

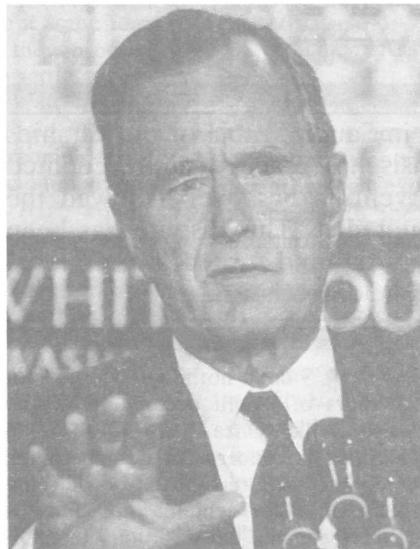
The Gulf crisis provides a conducive atmosphere for enhancing joint US-Israeli military planning in the context of the two states' strategic alliance. The most recent product of this alliance was the August 9th testing of the US-financed, Israeli-developed Arrow missile, in the aftermath of the visit to Israel by Colin Powell, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff.

In the midst of the current anti-Iraqi hysteria, it is not to be forgotten that Israel remains the foremost military power in the region and the sole possessor of a nuclear weapons arsenal. One cannot rule out a new Israeli aggression, which would reaffirm Israel's value as the US's strategic asset in the region.

US calculations

The US has judged that the time is ripe to reassert its global leadership, and gain broader acceptance of its using military facilities in both Europe and the Middle East as staging posts for intervention. The UN Security Council's imposition of sanctions against Iraq marked the first major issue on which Eastern and Western Europe have united; only Cuba and Yemen abstained. Bolstered by such international consensus, the US proceeded to translate the sanctions into a total economic blockade of Iraq with Britain and Australia joining in the patrols to enforce the blockade. Again the double standard being applied to Iraq is apparent, since the US and Britain resisted imposing sanctions against apartheid South Africa for decades, and never dreamed of such drastic measures to enforce them.

UN Secretary-General de Cuellar declared the blockade illegal in the absence of a new UN resolution allowing for such action, and Europe appeared divided on the issue of how to enforce the sanctions against Iraq. But these hesitations proved insufficient to influence the US to ease its confrontational course. On the contrary, while continuously consulting with its European allies and the Soviet Union, the US's main political activity has been bullying other states to toe the line. The most obvious case is the US bullying Jordan into cutting all trade with Iraq, even though Jordan's crisis-ridden economy is highly dependent on such trade. As well, King Hussein is perhaps the US's only possible go-between if it wanted to head off the confrontation with Iraq. On August 25th, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 665, authorizing whatever



Can he strangle Iraq?

steps are necessary to stop and search all ships travelling to and from Iraq; again only Yemen and Cuba abstained. With this resolution, the US, Britain and others have a green light to implement the blockade with military force, thus possibly igniting a war.

The US strategy seems to be based on the possibility of isolating Iraq physically and economically to the point of strangulation, hoping this would lead to an internal collapse which would then result in toppling Saddam Hussein. Bush has issued a secret directive to the CIA on destabilizing Iraq, but is at the same time pursuing a course of provoking direct military confrontation. So far, however, the Iraqis seem determined not to respond militarily to US provocations, such as US planes locking their weapons systems onto Iraqi planes and the August 20th firing on two Iraqi tankers. If the strangulation policy does not work, it is obvious that the US is ready for an all-out conflict with a pre-prepared plan for blanket bombing of Iraqi economic and military installations. According to a report by the US television network ABC, the Bush Administration is not ruling out the use of nuclear weapons against Iraq.

Divide and rule

Especially with the decision to call up reservists, the American troops, whose numbers may reach a quarter of a million, appear to be digging in for a long stay. In its crusade to exert direct control over Arab oil, the US has obtained official invitations to establish a military presence in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates - two countries that were loath to openly

approve this before; the US already enjoyed such rights in Bahrain. Having preempted the prospects of an Arab solution by sending troops before the Arab League met, the US has succeeded in dividing the official Arab ranks, with some states sending troops to Saudi Arabia under US leadership. In fact, the pro-US Arab regimes only used the summit to give an Arab cover to the US intervention. Chairing the meeting, Egyptian President Mubarak refused to entertain several reasonable proposals, including one forwarded by PLO Chairman Arafat, for finding an Arab political solution to the crisis. Playing on its long-standing alliance with Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco, etc. on the one hand, and the intensity of inter-Arab contradictions on the other, the Bush Administration has broken up the former bloc of anti-imperialist states. It is also working to reverse Iran's anti-US stance and draw Turkey more closely into US military strategy in the Middle East, beyond NATO's traditional sphere of involvement.

Obviously, the greater political clout which the US expects to gain in this realignment will be reasserted to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict to US-Zionist interests. The Palestinians will be the greatest losers in this scenario. With the US previously having suspended its dialogue with the PLO, Saudi Arabia and Egypt are now advising Western Europe to drop the PLO as well, punishing the Palestinian people because their representative did not side with US imperialism and the oil kingdoms in this crisis. These same oil kingdoms have cut all financial aid to the PLO and occupied Palestine.

As seen from the Middle East

On the other hand, the US intervention has unleashed an overwhelming mass sentiment not witnessed in the area for over a decade. There have been huge demonstrations in a number of Arab countries, condemning the US military build-up and the compliance of some Arab states with the US plans.

Having dealt with the main issue at hand - blatant US intervention in pursuit of hegemonic goals, let us view the current crisis in the Arab context.

Iraq claims Kuwait as part of its territory, and indeed the existence of various tiny emirates, posing as modern states, is the result of colonialism's divide-and-rule policy. In the Gulf, Britain originated this pattern, and the US later moved in to maintain the status quo, keeping the oil in the