

Arab League-Iraqi Move Redefines War Agenda

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Iraqi Foreign Minister Naji Sabri's Sept. 16 letter to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan "called the bluff" of a Bush Administration at a peak of war rhetoric; opened a gap between the United States and the UN Security Council; and was met by a Washington war party scramble to change the agenda to make immediate war inevitable. Defense Secretary Rumsfeld expressed the hysteria by telling Congress that now, only Saddam Hussein's voluntary exile could stop the war.

That the consensus President Bush sought at the UN Sept. 12 did not exist, had been known for months. Except for the Anglo-American combination, the only other government pushing for war had been Israel, and not as an also-ran, but as a prime mover. Russia, Asia, the Arab and Islamic world, as well as continental Europe, had made known their determination to prevent a repetition of Desert Storm.

This time, those opposed to war had mobilized a concerted effort to convince the Iraqi leadership that it would be wiser to allow the return of weapons inspectors, than to risk a war which all knew, would not only destabilize the region, but unleash global, enduring war.

Arab League Mobilization Key

Most instrumental in working out an arrangement with Baghdad, was the Arab League, as UN Secretary General Kofi Annan explicitly acknowledged in his announcement of Iraq's letter. Representing 22 Arab governments, the Arab League—led by former Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, whom Annan specifically congratulated on Sept. 18—had conducted intensive diplomacy towards this end. The fact that over the past year, the process of inner-Arab reconciliation—between Saudi Arabia and Iraq, as well as between Kuwait and Iraq—has been progressing steadily, built up a climate of trust in which Iraq could act with confidence.

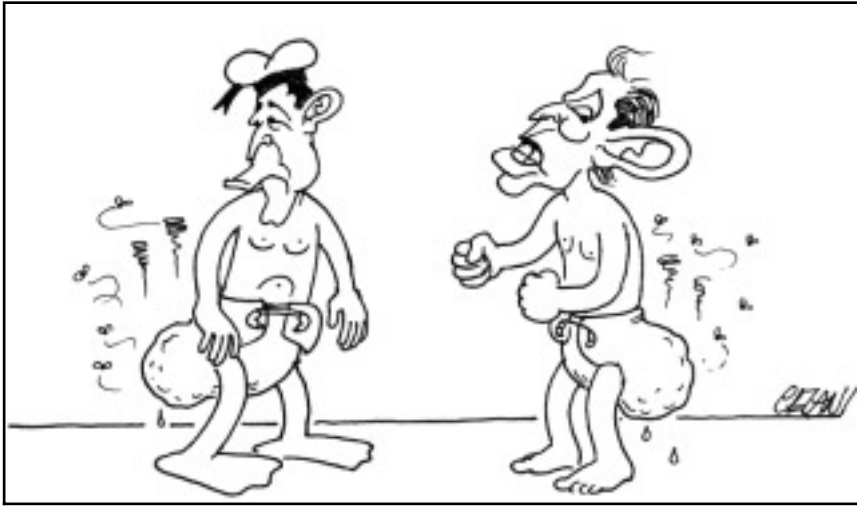
The Arab League, at its last summit in Beirut, on March 27-28, had consolidated this process by mediating a groundbreaking agreement between Kuwait and Iraq, in which Iraq recognized Kuwait's sovereignty, pledged never to violate its borders, and agreed to other confidence-building measures, including the return of prisoners of war. The summit had taken a united stand against any military aggression against an Arab state—including Iraq; and, it had endorsed the Saudi peace proposal for a global Arab-Israeli peace.

Furthermore, the two major powers of the Persian Gulf, Saudi Arabia and Iran, had been coordinating their stances on the crisis, and reached a principled agreement to oppose any military strikes against Iraq. Iranian President Mohammed Khatami made an "unofficial" visit to Saudi Arabia on Sept. 12-14, to perform a pilgrimage to the Muslim holy sites, and met with Saudi Crown Prince Abdallah. In Jeddah, the two leaders discussed behind closed doors for three hours; then met again in the presence of their defense and interior ministers and heads of intelligence. The U.S. war plans for Iraq were obviously high on the agenda.

Khatami, after the meetings, underlined the role played by the "two regional powers, Iran and Saudi Arabia," and stressed that regional countries should avoid provocative actions, boost cooperation, and defend security. He denounced the intervention of foreign powers in the region, as threatening peace and security of all, adding, as the Iranian news agency IRNA put it, "that if the big powers continue their strong-arm policies, global peace and security would be jeopardized." Abdallah echoed Khatami, and said the situation in the region was "sensitive." He said that any attack on Iraq would cause irreparable damage to Iraq and its neighbors.

Since then, authoritative spokesmen of both Iran and Saudi Arabia have reiterated this stance. Iran has repeatedly stated its view that Iraq must readmit the UN inspectors, in order to eliminate a pretext for military action.

Other pressures brought to bear on Iraq came from Europe, the United States, and Russia. Official and unofficial delegations of parliamentarians from France, for example, as well as Congressmen from the United States, have visited Baghdad, in an attempt to convince the Iraqi government that the wisest course of action would be to comply with inspections. American citizen and former UN weapons inspections chief Scott Ritter has been conducting an indefatigable campaign, to "wage peace." On one of many visits to Baghdad, Ritter addressed the Iraqi National Assembly, on Sept. 8, documenting how the U.S. administration has lied about weapons of mass destruction. At the same time, he urged the country's leaders to follow the path of non-confrontation. Ritter delivered the same speech back in the United States, on the cable TV news channel, C-SPAN, and a book with this documentation (see below) was to be rushed into print on Sept. 20.



Bush on Iraq: We need a change

Russia has stood out among the permanent members of the UN Security Council, for its intransigence against the U.S.-UK position. Not only have the Russians demonstrated their commitment to honor massive economic cooperation agreements with Iraq—worth \$40 billion—but they have repeated their rejection of any military aggression. Simultaneously, Russian diplomacy has focussed on urging Iraq’s leaders to comply with inspections. Most significantly, Russia participated in an unprecedented meeting of the foreign ministers of the “strategic triangle” countries—Russia, India, and China—at the UN, signalling the intention to combat the war drive with Eurasian development (see article, this section).

Finally, the turnaround on Iraq effected by German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, has lent decisive weight to the anti-war forces. Schröder stunned the world, especially Washington, when he announced that his government would not participate in any military action against Iraq, militarily or financially. Given that Germany was the logistical launching pad—and major funder—of Desert Storm, this stance has raised questions as to whether such an operation can be repeated. The popular support Schröder has received reflects the majority view across Europe, against a new war.

Inside Iraq, a process had been initiated by the leadership, months ago, to prepare the population for the return of UN inspectors. Once the threats emanating from the White House reached fever pitch, Iraq made its move. Thus, anyone understanding political processes in the world, and following these not-at-all-secret events, should have realized that there would be no consensus for a new war, and that Iraq would comply.

War Preparations Actually Accelerated

In Washington, leading spokesman for war have, in imperial fashion, called these events politically “irrelevant” (the President’s continued taunt at the United Nations). More to the point: The war party has determined that there will be war, regardless of the actions of the United Nations, the thinking

of the “international community,” or international law. The White House quickly shifted to “regime change” as the strategic aim, with Rumsfeld giving it the most arrogant expression.

Militarily, preparations for war have, and will continue to accelerate, against to the race to get UN inspectors back into Iraq. Following a months-long project to expand the air base at El Obeid, in Qatar (giving it a 15,000-foot runway), it was announced in early September that the Pentagon would be transferring the Central Command from Tampa, Florida, to this tiny Persian Gulf emirate. The Central Command, responsible for the Middle East and Central and Southwest Asia, is more conveniently placed there for a war.

Centcom’s Commander in Chief, Gen. Tommy R. Franks, moved to Qatar on Sept. 17, and is to be joined by 600 officers in November.

An estimated 2,000 Marines are to start a month-long amphibious assault exercise in Kuwait later in September. While these “maneuvers”—obviously designed to become live war operations—begin, the American and British warplanes, that have been periodically attacking sites in the so-called “no-fly zones” in Iraq, have shifted, to target major air defense sites, evidently to degrade Iraq’s air defenses in preparation for a major attack. At the same time, the U.S. military is preparing to base B-2 bombers outside the United States for the first time. The U.S. officially requested basing rights on Britain’s island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. Flight distance to Baghdad would thereby be cut by approximately 3,300 miles, from 6,800 miles. The B-2s, according to a Sept. 17 *New York Times* report, “can carry sixteen 2,000-pound laser-guided bombs, and the Air Force is preparing, within the next few months, to equip the aircraft to hold as many as eighty 500-pound laser-guided bombs, which the Air Force is expected to stock in its arsenal within months.”

Those opposed to a war, led in the UN Security Council by Russia, will continue to push for immediate resumption of inspections, and insist, as Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov has, that there is no need for any further resolutions. In New York on Sept. 18, the relevant officials—Hans Blix of the UN inspections regime, Kofi Annan and Iraqi Foreign Minister Naji Sabri—discussed the inspectors’ return. Sabri spoke of a “flying start,” to lay stress on the need to hurry, before the bombing begins. Final preparations are to be readied at the end of September when the Iraqis and the UN meet in Vienna. The reason for the rush, is the belief that inspectors on the ground would be an effective deterrent. (In 1998, before President Bill Clinton buckled under to pressure to bomb Iraq, he had the UN inspectors recalled for this reason.)

Whether there will be war or peace, will depend on what

President George W. Bush decides to do. The warplanes are in place, and could move as soon as he were to give the order. Or, the President could be brought to abandon the war policy, by the mobilization sparked by Lyndon LaRouche, and to clamp down on those forces in the United States and Israel, who are committed to Mideast conflagration.

Documentation

Former UN Inspector Ritter to Iraq's Congress

Former head of UN inspection teams in Iraq, American Scott Ritter, now "waging peace" against a new Iraq war, addressed the Iraq National Assembly Sept. 8—the first American ever to do so. These excerpts are from the Iraq Satellite Channel broadcast; Ritter also re-read his speech in a C-SPAN broadcast from Washington Sept. 16.

... While I have a great deal of respect and sympathy for the people of Iraq, I have a greater love for my own country and my people, which is why I am here. My country seems on the verge of making a historical mistake, one that will forever change the political dynamic which has governed the world since the end of the Second World War; namely, the foundation of international law as set forth in the United Nations Charter, which calls for the peaceful resolution of problems between nations. My government has set forth on a policy of unilateral intervention that runs contrary to the letter and intent of the United Nations Charter.

The consequences of such action are not only dire in terms of their near-term consequences as measured by death, destruction and lost opportunities, but also the long-term global destabilization that will result in the rejection of an international law by the world's most powerful nation. As someone who counts himself as a fervent patriot and a good citizen of the United States of America, I feel I cannot stand by idly while my country behaves in such a fashion.

Americans are a good people. No, Americans are a great people capable of doing great good. Never forget this. There has been a disturbing tendency among certain nations, Iraq included, to try and make a distinction between the people of the United States and the government of the United States. This is wrong. Ultimately, there is no difference, and indeed there can be no difference between the people of the United States and the government of the United States, because thanks to our Constitution, we the people of the United States of America are the government. In America today, we take very seriously the concept of government of the people, by the people and for the people. This represents the very founda-

tion of the democratic way of life we love and cherish. And you do us a great disservice if you think and say otherwise. . . .

Iraq Needs 'More Welcoming Posture'

The truth of the matter is that Iraq is not a sponsor of the kind of terror perpetrated against the United States on Sept. 11, and in fact is active in suppressing the sort of fundamentalist extremism that characterizes those who attacked the United States on that horrible day. This is the truth, and once the American people become familiar with and accept this truth, the politics of fear will be defeated and the prospect of war between our two countries greatly diminished.

Iraq needs to help the people of the United States, and indeed the world, become familiar with these truths. In order to do this, Iraq needs to adopt a more welcoming posture to invite the kind of scrutiny that would facilitate the discovery of these truths, for good reason. Iraq today finds itself in a defensive posture preparing itself for war. This is understandable. However, a defensive posture enables those who promote the politics of fear to distort reality in a way that turns Iraq's defensive characteristics into aggressive intent. . . .

'Only Option' Is Unconditional Inspections

Let America and the world know that Iraq, instead of being on the side of those who perpetrated the crimes of Sept. 11, is in fact at one with the world community in condemning such actions and that Iraq is prepared to stand shoulder to shoulder with the rest of the world in combating such persons and organizations.

Iraq must renounce violence and aggression against all of its neighbors. Iraq should let the American people and the world know that if there is a resolution to the Palestinian crisis that is acceptable to the people of Palestine, Iraq will accept this; that Iraq cannot be more Palestinian than the Palestinians. And that, in any case, Iraq rejects the threat or use of force in resolving this crisis.

Iraq must show the people of the United States that it will act in a manner respectful of international borders and agreements and that Iraq will strive to adhere to the internationally accepted standards of human rights. Educate the world as to the great good that Iraq has achieved in the past regarding health, education and an acceptable standard of living; and convince the world that Iraq will continue to pursue these achievements in a manner which does not oppress the rights of any individuals or groups of people inside Iraq. And, most importantly, show the world that Iraq does not possess weapons of mass destruction. Iraq must loudly reject any intention of possessing these weapons and then work within the framework of international law to demonstrate this as a reality. There is only one way that Iraq can achieve this; with the unconditional return of UN weapons inspectors, allowing such inspectors unfettered access to sites inside Iraq in order to complete the disarmament tasks as set forth in Security Council resolutions.

On this matter, Iraq has no choice. . . .