

Petulant Bush beats the war drums against Iraq

by Joseph Brewda

U.S. President George Bush has made a series of provocative statements since Oct. 22, proving that his administration is still committed to war with Iraq. In part, Bush's war rhetoric is motivated by his knowledge that peace initiatives undertaken by such diverse governments as that of Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and to some extent, France and the Soviet Union, would succeed were it not for U.S. interference. In apparent response to Bush's behavior, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein put the Iraqi military on "extreme alert" on Oct. 30. "We must be prepared with all the potential God has given us to thwart the perfidious intentions of the United States and its allies to launch an attack in the coming few days," he told the Iraqi News Agency.

In one grandstanding display, Bush zeroed in on the Iraqi government's supposed food cutoff to the eight people staffing the former U.S. embassy in Kuwait as his latest pretext for war. "I have just had it with that kind of treatment of Americans," Bush blustered, at a Virginia press conference on Oct. 31. While not explaining why Iraq should supply food to U.S. diplomats in Kuwait who are free to leave for Baghdad or elsewhere, while it is suffering a U.S.-imposed food embargo, Bush added, "And what am I going to do about it? Let's just wait and see."

Two days earlier, in California, Bush ridiculed the idea that bombing Iraq during the ongoing congressional recess would subvert Congress's constitutional authority to declare war. "History is replete with examples where the President would have to take action. I've done this in the past," Bush said, referencing his ordering the invasion of Panama in December 1989, during a similar recess.

Fearing such a possibility, 15 bipartisan congressional

leaders led by Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-Me.) and House Speaker Tom Foley (D-Wash.) had what was described as a "frank meeting" with Bush on Oct. 30, to demand that they be consulted before any attack is initiated. Alluding to the Oct. 25 announcement by Defense Secretary Richard Cheney that the United States might send 100,000 more troops to the Gulf region, Mitchell said, "There's a concern on Capitol Hill . . . that this is somehow a prelude to immediate military action."

In view of top secret Pentagon estimates—reported by syndicated columnist Jack Anderson on Nov. 1—that a war would mean the loss of as many as 30,000 American lives in the first three weeks, some in Washington are viewing the situation more soberly than they once did. This would be *nearly half* the total number of Americans killed in the Vietnam War.

Eighty-one congressmen signed a statement on Oct. 30, expressing their "grave concern about the possibility of war" during the recess, and reiterated that "only Congress can declare war." A congressional intelligence expert told the *Washington Post* on Oct. 31 that "any attempt to resupply the embassy" in Kuwait, which could occur during the recess, "would involve shooting and there is a better than even chance that it might precipitate general war."

Earlier, on Oct. 20, Bush's controller, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, told visiting Soviet envoy Yevgeni Primakov that the Iraqis "have only 11 weeks to make up their minds" to leave the former British colony of Kuwait—or else. Primakov, Moscow's top Mideast hand, has toured the Gulf region on two occasions since the Iraqi annexation of Kuwait on Aug. 2, in an ongoing effort by the Soviets to

avoid a war for varying, conflicting reasons.

Reflecting such concerns, Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachov and French President François Mitterrand held a Paris meeting on the crisis on Oct. 28-29. Immediately prior to their meeting, both leaders had received a letter from Saddam Hussein, in which the Iraqi President reportedly offered to release all the foreign hostages held by Iraq if the two leaders publicly committed themselves to a political solution. The meeting ended without such a joint statement.

Despite this disappointing result, on Oct. 30, Gorbachov called for the convening of an Arab summit to find a peaceful solution, stressing the importance of "the Arab factor" in avoiding war. The call was rejected by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak the next day, as one which would only be a "summit of insults," pointing out that "Arab countries held a summit on Aug. 10 without accomplishing anything." In fact, that summit could have led to a peaceful solution if it were not for the fact that Mubarak, under U.S. instructions, rammed through a violent condemnation of Iraq.

On Oct. 29, the U.N. Security Council approved another resolution against Iraq, with the approval of both the Soviet Union and France, threatening "further measures under the Charter"—that is, by force.

Sabotaging an Arab solution

While the Bush regime has claimed that there is a pressing need to go to war with Iraq, it has simultaneously sabotaged every promising Arab effort to negotiate a diplomatic solution to the crisis.

Typifying such potential, Saudi Defense Minister Prince Sultan signaled on Oct. 21 in widely publicized comments to journalists, that a negotiated settlement to the crisis might be at hand. Asked about Iraq's demands that it have an outlet to the sea if it withdraws from Kuwait, Sultan said that "Saudi Arabia has said, and says now, that giving rights, including territorial brotherly concessions—given willingly—is a matter of pride." Iraq, which is virtually landlocked, due to the artificial British creation of Kuwait in 1899, has demanded 99-year leases on two small, undeveloped islands at the mouth of the Tigris River, islands which are now formally part of Kuwait.

In case his hints in respect to the Kuwaiti islands were not sufficiently clear, Prince Sultan went on to say, "We in Saudi Arabia have given parts of our land and parts of our territorial waters willingly," referring to previous territorial settlements among Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and the United Arab Emirates. The remarks triggered a decline in the oil price by \$5 per barrel the next day—and a public tantrum by President Bush.

That a negotiated settlement has been possible, was apparent as far back as Aug. 5, three days after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, when an inter-Arab summit in Jeddah had been set to negotiate an end to the crisis. Bush ordered the summit canceled, and ordered U.S. troops into Saudi Arabia.

The Aug. 10 Arab summit in Cairo was also sabotaged. An Aug. 12 comprehensive peace initiative offered by Saddam Hussein, which offered an Iraqi pullout from Kuwait, was rejected out of hand by Bush.

Rejection of negotiations

Speaking at a campaign rally in New Hampshire on Oct. 22, Bush took aim at Prince Sultan's remarks. "I am more determined than ever to see that this invading dictator gets out of Kuwait with no compromise of any kind whatsoever," Bush exclaimed. "Appeasement" is the great problem, he added.

"I'm reading a book, and it's a book of history, a great big thick book about World War II," he reported, "and there is a parallel about what Hitler did to Poland and what Saddam Hussein has done to Kuwait."

That Sultan's remarks prompted the Bush formulations was admitted by White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater that day. "He just wanted to express some pretty strong resolve in light of stories in the last few days out of Saudi Arabia," Fitzwater said. On Oct. 25, the U.S. government leaked that Secretary of State James Baker would be making another trip to the Gulf in the first week of November, "to stiffen resolve."

Meanwhile, Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz reported on Oct. 26 how he viewed Bush's response to Sultan's peace feeler. "Whatever our opinion on what the Saudi official said, the U.S. and British governments have proved they are determined to repress any effort to open dialogue between Arab states aimed at settling the region's problems."

Also on Oct. 22, Baker summoned Saudi Ambassador Prince Bandar for "consultations." Bandar emerged to claim that his father, Prince Sultan, had been "misquoted." "My government has not changed its position," he insisted.

Saudi King Fahd himself issued a statement on Oct. 26 further distancing his state from Defense Minister Sultan, who is his brother. "Iraqi troops must withdraw unconditionally," he said, without any "bargaining" whatever. The King added that any statements offering concessions to Iraq (implying those made by Sultan), now or in the future, are and will be "untrue."

Bandar and Fahd have reason to be concerned. In 1975, Saudi King Faisal was assassinated, shortly after he had crossed then-Secretary of State Henry Kissinger—who is now overseeing Bush's Gulf deployment—over the issue of Israeli occupation of Jerusalem.

For such reasons, the Saudis even complied with U.S. demands to work with the Israelis and arm Ayatollah Khomeini's Iran in its war against Iraq. Bandar later reportedly pushed his family into accepting the huge U.S. military presence in the country, with the argument that they would not be able to stop it anyway. The decision has not been unanimously embraced by the royal family, since a war means that Saudi Arabia's oil fields will be incinerated.