to withdraw his name. Shelton was named to the post instead.

Shelton keeps on his office wall "the pictures of two Confederate generals, Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson," according to his official biography.

He has a very limited educational and strategic background. Born Jan. 2, 1942, Shelton got a degree in "textile technology" from North Carolina State University, and a Masters degree in political science from Auburn University. He was a special forces ("Green Berets") platoon leader and company commander in the Vietnam War, up to 1970. During 1983-85 Shelton was brigade commander at Fort Bragg, the Green Beret training center. He became a general in 1988. Shelton's position, before being named JCS chairman, was Commander in Chief of the Special Operations Command (SOCOM), near Tampa, Florida. General Shelton is the first chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to have come from the special operations forces (SOF).

The creation of SOCOM as a unified command for the special operations components of the various services, was a result of a bill sponsored by then-Sen. William Cohen and Sen. Sam Nunn in 1986. Cohen has been an enthusistic proponent of the "Israeli model," which gives special operations a preeminient place in the overall military structure. Cohen said on the floor of the Senate in 1986: "Israeli successes in special operations are legendary. The British, too, have had remarkable success in this area. . . . The United States, by contrast, has suffered repeated setbacks. . . . In my view, we have not been effectively organized to fight the most likely battles of the present or the future. . . . The successes of the Israeli Army in special operations are well known. What is less well known is that there is not a single general in the Israeli Army that has not served in the special forces."