

War on Iraq, Resistance, and the Shift in Global Politics

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April 1, 2003

George W. Bush's illegal, unwarranted and barbarous war against Iraq clearly has nothing to do with "liberating" the Iraqi people and everything to do with extending U.S. global power at the expense of both the Iraqi AND American populace.

The Bush administration's effort to "decapitate" Saddam Hussein with a massive cruise missile and bombing attack in the first hours of the war on March 19-20 reflected its intent to eliminate Hussein while preserving as much of the repressive Iraqi state apparatus (especially its police and Ba'ath Party officialdom) as possible. In response to the apparent failure of that initial attack and the emergence of armed resistance to the U.S. blitzkrieg in various Iraqi cities, Bush's war machine is unleashing a bloodbath that will be felt in the region for years to come.

The many setbacks that confronted the U.S. in the first week of the war in cities like Umm Qasr, Basra and Nasiriya indicates that the battle for Baghdad will be no high-tech "cake walk," as U.S. officials at first seemed to imagine. A lengthy and bloody war and occupation is now very likely.

THE RUSH TO WAR

Bush's insistence on pushing ahead with his war, despite the risk that it will plunge the U.S. into a colonial quagmire of its own making, has produced a major shift in world politics.

In response to the opposition of France and Germany, as well as Russia and China, to his war drive, Bush launched his assault without even asking for a vote at the UN Security Council—a move that is inflaming resentment around the world at U.S. unilateralism. Turkey's refusal to allow 60,000 U.S. troops to invade Iraq from its borders has led Bush to pour more arms and soldiers into Iraq from the south, even though this risks greater

U.S. combatant and Iraqi civilian casualties. And the anti-war sentiment that is growing in every country has led Bush to write off democratic world opinion, which is leading to increased resentment at the U.S.'s drive for permanent military intervention overseas.

The more this administration tries to negate all limits to its drive for war, the more it manages to establish other limits which become real barriers to the exercise of total U.S. dominance.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER?

U.S. actions in Iraq thus far show that this war will not result in the attainment of genuine self-determination or democracy for the Iraqi people.

Bush has made no secret of his plans to install a U.S.-run military regime for at least several years after a war. The U.S. is also intent on keeping many officials of Hussein's repressive Ba'ath Party in power. Worried about a fracturing of Iraq along ethnic and religious lines, the U.S. sees folding Ba'ath Party officials (many of whom are guilty of human rights abuses) into its occupation as a way to ensure "stability." In doing so the U.S. is also responding to pleas from regimes like Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, which fear the advent of any real democracy in the region.

It is this desire on the part of the Bush administration to preserve the structure of the repressive Iraqi state, and not any humanitarian qualms on its part about inflicting massive civilian casualties, that explains its attentiveness to trying to take down Hussein's regime with "precision" bombing.

While the U.S. claims to be fighting in the name of Kurds, Shi'ites, and other oppressed groups, it has made sure not to arm them—unlike its approach to the reactionary Northern Alliance in Afghanistan, which it flooded with weapons. Though the U.S. has given military training to 1,000 Iraqi exiles at a NATO base in Hungary, it banned any Kurds from participating.

We are seeing a repeat of what happened after the end of the first Gulf War in 1991, when the U.S. allowed Hussein to remain in power rather than allow the Kurds, Shi'ites and others to take destiny into their own hands. Though this time the U.S. is trying to depose Hussein, the Kurds, who have been betrayed by Western powers before (especially in 1974 and 1991), are about to be betrayed again.

Kanan Makiya of the Iraqi National Congress, a group funded by the U.S., stated in mid-February that U.S. plans for a post-Hussein Iraq are "guaranteed to turn the [Iraqi]

opposition into an opponent of the U.S. on the streets of Baghdad the day after liberation....The government of the United States is about to betray, as it has done so many times in the past, those core human values of self-determination and individual liberty” (“Our Hopes Betrayed,” THE OBSERVER [London], Feb. 16, 2003).

Meanwhile, the threat of a massive humanitarian disaster looms. Over 60% of Iraqis depend on UN aid for food. The World Health Organization estimates that a decade of U.S.-imposed sanctions and Hussein’s policies have forced the vast majority of Iraqis to live on a semi-starvation diet for years. These conditions are bound to worsen as the U.S. tries to subdue all forms of resistance to its invasion and occupation. The livelihood of millions of Iraqis is now in jeopardy.

RIFTS IN THE WESTERN ALLIANCE

Despite the Bush administration’s fruitless four-month effort to get the UN Security Council to sanction an invasion of Iraq, Bush long ago decided to go to war, with or without international approval. Stunned by the attacks of September 11, 2001, and emboldened by its rapid “victory” over the Taliban in Afghanistan, the administration sees war against Iraq as a way to further its drive for permanent military intervention by taking down the one regime in the critically important Middle East that has expressed open opposition to U.S. policies. Yet Bush’s arrogant over-reach has led to a pulling apart of the U.S.-led global alliance that SEEMED so unified after September 11, 2001.

France and Germany, among the most powerful components of NATO and the European Union (EU), have repeatedly opposed the U.S. drive for war against Iraq. However most of the other 15 nations of the EU have expressed support for the war. So have the 10 nations (mainly from the former Warsaw Pact) that are expected to join the EU in coming years.

More is at issue in this divide within Europe than widespread anti-war sentiment, crucial as that remains. Public opposition to war is almost as high in Britain, Spain and Italy—whose rulers support Bush—as in France and Germany.

French President Chirac’s decision to veto any UN Security Council resolution authorizing war against Iraq didn’t result from a sudden disdain on his part for military intervention overseas. He has shown little reticence to engage in such undertakings when it suits his purposes, as can be seen from France’s many military interventions in Africa. A few months ago Chirac sent 3,000 French troops to Ivory Coast.

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Chirac's refusal to support Bush on Iraq has more to do with France's declining power in Europe due to EU and NATO expansion. The more the EU expands into Central and East Europe, the more decentralized it becomes and less subject to French and German control. Chirac sees an independent stance vis-a-vis the U.S. on Iraq as a way to reassert French power in Europe at a moment when many newer EU members feel beholden to the U.S.

France's position also reflects a contest with the U.S. over influence in the Third World. On Feb. 20 leaders of 52 African nations attending a French-African summit in Paris endorsed the French position opposing war on Iraq.

While this is not the first time France has taken a position that conflicts with the U.S., what is new today is that it has the support of Germany. With the absence of any external military threat, Germany's rulers are less willing to go against the massive opposition to war among the German masses.

The positions of Chirac and German Chancellor Schroeder, however, have so far not had the effect of bolstering French and German influence in the EU as much as bringing to the surface long-simmering rivalries within it. The governments of Spain and Italy don't mind seeing their role in the EU augmented at French and German expense, given the increasing importance of their economies. They have supported Bush, despite mass opposition to war at home. Blair's Britain, meanwhile, always wary about Franco-German domination of the continent, has become Bush's most trusted and energetic ally.

The rulers of the 10 nations in Central and East Europe that were approved for EU membership in December 2002 have also rallied in support of Bush. They view total support for U.S. dictates as a way to counterbalance French and German power (France's economy is larger than that of Spain, Portugal, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic combined, and Germany's is 50% larger than France's). Romania and Bulgaria are a long way from reaching the EU's conditions for membership; its rulers view total support for U.S. acts as a way to jump-start their way into "new Europe" via NATO.

Bush's actions have brought to the surface the fault-lines of European enlargement, which long preceded his drive to war against Iraq. The result is rising tension between the U.S. and France and Germany on a scale not seen in 50 years.

Bush cronies like Richard Perle of the Defense Policy Board have declared that the U.S. should abandon "romantic, nostalgic notions of the U.S. and members of the EU as allies working to achieve a common policy." And Secretary of State Colin Powell stated: "The [Atlantic] alliance is breaking itself up because it will not meet its responsibilities."

This made it easier for Russia—which has nothing to gain and much to lose from a U.S. war against Iraq in the way of oil contracts and a \$20 billion debt owed to it by Hussein—to also threaten to veto a war against Iraq in the UN Security Council.

These intra-capitalist rivalries pose a huge challenge for the anti-war movements, because nothing would do more to channel them into a reformist, non-revolutionary direction than for the movements to follow the latest incarnations of neo-Gaullism. The more anti-war movements tailend existing state powers, be it France, Germany, or any other power in the UN, the less likely they are to pose any real challenge to world capitalism.

IMPACT ON THE MIDDLE EAST

Bush's rush to war has also led to increased conflict with Turkey. The Turkish parliament's March 1 failure to approve positioning 60,000 U.S. troops there for an invasion, even after being offered \$30 billion in economic inducements, was a stunning setback for the administration.

U.S. relations with Turkey have been severely strained. Turkey will not even allow U.S. jets to take off from NATO bases in the country, permitting only flights over its airspace. Over 95% of its populace opposes war on Iraq, and the U.S. pressure—it would not be wrong to call it bribery—to get it to agree to its mandates earned it few friends, even from within Turkey's political establishment. Murat Mercan, a member of parliament, said of U.S.-Turkish relations: "The relationship is spoiled. The Americans dictated to us. It became a business negotiation, not something between friends. It disgusted me."

The U.S. setback on Turkey is especially striking since the U.S. burned up a lot of political capital to secure its cooperation, as seen in its promise to allow the Turkish army to occupy northern Iraq to keep the Kurds in line. The U.S. also promised Turkey that it would make sure that the Kurds don't get control of the Mosul and Kirkuk oil fields. Kurdish groups were furious with the U.S. over this.

As bad a deal as the Kurds will get from the war, the Palestinians are destined to make out worse. Today is not like 1991, when the U.S. had support from many European and Arab regimes in the Gulf War. Because of this Bush Sr. had to pay at least lip service to Palestinian desires for self-determination after it was over.

The situation is different now, when the U.S. and Britain are taking on Iraq virtually alone. Bush's entire approach indicates that he will give a green light to Israel's Sharon to do as he pleases in his continuous war against the Palestinians. This despite the "road map" plan, which calls for forming a Palestinian state in three years. This will not amount to

much. First, because the divisions between the U.S. and some of its allies means that the so-called quartet—the U.S., UN, EU, and Russia—will be unable to put collective pressure on Israel. Second, because Bush insists that before any negotiations begin all violent acts against Israel must cease—the same demand Sharon has been making for two years to prevent any meaningful discussion from taking place with the Palestinians.

The peril facing the Palestinians is further underlined by Sharon's new government, which includes the National Union Party. It favors annexation of the West Bank and expulsion of the Palestinians from the occupied territories.

Israel's rulers hope that U.S. war against Iraq will allow it to reshape the Middle East in its image. Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz said that after the U.S. takes care of Iraq it should go after Iran, a greater threat to Israel: "We have great interest in shaping the Middle East the day after a war."

Most ominously of all, members of the Bush administration have begun to openly talk of the war against Iraq as a "pilot project" for future U.S. wars of intervention, possibly against Iran and North Korea.

WAR IN EAST ASIA?

Sensing that it may be next on Bush's hit-list, North Korea's decrepit Stalinist regime has upped the ante by restarting its nuclear reactor at Yongbyon and challenging U.S. spy aircraft. Bush, who refuses to engage in direct talks with North Korea, responded on March 4 by sending 24 B-52 and B-1 bombers to Guam, in striking distance of North Korea. Though he says the U.S. doesn't plan to invade North Korea, he has not ruled out a preemptive air strike on its nuclear sites.

These moves are causing consternation in South Korea. Over 21 million South Koreans live in the "kill box"—the Seoul metropolitan area, in reach of North Korea's 13,000 artillery pieces. Another Korean war could kill over a million people—and that's without counting the use of nuclear weapons.

This is creating serious tensions between the U.S. and South Korea, which wants to form a Common Market with North Korea. South Korea's President Roh Moo Hyun recently said in a speech to the Korean Federation of Trade Unions, "Koreans should stand together, although things will get difficult when the U.S. bosses us around." An advisor to Roh added, "If the American policy is simply to wait for North Korea to make a huge mistake, there is no future for the alliance and no future for the American position in East Asia" (See THE NEW YORK TIMES, Feb. 25).

On Feb. 24, China, Australia and South Korea urged the U.S. to enter into one-to-one talks with North Korea. Bush refuses. Relations with China are becoming strained. Japan has moved closer to the U.S. position, worried about China's growing power in East Asia. Whether we look at West Europe or East Asia, the U.S.'s drive for war threatens to unravel the whole structure of global politics.

A CHANGED WORLD

The U.S. war against Iraq is rooted in its drive for single world mastery. It's been with us since the end of World War II, when the U.S. contended with Russia for world domination. By 1991 the collapse of the Soviet Union forced one side to drop out of this drive for world domination. Yet the U.S. continued its drive, unencumbered by competition from another superpower.

At the time some thought the U.S. would create new global institutions to deal with this changed world. However, it didn't happen. Though there was a lot of talk after 1991 that NATO had lost its purpose, the collapse of the post-World War II world didn't lead U.S. rulers to create any new imperial architecture. The same institutions that served it during the Cold War, like NATO, were preserved, only now expanded into Central and East Europe.

Today, however, institutions like NATO and the UN are coming under severe strain. Whereas in 1991 U.S. rulers chose to stick with the old international institutions despite the new reality, by now those institutions are crumbling under the weight of the U.S.'s incessant drive for single world mastery.

What underpins such changes is U.S. military power. But the U.S.'s unprecedented military power does not necessarily translate into global dominance. As the ongoing war in Iraq shows, the U.S.'s effort to negate all limits to its drive for war ends up creating other limits which become real barriers to achieving U.S. global dominance.

As Michael Ignatiev has argued, it is a fatal mistake to confuse global power with global dominance. The U.S.'s global military power actually tends to undermine U.S. global dominance, as it leads more nations and peoples to resist U.S. dictates. (See "The Burden," NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE, Jan. 5, 2003.)

ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF WAR

Few issues have received less discussion than the economic ramifications of a war. A study by William D. Nordhaus says that the cost of military action, occupation, and

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reconstruction in a war with little Iraqi resistance would be \$120 billion, while if things get complicated the cost could be \$1.6 trillion. By the end of the war's first week, Bush was ready to ask Congress for a \$75 billion emergency appropriation to fight the war.

All this is occurring just when the economy is facing serious problems. From 1997 to 2000 (the height of the much-touted "boom") the rate of profit in the non-financial sector in the U.S. fell by 20%. Since then profit rates have fallen further. If profit rates are falling, what keeps the economy afloat? The answer in part is that the Federal Reserve has pushed interest rates so low that there's been a frenzy of household borrowing that has so far kept the economy going.

However, another key factor is the influx of foreign capital. In the mid-1990s the U.S. decided to push up the value of the dollar. To reduce the value of their currencies relative to the dollar, foreign capitalists bought up U.S. assets in treasury bonds and equities. A flood of foreign capital poured into the U.S., prompting a rise in the stock market. Even as profit rates fell, the value of stocks soared. This led to a wave of financial speculation. Yet when the disconnect between overvalued stocks and falling profit rates became evident in the past two years (which corporations tried to cover up through fake accounting) the bubble began to burst.

This indicates that U.S. capitalism has still not extricated itself from the problem which confronted it with the 1974-75 global recession—a sharp decline in its rate of profit. Profit rates remain at historic lows; in the past five years the rate of profit in the manufacturing sector has fallen by 42%. Though that has been papered over in part by an infusion of monetary capital from overseas, there's no assurance that this will continue in perpetuity.

What is Bush's response? 1) Return to massive budget deficits, à la Reagan, which creates pressure to cut spending on social programs, and 2) cut the taxes of the rich à la Reagan, like the tax on corporate dividends. Both are aimed at redirecting social wealth away from workers so that the rich can invest more funds in the stock market and reflate the speculative bubble.

Here may lie the basis of Bush's arrogance that he can do whatever he wants regardless of world opinion. He imagines that if the bubble is reinflated through tax cuts and budget deficits, and if the value of the dollar remains strong, foreign capital will have little choice but to continue to invest in the U.S. no matter what anyone thinks about U.S. policy in Iraq.

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The U.S.'s unprecedented military might does indeed have ECONOMIC consequences, as it leads foreign capitalists to view the U.S. as the safest haven for their investments. The U.S. is now more dependent on foreign capital than at any time in the past 50 years. Many in the administration imagine that by projecting total military power the U.S. can forever dominate the world economy, even though that "dominance" is DEPENDENT on investments from capitalists overseas.

Some have argued that one reason for Europe's decision to adopt a single currency, the euro, is that it hopes one day that the euro will replace the dollar as the world's currency, allowing Europe to reap the economic benefits that now accrue to U.S. capitalists. Is it any accident that the European country that's been most averse to accepting the euro—Britain—is most closely allied with the U.S., while those who have pushed hardest for the euro, France and Germany, are most critical of the U.S.? However, before one rushes to conclude that world capital is about to break up into contending continental blocs, keep in mind that euro or no euro, Europe is not a single, unified entity. Many European countries are willing to follow U.S. dictates at any price, though they are a far smaller part of Europe's economy than Germany or France.

In a word, there is no NATIONAL capitalist solution to the U.S. drive for war. The only solution can come from masses of people who refuse to accept war and the cutbacks in health care, education, social services, and living conditions that are already accompanying the war in Iraq.

Such continuous anti-war resistance has never been more critical. If the war is drawn out, it will be essential for the movement not to die off. If the war is brief, it will be no less important for it to continue to develop since a relatively brief war will embolden Bush to later go after other regimes with even more disastrous consequences. Never has it become more urgent to make sure that the voice of the "second America" is heard!

Pointing out the second world in each country as the only true source of resistance to Bush's drive for war is not where our work ends. It is only where it begins. For history shows that unless such resistance becomes wedded to a positive vision of a new society to replace capitalism, the movements will not truly succeed. There is no more important task than developing a dialogue within the movement so that this can be worked out for today.

Originally appeared in *News & Letters*, April 2003