

Undeclared war against Iraq is on

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

While an unprecedented “debate” is going on, inside the United States and among its would-be regional allies, regarding the niceties of a hypothetical military action perhaps to be mounted against Iraq to change its government, the fact is that the war is already going on. On the ground, Iraqi anti-aircraft defense installations have continued to come under attack every day, in both the northern and southern parts of the country. According to Washington sources quoted by the British *Daily Telegraph* Feb. 5, the joint U.S.-U.K. air strikes have “destroyed more Iraqi air defenses since Operation Desert Fox than were hit during the four-day bombardments.” It is estimated that 20% of these defenses have been destroyed, and as a result, Iraq has reportedly withdrawn the defenses to the central part of the country.

Meanwhile, there is no reason to assume that the military action will abate; on the contrary, it is likely to escalate steadily.

The diplomatic offensive

At the same time, the diplomatic offensive has also intensified to line up regional governments behind the planned coup d'état in Iraq. At the end of January, Deputy U.S. Secretary of State for the Middle East Martin Indyk started a tour of the region, accompanied by the American diplomat in Turkey, Frank Ricciardone, whom his boss Madeleine Albright had just crowned coordinator for the change of government in Iraq. The two visited Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. Ricciardone, whose new title introduces a new flavor to diplomatic posts, met with Iraqi opposition leaders in the course of his tour, on Jan. 28.

According to German press reports on Feb. 4, Indyk and Ricciardone failed utterly to gain explicit political support from the Arab states in the Gulf, which are rightly concerned that any foreign intervention into Iraq to overthrow the government would unleash civil war, a bloodbath, and regional chaos. Indyk told the press in Dubai, after his talks, that the Gulf Arabs would only accept changes determined by the Iraqis—with which, Indyk said, he “agreed.” He added that the policy enunciated by Albright for a change in the regime in Baghdad, would depend on support from neighboring countries and the United States. Indyk was quoted in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* as saying, “We will not try to force Iraq to do our will, nor will we try to force on the Iraqi people an opposition from the outside.” He denied outright that a military invasion was in the works, and repeated *ad nauseam* that the U.S. wanted only to “support the Iraqi people,” etc.

This is the nature of the “debate” which has been reported among the players in the region, which mirrors a similar “debate” inside the policy-making layers in Washington (see p. 47). According to a summary in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* on Feb. 2, Ricciardone talked to his interlocutors in the region about the two schools of thought in the United States: One would like to see a U.S.-backed military uprising of the Shiites in the south and the Kurds in the north. This is the group which drafted and passed the Iraq Liberation Act in Congress, allocating funds to prepare opposition groups for the job.

The other school is represented by elements in the State Department and Pentagon, according to the *Neue Zürcher*

Zeitung, who have a longer-term perspective to “divide the top of the ruling pyramid from its base, in order to take the means of power out of Saddam Hussein’s hands.” This would be “Half-palace revolution, half-military coup . . . which should spare the Iraqi people a bloodbath and a break-up of the country.” The United States apparently estimates that Saddam Hussein’s top forces number 75-100 men; these are the ones to be “divided” from the base of bureaucrats, administrators, civil servants, and military officers.

Needless to say, the proposition is absurd, and, if implemented, would trigger precisely the destabilization and bloodbath which it is allegedly designed to prevent. But no matter: The action is already under way. The only function of the “debate” is to provide cover for the continuing and escalating operation.

Who set up Clinton?

Among the Iraqi “opposition” groups the American diplomats met, is the Iraqi National Council, which has been offered, and gratefully received, some of the \$97 million in funds allocated under the Iraq Liberation Act. The INC, headed by swindler Ahmed Al Chalabi, occupies a cage in the “British zoo” of such organizations (see “Profile of Iraqi Opposition Groups,” *EIR*, Jan. 29). It is located in London, where it maintains close intelligence relations with the British, and in the United States, it curries favor with the same Republican madmen in Congress who are trying to eliminate President Clinton.

Chalabi met with Indyk and Ricciardone on Jan. 28. What they discussed can be surmised by a lengthy interview which the INC leader gave to the leading Kuwaiti newspaper, *Al Qabas*, which appeared a day earlier. In the interview, Chalabi reveals the role he played in selling to the U.S. administration the absurd scenario for overthrowing Saddam Hussein. The gist of Chalabi’s argument is the following: The Clinton administration, following the catastrophic failure of a coup attempt planned in northern Iraq in August 1996, with the CIA and Iraqi opposition groups including the INC, cut off all contact with such groups. This situation remained unchanged until the second half of 1998, when pressure was brought to bear on Clinton by Chalabi’s backers in the Congress, who set up Radio Free Iraq and drafted and passed the Iraq Liberation Act.

The resolution was of extreme importance, because it clearly stated that both houses of Congress had determined that Saddam Hussein had violated international commitments, including the cease-fire. Thus, Congress was saying that the United States had the right to act militarily to defend its strategic interests.

Throughout the interview, the arrogant Chalabi plays up his own role in this operation. Albeit exaggerated, his account makes sense. Chalabi relates, for instance, the story of United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan’s mission to Baghdad

in February 1998, which succeeded in averting war. It was then that Chalabi was deployed to the United States: “I went to Washington after the agreement made by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan with Saddam, and the issuing of the Memorandum of Understanding. I met with members of the House of Representatives, I talked with them, and then later the House decided to allocate money for the Iraqi opposition and also to establish the Radio Free Iraq station broadcasting from Prague.”

That was “the first step.” He continues: “The second step was that on March 2, 1998, I was invited to give testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee . . . I described the Iraqi opposition’s relationship with the United States and the aid it was giving, including the secret assistance. I said, ‘We want open assistance from America, and we want an American commitment to help democratic Iraqi forces that are willing to change and work to overthrow the dictatorial regime. From now on, we don’t want any assistance that is given to us in a secret form, and we will refuse any such assistance.’”

Pinning it on the United States

Ensuring that the U.S. support would be “open” was crucial to the British game of identifying the entire operation with official U.S. policy, endorsed by none other than President Clinton himself.

Chalabi underlined the significance of the timing of his testimony: Saddam Hussein “had made an agreement in February 1998, and my testimony came on March 2.” Chalabi’s backers in London were evidently not happy with the diplomatic arrangement engineered by Kofi Annan, in agreement with the White House. “I believe that Kofi Annan told Saddam Hussein that America was not going to make any military move to overthrow him, if he committed himself to international resolutions. And when my testimony in the Senate took place, Saddam Hussein realized that the situation had changed.”

Chalabi went on to specify how his testimony regarding Iraqi weapons was crucial in pushing through the resolution: “The other point is about our role in revealing the information on the VX warheads, which we had discovered, and the American administration later was very angry with us because we published this report in the *Washington Post*. . . . The complaints from the American government were very strong, and they asked us, ‘Why did you do this without coordinating with us?’ This provoked Saddam Hussein because this report left a great impression on the Congress, which took the decision . . . [to pass] the resolution [which] had declared that Saddam Hussein is considered in a state of violation of international commitments.”

Chalabi describes how the “hesitation” on the part of the Clinton administration was overcome: His testimony was “received warmly in the Senate. I reminded those present

of the letter which was sent to us by the Vice President of the United States in summer 1993, in which he said that he, on behalf of the American President, would stop Saddam Hussein from continuing to oppress the Iraqi people in northern Iraq.”

Chalabi contrasted Gore’s statement to the administration’s policy, which did not prevent Saddam Hussein from intervening in northern Iraq in 1996. Chalabi said that James Woolsey, then director of the CIA, had told the same committee, “I support the statements of Chalabi, . . . there is a need for open support and American commitment to help the democratic forces in Iraq, to change the regime through combatting Saddam Hussein.” But, Chalabi added, “the American administration was not willing to do that, and reluctant to take such steps.” In his view, Chalabi’s testimony “provoked Saddam Hussein and scared him.”

Once the resolution had gone through, Chalabi reported, the operation against Saddam Hussein could be launched. “This resolution had a major impact in America and it was signed by Bill Clinton on July 25, 1998.” Then, he went on, “on Aug. 5, Saddam Hussein kicked out the UNSCOM, and the Americans tried for three months to put things back on track, but they failed. Then the Congress came in September to open a dialogue with us and since then they started to work on the Iraq Liberation Act. They realized the American administration’s hesitation and reluctance and . . . the Congress wanted to embarrass Clinton. . . . They put this resolution in front of the administration, which found itself face to face with this Act.” Chalabi also reported on the amendments made in the text of the resolution at the demand of the Clinton administration: “Many amendments were added later, while I was in Washington. One of the amendments was that the American administration demanded a change in the paragraph which states ‘The policy of the American government must be to work to overthrow the regime of Saddam Hussein.’ They wanted to change it to ‘The policy of the United States must be to act to help, to assist those who want to overthrow Saddam Hussein.’”

Finally, in the interview, Chalabi outlined his strategy for the overthrow of the Iraqi government. First, he commented that “Saddam Hussein does not feel that the Iraqi Army is loyal to him, and he is treating the officers in the Army with strict caution. This puts Saddam Hussein in a state of suspicion all the time. We know the Iraqi Army has three characteristics, from our experience: 1) the Iraqi Army would not defend Saddam Hussein and will not fight against a force which is calling for his overthrow. 2) The Iraqi Army is too weak to overthrow Saddam Hussein alone. 3) The Iraqi Army will join the opposition and become part of any serious effort which the Army believes has any slight chance of success.”

Chalabi claimed that in 1995, when his group took up arms against the Iraqi government, they were supported by large parts of the Iraqi Army, including Brigadier Wafiq Assa-

marai, who had defected earlier. But their forces were too small and untrained. Chalabi went on:

“The Iraq Liberation Act has come to treat the weakness in the Iraqi opposition. A well-trained and well-armed Iraqi opposition force, well-equipped to combat Saddam Hussein’s tanks and supported by the Americans through a demilitarized zone, can control parts of Iraq and expand [this control,] and can find the manpower which already exists inside Iraq. The people are there, but they should be trained and equipped to become stronger than any of Saddam Hussein’s forces. This force will be the first spark, because it can strike and stop any of Saddam Hussein’s forces. *We believe that the timing is in the range of months and not years*” (emphasis added).

The concrete plan, which Chalabi reported he had presented to the U.S. Congress, “is as follows:

“1) to train a military force from the existing groups, to conduct operations inside Iraq. This force should be given high-level training in weapons, anti-tank weapons and other technical means, communications, modern technological equipment and coordination between ground and air forces. It should be given capability for quick movement, and should be prepared to enter Iraq. And we are able to provide tens of thousands of Iraqis who are willing to fight Saddam. But we don’t need more than 5,000-8,000 competent fighters; more are not necessary.

“2) A demilitarized zone should be declared in southern Iraq and west of the Euphrates River [on the border with Jordan], and the safe haven in northern Iraq should be renewed. Clinton had recently emphasized the importance of the safe havens and said, ‘We have to protect the Kurds.’ The important thing is that Saddam Hussein’s tanks are not able to reach or attack the Kurdish area, and this means that the zone which would be demilitarized in the south will be a prohibited zone for Saddam Hussein’s tanks and artillery. And according to the opinions of military experts, this thing is possible and could very easily be achieved.

“3) The Iraqi opposition forces declare the establishment of an Iraqi national government in charge of the liberation operation, and consisting of all the different active political groups and representing all Iraqi ethnic groups. Its headquarters would be on Iraqi soil, and not an exile government. This government will take charge of the administration of the area or zone, and lead the military force which is trained to defend the zone and assimilate other Iraqi forces which would come over to its side. It will be in charge of exploiting its resources in order to save the Iraqi people and to complete the overthrow of Saddam Hussein’s regime.”

Chalabi ended by saying that this plan has not yet been accepted by Washington. “The United States so far is not accepting this plan, it’s our own plan, and we are ready to discuss it with all the relevant parties. . . . Saddam Hussein’s power is in the center, in Baghdad, and we challenge him in the areas which are out of his control. All of the Iraqi people

are with us and against Saddam.”

It goes without saying that Ahmed Chalabi’s wide-ranging interview represents precisely the thinking of the British geopolitical centers which have been designing Iraq policy for the United States since at least 1990. Chalabi is nothing but a tool of these forces; he functions very much like Baroness Caroline Cox, the British intelligence agent in charge of destabilizing of Sudan. Cox, too, has spent enormous effort and time testifying before the U.S. Congress, with “proof” of Sudanese human rights violations, fabrication of weapons of mass destruction, etc., to justify American military intervention against the country.

Chalabi is no aristocrat, but a small-time thug. He would not be capable emotionally or militarily of taking part in any such operation, nor would he be capable of providing political leadership anywhere. His function is that of a tool, to be inserted into certain locations, to turn certain keys.

Chalabi’s mission

Most important in Chalabi’s mission—like those of Cox—is to ensure that the official stamp of approval of the U.S. President is placed on the military assault which has been orchestrated by the British. So far, London has succeeded in making the continuing air strikes appear as American acts. Significantly, the British have flown far fewer missions with the U.S. planes since the end of Ramadan, than they did in December. Significantly as well, there have begun to appear in the British press, voices of “dissent” against the “American policy” on Iraq. Thus, for example, a *Guardian* commentary on Jan. 28 titled “Britain Should Not Act as a Puppet of the U.S. over Iraq. France Doesn’t.” The article argued that Tony Blair, whose “Iraq policy is a disaster,” should talk to French President Jacques Chirac, and should shift policy. Britain is accused of behaving, “whenever required, as Washington’s lobotomized puppet.”

Or, in the *Guardian* on Feb. 5, an editorial titled “Washington’s Vassal,” argued that Britain should break the special relationship and hook up with France, under whose leadership “Europe is beginning to resist American hegemony.” Author Ian Aitken singles out Iraq policy as the test case. Britain has made a mistake in joining the “perilous confrontations now taking place daily in the skies over Iraq,” and in “defying the United Nations and humiliating its General Secretary,” etc. The piece makes the point that, if Britain were to pull out, Washington would be smashed: “For this is the essential vulnerability of the United States: Without Britain’s support, they would be almost completely isolated, and thereby greatly weakened in the exercise of the almost unlimited power they have acquired as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union.”

Perhaps one item Chalabi left out of his scenario is worth considering: What happens if the United States continues with its drive to force a change in government in Baghdad, and the British ally suddenly reconsiders the entire affair?

Opposition builds to Iraqi ‘Contra’ schemes

by Jeffrey Steinberg

When the commander of the U.S. Central Command, Marine Gen. Anthony Zinni, appeared before the Senate Armed Services Committee on Thursday, Jan. 28, 1999, to voice his strong reservations about a “Contra”-style program to overthrow Saddam Hussein, he had the explicit backing of a faction of active-duty and retired flag officers, according to a highly placed U.S. military source. *EIR* had been alerted to the Zinni testimony 24 hours in advance by the highly decorated retired military officer, clearly indicating that Zinni’s views were shared by a number of leading American military strategists.

But, while General Zinni’s remarks before the Senate were clearly aimed at throwing cold water on the Iraqi Liberation Act (a 1998 bill rammed through Congress by neo-conservative Republicans that mandates Clinton administration backing for a ragtag collection of Iraqi opposition groups), momentum nevertheless continued to build toward some kind of military confrontation between the United States and Great Britain on the one side, and the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq on the other.

Under these paradoxical circumstances, muddied still further by President Clinton’s continuing preoccupation with the impeachment trial in the U.S. Senate, it remains for the President to step forcefully into the breach, and “just say no” to those who are pressing for a new military showdown with Saddam before a viable diplomatic solution to the Middle East crisis can be reached.

Over the past weeks, military confrontations between American and British fighter jets and Iraqi air defense units have been a daily occurrence. And, while General Zinni’s public statements, buttressed by similar comments from White House and State Department spokesmen, indicate an ebbing of the momentum for a “quick-fix” military confrontation with Saddam, employing opposition “Contra” groups backed by U.S. Special Forces teams, the region remains on a hair-trigger for escalated military confrontation—at least on the scale of the December 1998 “Desert Fox” bombing campaign.

The focal points for such a renewed military showdown are the British government of Prime Minister Tony Blair, and some members of the Clinton administration “Principals Committee,” a group of cabinet- and lower-level Presidential advisers who prevailed on the President last December to approve the bombing campaign which he had nixed just one month earlier.