

War: The Global Opposition

Feature Article by Lindsey German, January 2003

Lindsey German introduces statements from activists in Egypt and Europe who are part of a growing international movement determined to stop Bush and Blair's war in Iraq.

The central question facing us this new year is war. Daily, the US war machine grinds into place, with weapons of mass destruction shipped into the Middle East in preparation for a massive bombardment against the people of Iraq. Tony Blair used his holiday in Egypt to meet with Hosni Mubarak, a man who presides over one of the most repressive regimes in the Middle East but whose loyalty to the west ensures he is not threatened with sanctions or war. Blair is desperate to get the Middle Eastern regimes onside because he knows that opposition to war is near universal among the peoples of the region, who will suffer its consequences.

Elsewhere in the world opposition to war mounts. Never has there been a war where so many were so sceptical about the build-up and the reasons for it, and never has there been so many difficulties for the warmongers. North Korea is using the US involvement in the Middle East to push its own agenda, and despite the claims that the US can fight on two fronts, in reality it cannot and will have to compromise. The UN weapons inspectors in Iraq have found nothing to justify going to war. And recently released classified papers in the US show the close involvement of previous US administrations, including Donald Rumsfeld, in supplying Iraq with the same weapons of mass destruction which they now denounce.

We know that the US and Britain are still determined to go to war--but they have massive problems in doing so. That is why opposition to the war is so important. 15 February is now becoming a key day of protest worldwide when the world's population can stand up to the war drive. The anti-war movement made great strides last year, notably on 28 September in London and at the European demonstration in Florence in November, when up to a million marched. We have to repeat these huge mobilisations in February. Both those major mobilisations showed the importance of making

the connections between capitalism and war, and recognising that imperialism is fuelling this war drive.

Here we reprint two significant statements of international opposition to war. The first is from a conference in Cairo held in late December and initially banned by Blair's friend Mubarak. It is a major step forward internationally and especially in the Arab world. The second is from a European meeting of anti-war activists in Copenhagen. Both oppose war and commit their supporters to mobilising. If they can help build international coordinated mass action, then we can help to stop the war.

Cairo Declaration

The international meeting organised by the Egyptian Popular Campaign to Confront US Aggression was convened in Cairo on 18 and 19 December to launch the International Campaign.

We, the participants reaffirm our resolve to stand in solidarity with the people of Iraq and Palestine, recognising that war and aggression against them is but part of a US project of global domination and subjugation. Solidarity with Iraq and Palestine is integral to the internationalist struggle against neoliberal globalisation. The Cairo meeting is not an isolated event, but an extension of a protracted international struggle against imperialism, from Seattle and Genoa to Lisbon and Florence, to Cordoba and Cairo.

The US provides unlimited support, and even justification, to the Zionist perpetrators of genocidal crimes against the Palestinian people. The suffering of the Iraqi people under a regime of genocidal sanctions lasting over a decade, and the aggressive militarism which they face today, is but a logical outcome of asymmetrical power structures of the existing world order:

* The US monopolises political, economic and military power within the framework of capitalist globalisation, to the detriment of the lives of the majority of the world's people.

* The US imposes control through naked aggression and militarised globalisation in pursuit of its rulers' interests, all while reinstating the characteristic direct occupation of classical colonialism.

* The US global strategy, which was formulated prior to 11 September 2001, aims to maintain the existing unipolar world order, and to prevent the emergence of forces that would shift the balance of power towards multipolarity. The US administration has exploited the tragic events of 11 September, under the pretext of fighting terrorism, to implement the pre-existing strategy.

Attention to this global context helps explain current world developments:

First: Capitalist globalisation and US hegemony

* This prioritises the interest of monopolistic capitalist circles above those of the people, including Europeans and US citizens.

* It integrates the economies of different countries into a single global capitalist economic system under conditions which undermine social development and adversely affect the situation of women, child health, education, and social services for the elderly. In addition, unemployment and poverty increase.

* It generalises the culture of consumerism and individualism, to the detriment of a sense of collective responsibility, whether towards the thousands of infant and child deaths in Iraq resulting from polluted water, malnutrition and deficiencies in medical supplies, or towards the victims of Aids, malnutrition and famines around the world. Among millions of people standards of living have deteriorated while unemployment and poverty have become widespread. Globalisation has resulted in the marginalisation of entire peoples who can no longer acquire the basic necessities to sustain life.

Second: In the absence of democracy, and with widespread corruption and oppression constituting significant obstacles along the path of the Arab peoples' movement towards economic, social, and intellectual progress, adverse consequences are further aggravated within the framework of the existing world order of neoliberal globalisation.

* Admission to restrictions on democratic development in Iraq in no way constitutes acceptance of US justifications for continuation of sanctions, and now preparations for war. Without disregarding longstanding restrictions on democratic development in Iraqi society--as is the case in all Arab societies--it is evident that the US-imposed sanctions have had a devastating effect on Iraq's development. Whereas Iraq had once enjoyed a relatively positive profile according to certain human development indicators, its people now suffer severely as a result of the sanctions regime. Iraq has witnessed a significant rise in child mortality rates, the spread of several diseases, reduction of opportunities in education, and a marked deterioration of the standard of living. As human suffering increases it generates a sense of defeatism.

* The Palestinian people are suffering as a result of the loss of their land and continued Zionist aggression, which the US supports militarily, economically, and politically, making its administration a de facto accomplice in the crimes committed against the Palestinian people. The US protects Israel from condemnation in international forums under the pretext of combating terrorism, and it asserts additional false claims, such as when it equates the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people to resist occupation, liberate their land, and return to their homes on the one hand, with terrorism that we all abhor on the other.

* The policies of structural adjustment associated with neoliberal globalisation have precipitated global crises manifest in a widening wealth gap, increase in poverty and unemployment, and general deterioration of standards of living.

* The US military presence in the Arab region, and its dictates to governments of sovereign nations of the region, has compounded the suffering of the Arab people. Interference in the internal affairs

of these nations now extends to demands of educational reform, and insistence on 'democratisation'. Ironically this is occurring at a time when civil liberties in the US are clearly under siege, especially with regard to Arab and Muslim Americans, along with other minorities. The US administration also violates international law by its inhumane treatment of the POWs in Guantanamo. Also evident is the wealth gap in the US, which is the widest among the industrial nations of the world.

* Far from secretly, the US intends to partition Arab countries into smaller entities on ethnic or religious bases. This would enable Israel to become the dominant regional power within the framework of the Middle East Project, to the peril of an Arab project of equitable development and regional unity.

The suffering of the Arab people and the US's unwavering support of the system of apartheid imposed on the Palestinian people, will undoubtedly fuel conflict and lead to the escalation of violence in one of the most sensitive areas of the world. Such danger can easily extend to neighbouring Europe, Asia and Africa. Continued preparation for war on Iraq, in spite of its acceptance of a UN resolution of aggressive inspection of its armament, as well as civilian industries, signals a predetermined intent to control the Arab region, its oil and indeed the entire world supply of oil.

Third: For all these reasons we declare our total opposition to war on Iraq and our resolve to continue the struggle against US policies of global domination. We strongly believe in the urgency of mobilising against these policies. All democratic forces in the world that are for genuine peace and justice must join together within the framework of an international campaign against neoliberal, US-centric globalisation and promote an alternate globalism based on equity and justice. This would mean better utilisation of the world's resources and protection of the environment. Together the people of the world are quite able to combat aggression and all forms of injustice, prejudice and racism, and make a better world possible.

The Cairo conference against war on Iraq and in solidarity with Palestine represents the launching of an international popular movement that creates effective mechanisms for confronting policies of aggression. The participation of international activists who are prominent for their struggles for human dignity, rights and justice, as well as intellectuals, authors, unionists, human rights workers, journalists and artists--from Egypt and the rest of the Arab world, Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe, and the United States--will no doubt accelerate this noble endeavour in spite of the numerous obstacles that we have to confront.

Fourth: It is important that this international popular initiative of solidarity with Iraq and Palestine proceed according to an action plan which includes clearly defined priorities:

1. Condemnation of US military presence on Arab land along with pressuring the Arab governments that allow US military bases on their territory to close them down, and not to provide air, naval, or land facilities.
2. Develop cooperation among popular organisations of the South to reinforce solidarity in confronting the policies and practices of neoliberal globalisation and US hegemony.
3. Work towards cooperation with the international anti-globalisation movement of the North and South, and participate in activities and meetings organised by this movement.
4. Promote the unity of democratic forces and popular organisations in different parts of the world, and form solidarity committees which oppose war on Iraq, and the genocidal crimes faced by Palestinians, supporting their right to resistance and struggle for liberation.
5. Under the banner 'Together Against Globalisation and US Hegemony' add Iraq and Palestine to the agendas of international progressive meetings, particularly the next Social Forum at Porto Alegre.

6. Invite Arab and international human rights organisations to evaluate humanitarian conditions in Iraq and disseminate their findings worldwide.

7. Prepare to send human shields to Iraq.

8. Introduce the boycott of US and Israeli commodities in solidarity campaigns in support of Iraq and Palestine, with emphasis on the right of return for Palestinians.

9. Elect a steering committee to follow up on the implementation of the Cairo Declaration and coordination among organisations which commit to its principles, and enhance awareness through appropriate actions ranging from the preparation of posters to organising marches and demonstrations in solidarity with Iraq and Palestine.

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Europe endorses the call

Statement issued by the European Anti-War Coordination Meeting, Copenhagen, 15 December 2002:

'As agreed at the Assembly of the Social Movements in Florence in November, activists from 12 European countries, the US and the Philippines have come together in Copenhagen to coordinate European-wide action against war on Iraq.

We endorse the anti-war call launched at the assembly in Florence. We believe that a war on Iraq, with or without UN support, would be a disaster for the people of the Middle East and beyond.

It is clear there is majority opposition to war in almost every country in Europe and across the world. That is why this war cannot be fought in our name. This is also why we believe it is vital to build the broadest possible anti-war alliances everywhere around the demand No War on Iraq.

Our meeting shows that the movement against the war is gaining strength. All the countries represented have called action on 15 February. We reinforce the decision to protest in every country immediately war starts, to hold national protests the following Saturday and to organise coordinated mass national demonstrations in capital cities on February 15.

To this end we have decided to continue our coordination at a European level, to set up a European-wide anti-war website and to have a common banner on each of our demonstrations demanding No War on Iraq. We are committed to spreading anti-war coordination both inside and beyond Europe, and to holding another enlarged meeting after the 15 February demo. We will continue to campaign until this war is stopped.

We urge the movements in countries not represented at our meeting to join in our initiatives. We urge every organisation that opposes this war to work for a massive mobilisation on February 15. Together we can stop the war.'

Representatives of anti-war coalitions from Belgium, Denmark, England, France, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Macedonia, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the US and the Philippines.

<http://www.socialistreview.org.uk/article.php?articlenumber=8267>