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War Drive

Drive to war accelerates

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THE US is not only preparing to launch all-out war against Iraq, without anything that can be claimed as new justification from the Iraqi side, but has decided to use nuclear weapons in that war if necessary.

It emerged, in a leaked classified Pentagon report called the Nuclear Posture Review, that Bush has a list of countries against which the US is prepared to launch a nuclear first strike. The list includes not only Iraq but North Korea, Iran, Libya, China - and even Russia, despite President Putin's repositioning towards NATO. The report also includes the use of nuclear weapons in the event of an Arab-Israeli conflict.

Included in the circumstances under which nuclear weapons could be used against the countries concerned are the possibility of "targets able to withstand a non-nuclear strike", and "surprising military developments". Alongside this the report revealed that the US is developing a new generation of so-called battlefield nuclear devices designed for particular situations.

Before September 11 these chilling revelations might have been dismissed as the ravings of a right-wing lunatic fringe. Nuclear weapons, sold for the last 50 years as a supposed deterrent, are being rehabilitated as a legitimate means of warfare, even against states which do not have such weapons.

The US Republican right is now calling the shots for the world's only super-power, and it is clear that they are prepared to contemplate the use of nuclear weapons - at least against Iraq.

At the same time political preparation for an attack on Iraq is going ahead apace. It seems that there is nothing Iraq can do which would divert the Bush administration from attacking it.

If Iraq agrees in principle to let so-called weapons inspectors in the US will demand a regime so stringent - access to anything and everything at a moment's notice - that it will be impossible for the Iraqis to accept. Rumsfeld has said "we do not intend to take yes for an answer".

The coalition pieced together for the assault on Afghanistan will of course be adapted for a war against Iraq: Dick Cheney's current shuttle diplomacy in the Middle East is designed to neutralise or contain any hostile reaction to a new US onslaught against Baghdad.

Bush calls the preparation for war against Iraq 'stage two' of his "war against terrorism". But stage one is still expanding rapidly, and the world is changing by the day. Military action continues in Afghanistan in the guise of so-called "mopping up" operations.

Simultaneously the Palestinians are facing all out war from Israel, with the direct support and protection of the USA. This has escalated consistently since September 11 and continues to do so.

In the USA Bush is increasing defence spending by 14%, or \$48 billion dollars. This war drive goes hand-in-hand with a huge increase in anti-democratic measures and paranoid surveillance in the US itself. Thousands of immigrants have been rounded up and several hundred are still kept in jail, often in undisclosed locations.

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US troops are already intervening in the Philippines and Colombia as well as Somalia and the Yemen, and civil rights are under attack across the world.

In Britain the Crime and Security Act has introduced internment without trial in contravention to the European convention on human rights. A number of people, all of Arab origin, have been detained without trial or any apparent evidence of wrong-doing under this draconian legislation, and kept under top security conditions. Measures of this kind are adopted by major European states, and new legislations - at the level of the European Union as well as at the level of its individual member states - have been furbished that can and will be used against the movement fighting neo-liberal globalisation.

India, too, has responded, using its own "Terrorist" problem in Kashmir as the pretext for an internal crackdown with new draconian anti-terrorist laws, while the Pakistani military dictatorship started a crackdown against the very Islamic fundamentalists which it nurtured for so long - a crackdown which does not spare left-wing parties and unions.

As a result of all this US imperialism is stronger and more aggressive than ever before in military and political terms, having gained a new hegemony in Central Asia and greater influence over Russia and China.

The danger of an open-ended war, in which the most barbaric weapons of mass destruction are used by the world's dominant imperialist nation in pursuit of a fraudulent war against "terrorism" has never been greater.

Anyone concerned about the future of the planet should react with anger and horror at the US plans to bombard defenceless, dependent nations with nuclear radiation. Anyone committed to defending the rights of the oppressed should be joining the protests at the brutality of the Israeli forces, wielding the full force of a terrorist state to crush any aspiration of the Palestinians for an independent state on a tiny part of their historical homeland.

A new US war on Iraq aimed at ousting Saddam Hussein and replacing his dictatorship with a regime more amenable to Washington will escalate the slaughter of innocents that has followed September 11.

Already far more Afghan civilians have died in US bombings than the death toll in the Twin Towers and Washington on that day. But a war against Iraq brings the risk of a far larger death toll, even without the threat of a US nuclear strike. In the meantime, the US-imposed embargo against Iraq is continuing to bring its huge death toll among Iraqi civilians and children: 90,000 each year, the majority of whom are under 5 years old, according to UN agencies.

The US-Nato criminal world hegemony and new war drive must be opposed by anyone committed to notions of democracy and to the interests of humankind.