

Gangsterism in the guise of diplomacy

US flaunts scheme to use weapons inspections as pretext for war vs. Iraq

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A measure of the cynicism of the US political establishment is its undisguised use of weapons inspections as a pretext to launch a new war against Iraq.

In recent weeks US officials have openly discussed their campaign in the United Nations Security Council for a renewal of weapons inspections as a *casus belli* to manipulate public opinion for a new military assault. It is remarkable that American officials no longer feel the need to conceal the duplicity of their policy toward the Persian Gulf country.

Bush administration officials hardly bother to conceal their contempt for the UN and international public opinion as a whole. A series of reports in the US press have cited unnamed US officials setting forth the scheme to devise new sanctions so onerous that Saddam Hussein will be bound to reject them, or, alternately, to impose a regime of inspections so intrusive and provocative that, sooner rather than later, the Iraqis will balk, creating the pretext for a new US military assault aimed at toppling the government in Baghdad.

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld is among the American officials who have all but boasted of using the UN as a cat's paw in the US war preparations. He recently said new inspections would "have to be far more intrusive" and involve "the Iraqis not controlling when they come in, where they could go, what they could do." Rumsfeld added, "The Iraqis aren't going to agree to something like that."

The fact that the renewed campaign for weapons inspections is a mere pretext for war is underscored by events since September 11. Within hours of the terror attacks on New York and Washington, the most militaristic faction of the administration began lobbying to extend the "war on terror" to Iraq. They faced a problem, however. There was no evidence Iraq had anything to do with the September 11 attacks.

The "bomb Iraq now" zealots, headed within the administration by Rumsfeld and his deputy Paul Wolfowitz,

shifted their tactics after the anthrax attacks in October. Editorials appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* and other sounding boards of the most extreme war faction insisting that the Iraqi regime was the source of the anthrax sent through the mail to congressional Democratic leaders and various media figures. This pretext for war collapsed when it emerged that the anthrax came from a domestic source.

The White House then came up with the scheme to use weapons inspections to provoke a crisis with the Baghdad regime, which could be used to justify military action that had already been decided upon. US officials are demanding unrestricted access for UN inspectors, including access to Saddam Hussein's personal security apparatus.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan was expected to meet with a high-level Iraqi delegation Thursday to demand the renewal of inspections. Before the meeting Hans Blix, the head of the UN inspections commission, told the *New York Times* the UN wants unrestricted access and no Iraqi veto over the nationality of inspectors. Echoing US demands, Blix said, "There are no sanctuaries. The resolutions make it quite clear that there should be access that is unconditional, immediate and unrestricted."

The *Times* acknowledged that the Bush administration calculates the Iraqi government will be compelled to reject these demands. "The question hanging over the United Nations now is whether the United States really wants arms inspectors to return, based on public comments made by Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld questioning their value. Some diplomats say the United States would not want inspectors on the ground if a military attack were being planned; the last inspectors to work in Iraq had to be pulled out ahead of American bombing in 1998."

Iraq barred UN inspectors from reentering the country after charging they were working with US, British and Israeli intelligence agencies to spy on the Iraqi security apparatus and track Hussein's movements in preparation for an assassination attempt against the Iraqi leader. These

accusations were confirmed in articles published by the *Washington Post* and *Boston Globe* in January 1999, following US air strikes that included attacks on Hussein's personal security detachment.

Well aware that Iraq's weapons program has long been dismantled—after the Gulf War and more than a decade of inspections and sanctions—US demands for ever more intrusive searches are a transparent effort to justify a military attack already in advanced planning stages. Military analysts acknowledge that a renewed dispute over inspections would give the Pentagon time to prepare an invasion.

Retired Air Force General Charles G. Boyd, who runs the Washington office of the influential Council on Foreign Relations, told the *Washington Post* the US military presence in the region could be gradually increased while the administration pressed Iraq at the United Nations. "I would send them [US troops] in while banging the drums on the need for more opening to inspectors," Boyd said.

Even in the event that Iraq allows inspectors back in the country, Rumsfeld, Secretary of State Colin Powell and other US officials have already laid the groundwork to justify war. Rumsfeld told CBS-TV's *Face the Nation*, "Under the best circumstances, inspectors have a very, very difficult time, because you're dealing with a regime that ... kills people, that lies, that's had years to hide things."

In other words, if inspectors are allowed back in, they will carry out one provocation after another in order to charge the Iraqi regime with "obstruction," thereby providing a rationale for military action.

The White House's ploys are openly discussed in the American media, which report them without the slightest criticism. "Conceivably, the Bush administration could muster some support by provoking a *casus belli*," comments *Newsweek* magazine in its March 4 issue. "This spring the UN Security Council is expecting to demand that Saddam allow in international arms inspectors to identify and eliminate his WMD [Weapons of Mass Destruction]. Bush administration officials fear, however, that Saddam will play the fox and say yes."

A senior administration official told *Newsweek* the United States will demand "total, unfettered, 24-hour-a-day, 365-day-a-year" inspection rights. Commenting on this, the magazine concludes, "Saddam is not likely to permit arms-control inspectors in his bedroom."

Meanwhile, *Newsweek* reports, the CIA is continuing its long-term covert operations to undermine Hussein and foment a coup from inside the military, "a plan agency officials say is enhanced by increased UN pressure combined with the ongoing buildup of US forces in the area."

The *Washington Post* wrote February 24: "The assumption

is that either Hussein will acquiesce, something the administration views as unlikely, or his continued refusal will help convince the world that all peaceful options have been exhausted."

Summing up the position of the administration *USA Today* wrote on February 27, "To give the impression of building the widest possible coalition against Iraq, US officials are going through the motions of implementing UN agreements, the officials say. That includes making proposals that may be difficult for US allies, as well as Iraq, to accept."

The newspaper then noted approvingly, "Before resorting to military action, the administration wants to be able to say that it tried other options." It concluded, "Diplomatic efforts also provide time for the United States to prepare for military action."

There is nothing new in US administrations using the bogeyman of "weapons of mass destruction," or similar pretexts, to obscure their war aims. This has certainly been the modus operandi since the Gulf War, and was used by the Clinton administration to justify repeated air strikes and the maintenance of economic sanctions, which have claimed more than a million Iraqi lives. What is new is that US officials openly admit to using the supposed threat of Iraqi WMDs as a *casus belli*.

This is indicative of the gangster-like character of the Bush administration, which feels it is accountable to no one but its corporate and military overseers. Blind to the deep-seated anger and resentment generated throughout the world by their arrogance and bullying, Bush officials are plunging the entire Middle East along a road leading to catastrophe.

The administration feels it can operate in this manner largely because it faces no opposition from the corporate-controlled news media or the Democratic Party. Al Gore, the Democratic presidential candidate in 2000, recently emerged from political semi-retirement to declare his full support for war against Iraq, saying the US should "go the limit" to overthrow the regime in Baghdad. Earlier this week, Gore's 2000 running mate, Senator Joseph Lieberman, reiterated his support for a military assault against Iraq and assured the White House it could initiate such action without seeking the approval of Congress.



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