

A U.S. Invasion of Iraq Can Be Stopped

By Stephen Zunes

Despite increased preparation for war, there is a growing perception that a U.S. invasion of Iraq can be stopped.

There is little question that were it not for the anti-war movement, the United States would have gone to war against Iraq already. It was the strength of opposition to plans for a unilateral U.S. invasion that forced the Bush administration to go to the UN in the first place. So far, Iraqi compliance with the United Nations weapons inspectors has made it extremely difficult for the administration to proceed with its war plans.

UN Security Council resolution 1441—written by and pushed through by the United States to strengthen the power of UN inspections and weaken the ability of Iraq to evade them—was modified before passage so that military action to enforce the resolution is possible only with explicit Security Council authorization. In order for such authorization to go forward, Iraq would have to do something rather brazen and stupid which—while it certainly cannot be ruled out—has thus far forced a reluctant Saddam Hussein to cooperate with the new inspections regime.

This does not mean that the Bush administration—which has repeatedly shown its contempt for international law—would not proceed with an invasion anyway. In October, the U.S. Congress, with support of both the Republican and Democratic leadership, granted President Bush the authority to invade Iraq without UN Security Council authorization. This war resolution was illegal, however, since such an invasion would violate the United Nations Charter, which was signed and ratified by the United States; Article VI of the U.S. Constitution declares such international treaties as “supreme law.”

The Bush administration has demonstrated, however, that it does not have great respect for the Constitution either. What, then, might be able to stop an invasion?

Again, it would be the strength of anti-war opposition.

Already, a number of Democrats who supported the war resolution and then saw their party loose miserably in the November elections, are now arguing against a rush to war. Among their fears is that a resurgent and clearly anti-war Green Party could capture enough liberal votes to cause the Democrats’ defeat in the 2004 election.

Some top military brass and career officials in the Department of Defense are quietly but firmly expressing their opposition to the war, recognizing that an invasion of Iraq would be the most complicated and bloody U.S. military operation since Vietnam. This, in turn, would strengthen anti-war opposition further. The Vietnam War taught the U.S. military that it should not fight in any major war without the backing of the majority of the American public. Currently, the U.S. military is one of the most respected institutions in America. It does not want to go back to the days when military recruiters could not even show up on college campuses without demonstrations breaking out. As military officials, they will certainly obey the orders of their commander-in-chief if called into combat. However, the more anti-war forces grow, the greater the U.S. military will be concerned about its own institutional self-preservation.

The intelligence wing of the Central Intelligence Agency—unlike the operations wing—is composed largely of professionals whose concerns are less ideological. They are focused instead on how to protect American security. CIA cost/benefit analyses have shown that a U.S. invasion of Iraq would threaten

rather than protect American interests.

In effect, we have the ironic situation where the peace movement finds some of its most significant allies are the Pentagon and the CIA. These very influential actors in foreign policy decisionmaking could potentially allow cooler heads to prevail. Indeed, they are joined in their opposition by top foreign and defense policy officials from former Republican administrations, including Lawrence Eagleburger, Brent Scowcroft, and retired General Anthony Zinni.

There is also the international factor: While a number of America's key European allies are willing to grant rights to use bases on their soil for re-supply and to provide other logistical assistance for war against Iraq in the event of United Nations authorization, they are skeptical about a unilateral U.S. invasion. Public opinion polls in Europe show scant support for U.S. military action without UN authorization.

In the U.S., public opinion polls have consistently shown that while the majority of Americans support a U.S. invasion of Iraq to topple Saddam Hussein, only a minority support a war without authorization from the United Nations or active participation of allied militaries, or one that results in high American casualties. Since all three of these appear very likely, it is not unreasonable to assert that the majority of the American public opposes the Bush administration's plans to unilaterally launch a pre-emptive invasion of Iraq. Indeed,

polls have shown support for war declining.

The anti-war movement is strong and is growing. Already, the demonstrations against a U.S. invasion of Iraq—which hasn't yet happened—have been larger than those against the Vietnam War during the first three years of heavy fighting by American soldiers. Anti-war activities on college campuses are also significantly greater than during that same period. This is particularly significant since this comes despite the fact that today's college students do not fear for their personal safety through the draft.

The Roman Catholic bishops and virtually all major Protestant denominations have come out against a U.S. invasion, whereas it was not until the last few years of the Vietnam War that so many churches came out with an anti-war position. While the U.S. labor movement was hawkish to the bitter end of the Vietnam War, several major labor unions are also now on record in opposition to a U.S. invasion of Iraq.

The economic impact of an invasion of Iraq—which could cost upwards of \$200 billion and could be significantly more should there be a long-term U.S. military occupation and administration—has raised serious concerns among economists and business leaders. As the federal deficit grows, domestic programs are cut, and states are struggling with unprecedented deficits, the economic impact of the war could be staggering. On January 13, a group of Republican businessmen took out

a full-page ad in the *Wall Street Journal* denouncing the war. And a number of governors facing huge budget shortfalls have joined the ranks of administration critics.

Today's anti-war movement is far more diverse in terms of women and people of color in positions of leadership. Increasing numbers of poor and working class people are becoming involved in anti-war activities, recognizing that it is their loved ones who will be doing most of fighting and dying and it is they who will be disproportionately affected by the inevitable cutbacks in social programs made necessary by this incredibly expensive military adventure. The diverse age range of the anti-war movement is also a significant indicator of its strength, blending the experience of activists from the 1960s and earlier with the energy and creativity of younger activists.

Despite all this, the Bush administration may still decide to forge ahead with its planned invasion. It is far from inevitable, however, and there are increasing signs that this war can indeed be stopped before it starts.

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