

New US provocation against Iraq

Martin McLaughlin
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The chief weapons inspector for the United Nations, Australian diplomat Richard Butler, cut short a visit to Baghdad Monday and returned to New York City after the collapse of talks on the conditions for lifting UN sanctions against Iraq.

The UN Security Council will discuss the breakdown of talks Wednesday, amid reports suggesting that the US and Britain will seek to use the incident as the pretext for the long-planned escalation of political, economic and military pressure against the regime of Saddam Hussein.

Butler refused to discuss the details of the negotiations until after he briefs the Security Council, other than to say that Iraqi leaders, headed by Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz, had demanded immediate certification by the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) that Iraq does not possess chemical and biological weapons or offensive missiles.

'I told him that I cannot fulfill your demand because I don't have the evidence,' Butler said. The UN sanctions are to continue until UNSCOM certifies to the Security Council that Iraq is without such weapons. Iraqi officials have charged that UNSCOM continually escalates its demands for inspection and documentation in a process--proving a negative--which is for all practical purposes neverending.

The Butler-Aziz talks took place under tense conditions in Baghdad. At one point during the negotiations, the bodies of 35 children who died recently because of the UN economic blockade, were brought past the meeting place in a funeral procession.

Tariq Aziz reiterated the longstanding Iraqi complaint that UNSCOM is dominated by the United States and Britain, the two countries that spearheaded the 1991 Persian Gulf war, and therefore is not an objective or neutral body. He accused Butler of 'serving the American policy' of prolonging sanctions indefinitely.

'I have had ... the impression that UNSCOM is back

to its old games and tricks,' he said, referring to an incident July 28 when an American UNSCOM inspector was caught hiding behind a UN truck taking photos of a train transporting military equipment. An Iraqi who was accompanying the inspection team accused the US inspector of espionage and the film was subsequently destroyed. This evidence of US spying was not reported in the American press.

American intervention in Iraq has been publicly intensified in the last two weeks, however. On July 23-24 US Undersecretary of State David Welch visited northern Iraq, the highest-ranking US official to visit the zone run by Iraqi Kurdish militias outside of Saddam Hussein's control.

Over strenuous Iraqi protests, Welch held talks with two rival Iraqi Kurdish leaders, Masud Barzani of the Kurdish Democratic Party and Jalal Talabani of the Popular Union of Kurdistan, and extended an invitation from the Clinton administration for both to visit Washington later this year. The State Department later issued a statement declaring the visit, 'a useful expression of the US role in northern Iraq.'

On July 26 the *Washington Post* reported that the Clinton administration has submitted to Congress a 27-page plan for the political destabilization of Iraq, calling for the establishment of a Radio Free Iraq and pumping another \$5 million to fund a center for Iraqi exile political activities in London and to gather documents for a possible war crimes trial for Saddam Hussein and other senior leaders of the Ba'athist regime.

While the CIA and State Department openly conspire at the overthrow of the Iraqi government, the American media, working in close coordination, seek to prepare public opinion for a new diplomatic confrontation and ultimately for further US military action in the region.

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