

# “Rogue states” and UN inspections

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It will be recalled that only two months ago the United States came to the brink of war over the refusal of the Iraqi government to permit unrestricted access by United Nations weapons inspectors to certain sites within Iraq. President Clinton declared that in rebuffing the United Nations, Saddam Hussein, the leader of a “rogue state,” was defying the “civilized world.”

The American government has a far different opinion of UN inspections when they are carried out against the US itself. The rapporteur for the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Bacre Waly Ndiaye, discovered this during his three-week visit to the United States last fall to investigate how the US applies the death penalty.

Jesse Helms, the North Carolina Republican who heads the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, refused to meet with Ndiaye and urged the State Department not to cooperate with the UN probe.

Despite a US government pledge to collaborate with Ndiaye’s investigation, the UN representative found many doors closed to him. He was given access to Texas prisons and prisoners, but the state of California refused to allow him to interview the death row prisoners he requested, and the state of Florida denied him access to women prisoners on its death row.

The US delegate to the United Nations, Bill Richardson, a former Democratic congressman from New Mexico, dismissed Ndiaye’s report criticizing capital punishment in America, saying it “would only collect a lot of dust.”

Needless to say, had Iraqi officials acted with such undisguised contempt for the UN, American bombs would be falling on Baghdad.

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