

Bush at the UN: Washington's war ultimatum to the world

The Editorial Board
13 September 2002

George W. Bush went before the United Nations General Assembly Thursday to reiterate Washington's plans for war against Iraq and issue an ultimatum to the UN itself: rubber stamp American aggression or become "irrelevant."

Aside from its arrogant and bullying tone, the entire speech was based on a glaring contradiction: Saddam Hussein had to be punished and overthrown because he has flouted the will of the UN, and the United States will invade Iraq and install a puppet regime whether the UN likes it or not!

This double standard pervaded Bush's every utterance. The underlying premise can be summed up as follows: the imperialist states can do what they want; the semi-colonial states must do what they are told.

The bellicose substance behind Bush's talk of world peace and security was underscored by the Pentagon's announcement, on the eve of the US president's UN appearance, that some 600 officers under General Tommy Franks would be moved in November from the US Central Command's headquarters in Florida to the Persian Gulf state of Qatar, where they will set up a forward war command. The timing of the announcement was intended to leave no doubt as to Washington's intentions.

Without stating so directly, Bush implicitly demanded that the UN Security Council adopt a resolution ordering Iraq to allow UN weapons inspectors to reenter the country within a matter of weeks, and give them unfettered access to any and all Iraqi installations. Such a resolution would sanction, in advance, the use of military force should Iraq fail to comply in full.

At the same time, Bush made it clear that the passage of such a resolution, whether or not Baghdad complied, would only be a prelude to a US invasion and the installation of a puppet government subservient to Washington.

Bush's speech was a compendium of the lies, distortions and contradictions that pervade the US brief for war against Iraq. It was based on the absurd premise that the Iraqi regime represents the world's greatest threat to peace and security—a threat so dire and so imminent that immediate military action is required.

Bush reiterated the US claim that Saddam Hussein is a modern-day Hitler, declaring the UN was founded so that the "peace of the world" would never again be "destroyed by the will and wickedness of any man." The Iraqi regime was, he said, "exactly the kind of aggressive threat the United Nations was born to confront."

It does not take an abundance of critical judgment to perceive the

outlandishness of such assertions. Iraq is an impoverished former colony, defeated in war and devastated by more than a decade of sanctions. Its defenses have been decimated since the Gulf War of 1991. The United States has waged non-stop war—diplomatic, economic and military—against the virtually defenseless country. It continues to bomb military and civilian targets in the north and south of Iraq on a nearly daily basis.

Bush speaks for the most powerful imperialist country in the world, armed to the teeth with the most advanced and deadly weapons of mass destruction. It has used its unchallenged military might to devastate far weaker and smaller countries, laying waste to Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s, and attacking in the space of two decades a host of other states: Lebanon, Grenada, Libya, Panama, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, Yugoslavia and Afghanistan.

It presently has military forces deployed in dozens of locations around the world, and has spent the past year pounding Afghanistan—killing thousands of civilians and massacring hundreds of captured Taliban and Al Qaeda soldiers.

One of the defining features of the German Nazi regime was its virulent militarism and contempt for international law and world opinion. It is the Bush administration, in its use of military force as the basic component of foreign policy, that resembles, more than any other present-day government, the Hitler regime. Bush's performance at the UN epitomized his government's belligerence and disdain for international law.

Bush made no attempt to provide evidence of Iraq's alleged buildup of chemical, biological or nuclear weapons. His administration takes the position that it has no need to do so. The people of the US and the world are told they must simply accept Washington's word.

The obvious explanation for this stance is that the US has no serious evidence to back up its charges. The day before Bush's UN speech, senior US intelligence officials admitted that the government had failed to compile a new national intelligence estimate of Iraq's nuclear, chemical and biological weapons capacities. The last such cross-agency analysis was prepared some two years ago. Bob Graham, the Florida Democrat who heads the Senate Intelligence Committee, requested a new assessment last July, to no avail.

It is instructive to compare the present "believe us or else" posture of the US government with the approach taken by the Kennedy administration during the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962. At that time, the US ruling elite considered it mandatory,

prior to taking any military action against Cuba, to go before the United Nations and provide clear proof that Cuba was deploying Soviet missiles. The US ambassador to the UN, Adlai Stevenson, displayed blow-ups of US reconnaissance photos showing the missile sites to a meeting of the Security Council.

Lacking such proof, Bush's brief for war boiled down to two arguments. First, the Iraqi regime menaced the world because it *might* turn over its alleged weapons of mass destruction to terrorist groups, which might then use them to carry out attacks even more devastating than those of last September 11. Iraq might even, in the near future, build a nuclear weapon. "The first time we may be completely certain he has a nuclear weapon is when, God forbid, he uses one," Bush declared.

In other words, the UN had to sanction a US war to the finish against Saddam Hussein not because of what the Iraqi dictator had done, but because of what he *might do* in the future. This novel justification for war could, quite obviously, be used by any country to justify a preemptive attack on any other country.

More concretely, it could—and undoubtedly would—be used by the US to justify military attacks on a number of other countries which, as every UN delegate knows, have been targeted by the war cabal within the Bush administration—in particular, Syria, Iran and Korea.

The second argument consisted of a litany of UN Security Council resolutions passed after the 1991 Gulf War which, according to Bush, Iraq had defied. Bush demanded that the UN give its imprimatur to US military action, in the name of enforcing these resolutions.

The first thing to be said about this argument is that the resolutions themselves constitute the framework of a victor's peace, imposed at the behest of the US and its imperialist allies in the 1991 Gulf War. They testify to the essential role of the United Nations as a tool of the great powers.

These measures, imposing stringent economic sanctions and stripping Iraq of its sovereignty, were designed to starve and humiliate the Iraqis and cripple the country, so that the US could strengthen its grip on Iraq's rich oil resources, with the promise of a share of the booty going to Britain, France, Germany and Japan.

No such sanctions have ever been imposed on the US or the other imperialist powers for their acts of subversion and violence against scores of countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

In his catalogue of Iraq's sins, Bush neglected to mention the manner in which the US distorted and abused the provisions of the UN resolutions in order to create provocations and launch repeated bombing attacks on the country. These include the imposition of "no fly" zones in the north and south of Iraq, implemented without the benefit of UN sanction, and the infiltration of CIA spies among the UN weapons inspectors, who helped pinpoint targets for US missiles and supplied intelligence for US assassination attempts against Saddam Hussein and other Iraqi leaders.

Bush referred euphemistically to Iraq's "ceasing cooperation entirely" with the weapons inspectors in 1998, without mentioning that the UN withdrew its inspectors in advance of the four-day US-British air war launched in December of that year—an assault that was carried out without the approval of the Security Council.

Nor did he note that the US unilaterally, in 1998, declared its

policy toward Iraq to be, not simply the enforcement of UN sanctions, but the removal of the regime—a policy that violates the UN charter.

Bush's supposed concern for the inviolability of UN authority highlighted the hypocrisy that pervades the US position. Bush had nothing to say about its closest ally in the Middle East, Israel, which has flaunted UN resolutions demanding its withdrawal from the occupied territories for more than 35 years.

The US, moreover, refuses to be bound by UN resolutions that it finds inexpedient. It is presently engaged in an open effort to sabotage the International Criminal Court, newly established by the UN to try war criminals.

Bush topped off his tirade against Iraq with the standard American denunciations of Saddam Hussein's invasion of Iran and use of chemical weapons during the Iran-Iraq war. He omitted the fact that the US supported Saddam Hussein against Iran, helped him develop chemical and biological weapons, and tacitly sanctioned his use of chemical weapons against Iran and its Kurdish allies in the north of Iraq.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, who preceded Bush to the podium on Thursday, made it clear that the United Nations was prepared to give the US the legal fig leaf it seeks for a new war against Iraq. Annan, in a typical display of cringing before Washington, held up the US-led war of 1991 as a model of "multilateral" action. The essence of his remarks was a plea for the US to continue to use the services of the UN. When embarking on war, Annan advised Bush, "there is no substitute for the unique legitimacy provided by the United Nations."

Annan spoke above all for the lesser imperialist powers such as France and the other Security Council members holding veto power, Russia and China, which are prepared to pass a resolution authorizing military action against Iraq in exchange for assurances that Washington will take their interests in the Gulf and elsewhere into consideration.

Taken as a whole, the opening of the UN General Assembly session provided a stark warning of the catastrophic implications of the eruption of American militarism, and the hopelessness of any opposition that bases itself on appeals to the United Nations or Washington's imperialist rivals. There is only one force that can halt the US war drive, and that is the international working class, mobilized on the basis of a socialist perspective.



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