

UNSCOM aided Pentagon targeting

Controversy mounts over role of UN inspectors in Iraq

Martin McLaughlin
18 December 1998

The role of the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) in Iraq has come under public attack, with charges that the UN weapons inspectors deliberately provoked a confrontation with Iraqi officials to provide the Clinton administration with a pretext for launching its air war.

Russian officials at the UN Security Council denounced UNSCOM chief inspector Richard Butler, saying that the crisis 'was created artificially as a result of irresponsible acts' by Butler. Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov demanded that Butler resign, charging that he 'bore personal responsibility for this turn of events.'

Both UN and US officials have confirmed the extraordinary degree of collaboration between UNSCOM and the Pentagon and CIA. Secretary of Defense William Cohen indicated that US officials had been kept informed of UNSCOM activities minute-by-minute during the month between the last previous confrontation with Iraq, which ended November 15, and the launching of Wednesday's air strikes.

While President Clinton claimed that Butler's report on UNSCOM's inspection activities during the past month, officially delivered to the UN Security Council on Tuesday, was the trigger for the air raids, both UN and Pentagon officials said that the US government actually participated in the drafting of the document, essentially writing its own pretext for war.

The actual record of UNSCOM activities shows virtually complete cooperation by Iraq with even the most provocative demands of the UN inspectors. UNSCOM inspectors carried out 299 visits to previously inspected sites and 128 visits to new sites during the period from November 15 to December 14.

Of those 427 visits, there were a total of 5 in which they claim to have encountered 'obstacles' from Iraq.

These five incidents, the supposed cause for the massive US air strikes, include one instance where UN inspectors were kept waiting for 45 minutes, another where Iraqi officials sought to limit the number of inspectors to four, and two more where entry was denied at locations where the entire work force had gone home because it was Friday, a day of rest in many Moslem countries.

In their attempts to deflect criticism that Clinton launched the air strikes to divert public attention from the impeachment drive in Washington, US government spokesmen have revealed that the war against Iraq was being planned down to the last detail for at least a month.

From the time that Clinton called off air raids November 15, with US B-52 bombers actually in the air and headed for Baghdad, the Pentagon planners had targeted the week beginning December 14 as the next possible window of opportunity for air strikes, because the new moon provides the best conditions for nighttime air raids.

The 'routine' recycling of US military forces, allowing those stationed in the Persian Gulf for the past six months to return home for the holidays, meant that during the week before Christmas there would be two aircraft carriers in the region, one arriving and one preparing to leave, thus doubling the available forces. Similarly, two groups of B-52 bombers are now at the US base on Diego Garcia island, in the Indian Ocean, from which they have launched devastating cruise missile attacks.

There is no doubt that the actions of the UNSCOM

inspectors, as well as the timing of Butler's report to the Security Council, were just as carefully planned as the movement of ships and planes. According to General Henry Shelton, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, since Butler's report was due to be delivered December 15--a fact known well in advance--December 16 was always the prime target day for US air strikes.

UNSCOM not only cooperated in providing the political pretext for the attacks, the UN inspectors served as virtual bomb spotters for the Pentagon. A series of reports in the American press provides extraordinarily blunt confirmation of the intelligence gathering role of the supposedly neutral and 'professional' agency.

The *Los Angeles Times* wrote December 17, 'The Pentagon has been accumulating information since the Gulf War that it could use for such an assault. It has a pile of information from the work of the United Nations Special Commission.' The *Washington Post*, in its front-page account of the preparation of the air strikes, wrote, 'U.S. planners benefited immensely from seven years of intelligence gathered by UN weapons inspectors.'

The *Wall Street Journal* spelled out the UN role in the most detail, writing: 'American military planners know a lot more about Iraq than they did in January 1991. Back then, the targeting followed just six months of hurried work by military-intelligence specialists, much of it guesswork. By contrast, the campaign that began yesterday draws on seven years of study, bolstered by the findings of UN weapons inspectors and the revelations of several high-level Iraqi defectors.'

These reports cast a new and sinister light on the activities of UNSCOM during the past year, when the agency's inspectors have focused their attention on surprise visits to so-called presidential sites within Iraq--that is, the various public buildings and residences set aside for the personal use of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. The question is posed: were UNSCOM's operations dictated by the need of the Pentagon to gather intelligence on the movements of the Iraqi leader, so that he could be targeted for US attack?

In a television interview Thursday, retired General Norman Schwarzkopf, the chief US commander in the Persian Gulf war, said that on the first night of US air strikes on Iraq in January 1991 bombs and missiles had

hit every known residence and hiding place of the Iraqi president. There is no doubt that similar efforts are being made in Operation Desert Fox. One of the sites hit in the first night's attacks was the home of the Iraqi president's daughter.

From a tactical standpoint, the current air strikes are the closest thing to an assassination attempt which the US military can carry out. From the point of view of the political goals declared by Clinton and other administration officials, the raids will be a strategic success only if the Iraqi president himself is killed. And according to one analyst cited in the *Wall Street Journal*, the US is also launching covert operations using Iraqi exiles with the goal of killing Saddam Hussein during the current crisis.

See Also:

Clinton's attack on Iraq

Military aggression and political diversion

[17 December 1998]

New Caspian oil interests fuel US war drive against Iraq

[16 November 1998]



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact