



THE GREAT CHEMICAL WEAPONS HOAX

Pretext for Imperialist War

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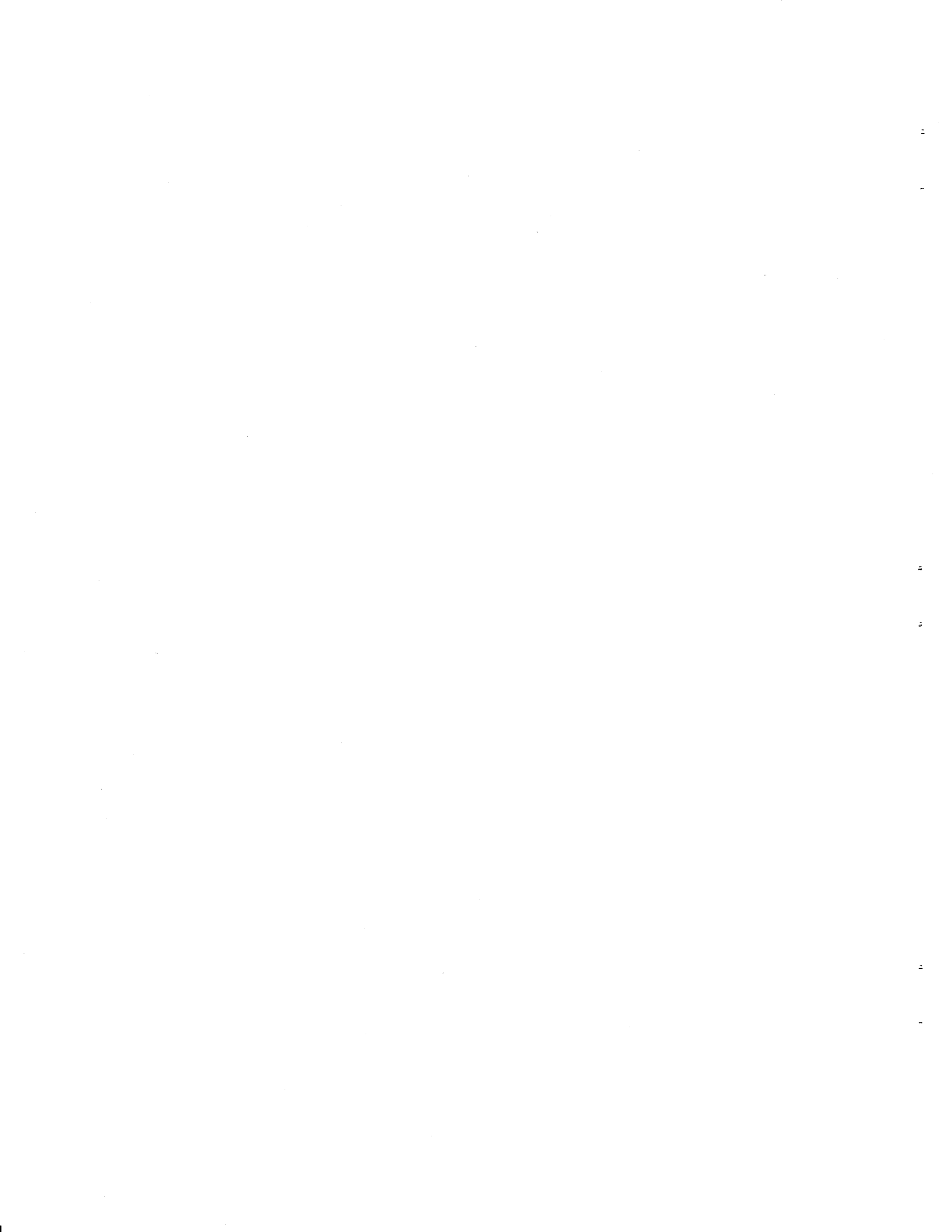
Above: Trailer in Mosul Iraq, alleged by U.S. to be a bioweapons laboratory. Tests show evidence of...bleach. Below: U.S. bombed Vietnam with 388,000 tons of napalm during Vietnam War, killed more than 2 million Vietnamese.

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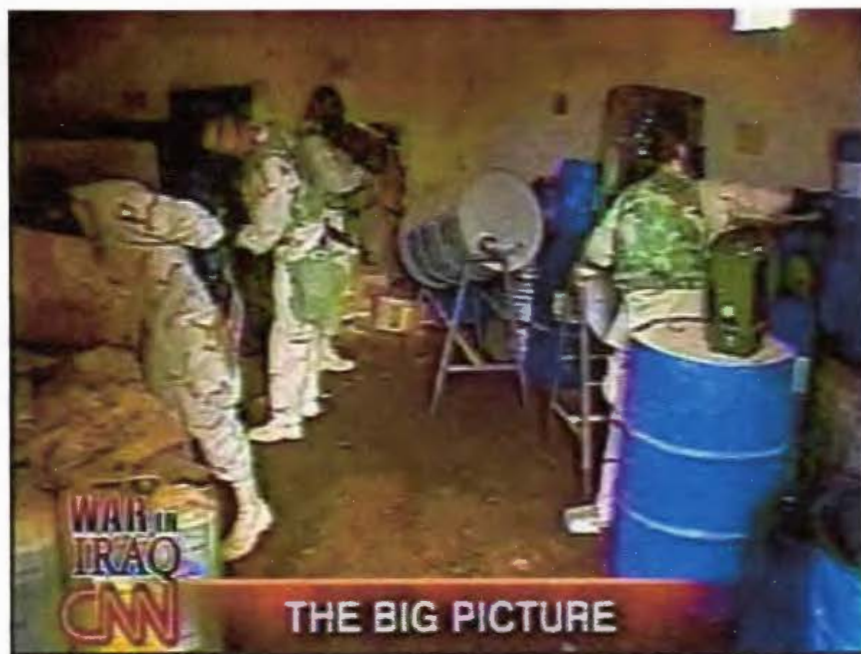
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The U.S.' Pretext for Imperialist War

The Great Chemical Weapons Hoax



U.S. troops discover oil drums on April 7 near Karbala, announcing to “embedded” journalists that they could be chemical arms. Tests show: zero. (Photo: CNN)

On the evening of March 20, U.S. president George W. Bush ordered the dropping of “bunker buster” bombs on Baghdad in a blatant attempt to assassinate Iraqi president Saddam Hussein. On April 10, a Marine from Brooklyn placed the American flag over the head of a statue of Hussein in the Iraqi capital in a triumphant gesture of Yankee imperialist conquest. Three weeks was more than the Pentagon planners had anticipated, as they hadn’t factored into their war games the guerrilla strikes by militias in the south against the Americans’ vulnerable supply lines. But despite brave Iraqi resistance, the U.S. military juggernaut with its vastly superior firepower rolled on. Bombing thousands of Iraqis and mowing down survivors, they left a trail of death all along the road to Baghdad.

Little of this was reported in the news accounts by “embedded” journalists, who instead carried out their task of glorifying the fighting prowess of the “coalition” forces. One of the few half-way honest dispatches in the imperialist press reported:

“Throughout the march north across the desert, the human toll of war was evident, at the border outposts, in the streets of the village of Kifl, along the banks of the Euphrates, in bunkers along canals, and finally at the airport west of Baghdad.

“The corpses of scores of Iraqis lay in the sun, twisted, starting to rot. Some were in uniform; some were not. Most of the dead were young men, no older than the soldiers who killed them. Many were burned beyond recognition in vehicles destroyed by American air and artillery bombardments.

“For the soldiers of the First Brigade, most of them in their early 20’s, it was their first experience of killing, their first encounter with death on such a scale. Some showed revulsion, a sense of unease, and concern about what their families at home might think. Others simply gawked, apparently impassive. A few became physically sick.”

—Steven Lee Myers, “Doubt and Death on the Drive to Baghdad,” *New York Times*, 13 April

Smash Imperialism Through International Socialist Revolution!

Of course, readers of the Western press and viewers of Western television never saw the carnage, for such macabre scenes were carefully excised from the media coverage, mostly by the self-censorship of the patriotic press. You can probably count on the fingers of one hand the number of Iraqi corpses that you saw in the sanitized virtual war beamed to the audience at home. "Image control" has become a key part of the U.S. military's battlefield management. This is true not only for the fighting, but also of the batteries of war propaganda softening up the home front and battering reluctant imperialist allies. Key to this was the declared war aim, the *casus belli*.

I. U.S. Pretexts for Colonial Invasion of Iraq



U.S. soldier at fuel dump near Baiji. Initial reports claimed drums contained mustard gas and sarin nerve gas. Analysis showed: rocket fuel. (Photo: Brennan Linsley/AP)

The Bush regime has had problems from the beginning in settling on the alleged purpose of this war. The day American bombs started falling on Afghanistan a year and a half ago, Vice President Dick Cheney declared that the war the United States was unleashing "may never end. At least, not in our lifetimes" (*Washington Post*, 7 October 2001). The invasion of Iraq is the second episode of Cheney's "war without end" and the first under the Bush Doctrine of "preemptive war," which the U.S. commander in chief announced at West Point last year. This was later elaborated as a *National Security Strategy of the United States* in September. Launching unprovoked wars of imperialist aggression is hardly new, of course. That, after all, was the main charge on which the Nazi leaders were prosecuted by the victorious Allies at the war crimes trials at Nuremberg following World War II. U.S. rulers have traditionally claimed to be waging defensive wars against an attack or intervening in a conflict in the name of lofty ideals ("war for democracy"). How, then, would they market the unprovoked war on Iraq?

Liberal critics made much of the fact that the Bush administration offered several different reasons for the invasion of Iraq. In one version, it was about retaliation for 11 September 2001 ("9-11"), even though the hijackers who slammed airplanes into the World Trade Center that day had no connection to Iraq. The reputed intellectual author of that attack, Osama bin Laden, called Saddam Hussein "an apostate, an infidel and a traitor to Islam." According to the polls, the White House spin doctors managed to convince a majority of the U.S. population that Hussein was behind 9-11. But this wouldn't sell well overseas. So they came up with version II, particularly for external consumption: that Hussein possessed monster weapons that threatened the world. This was the theme of the British government's September 2002 White Paper, *Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction*, a compilation of outright fabrications and outdated information lifted from a graduate student's decade-old thesis. The introduction by Prime Minister Tony Blair declaimed that UN weapons "inspectors must be allowed back in to do their job properly...or the international community will have to act." When Iraq let the UN inspectors return in November, this excuse fell flat. So they came up with version III: that the Hussein government was an oppressive regime and this was a "war of liberation" of the Iraqi people.

Now that U.S. general Tommy Franks has held his victory ceremony in Baghdad and the imperial viceroy, U.S. general Jay Garner, is ensconced in Hussein's Republican Palace, it's payback time. No matter that they haven't captured or (apparently) killed the Iraqi strong man, or that the American "liberators" were met by Kalashnikovs instead of crowds greeting them with flowers and kisses; forget about the mass demonstrations against colonial occupation. The war hawks are crowing "we told you so" against "lily-livered liberals," imperialist doves and "cheese-eating surrender monkeys" (the French) who tried to delay the invasion by appealing to the United Nations. The doves respond by asking whatever happened to the fabled weapons of mass destruction (WMD) that Hussein was supposed to have, allegedly deployable "within 45 minutes of an order to use them" (Tony Blair)? "Where Are They Mr Blair" headlined the London *Independent on Sunday* (20 April), adding:

“Not one illegal warhead. Not one drum of chemicals. Not one incriminating document. Not one shred of evidence that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction in more than a month of war and occupation.”

The London *Guardian* (25 April) chimed in with a leader (editorial), “Credibility Gap Widens on Iraq’s Weapons,” lamenting “the signal failure so far to locate a warm-ish peashooter, let alone a smoking gun.” Across the Atlantic, the *New York Times* (26 April) editorialized: “This page agreed with the president’s conviction that there were world-threatening weapons in Iraq, if not the manner in which the United States went to war. We still tend to believe they are there” (“Assessing the Weapons Search”). But with “the most obvious storage sites coming up empty,” the Times editors gave the White House and Pentagon some pointers as to what might constitute a warmish peashooter: finding mustard gas or nerve agents in artillery shells and missiles would be ducky, but “precursor chemicals” alone just won’t do it. Next-best “would be evidence that Iraq was working with the smallpox virus”; alternatively, “even 15-year-old stocks of liquid anthrax would be alarming.” If that doesn’t pan out, “discovery now that Iraq had obtained either highly enriched uranium or weapons-grade plutonium... would be a real shock,” and “almost as disturbing would be full-scale enrichment facilities,” which might do in a pinch.

The *Times*’ Idiot’s Guide to finding a justification for imperialist war underlines the fact that all the hoopla about Hussein’s hypothetical “WMD” was just a ploy to speed up the attack on Iraq (in the case of the hawks) or to slow it down (in the case of the doves). It never had anything to do with an illusory Iraqi “threat” to the imperialists – much less to the “American people” – but was only a cover for launching a horrendous slaughter. The job of UN “inspectors” was to find the excuse for the Pentagon to test drive its “Massive Ordnance Air Blast” (dubbed the “Mother of All Bombs,” or MOAB, for short, recalling the biblical prophecy in Jeremiah 48:42, “Moab will be destroyed as a nation because she defied the Lord”) which would truly carry out mass destruction. When the head of the UNMOVIC chemical weapons inspection operation Hans Blix came up empty-handed, the pretext was simply discarded and the bombs began falling. To liberal pleas to let the Blix boys back in, the response from Bush and Blair is: they had their chance, no way is the UN getting in on this act again.

Instead, the Pentagon had the *Times*’ own (more or less) germ warfare “expert,” Judith Miller, “embedded” with the 75th Exploitation Task Force. Her assignment is to validate any pseudo-proof of Iraqi WMD the U.S. military “exploiters” come up with. But after visiting more than half the 150 sites on U.S. intelligence agency lists, she reported that “military experts said they now believed they might not find large caches of illicit chemicals or biological agents, at least not in Iraq” (*New York Times*, 25 April). Not to worry, say her handlers. “I think there’s going to be skepticism until people find out there was, in fact, a weapons of mass destruction program,” said George Bush in an interview on NBC-TV (24 April). “And so we will find them.” Just to make sure, they’re bringing in new teams of weapons experts, coordinated by the Pentagon’s Defense Threat Reduction Agency. This is the outfit which has been secretly developing a more potent strain of anthrax – for “defensive” purposes, of course. The DTRA will be assisted by two private companies, Raytheon Corporation (manufacturers of the Patriot “Scud-buster” missile which missed 80 percent of Iraqi missiles in Gulf War I) and the Kellogg, Brown & Root division of Vice President Dick Cheney’s Halliburton Corporation!



U.S. military brought reporters to agricultural facility near Karbala, April 7, posting sign announcing drums contained poison gas. Initial claim: sarin and tabun nerve gas and blister agent lewisite. Result of testing: pesticide. (Photo: ABC News)

Rest assured that they will “find” something, even if it has to be planted, as is by now widely expected. The Bush war marketers wouldn’t hesitate for a minute, given the stakes; indeed, that is doubtless why they are bringing in their back-up team. The only question is how crude a fabrication it will be. After all, these are the people who tried to pass off a forged memo from an official in the African republic of Niger about an Iraqi attempt to buy enriched uranium! (Niger has no facilities to enrich uranium, the official in question had been out of office for ten years, etc.) The warmongers in Washington clearly don’t give a damn whether they are believed. Their real

war aim is to demonstrate overwhelming U.S. power to secure untrammled American imperialist hegemony in the New World Order proclaimed by George Bush Sr. The rest – war on “WMD,” war on terror, war of liberation – is eyewash. Hermann Göring, the Nazi Luftwaffe (air force) commander, explained it to an American intelligence officer in his cell in Nuremberg:

“After all, it is the leaders of the country who determine the policy and it is always a simple matter to drag the people along. ... Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the peacemakers for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger.”

This exactly the mindset of U.S. rulers today as they seek to “shock and awe” the world into submission to their *Diktat*. The unelected American president added the Bush codicil – “You can fool some of the people all the time, and those are the ones you have to concentrate on” – slyly modifying Abraham Lincoln’s famous dictum at the Washington Gridiron Club a few months after stealing the Florida vote and the 2000 U.S. election.

From a Marxist perspective, the whole hullabaloo about atomic, chemical and biological weapons that the Iraqis may have, could have or would have if they could, is nothing but a charade, sucker bait for the liberals who get queasy at the slaughter of imperialist war. As Lenin insisted in the first imperialist world war:

“Our attitude towards war ... is fundamentally different from that of the bourgeois pacifists (supporters and advocates of peace) and of the anarchists. We differ from the former in that we understand the inevitable connection between wars and the class struggle within a country; we understand that wars cannot be abolished unless classes are abolished and socialism is created; we also differ in that we regard civil wars, i.e., wars waged by an oppressed class against the oppressor class, by slaves against slave-holders, by serfs against landowners, and by wage workers against the bourgeoisie, as fully legitimate, progressive and necessary....

“For example, if tomorrow, Morocco were to declare war on France, or India on Britain, or Persia or China on Russia, and so on, those would be ‘just,’ and ‘defensive’ wars, irrespective of who attacked first; any socialist would wish the oppressed, de-pendent and unequal states victory over the oppressor, slave-holding and predatory ‘great’ powers.”

– V.I. Lenin, *Socialism and War* (September 1915)

Leninists judge the character of a war by the class and national forces arrayed against each other. In the case of a war by an imperialist country, no matter how “democratic” it pretends to be, against a colonial or semi-colonial country, no matter how brutal and anti-democratic the current dictator, class-conscious workers are duty-bound to defend the oppressed nation and to fight for the defeat of the imperialist oppressor.

In the U.S. imperialist war on Iraq the League for the Fourth International stands on the side of Iraq, as Trotskyists did in Gulf War I as well. While denouncing Saddam Hussein, the butcher of Kurds, Shiites and communists, who was installed with the aid of U.S. imperialism and for years enjoyed Washington’s support, we defended the right of Iraq’s government to possess any weapons needed to fight the imperialists. That includes nuclear, chemical and bioweapons which the Pentagon has in superabundance and which American imperialism has repeatedly used against oppressed peoples and the civilian populations of its imperialist rivals, killing millions – far more than a tinpot nationalist dictator like Hussein could ever do. We opposed demands on Iraq to admit UN “inspectors,” whose task was to trigger imperialist aggression (and who often were literally U.S. spies). And while giving no credence to squabbles between imperialist hawks and doves over Iraqi “weapons of mass destruction,” we expose the falsehood and sophistry of the Great Chemical Weapons Hoax that was the main pretext for the imperialist war on Iraq.

The battle cry from Washington over Iraqi chemical warfare (CW), biological warfare (BW) and nuclear weapons programs is shameless hypocrisy coming from the mouths of the U.S. imperialists who nuked Hiroshima and Nagasaki, who used chemical weapons such as napalm and phosphorous bombs in Korea, who used napalm and Agent Orange on a massive scale in Vietnam. Besides which, the chemical arms which Iraq actually did obtain were supplied to it by Washington, to be used against Iranian forces in the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war. Iraq’s chemical plants, now alleged to be “dual-use facilities,” were built by none other than Britain and Germany. And in Iraq, chemical weapons were first used against the population by the British colonialists in suppressing a revolt in 1920. This is part of the hidden history of the Iraq war that the imperialist invaders are desperate to cover up.

II. Britain Used Chemical Arms on 1920 Iraq Revolt



In March 1917, British commander Lt.-General Stanley Maude, issued a proclamation upon entering Baghdad (above) declaring that “Our armies do not come into your cities and lands as conquerors or enemies, but as liberators.” British “liberators” proceeded to use poison gas against Iraqi rebels. (Photo: New York Times)

It all goes back to the seizure of the Near East by the Western powers during and after World War I. As Marxists declared at the time, that was not a war to “make the world safe for democracy,” as U.S. president Woodrow Wilson sanctimoniously claimed. Rather, it was over the division of the world by the imperialists and the redistribution of their respective colonies. WWI saw the break-up of the Ottoman Empire in the Near East, whose capital Constantinople became Istanbul, the metropolis of modern Turkey. Out of the remnants of that decrepit empire, a series of artificial states were created which arbitrarily divided up and threw together various peoples of the Arab East under puppet monarchs imposed by the colonialists (see “Mr. Sykes and Monsieur Picot Carve Up the Near East”). Under League of Nations “mandates,” France got Syria and Lebanon, while Britain got Palestine, Jordan and Iraq. Naturally, the imperialist “democracies” didn’t bother to consult the populations of the countries involved.

The birth of Iraq was presided over by Winston Churchill, an arrogant, brutal colonialist and imperialist who to this day is honored as a “statesman” in bourgeois histories. At the time Churchill was British secretary of state for the colonies. He had earlier promised Arabian ruler Sharif Hussein to install his son, Feisal, as ruler of Syria. When the French grabbed Damascus in the diplomatic horse-trading, Churchill gave Feisal the lands formerly known as Mesopotamia, lying between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, as a consolation prize. Repeatedly from 1919 on, the population of what is now Iraq rose up against the Hashemite ruler and his British patrons. In June 1920, a full-scale rebellion broke out. British garrisons were taken by surprise as the revolt spread throughout the lower Euphrates valley. In August, the insurgents declared a provisional Arab government. But by February 1921, the revolt had been crushed, with between 8,000 and 9,000 rebels killed. This was accomplished mainly through the use of air power, by the Royal Air Force (RAF), which mercilessly bombed the insurgents using incendiary weapons and poison gas.

Before the outbreak of the rebellion, the RAF asked Churchill in 1919 for permission to use chemical weapons “against recalcitrant Arabs as an experiment.” Churchill (then secretary of state for war) in turn asked experts if it would be possible to use “some kind of asphyxiating bombs calculated to cause disablement of some kind but not death...for use in preliminary operations against turbulent tribes.” He added: “I do not understand this squeamishness about the use of gas. I am strongly in favour of using poison gas against uncivilised tribes” which “spread a lively terror.” General Sir Aylmer Haldane wrote that

poison gas was more useful against the hilly Kurdish redoubts, while “in the hot plains...the gas is more volatile” (quoted in Geoff Simmons, *Iraq: From Sumer to Saddam* [MacMillan Press, 1994]). In fact, the weapons used by the RAF in its “civilizing mission” against the “turbulent tribes” were quite lethal. The British cabinet was squeamish, but Churchill argued that use of gas should not be prevented “by the prejudices of those who do not think clearly.” Eventually, poison gas was used on Iraqi rebels, with what the illustrious “statesman” described as “excellent moral effect” (quoted in David Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control. The Royal Air Force, 1919-1939* [Manchester University Press, 1990]).

The RAF was also used to bomb and strafe Kurds and Iraqis before, during and after the revolt. A series on the “Secret History” TV program of Britain’s Channel 4 on “The RAF and the British Empire” (6 July 1992) interviewed a squadron leader, who said that if the tribespeople “were doing something they ought not to be doing then you shot them.” A commander remarked: “If the Kurds hadn’t learned by our example to behave themselves in a civilised way then we had to spank their bottoms. This was done by bombs and guns.” A colonel with the Royal Artillery noted in his diary that the burning of Arab villages made “a wonderful sight at night.” Earlier, Wing Commander Arthur Harris emphasized, “The Arab and Kurd now know what real bombing means in casualties and damage. Within forty-five minutes a full-size village can be practically wiped out and a third of its inhabitants killed or injured.” The bloodthirsty Harris was later known as “Bomber Harris” (or, more to the point, Butcher Harris) during World War II, when he designed the infamous firebombing of Dresden, Germany in February 1945 (see “[U.S./British Massacre at Dresden](#)”).

As the Pentagon is doing today, Britain used the suppression of the Iraqi revolt in order to test out new weapons. Devices developed for use against tribal villages included forerunners of napalm, air-to-ground missiles and fragmentation bombs. An Air Ministry list included:

“Phosphorous bombs, war rockets, metal crowsfeet [to maim livestock], man-killing shrapnel, liquid fire, and delay-action bombs. Many of these weapons were first used in Kurdistan.”

Gertrude Bell, the Oriental Secretary in the Colonial Office, described a demonstration of the new technology: “They had made an imaginary village...and the first two bombs dropped from 3000 feet, went straight into the middle of it and set it alight.... Then they dropped bombs all round it, as if to catch the fugitives and finally fire bombs which even in the brightest sunlight made flares of bright flame in the desert. They burn through metal and water won’t extinguish them. At the end the armoured cars went out to round up the fugitives with machine guns” (quoted in Simons, *Iraq: From Sumer to Saddam*, which brings together reports of Britain’s use of poison gas and terror bombing of the civilian Iraqi population).

Today the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, successor to the Colonial Office, professes horror at the suffering of the Kurds under Hussein’s rule, which has “included the use of chemical weapons” (*Saddam Hussein: Crimes and Human Rights Abuses* [November 2002]). Yet this is the bloody history of the British imperialists who claim to be friends of the Kurds! In March 1917, the commander of the Anglo-Indian Army of the Tigris, Lt.-General Stanley Maude, issued a proclamation upon entering Baghdad declaring that “Our armies do not come into your cities and lands as conquerors or enemies, but as liberators” (Robert Fisk, “The West Has Been Liberating the Middle East for Centuries,” *Independent* [London], 7 March). This is the fiery hell the imperialist “liberators” visited on the Iraqi people then, as they are doing again today.

III. Spanish and Italian Imperialists Use Poison Gas in Africa

Britain was not the only “great power” to engage in indiscriminate bombing and employ chemical arms in their wars of conquest and colonial policing. Indeed, all of the imperialists in the current U.S.-led “coalition of the willing” have used so-called weapons of mass destruction against civilian populations.

Spain used poison gas against the Berber rebellion in the Rif region of northern Morocco. The revolt led by Abd el Krim began in 1921, and trounced the Spanish army in July of that year. In response, the Spanish air force “took reprisals against the homelands of tribes who joined the rebels and made lavish use of poison gas” (Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control*). When the rebels continued to advance, proclaiming an independent republic of the Rif, imperialist France dispatched 400,000 troops (led by Marshal Pétain, the future collaborator with Hitler) to aid the Spanish. Entire Rif villages were wiped out by French aerial bombardment and artillery. Today the French Communist Party (PCF) recalls that its forebears called then to stop “immediately the spilling of blood” (*L’Humanité*, 20 December 2000). Actually, this is a reformist rewriting of history as if the early Communists were nothing but a group of pacifists.. At the time, the PCF proclaimed its solidarity with the independence fighters, organized dock workers strikes refusing to move war materiel to Morocco, and in October 1925 called a general strike against the colonial war.

In the mid-1930s, *Italy* under the fascist *Duce* Benito Mussolini notoriously used poison gas in its conquest and occupation of Abyssinia (now known as Ethiopia) in East Africa. In December 1935, the commander of the Italian expeditionary force, Marshal Pietro Badoglio, ordered the use of dichlorodiethyl sulfide (mustard gas) against the troops of Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie. In February 1936, Badoglio sent 200,000 Italian troops against the Ethiopians. As the Ethiopian forces retreated, some 6,000 were killed by poison gas in 600-pound bombs dropped from planes. Celebrating his victory at a ceremony in Rome that May, Mussolini declared: "At last, Italy has her empire... a civilizing empire, humanitarian toward all the peoples of Ethiopia" (see Alberto Sbacchi, *Legacy of Bitterness: Ethiopia and Fascist Italy, 1935-1941* [Red Sea Press, 1997]).

Altogether a quarter million Ethiopians were killed in this colonialist slaughter. The response of many liberals and reformists (including the Stalinized Communist parties, by then wedded to the "popular front") was to beseech the League of Nations to intervene, just as today many forlornly looked to the United Nations as a brake on the U.S./British invasion of Iraq. But the UN's predecessor simply washed its hands of the question. In contrast to the Stalinists' illusory appeal to the "democratic" imperialists, Leon Trotsky, the founder of the Fourth International, who together with V.I. Lenin led the October 1917 Russian Revolution, called instead for the action of the workers movement in defense of Ethiopia:

"Of course, we are for the defeat of Italy and the victory of Ethiopia, and therefore we must do everything possible to hinder by all available means support to Italian imperialism by the other imperialist powers, and at the same time facilitate the delivery of armaments, etc., to Ethiopia as best we can.

"However, we want to stress the point that this fight is directed not against fascism, but against *imperialism*. When war is involved, for us it is not a question of who is 'better,' the Negus [the Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie] or Mussolini; rather, it is a question of the relationship of classes and the fight of an underdeveloped nation for independence against imperialism."

—"The Italo-Ethiopian Conflict" (July 1935), *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1935-36)*

Haile Selassie was no pseudo-progressive bourgeois nationalist, but presided over a regime that practiced slavery (particularly of subjugated minority peoples). Yet Trotsky insisted that the movement for the Fourth International defend Ethiopia against the Italian imperialists just as the Trotskyists today call to defend Iraq and defeat U.S. imperialism and its second-rate imperialist British, Italian, Spanish and Australian allies.

IV. Korea and Vietnam: U.S. Chemical Warfare and Terror Bombing Kills Millions

Prior to the second imperialist world war, it was primarily the European powers who used poison gas to subdue their colonial subjects. After WWII, the imperialists of what the American war minister Donald Rumsfeld now calls "Old Europe" were increasingly replaced by U.S. imperialism, which took on itself the "white man's burden" of policing the so-called Third World. Chemical weapons were heavily used by the Pentagon's expeditionary forces in Korea and Vietnam. In fact, for decades the U.S. was the main producer, purveyor and user of chemical arms, and today it still has what may be the largest stockpile of bio-chemical weapons in the world. This was almost entirely hidden from public view until the 1960s when the U.S.' use of CBW in Vietnam was exposed and investigative journalist Seymour Hersh published *Chemical and Biological Warfare: America's Hidden Arsenal* (Bobbs-Merrill, 1968). This has recently been updated by Judith Miller with Stephen Engelberg and William Broad in *Germs: Biological Weapons and America's Secret War* (Simon & Schuster, 2001).

As Harvard microbiologist Matthew Meselson notes in his review of Miller's book (*New York Review of Books*, 20 December 2001), just as the United States enrolled Hitler's rocket scientists in its missile programs after World War II, the U.S. also granted immunity from war crimes prosecution to scientists from the Japanese Army's notorious Unit 731 in exchange for data on Japan's biological warfare program. That unit had attacked Chinese villages and towns with anthrax, plague and typhoid during the Sino-Japanese War. But it wasn't as if the imperialist Allies were above using biological warfare themselves. In 1944, a bomb factory was set up near Terre Haute, Indiana to produce British-designed anthrax bombs; Churchill had placed an initial order of 500,000 of the bombs. They were never used against Hitler's Germany because the Nazi regime fell before the plant came on line. Yet during the Cold War, the U.S. made extensive preparations for using anthrax bombs to attack the USSR. Cluster bombs were designed, each containing 536 biological bomblets, and tests releasing aerosols were conducted in Minneapolis, St. Louis and Winnipeg.

The Pentagon not only developed chemical and bioweapons, they used them.

Korea

The Korean War is often referred to as the “forgotten war.” Certainly, over the decades the imperialist media have done their best to cover up the war crimes carried out there by the United States, Australian and other imperialist military forces during 1950-53 under the flag of the United Nations. A hole in the curtain of ignorance was ripped by the revelations in a September 1999 AP report by courageous Korean journalists, who demonstrated in great detail how the U.S. Army slaughtered 400 or more Korean civilians huddling under a bridge at No Gun Ri on 26 July 1950. Despite efforts by “responsible” American media executives to impugn the U.S. soldiers who confirmed the massacre, and intense pressure from the Pentagon on them to recant their testimony, the facts of this cold-blooded mass murder have been established beyond any doubt.

Yet No Gun Ri was only one of many atrocities committed by the U.S. imperialist forces and their South Korean puppet army in this first major engagement in the anti-Soviet Cold War, a war that lasted almost half a century. Among many other cases, in the same month of July 1950 more than 1,800 Korean Communist political prisoners were executed in Taejon, South Korea and their bodies thrown into a mass grave. U.S. Army photos of this slaughter were long classified Top Secret. A South Korean admiral reported that 200 people were taken off shore from Pohong and dumped into the sea. Another classified document reported the execution in August 1950 of between 200 and 300 Korean prisoners, who were lined up on a cliff near Taegu and shot. Villagers in Dokchon reported that truckloads of prisoners were taken into the hills and shot. Declassified documents confirm that it was U.S. policy for fighter jets to strafe civilian refugee columns. Even before the outbreak of the Korean War, U.S. and South Korean forces massacred 30,000 to 60,000 civilians in suppressing the 3 April 1948 uprising on Cheju-do Island.

U.S. puppet South Korean army massacred more than 1,800 Communist prisoners at Taejon in July 1950. Amsterdam housing project in October 1992, killing 43. (Photo: AP)



In North Korea, the U.S. policy of mass murder was carried out on an industrial scale. Napalm (jellied gasoline) and phosphorous bombs were systematically dropped in order to incinerate every city north of the 38th parallel (roughly marking the line between capitalist South Korea and the bureaucratically deformed workers state to the north). The North Korean capital was a particular object of Washington’s murderous fury. On 11 July 1952, the U.S.

Air Force dropped 1,400 tons of bombs and 23,000 gallons of napalm on Pyongyang, leveling more than 1,500 buildings and killing many thousands. The American bombers returned on August 4 and again on August 29 to finish the job. By that time there was literally nothing left to hit. And not just in the north. General Curtis LeMay described the devastation saying, “we eventually burned down every town in North Korea... and some in South Korea too. We even burned down [the South Korean city of] Pusan – an accident, but we burned it down anyway” (from the PBS TV program, *Race for the Superbomb*, January 1999).

It is well-known that General Douglas MacArthur unsuccessfully pushed to A-bomb Chinese and North Korean forces in Korea and even Chinese industrial centers north of the Yalu. It is seldom reported, however, that from the very beginning of the Korean War, in August 1950 U.S. president Truman moved ten B-29s loaded with atomic bombs to Guam, that Eisenhower moved them up to Okinawa in 1953 to force the Soviets to accept an armistice, and that the U.S. actively considered using atomic weapons throughout the war. More than 2 million Korean civilians and another 1.5 million soldiers were killed in the Korean War, overwhelmingly by the U.S. and its allies. Today, U.S. president Bush again threatens “pre-emptive” action against North Korea’s tiny nuclear facilities, claiming they are a “threat” to the United States. In fact, it is U.S. imperialism which has not only threatened but carried out mass killings with chemical weapons in an attempt to obliterate North Korea.

As we stressed in “Defend North Korea Against Nuclear Blackmail and War Threats!” (*The Internationalist* No. 15, January-February 2003): *the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea has the right to obtain any weapon it requires to defend itself against the imperialist mass murderers, and it is the obligation of every class-conscious worker and opponent of imperialism to defend North Korea against U.S. nuclear threats.*

Vietnam



U.S. napalm bomb strike in South Vietnam, 1966. U.S. dropped more than 338,000 tons of napalm (jellied gasoline) on Vietnam and killed more than 2 million Vietnamese during eight years of war. (Photo: AP)

In Vietnam, the massive use of chemical warfare by the United States is notorious. The U.S. Air Force dropped over 338,000 tons of napalm on Vietnam between 1963 and 1971 as well as more than 100,000 tons of herbicides. The napalm had been “improved” over that used by the U.S. in Korea and the French in Algeria, combining it with magnesium and phosphorous so that it burned at much higher temperatures. In addition to the gruesome deaths due to the burns and carbon monoxide poisoning caused by napalm, hundreds of thousands were killed by the “carpet-bombing” from B-52s. The resulting toll of civilian deaths was not inadvertent “collateral damage,” but an intended result. To Mao Zedong’s aphorism that guerrilla fighters among the people were like fish swimming in the water, the Pentagon counterinsurgency experts responded: “If you want to kill the fish, you remove the water. If you want to kill the guerrilla, you remove the people.” The people were “removed” by rounding them up in concentration camps (the “strategic hamlet” program) or simply killing them wholesale. In the CIA-designed Operation Phoenix, U.S. commandos (including one commanded by former U.S. senator Bob Kerrey) deliberately murdered tens of thousands of Vietnamese (see “[Drive Out War Criminal Bob Kerrey!](#)” *The Internationalist* No. 10, June 2001).

Planes spraying Agent Orange defoliant on Vietnam in 1966. Over 100,000 tons of herbicides (Agents Blue, Orange, Pink, Purple and White) were dropped on Vietnam in attempt to deprive Viet Cong of food and forest cover. New study shows 2 to 4 million people were sprayed directly with the chemicals which contained concentrations of dioxin more than 100 times greater than normal. In addition to killing many thousands, U.S. chemical warfare left legacy of half a million Vietnamese children suffering from birth defects, according to the *Wall Street Journal*. (Photo: AP)



U.S. imperialist rulers would dearly like the Vietnam War to be forgotten or relegated to the category of ancient history, but a quarter century later White House and Pentagon war planners are still trying to overcome the “Vietnam syndrome” in the American population – that is, the revulsion at a dirty, *losing* colonial war. And revelations about the wanton slaughter carried out there in the name of “defending democracy” continue to surface. The latest is a study published in the British scientific magazine *Nature* (17 April) by Jeanne Mager Stellman of the Columbia University School of Public Health reporting that the quantities of defoliants used in Vietnam, and the concentrations of dioxin (2,4,5-T) were “up to four times as great as previously estimated.” In a program originally known as Operation Hades (later changed to the innocuous-sounding Operation Ranch Hand), the Pentagon used not only Agent Orange but also significant quantities of the even more potent Agent Blue and Agent Purple in order to destroy crops in heavily populated areas of Vietnam (“food deprivation”). These poisons, whose concentrations of toxic chemicals were more than 100 times greater than commercial weed killers, were sprayed directly on at least 3,000 Vietnamese villages populated by 2 to 4 million people.

Hoping to obliterate the memory of its war crimes in Indochina, or at least to relativize them, beginning in 1975 the U.S. accused the Soviet Union of using chemical warfare in Southeast Asia. If the U.S. used Agent Orange, they charged, the Soviets used “Yellow Rain” (trichothecene mycotoxins). As Washington stepped up its war against the Soviet forces in Afghanistan in the early 1980s, a propaganda blitz was organized around this claim. In September 1981, General Alexander Haig, then Reagan’s ambassador to the United Nations, announced with great fanfare that “the Soviet Union and its allies have been using lethal chemical weapons in Laos, Kampuchea, and Afghanistan.” However, when a group of scientists led by Harvard molecular biologist Matthew Meselson looked at the evidence, they concluded that the “rain” was showers of yellow feces from swarms of giant Asian honeybees (see Julian Robinson, Jeanne Guillemin and Matthew Meselson, “Yellow Rain in Southeast Asia: The Story Collapses,” *Foreign Affairs*, Fall 1987, for a recounting of this saga). *U.S. imperialism tried to bury its own massive use of chemical arms in Indochina under a pile of bee shit.*

The U.S. chemical warfare against the Vietnamese people killed many thousands, and left a legacy of an estimated 500,000 children with serious birth defects (Peter Waldman, “Body Count,” *Wall Street Journal*, 12 December 1997). Overall, upwards of 3 million people were killed in the U.S.’ counterrevolutionary war on Vietnam, plus another 2 million in neighboring Cambodia and Laos. This horrendous death toll was justified with overtly racist arguments. The commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam, General William Westmoreland, claimed that, “The Oriental doesn’t put the same high price on life as does a Westerner. Life is plentiful, life is cheap in the Orient” (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, 21 April 1975). The same grotesque arguments are used by the apologists for the U.S. imperialist invasion of Iraq today.



Grasping at straws. U.S. arms inspectors’ latest find: touted by *New York Times* as “mobile bioweapons lab,” not-so-mobile hulk of a trailer near Mosul had no biological agents, only signs of ... bleach. (Photo: AP)

V. U.S. and Other Western Imperialists Supplied Saddam Hussein's Chemical Weapons

Long before the recent U.S./British invasion of Iraq, the charge that the Saddam Hussein regime had produced and used chemical weapons (such as mustard gas, VX and sarin), had the capability of producing biological weapons and was seeking to develop nuclear weapons has been bandied about by the imperialists to justify their unrelenting persecution of Iraq. This was the excuse for the whole charade of United Nations inspection and more than a decade of murderous UN "sanctions" which killed over a million Iraqi children. During the 1990s, the UNSCOM "inspectors" were shot through with U.S. agents, who planted surveillance devices and sent back espionage data to Washington on Iraq's defenses. As we have emphasized, Hussein's Iraq had every right to procure or develop any weapon needed to defend the country against the imperialist onslaught, and expulsion of the "UN"/U.S. spies was more than justified. When UN inspectors were readmitted last year, they failed to uncover any CBW (chemical and biological warfare) weapons at all and stated that everything indicated the Iraqi nuclear program had been shut down over a decade ago. Thereupon, Bush and Blair simply went ahead and ordered the attack anyway.

But beyond the bottomless hypocrisy and bushels of lies from Washington and London, *for years the imperialists actively supplied Iraq with chemical and biological agents, built the factories to produce CBW arms, fed Baghdad intelligence data on where to use them, and dispatched agents to the battlefields to check up on their usage.* Hussein's regime did possess and use chemical weapons against the Iranian army during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War. This was a bloody slaughter between two reactionary capitalist regimes in which the workers and oppressed did not have a side. The Reagan administration in Washington early on backed Hussein's Iraq in order to block the spread of Ayatollah Khomeini's "Islamic Revolution"; then toward the end of the nine-year carnage, the U.S. secretly aided both sides in a cynical effort to produce a battlefield stalemate. Bits and pieces of information about the United States' deep involvement in Iraq's use of chemical weapons occasionally seep into the bourgeois press, but these snippets are quickly buried and the dots are not connected to show the whole picture.

After Baghdad's initial successes in the war with Iran, Tehran launched "human wave" attacks with tens of thousands of Iranian soldiers overrunning Iraqi positions. The focus of these attacks was the Fao Peninsula, the spit of land south of the Shatt al-Arab (the river formed by the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates), which is Iraq's only access to the sea. Washington was worried that if Khomeini's legions could storm across that narrow corridor, they could break into the vital oil-producing area of the Persian Gulf emirates and eastern Saudi Arabia (whose population is heavily Shiite). With a third the population of Iran, Iraq could not afford such heavy losses. As a last-ditch measure, Hussein began using poison gas. Last year when the Bush administration began citing Iraq's use of gas in the war with Iran as an argument for "regime change" in Baghdad, the *New York Times* (18 August 2002) published an article revealing that: "A covert American program during the Reagan administration provided Iraq with critical battle planning assistance at a time when American intelligence agencies knew that Iraqi commanders would employ chemical weapons in waging the decisive battles of the Iran-Iraq war, according to senior military officers with direct knowledge of the program."

It was long known that the U.S. supplied Iraq with satellite photography of the deployment of Iranian forces. But now the *Times* revealed a "highly classified program in which more than 60 officers of the Defense Intelligence Agency were secretly providing detailed information on Iranian deployments, tactical planning for battles, plans for airstrikes and bomb-damage assessments for Iraq." DIA operative Lt. Col. Rick Francona reported directly from the battlefield on Iraqi use of nerve gas. The senior DIA official at the time, Col. Walter Lang, said the U.S. was "desperate to make sure that Iraq did not lose" the war with Iran. "The use of gas on the battlefield by the Iraqis was not a matter of deep strategic concern," he said. The Pentagon "wasn't so horrified by Iraq's use of gas," said another veteran of the program. "It was just another way of killing people - whether with a bullet or phosgene, it didn't make any difference." But the *Times* article neglected to mention that the U.S. not only knew Iraq was using chemical weapons, but it also *supplied the precursor chemicals to produce them* as well as "starter strains" for biological weapons.

Rumsfeld's Handshake with Hussein

Documents declassified in recent months revealed that by November 1983, Secretary of State George Shultz was receiving intelligence reports that the Iraqis were resorting to "almost daily use of CW" against the Iranians and that "Iraq has acquired a CW production capability, primarily from Western firms, including possibly a U.S. foreign subsidiary."¹ Yet

simultaneously Ronald Reagan issued National Security Decision Directive 114 (26 November 1983) which declared that the U.S. would regard “any major reversal of Iraq’s fortunes as a strategic defeat for the West.” It was decided to reestablish diplomatic relations with Hussein. For this purpose, none other than Donald Rumsfeld (who had been secretary of war in the previous Republican administration of Gerald Ford) was dispatched to Baghdad in December 1983 where he cordially met with the Iraqi strongman (see photo) and informed him of Washington’s new attitude. Rumsfeld was not a government official at the time but emphasized the importance of this “direct contact between an envoy of President Reagan and President Saddam Hussein.”



Donald Rumsfeld (now U.S. secretary of war) warmly greets Saddam Hussein in December 1983. Rumsfeld was personal envoy of Ronald Reagan to arrange U.S. support for Iraq in war with Iran. (Photo: CNN)

Among other things, Rumsfeld pushed a project for a pipeline from Iraq to the Gulf of Aqaba in Jordan, next to Israel, to be built by Bechtel Corp, Shultz’s former company. Rumsfeld was back in Baghdad in March 1984, meeting with Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz the very day the UN cited Iraq’s use of chemical weapons against Iran; again he pushed the pipeline plan and offered Israeli support, to no avail (see Institute for Policy Studies, *Crude Vision* [March 2003]). In the wake of the U.S. invasion, Israel has raised the issue of a Baghdad-Haifa pipeline, and Bechtel (once headed again by Shultz) is in line to

get the contract (London Guardian, 20 April). Accompanying Rumsfeld was National Security Council official Howard Teicher. In a sworn court affidavit in 1995, Teicher wrote that the United States “actively supported the Iraqi war effort by supplying the Iraqis with billions of dollars of credits, by providing military intelligence and advice to the Iraqis, and by closely monitoring third country arms sales to Iraq to make sure Iraq had the military weaponry required” (quoted in *Washington Post*, 30 December 2002). That weaponry included cluster bombs, supplied by a Chilean company at the CIA’s request.

It was not just “third country” sales. The Post article cited a \$1.5 million order for pesticide chemicals from Dow Chemical, notorious for its production of napalm and Agent Orange for use in Vietnam. Approval was granted even though the export control officer noted that these chemicals would cause “death by asphyxiation.” That was not all that U.S. companies supplied. In an article titled “Anthrax for Export” (*Progressive Magazine*, April 1998), William Blum noted that “private American suppliers, licensed by the U.S. Department of Commerce, exported a witch’s brew of biological and chemical materials to Iraq,” including bacillus anthracis, clostridium botulinum and dozens of other pathogenic biological agents. This was detailed in a staff report for U.S. senator Don Riegle of the Senate Committee on Banking on “U.S. Chemical and Biological Warfare-Related Dual Use Exports to Iraq” (7 October 1994). The report notes that these deadly organisms “were not attenuated or weakened and were capable of reproduction,” and it adds: “It was later learned that these microorganisms exported by the United States were identical to those the United Nations inspectors found and removed from the Iraqi biological warfare program.”

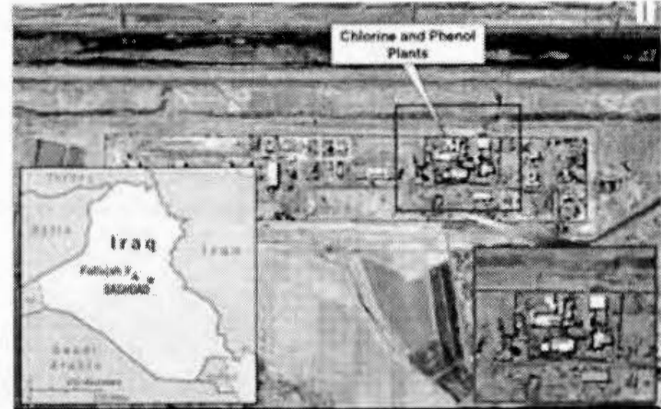
So UN inspectors “found” exactly what the U.S. firms sent to Iraq with the permission of the U.S. government – some discovery! Yet to this day the *New York Times* (14 April), while admitting that the means for making Iraq’s chemical weapons “came primarily from Western companies years ago,” pretends that: “The data reveals that firms in Germany and France outstripped all others in selling the most important thing – specialized chemical-industry equipment that is particularly useful for producing poison gas.” So it’s supposedly the perfidious French and Germans at it again! But wait. Explaining an accompanying map, which lists no American firms, the writers state, “The countries of origin are compiled based on the exporter, not the manufacturer, because it was the exporter who decided to sell a sensitive item to Iraq.” So if the U.S. manufacturer exports it to Germany or France for re-export in order to evade U.S. export controls, as regularly occurred, or sends it via its own German or French subsidiary, for the *Times* this counts as a French or German export! This piece, from the Washington-based Wisconsin Project on non-proliferation, is the U.S. war propagandist machine at work again.

Fallujah 2: Britain’s Dirty Secret

In fact, not only did Monsanto and Dow Chemical and dozens of U.S. laboratories supply Iraq with materials for chemical and biological weapons, with full approval of the Department of Commerce, but the very industrial plants cited today by U.S. and British leaders as supposed proof that Iraq has “weapons of mass destruction” were built for Hussein with full knowledge

that they could be used to produce CW arms. A case in point is the Fallujah 2 plant 80 km. outside of Baghdad. Spy satellite photos of the plant identifying it as a chemical weapons site were published by the CIA, and Colin Powell featured it in arguing for an invasion of Iraq at the UN Security Council in February. The same plant figured prominently in last September's dossier by Britain's Joint Intelligence Committee, which claimed that the plant (rebuilt after the 1991 Gulf War) was "formerly associated with the chemical warfare programme." What Blair didn't say, but the London *Guardian* (6 March) later revealed, was that the Fallujah plant was exported to Iraq by a British subsidiary of a German company, after approval by Margaret Thatcher's cabinet over internal objections that it could be used to produce CW arms.

Fallujah 2 chlorine plant. CIA published satellite photos of plant, identifying it as chemical weapons site. UN inspection showed plant was inactive.
(Photo: National Security Archive)



The *Guardian* exposé, titled "Britain's Dirty Secret" shows that "British ministers knew at the time that the £14 million plant, called Fallujah 2, was likely to be used for mustard and nerve gas production." A Foreign Office minister objected to the sale, but he was overruled by the trade minister in line with London's policy of backing Hussein against Iran. The plant was built in 1985 by Uhde Ltd., a British subsidiary of Uhde, GmbH of Dortmund, which in turn was a subsidiary of the German chemical giant Hoechst. Not only did the British government approve the deal, it granted an export credit guarantee and eventually paid Uhde (now owned by Thyssen-Krupp) £300,000 when Iraqi payments were interrupted by the Gulf War. If Fallujah did produce chemical weapons before 1990, the responsibility is to be laid squarely on the doorstep of the British prime minister's residence at No. 10 Downing Street.

Whether this was ever a poison gas plant is another question. Repeated UN inspections since last November reported that the plant was inactive. The plant formerly produced chlorine, which can be used to produce epichlorohydrin (a precursor to mustard) or phosphorus trichloride (a precursor of nerve gas). Yet chlorine is the key chemical for water purification, which is what Baghdad said it was used for. The Foreign Office argument in 1985 was that Iraq already had enough chlorine plants. But after the Gulf War, Iraq's entire chlorine production capacity was destroyed, and the U.S. deliberately targeted Iraqi waterworks. The resulting contaminated water supply produced massive sickness and disease. The Fallujah plant's chlorine was desperately needed for water purification, and there is not a shred of evidence it was used for anything else in the last decade. Yet under UN sanctions, the U.S. refused to allow any import of materials for chlorine production. The Iraqi people paid the price with hundreds of thousands of deaths.

¹These documents can be found on the Internet in the briefing book "Shaking Hands with Saddam Hussein: The U.S. Tilts toward Iraq, 1980-1984" (<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB82/index.htm>) on the site of the National Security Archive, a private group which has obtained large quantities of documentation of the American government's skullduggery around the world.

VI. Iraqi Genocide of Kurds at Halabja?

The key evidence to back up the charge that Saddam Hussein "gassed his own people," which in turn was the battle cry for the U.S./British attack on Iraq, is the death of several thousand Iraqi Kurds in the town of Halabja in March 1988. (A Kurdish researcher gave the estimate of 3,200 dead.) Various human rights groups who make a profession of pushing for imperialist military intervention, from Yugoslavia to Iraq, have cited this to portray the Iraqi strongman as a Hitler-like figure, calling up the images of the gassing of Jews in the Nazi death camps. In his weekly radio talk of March 15, on the eve of the invasion, U.S. president George Bush declared:

"Fifteen years ago, Saddam Hussein's regime ordered a chemical weapons attack on a village in Iraq called Halabja. With that single order, the regime killed thousands of Iraq's Kurdish citizens. Whole families died while trying to flee clouds of nerve and mustard agents descending from the sky. Many who managed to survive still suffer from cancer, blindness, respiratory diseases, miscarriages, and severe birth defects among their children. The chemical attack on Halabja – just one of 40 targeted at Iraq's own people – provided a glimpse of the crimes Saddam Hussein is willing to commit, and the kind of threat he now

presents to the entire world. He is among history's cruelest dictators, and he is arming himself with the world's most terrible weapons."

In fact, it is George Bush and his "regime" (including both parties of U.S. imperialism) who are armed with a vast arsenal of the most terrible weapons and constitute a mortal threat to the peoples of the world. But given how this incident is waved as a bloody flag, we must ask what happened at Halabja. Was this genocide?

What is certain is that a large number of Kurdish civilians were killed by chemical weapons in Halabja. Photos show horrendous scenes of bodies all over town. What is not at all certain is whose chemical weapons killed them. This has been long disputed, not only by the Iraqi government. For the attack on Halabja took place in the middle of a bitter battle between the Iranian and Iraqi armies, with Kurdish forces participating on the Iranian side. Moreover, during the fighting over this town on the Iran-Iraq border, both sides used gas, as they were regularly doing at that time in battles from north to south. These facts are never mentioned by the U.S. and British governments, which makes their accounts suspect from the outset. Furthermore, Washington's current story conflicts with what Washington's spokesmen said at the time, when the U.S. (and others) said that it appeared that Iranian gas had killed the Kurdish civilians.



Kurdish civilians killed in poison gas attack at Halabja, March 1988. What is not clear is whether Iraqi or Iranian gas killed them. (Photo: Kurdistan Regional Government)

The fighting in Halabja began with a joint offensive of Iranian Revolutionary Guards (*pasdaran*) and Kurdish guerrillas (*peshmergas*), which took the town on the night of 15 March 1988. The Iranians also claimed to have reached the strategic goal of their offensive, the nearby Darbandikhan Lake, whose dam controls a significant part of the water supply of Baghdad. The expected Iraqi counterattack came the next morning with artillery shelling from the north and air strikes. According to a technical analysis by Jean Pascal Zanders of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, "Later reports stated that Iraqi planes initially bombed the town with mustard agent. When the Kurdish civilians began to flee, the Iranians, thinking that they were Iraqi troops, fired munitions filled with hydrogen cyanide (HCN)." A 23 March 1988 U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency report stated:

"Most of the casualties in Halabjah were reportedly caused by cyanogen chloride. This agent has never been used by Iraq, but Iran has shown interest in it. Mustard gas casualties in the town were probably caused by Iraqi weapons because Iran has never been noted using that agent."

A joint Dutch-Belgian team of Doctors Without Borders (Artsen zonder Grenzen, an affiliate of the French-based Médecins sans Frontières) which examined bodies a week later found that while there was evidence of mustard gas, many of the victims showed symptoms indicating a cyanide-based compound.

A later UN investigation condemned the use of poison gas against civilians at Halabja but did not determine which country was responsible. A number of sources confirm that most of the deaths were due to a cyanide agent, and also that Iraq did not use HCN at any point while Iran did. "Iraq relied more on persistent agents because it was on the defensive, whereas Iran had developed rapidly dissipating agents of the chlorine and cyanide types in order not to hamper its advances" (Zanders). Even reports accusing Iraq note that shortly after the attack, "Iranian soldiers flitted through the darkened streets, dressed in protective clothing, their faces concealed by gas masks," and that "The Iranians were ready for the influx of refugees. Iranian helicopters arrived... in the late afternoon and military doctors administered atropine injections to the survivors" (from the

July 1993 Human Rights Watch report, *Genocide in Iraq*). Moreover, the Iranians immediately began bringing in journalists to take pictures of the Kurdish victims, who were left on the ground for days for filming.



Children killed by poison gas at Halabja. Discoloration of many bodies indicates use of chlorine gas, which Iraq did not have at the time but Iranian army did. (Photos: Kurdistan Regional Government)

All this was public knowledge for years, although almost never mentioned in the imperialist press, which for more than a decade focused on demonizing the Iraqi regime. It was raised again by an article in the *New York Times* (31 January 2003) by Stephen Pelletiere, who wrote:

“The truth is, all we know for certain is that Kurds were bombarded with poison gas that day at Halabja. We cannot say with any certainty that Iraqi chemical weapons killed the Kurds. This is not the only distortion in the Halabja story.

“I am in a position to know because, as the Central Intelligence Agency's senior political analyst on Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war, and as a professor at the Army War College from 1988 to 2000, I was privy to much of the classified material that flowed through Washington having to do with the Persian Gulf. In addition, I headed a 1991 Army investigation into how the Iraqis would fight a war against the United States; the classified version of the report went into great detail on the Halabja affair.”

Pelletiere noted that treatments of the issue by those pushing for war against Iraq, such as an influential article by Jeffrey Goldberg (“The Great Terror,” *New Yorker*, 25 March 2002), don't even mention the reports that Iranian gas may have killed the Kurds. Pelletiere's letter ends, “Until Washington gives us proof of Saddam Hussein's supposed atrocities, why are we picking on Iraq on human rights grounds, particularly when there are so many other repressive regimes Washington supports?” Certainly, this former CIA and Army analyst is “in a position to know.”

Most U.S. wars in the last century have used an incident supposedly demonstrating the enemy's perfidy in order to stampede the population into imperialist slaughter. The Spanish-American war which launched the U.S. colonial empire was fought on the battle cry of “Remember the *Maine*!” even though there is no evidence that the Spanish or Cuban rebels blew up the USS *Maine* in Havana harbor in 1898, and plenty to suggest either that the explosion was an accident or that the Americans may have blown it up themselves. The U.S. entered World War II after the Japanese “sneak attack” on Pearl Harbor, which top officials in Washington were amply informed was coming, but ignored in the expectation that an attack on “U.S. soil” would overcome antiwar sentiment. (They clearly underestimated the toll the attack would take on the U.S. Pacific Fleet.) In the Vietnam War, the Gulf of Tonkin incident, a supposed attack by North Vietnamese torpedo boats in August 1964 which never took place, was used to justify the bombing of Hanoi. And now, since the U.S. has been unable to come up with any evidence that Iraq has had chemical or biological weapons for the last decade, Halabja is being used as the latest *casus belli* for Bush's invasion of Iraq.

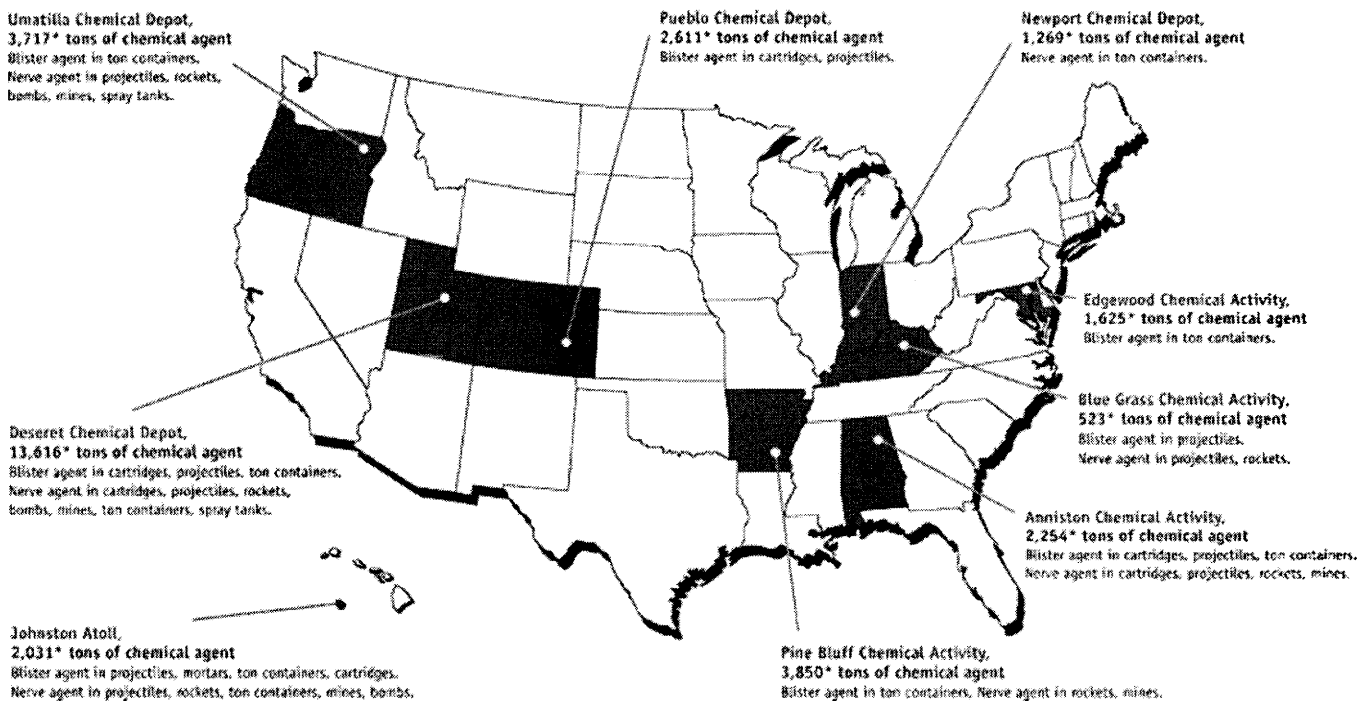
With the present publicly available information, it is not possible to say definitively what took place at Halabja. But even if the Saddam Hussein regime were responsible for indiscriminately gassing and killing Kurdish civilians there, it is the height of cynicism for U.S. rulers to use this a “justification” for an American war on Iraq. Not only is Washington speaking with a forked tongue, having said at the time that Iran was responsible for the gas attack on the Kurds. As we have shown, the U.S. had been supplying Iraq with the chemicals and plants to produce the poison gas it was using in the Iran-Iraq war, and indeed, it was precisely in early 1988 that a Defense Intelligence Agency colonel was touring battlefields with Iraqi officers. It is a

fact that Saddam Hussein's forces brutally repressed the Kurds in northern Iraq and the Shiites in the south. It is also a fact that the Iranian government, both under the shah and under the mullahs, brutally suppressed the Kurds in Iran, killing thousands. Where are the U.S. complaints about that? And it is an indisputable fact that Turkey has for decades suppressed the Kurdish population of Anatolia with unparalleled ferocity, killing over 40,000 and wiping thousands of villages from the face of the earth. Yet Turkey is a strategic ally, and the U.S. *justifies and actively participates in the repression of Turkish Kurds* (as do the "peace-loving" German imperialists).

Hussein's Ba'ath nationalist regime in Baghdad and Khomeini's Islamic regime in Tehran were together responsible for the carnage of the Iran-Iraq war in which over a million people were killed. *But so was the U.S.*, which armed both sides of this reactionary war. (Donald Rumsfeld's handshake with Saddam in 1984 was followed by Oliver North's present of a Bible, a cake and planeloads of Hawk anti-aircraft missiles to Iran in 1986.) As the Internationalist Group noted in our 20 March statement on the war on Iraq:

"The many crimes of Hussein are the crimes of the imperialists who backed him. And it will take revolution by the Iraqi workers, Sunni and Shi'ite alike, mobilized independently of and against the imperialist aggressors, to put an end to the likes of Hussein and his former patrons."

VII. The U.S. Arsenal of Chemical and Bioweapons



Map shows major U.S. chemical weapons stockpiles. (Map by Federation of American Scientists)

Who is it that actually has chemical weapons today? In his State of the Nation speech to Congress on January 28, George Bush devoted a large section to his case for war against Iraq. He argued that: "Our intelligence officials estimate that Saddam Hussein had the materials to produce as much as 500 tons of sarin, mustard and VX nerve agent." This is chicken feed compared to the massive U.S. arsenal of CW weapons:

- As of July 1997, the United States had stockpiled 31,500 tons of mustard, VX and GB (sarin) weapons, in addition to untold quantities of "non-stockpile" chemical weapons to be found on military installations in 39 out of the 50 states.

Bush argued that "Saddam Hussein had upwards of 30,000 munitions capable of delivering chemical agents." Yet the U.S. not only has munitions "capable of" delivering CW agents:

- As of July 1997, the United States had stockpiled more than 3 million (3,095,000) already-assembled chemical weapons in the U.S.

- Some 88,000 of these U.S. poison gas weapons are stored at the Pine Bluff, Arkansas chemical weapons center alone, near a largely black community, which has been a center of the U.S. CW weapons program since World War II. Even larger amounts are stored in other sites.
- 660,000 of these chemical weapons are stored in Anniston, Alabama, which is complaining that the mortar shells and rockets are leaking, and plans to burn them are a threat to nearby black neighborhoods.
- 780,000 chemical munitions are stored in Pueblo, Colorado, with its heavily Latino population.
- 1,100,000 chemical munitions (mainly GB) are stored in at the Tooele ordnance depot in Utah. In the fall of 2000, the U.S. Department of Energy “conducted tests over Salt Lake City using a gas meant to mimic a toxic cloud” (*Los Angeles Times*, 8 October 2001). But any toxic cloud over the Desert Kingdom (Utah) isn’t going to come from Iraq (or North Korea) but from the huge arsenal of sarin 25 miles from downtown.

In the State of the Union speech, Bush argued that “Saddam Hussein had materials sufficient to produce more than 38,000 liters of botulinum toxin.” This is the main ingredient of the popular cosmetic surgery product Botox, which the U.S. produces vast quantities of every year.

And, Bush argued, in 1999 “Saddam Hussein had biological weapons sufficient to produce over 25,000 liters of anthrax,” whatever that is supposed to mean.

- Yet U.S. Army scientists have been producing weapons-grade anthrax for years at the Dugway Proving Ground in Utah and at Fort Detrick in Maryland, even though the U.S. biological warfare program supposedly shut down in 1969. Moreover, this weaponized anthrax is “virtually identical to the powdery spores used in the mail attacks that have killed five people,” as the *Baltimore Sun* (12 December 2001) revealed at the time of the post-September 11 mail attacks.

Meanwhile, the U.S. invaders in Iraq have so far come up with:

Zero (0) sarin, mustard or VX chemical weapons;
 Zero (0) chemical munitions;
 Zero (0) botulinum toxin; and
 Zero (0) anthrax.

As for so-called “precursor chemicals” (like chlorine), you could find a hundred times more in any 10 square mile area of northern New Jersey than the pittance they have come up with in Iraq. Which is not to say that they won’t eventually “find” (that is, plant) some CW material in order to justify their invasion.

VII. The Bush Gang and Chemical Weapons

The cynicism of Washington’s claims that it had to invade Iraq because of the Saddam Hussein regime’s hypothetical possession of chemical and biological weapons is underscored by the fact that, not only does the U.S. have huge stocks of such weapons, possibly the largest in the world, but the Bush regime has consistently opposed international conventions outlawing possession and use of CW weapons! In November 2001, U.S. representatives at a United Nations conference on the 1972 Biological Warfare Convention mounted a publicity operation to “name and shame” countries it claims were violating the treaty. Tops on the list were Iraq, North Korea and “probably Iran.” As the Iraqi delegate rightly noted, this stunt meant the U.S. was “envisaging Iraq as a target, a second target for an attack” after Afghanistan. Yet only months beforehand, in July 2001, the chief U.S. negotiator walked out of a session preparing a protocol aimed at strengthening monitoring of the BWC. Washington’s rejection of the protocol led to its demise. Many people wondered why.

Among the reasons given by the Bush administration was that it opposed international inspection or even disclosure of American bioweapons facilities. The U.S. had long claimed it had terminated all work on biological arms in 1969, but a couple of months after its dramatic walkout, the *New York Times* (4 September 2001) revealed that Washington was developing new germ weapons: the Defense Department built a small germ weapons plant at the Nevada nuclear test site; the Central Intelligence Agency developed a cluster bomb designed to disperse bomblets that would release germs in a mist; a Department of Energy program is testing the aerosol dispersal of “simulants,” while its budget indicates plans to test “actual agents” (i.e., weaponized germs); and the Defense Intelligence Agency has been seeking to produce a more powerful strain of anthrax. The DOD, DOE, CIA and DIA programs are only the ones which have been leaked to the public. Beyond these

specific projects, a number of scientists are now asking if “perhaps the United States rejected the protocol not just because it is conducting secret, offensively oriented ‘biodefense’ programs, but because it is committed to continuing and expanding them” (see “Back to Bioweapons?” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, January-February 2003).

As for chemical weapons, U.S. war propaganda made much of the fact that Iraq didn’t sign the Chemical Weapons Convention, negotiated in 1993. What Washington’s disinformation mills didn’t mention is that the present inhabitants of the White House fought tooth and nail against U.S. ratification of the CWC. At Senate hearings in April 1997, the speakers against the treaty banning chemical weapons included former (and present) secretary of war Donald Rumsfeld; former secretary of war (and current vice president) Dick Cheney; former deputy assistant (presently assistant) secretary of war Douglas Feith; and former assistant secretary of war (who was until recently chairman and is still a member of the Defense Policy Board) Richard Perle. Another prominent opponent of the CWC was the former deputy under (presently under) secretary of war Dov Zakheim. This is precisely the gang of left-over hard-line Cold Warriors that has been pushing the U.S. war drive against Iraq, using the pretext that Saddam Hussein has, or had, or was trying to get, or had the materials to make, chemical weapons but was resisting international inspections of Iraqi facilities. Yet the main argument these war hawks made against the CWC is that it would open the U.S. to the kind of inspections to which they were subjecting Iraq!

Israel's Chemical and Biological Warfare Program

But there was another reason behind their objections to the Chemical Weapons Convention. In Rumsfeld’s Senate testimony he complained that the CWC “could conceivably disarm democratic, friendly, non aggressive nations, that either do not have chemical weapons, or if they have them would be most unlikely to use them against us” (Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearings, 8 April 1997). And who might that be? The answer is immediately obvious: Israel. These are all prominent members of the Zionist lobby in Washington: Feith was a campaign advisor for Israeli right-wing premier Benyamin Netanyahu; together with Perle was a co-author of the June 1996 policy paper “A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm” calling for Israeli domination of the Near East; Perle, Rumsfeld, Feith, Zakheim along with Elliot Abrams, Paul Wolfowitz and other current Bush administration officials jointly wrote a letter to then president Bill Clinton in February 1998 demanding that his bombing of Baghdad (Operation Desert Fox) be turned into full-scale war for “regime change” in Iraq.

Note also that while Israel signed the CWC, it has not ratified it. Why? As the Federation of American Scientists tersely noted, “Israel has nuclear and chemical weapons, and an offensive BW program.” A big one.

Israel cargo jet crashed into Amsterdam housing project in October 1992, killing 43. Illnesses among residents and rescue workers sparked inquiry and revelation that El Al plane was carrying chemicals for deadly sarin nerve gas. (Photo: AP)



We have written of the Israeli nuclear program, which includes hundreds of nuclear weapons and delivery systems capable of striking every country in the Near East (and the former Soviet Union), and whose scope has been known since it was revealed by the courageous Israeli nuclear technician Mordechai Vanunu in 1986 (see “Free Mordechai Vanunu!” *The Internationalist* No. 14, September-October 2002). A corner of the cloak of secrecy covering the Zionist regime’s chemical and biological weapons program was lifted as a result of the 1992 crash of an El Al cargo jet after takeoff from Schipol Airport in the Netherlands when it hit an Amsterdam apartment block, killing 47. Men in white suits were seen sifting through the debris. Up to 2,000 residents and firemen later reported health complaints. Six years later, the Dutch paper *NRC Handelsblad* (30 September 1998) published a cargo manifest showing that the flight was carrying 800 kilograms of depleted uranium and the chemicals to make 190 liters of the nerve gas sarin. It was destined for the Israeli Institute of Biological Research at Nes Ziona. A biologist formerly associated with the IIBR told the *London Times* (4 October 1998): “There is hardly a single known or unknown form of chemical or biological weapon...which is not manufactured at the institute.”

Given how the Israeli authorities reacted to Vanunu’s revelations (kidnapping him and imprisoning incommunicado for the last 17 years), it’s clear that the Zionist state and its defenders will go to great lengths to prevent any inspection of its chemical and bioweapons programs.

VIII. Smash Imperialism Through International Socialist Revolution!

Much of the above has appeared in various publications. Liberals and reformists have written about how the British colonialists used poison gas in Iraq, how the U.S. and British air forces firebombed Dresden, how the United States napalmed Vietnam and poisoned the country with Agent Orange, how Washington knew of Hussein's use of chemical weapons against Iran, and even how the U.S. supplied Baghdad with chemicals and biological agents for its CW and BW programs in the 1980s. In each case, what they seek to show is the hypocrisy of the U.S. rulers as the latter go to war against yet another of their former Third World allies and puppet dictators. But they do not show the broader picture. There is plenty of hypocrisy coming out of the Bush and Blair propaganda machines, to be sure, but what this all shows, taken together, is that there are forces whose possession of weapons of mass destruction is a threat to humanity, who have used them against their own and many other peoples, and who are fully prepared to plunge the world into radioactive barbarism. It is the imperialists, with U.S. imperialism in the forefront – not Saddam Hussein's Iraq – who constitute this clear and present danger to humanity.

It is not enough to expose the imperialists' boundless hypocrisy, it is necessary to fight to defeat them. As Lenin and Trotsky stood with the Rif Berbers against French and Spanish colonialism in the 1920s, as the Fourth International defended Ethiopia against Italian imperialism in the '30s, as revolutionaries defended North Korea against the U.S. Army wearing UN shoulder patches in the Korean War of the '50s and fought for the victory of the Vietnamese Revolution in the 1960s and '70s, as Trotskyists hailed the Red Army in Afghanistan and supported its struggles against "holy warriors" (among them one Osama bin Laden) dispatched by the CIA against the Soviet Union in the '80s, as we stood with Iraq against the imperialists in the first Gulf War, defended Yugoslavia against the U.S./NATO war in 1995 (Bosnia and Croatia) and again in '99 (Kosovo), and defended Afghanistan in 2001, so it is necessary in this latest imperialist dirty war to defend Iraq and mobilize the international working class to defeat the U.S. colonialist invasion and occupation. So too it will be necessary to defend the North Korean, Vietnamese, Cuban and Chinese deformed workers state against the next imperialist war that is already being prepared in the bowels of the Pentagon.

This history makes clear that the fight cannot be simply against a particular war, for the string of wars is unbroken. It cannot be in support of other imperialists, such as the French and Germans, who joined with the U.S. in its previous wars and who are today policing Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia and Afghanistan in the wake of American-led imperialist attacks. It cannot be in political alliance with "Third World" nationalists, who at best stood on the sidelines (where they were not secretly cooperating with Washington): they are only angling for a deal with imperialism. It cannot be in alliance with any capitalist political force, for this history makes abundantly clear that the cause of these wars is capitalist imperialism, and they will continue to occur until the imperialist system is overthrown. As we expose the hypocritical rhetoric spouted by the warmongers to grease their machinery of death, we must direct the struggle to mobilize the social force that has the power to defeat them: the international working class.

Reflecting on the horrors of the first imperialist world war, the German communist Rosa Luxemburg declared that the alternatives facing mankind were socialism or barbarism. Today, 85 years later, the war on Iraq constitutes a giant step toward a new inter-imperialist world war, only this time by forces armed with vast arsenals of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction. Rather than spreading treacherous pacifist illusions, which mislead and demoralize those who would wage a serious fight against the imperialist slaughter, the League for the Fourth International has called forthrightly for class war against the imperialist war. We also seek, within the limits of our very modest forces, to carry out and spark actions aimed at mobilizing the tremendous power of the working class. We fight to build revolutionary workers parties around the globe in the struggle to smash the imperialist system through workers insurrections at the head of all the oppressed. This was the banner under which Lenin and Trotsky led 1917 October Revolution in Russia and began the construction of the first workers state in history. International socialist revolution is the only road to peace. ■

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