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War drive

# Oiling the war machine

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**When will the US-led war on Iraq begin? Instead of "if", 'observers' now ask "when". But hasn't this war already begun?**

**During August 2002 alone, US and British bombers carried out '10 sorties' over Iraqi territory to bomb 'command centres'.**

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In the shadow of public debate - more exactly of a vast campaign of biased information - US military forces are deploying in a zone surrounding Iraq, at a faster rhythm than was the case during operation 'Desert Shield' (August 8, 1990-January 15, 1991), the preparatory phase for 'Desert Storm'. US troops are positioned - admittedly at varying levels of significance - in the Middle East, central Asia and the Horn of Africa: Pakistan, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Kirghizstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Jordan, Egypt, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Yemen, Eritrea and Kenya. Add to that the US fleet in the Persian Gulf, the Oman sea, the Red Sea, the Mediterranean... [1] In all of this, Israel plays a role of the first order.

Hardly astonishing then that US military specialists stress that the logistic set up for waging war on Iraq is qualitatively superior today to what existed in 1990-1.

## The monopoly of power

A third stage of the war against Iraq is about to open. Following the war against Afghanistan, it amounts to a new deployment of US imperialism after the phase of transition from the late 1980s to 2001.

The outlines of this policy were sketched in the early 1990s, by influential members of the circle currently around George W. Bush. Thus, on March 8, 1992, the New York Times leaked the content of a draft of what was called a Defense Planning Guidance, written for the Pentagon and covering the period 1994-1999. It sought to define the diplomatic and military policy of the US in the post-Cold War period. The authors? Dick Cheney (currently vice-president), Donald Rumsfeld (the current secretary of Defense) and Zalamy Khalilzad, now representing the National Security Council with KarzaÃ in Afghanistan.

By the Times's account, the policy paper "asserted that America's mission was to ensure that no rival superpower emerged in any part of the world. The United States could do this, it proposed, by convincing other advanced industrialized countries that the US would defend their legitimate interests and by maintaining sufficient military might. The United States, the document stated, 'must maintain the mechanisms for deterring potential competitors from even aspiring to a larger regional or global role.' It described Russia and China as potential threats and warned that Germany, Japan, and other industrial powers might be tempted to rearm and acquire nuclear weapons if their security was threatened, and this might start them on the way to competition with the United States". [2]

This orientation is astoundingly similar to that of the statements made by Condoleezza Rice, Bush's national security adviser, Donald Rumsfeld or Dick Cheney. Thus on September 20, 2002, the New York Times (NYT) reported on a document entitled "THREATS AND RESPONSES: SECURITY; Bush to Outline Doctrine of Striking Foes First". In

other words, preventive war.

The NYT commented thus on this document: "it sketches out a far more muscular and sometimes aggressive approach to national security than any since the Reagan era; it includes discounting of most non-proliferation treaties in favour of a doctrine of 'counter proliferation'; calls strategies of containment and deterrence - staples of American policy since 1940's - all but dead; says America is threatened less by conquering states than by failing ones". One of the most striking elements of this document lies in its insistence that "the president will not allow any foreign power to catch up with the huge lead the US has opened since the fall of the Soviet Union". With Russia in deep financial difficulties, this doctrine seems aimed at powers like China that are increasing their conventional and military forces.

All this is in conformity with the theses developed in the Nuclear Posture Review of January 2002, with Rumsfeld's speeches and with the recent interview given by Condoleezza Rice to the Financial Times (September 23, 2002). The British daily summed up thus: "In short, Ms. Rice and Mr. Bush believe they can both dominate other countries and build alliances with them. US military supremacy, they say, should dissuade other countries from pursuing their own military programmes and encourage them to collaborate in other areas".

It is in the light of this overall orientation of US imperialism that we should approach the new war against Iraq. The disequilibria and political instabilities - at the level of a country or a region - that could be provoked by such a war are integrated in such a strategy. They offer opportunities to reconfigure the relationship of forces to the advantage of the US and/or its privileged allies, to ensure the taking of control of some countries ('regime change'), with their resources, to establish new alliances, to weaken the position of their actual and potential rivals.

## The energy market in the 21st century

There is a characteristic imperialist undertaking based on 'zones of influence', conquest and pillage. All this in a context where finance capital has imposed its rules of 'deregulation' and where the 'pressures' of the dominated peoples of the 'periphery' as well as the US working class are lessened, in synchronicity with the implosion of the bureaucratic collectivist societies.

[[https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/08\\_Cartoon-crushing\\_world.jpg](https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/08_Cartoon-crushing_world.jpg)]

In the current conformation of US pre-eminence, the military dimension is key. It reshapes the inter-imperialist contradictions to the advantage of the US. Because, exceptionally in history, this country is both the biggest power and the biggest debtor in the world. Financial transfers from Europe, Japan and the rest of the world finance the US deficits. Hence the interest in controlling other flows, like oil, a source of energy which is at the centre of a decisive industrial crossroads, stretching from chemistry to electronics via cars.

If the US is dependent on flows of finance channelled to Wall Street, it is also dependent on oil imports for its energy needs. The National Energy Policy Report of May 2001 - known as the Cheney Report - indicated two priorities: to increase and ensure, over the long term, access to the oil resources of the Persian Gulf region; to diversify supply.

Iraq holds the second biggest oil reserves of the world: 112 billion barrels. Moreover, for more than two decades, geological research has been interrupted and only 24 out of 73 wells are functioning. Several estimates put Iraq's reserves as high as 250 billion barrels (as against Russia's proven reserves of 49 billion). [3] Moreover, this oil is of very good quality, its cost of extraction is very low, its transport easy. In other word, control of Iraq's oil resources would confer a determinant influence on the energy markets of the 21st century.

This oil, then, is at the centre of much manoeuvring. During the UN debate on 'smart sanctions' against Iraq, in June 2001, France proposed a resolution allowing foreign investment in oil, which the US and Britain blocked. Despite these obstacles, various oil companies have entered into contracts with the Iraqi government. They have acquired rights of direct prospecting and extraction, thus breaking with the traditional policy of the Iraqi state company.

However, all these plans could go wrong. For the US is interested in 'regime change' in Iraq and the contracts of US, European, Russian and Chinese companies concerning the exploitation of certain oil fields - which account for 44 billion barrels according to the International Energy Agency in its 'World Energy Outlook 2001', that is a total equivalent to the joint reserves of the US, Canada and Norway - would be declared null and void in the case of such a 'regime change'. Ahmed Chalabi, leader of the Iraqi National Congress (an opposition grouping financed by US oil companies and supported by the Bush administration), has politely made it known that it favours the implantation of US consortiums and that the contracts signed by Saddam Hussein will not be considered as legally valid. Dick Cheney's company, Halliburton - with its acquisitions, Landmark Graphics and Numar Corporation, specializing in the evaluation of oil and gas reserves - will be in the forefront of oil prospecting in vast regions.

## 'Euros' Get aligned'

James Woosley sheds light on another aspect of the US's policy of alliances with the view of 'eliminating weapons of mass destruction' and 'regime change' in Iraq. Woosley, a former director of the CIA, says unambiguously that the negotiations among the members of the UN Security Council take place on a basis of cold bargaining: those who align themselves with the US can share in the spoils, the others should look to their future alliances.

Indeed, control of Iraqi oil would not only allow the US to guarantee the regularity of supply in case of a crisis with Saudi Arabia, but would also provide it with an instrument of pressure on oil prices. OPEC would be weakened and with it Chavez's Venezuela. As for Saudi Arabia, if the price of oil fell below 18 dollars a barrel its financial stability will be shaken. The US will thus have an efficient lever to accompany another type of regime change. With lower prices, Russia's oil supplies could be rapidly devalued - the cost of extraction in Siberia being high. The entire Russian economy would feel it. Putin and his acolytes at Lukoil know it. The US has already succeeded in impinging on the Russian monopoly on oil transport with the Baku (in the Caspian)-Tbilisi (Georgia)-Ceyhan (Turkey) pipeline. Schröder's disquiet at Bush's muscular initiatives was obvious at the German elections, but his visit to Blair on September 24, 2002 marked the first stage of a realignment. The appeal by the CEO of the powerful Siemens group, Heinrich von Pierer, will be heard: "Germany's relations with the United States are particularly important: agreement on fundamental political values and economic orientation should not be lightly thrown aside... The recent remarks by Mr. Schröder on the US's Iraqi policy were undoubtedly made in the heat of an electoral campaign". [4] Realignment around the US position will take place more quickly than some think. The manoeuvrings for position of the various European imperialisms do not merit the flattery of anyone on the left.

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[1] Los Angeles Times, September 10, 2002.

[2] See Frances Fitzgerald, 'George Bush & the World', New York Review of Books, September 26, 2002.

[3] Raad Alkadiri, 'The Iraqi Klondike. Oil and Regional Trade', Middle East Report, 220, autumn 2001.

[4] Financial Times, September 24, 2002.