

US, Britain block relaxation of Iraq inspections

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The United States and Britain blocked a Russian proposal Wednesday that would have meant the first easing of United Nations weapons inspections of Iraq. The threat of a veto by the two countries, both permanent members of the UN Security Council, blocked action on a resolution introduced by Russia with backing from France and China, the other three countries with veto power.

The plan devised by the Yeltsin regime would not have ended all nuclear inspections, but would have cut back the regime of monitoring, removing the omnipresent IAEA inspectors from Baghdad but permitting them to return without no notice and make random inspections.

A separate UN agency, the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM), conducts inspections for chemical and biological weapons and missile delivery systems. Its operations are to be reviewed by the Security Council in October. Both IAEA and UNSCOM must certify that the inspection process is completed before the Security Council will consider lifting the economic sanctions on Iraq, barring all but a trickle of food and medicine, which have been responsible for the deaths of an estimated 500,000 Iraqi children.

Russian officials cited a report delivered to the UN July 27 by the International Atomic Energy Agency, the UN-sponsored body which conducts nuclear weapons inspections in Iraq. The IAEA report reiterated conclusions the agency had reached in August 1997, when it found no evidence that Iraq possesses either nuclear weapons or the technical means and raw materials for making them.

But American UN Ambassador Bill Richardson pointed to language in the report criticizing Iraq for failing to deliver certain documents requested by the

IAEA, and noting that Iraq still possesses the technical expertise to begin a nuclear bomb-making program. This, he said, was grounds for continuing the nuclear weapons monitoring program at the same level of intensity that has been maintained since the end of the Persian Gulf war.

One portion of the IAEA report warns, 'There remains in Iraq a considerable intellectual resource in the form of the cadre of well-educated, highly experienced personnel.' After Richardson cited this passage, the French ambassador asked if it was a crime that 'Iraq keeps scientists as the report indicates.'

This exchange in the Security Council discussion sheds light on the barbaric aims which the Clinton administration and the British government of Tony Blair are pursuing. Their fundamental demand is not the dismantling of weapons, but the destruction of the capability of producing weapons, a demand which can only be fully met through the destruction of Iraq as a modern society equipped with scientists, technical knowledge, laboratory facilities, etc.

The IAEA report admits that there are 'no indications that Iraq has achieved its goal of producing nuclear weapons.' At the same time, the agency added, 'A statement by the IAEA that it has found 'no indication' of prohibited equipment, materials or activities ... is not the same as a statement of 'non-existence.'

The *Washington Post* highlighted this passage in its account of the release of the IAEA document, under a headline which, perhaps inadvertently, captures the absurdity of the US and UN position: 'Report Cites Absence of Evidence, Not Absence of Nuclear Arms.'

In other words, Iraq is to prove a negative, the nonexistence of nuclear weapons. The lack of evidence that Iraq has nuclear weapons is twisted, in the *Post* account, into something almost sinister: what are those

treacherous Iraqis hiding?

This should be contrasted with the approach taken by the media toward the far better documented charges that the United States used nerve gas during the Vietnam War. The CNN producers who made these charges in a recent documentary have been fired, the program has been retracted, and the media is in full hue and cry over the terrible 'injustice' done to the American military.

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