

US plan for Iraq inspections: invasion under another guise

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George W. Bush and his junior partner, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, have repeatedly insisted that their aim is to “disarm” the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Their justification for preparing an invasion of the Arab nation is Iraq’s alleged refusal to comply with UN resolutions on weapons inspections.

The reality is that Washington is straining every muscle to block two United Nations inspection agencies from returning to Iraq, while proposing a new Security Council resolution that is aimed at scuttling the entire process.

After an agreement was reached a week ago between Iraq and UN officials to allow the inspectors to return with “unconditional and unrestricted access” to all sites, the State Department’s spokesman announced that Washington was going into “thwart mode”—which means, in practice, using intimidation and bribery to prevent the plan from being implemented.

There are no valid legal or procedural grounds for the US stonewalling of the inspectors. Their proposed return would be carried out under terms set by the UN four years ago that were accepted by the US. Iraq has agreed to an even more intrusive UN presence in its recent negotiation with Hans Blix, chairman of UNMOVIC (United Nations Monitoring Verification and Inspection Commission).

The Bush administration has two basic reasons for opposing resumption of inspections. First, it is universally recognized by those familiar with Iraq’s weapons programs and capabilities that Washington’s fear-mongering about Iraqi “weapons of mass destruction” is based on outright lies and gross exaggerations. The return of inspectors would soon make that clear.

Second, if weapons inspectors were sent back to Iraq, it could disrupt a timetable that has already been worked out for a US invasion. Military planners have recommended that the ideal period for launching an unprovoked war against the Arab nation is during the coolest months of January and February, which present the best conditions for nighttime attacks as well as for the use of chemical-protective gear by US troops. The bombing to prepare the way for an invasion force could begin even earlier. With hundreds of UN inspectors still completing their work inside Iraq, an invasion could be placed on hold for several more months.

The US reaction to the UNMOVIC-Iraqi agreement makes clear that allegations about the Baghdad regime’s development of “weapons of mass destruction” have never been anything more than a pretext. The administration in Washington is determined to carry out a long-planned war aimed at achieving geopolitical and economic interests bound up with seizing control of Iraq’s oilfields, the second-richest in the world.

The blunt instrument that the Bush administration has chosen for the purpose of demolishing the agreement reached by the UN is a Security Council resolution crafted to provoke an Iraqi rejection, thereby providing the pretext for a US invasion. In the unlikely event of Baghdad’s acquiescence to the US demands, the resolution would provide the framework for a US military occupation of the country under the guise of

weapons inspections.

A draft of this resolution leaked to the press last week makes clear Washington’s real intentions. The proposal sets a deadline of seven days for Iraq to submit to the US proposal, and another 23 days to make a “full and complete declaration of all aspects of its programs to develop chemical, biological and nuclear weapons.”

If Iraq is found to have given “false statements” to the UN, the resolution allows “member states” to immediately use “all necessary means to restore international peace and security in the area.” In other words, if Baghdad denies the US allegations that it has resumed its weapons programs, Washington is free to declare that it is lying and launch an invasion aimed at “regime change” and the US occupation of the country.

The deadline is itself a manifestation not of Washington’s desire to “toughen” inspections, but of its cynical tailoring of US diplomatic maneuvers to further the ongoing preparations for military aggression. Undoubtedly the time period given for declaring Iraq out of compliance was determined by counting backwards from the Pentagon’s planned date for launching US air strikes.

In the unlikely event that this first hurdle is cleared and inspections actually go forward, Washington’s proposal provides for the entry of US troops into Iraq on a scale approximating that of a full-scale invasion and the imposition of conditions that no sovereign government in the world could accept.

First, the resolution stipulates that any of the five permanent member states on the Security Council may join the inspections, sending their own personnel and enjoying the same rights of unrestricted entry into Iraq and into any site or building in the country.

In practice, this would mean the hijacking of the inspections regime by Washington, which would be able to flood special operations troops and CIA agents into Iraq posing as inspectors. US officials have admitted many of the Americans involved in the inspections in the 1990s were Green Berets out of uniform or military intelligence officers. It was revealed in 1999 that these covert operatives used the inspections as a cover for gathering intelligence on Iraqi defenses and on the movements of Saddam Hussein in preparation for future US military actions.

Some of these agents supplied the location coordinates of Iraqi facilities to the US Air Force, which used the information for targeting air strikes—the same methodology employed so effectively in Afghanistan against the Taliban regime.

The resolution further demands that inspection teams be provided with “bases” throughout Iraq and that both they and their bases be protected by armed troops. These would be supplied by Washington. The document reserves the right for inspectors and the US military forces accompanying them to declare “no fly/no drive zones,” “exclusion zones” and secure “ground and air transit corridors” whenever and wherever they see fit. The result would be the fragmentation of the country into various occupied zones.

Finally, it allows inspectors and the US government, as a member of the Security Council, to take Iraqi scientists and officials together with their entire families out of the country for interrogation.

Hans Blix, the UNMOVIC chairman, was reported to have balked at the US proposal, questioning the need for military-enforced “exclusion zones” and, according to one UN diplomat, expressing the belief that “the UN shouldn’t be in the business of spiriting people out of the country.”

There is a clear precedent for this kind of diplomatic ultimatum. In 1999, the US led a devastating NATO bombing campaign against Serbia on the pretext of defending ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. The pseudo-legal justification for that war was Belgrade’s refusal to sign the Rambouillet Accord.

The conference in Rambouillet was supposed to forge a negotiated agreement on Kosovo autonomy, which Yugoslavia was prepared to accept. Instead, at Washington’s instigation, the final accord demanded that Belgrade accept the right of NATO military forces to “free and unrestricted passage and unimpeded access” throughout all Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo as well as their airspace and territorial waters.

In short, it would have meant a US occupation without a shot being fired. Not surprisingly, the Yugoslav government rejected the agreement, and Washington used its opposition as the pretext for launching an air war that claimed thousands of lives and left much of the country’s infrastructure in ruins.

With the current proposal, the State Department has put together another offer that can only be refused in order to pave the way to war.

Three members of the Security Council with veto powers—China, France and Russia—have all expressed opposition to the proposed resolution. France in particular has insisted that any resolution granting authorization for military action should be passed only after inspections are thwarted. If the US-backed resolution is vetoed, there is substantial support within the administration for moving toward unilateral action, while proclaiming that Washington attempted to make the UN act, but it shirked its duty.

From the end of the Persian Gulf War more than a decade ago, the weapons inspection regime has served as a cat’s paw for US military intervention in Iraq and has been carried out under terms that represent a fundamental violation of international law and Iraqi sovereignty.

Many of those involved in the inspections, including former US Marine intelligence officer Scott Ritter, acknowledge that the inspections succeeded in effectively disarming Iraq by 1998, when Washington pressured the UN to pull out of the country on the eve of a US bombing campaign.

In an interview this week with the Portuguese daily *Diario de Noticias*, Ritter charged that the new Security Council resolution backed by the US is “designed so that Saddam Hussein will reject it and refuse to allow the return of weapons inspectors.” He added: “It is not a resolution that has as a goal the disarmament of Iraq; its goal is to humiliate Iraq. The only purpose is to provoke Iraqi obstruction, which will then allow the US to start a war.”

From the outset, the inspections mandate has provided an open-ended pretext for intervention into Iraqi affairs and the continuation of the punishing sanctions imposed upon the country after its defeat in the unequal confrontation of 1990-91.

Despite the wholesale destruction of Iraq’s military hardware during and after the last war, it is virtually impossible to prove the negative—that Iraq does not somewhere possess such weapons. Therefore, the inspections are never deemed completed.

While Iraq’s cooperation with the inspections was supposed to have led to the lifting of economic sanctions against the country, Washington has repeatedly blocked the fulfillment of this agreement. According to UN sources, 1.5 million Iraqi civilians, more than a third of them children, have died as a result of the economic sanctions. Many are victims of malnutrition and diseases that are caused in large part by the decimation

of Iraq’s water-treatment and health care facilities and other basic infrastructure as a result of the war and the sanctions regime.

The weapons inspections are part of an entire framework of continued aggression against Iraq that includes the unilateral imposition of no-fly zones by the US and Britain over northern and southern Iraq and the continuous aerial bombardment of these areas by US and British warplanes.

While undoubtedly Saddam Hussein heads a despotic regime that oppresses its own people, the claim that Iraq’s attempts to arm itself with advanced weapons is driven by plans for terror and aggression is spurious. What the war propagandists in Washington always conceal is the fact that Iraq confronts a nuclear-armed Israel in the region, a country that has invaded neighboring states more times than any other in the world.

While preparing to seize upon Iraq’s—or the United Nations Security Council’s—expected rejection of the US proposal on weapons inspections as a pretext for invasion, Washington has routinely blocked any attempts to subject its own massive biological, chemical and nuclear programs to international scrutiny.

Last year, US negotiators effectively gutted the 30-year-old Biological Weapons Convention, blocking international efforts to develop an inspection and enforcement mechanism under the aegis of the UN.

Both the Bush and Clinton administrations have similarly attempted to undermine the Chemical Weapons Convention. US government officials have carried out precisely the conduct that Washington has cited in relation to the Iraqi regime as a pretext for military aggression—blocking inspectors from entering selected parts of facilities and vetoing inspectors based on their nationality.

Moreover, the US reserves the right to simply refuse inspections altogether. In 1997, the US Senate passed the Chemical Weapons Convention Implementation Act, which stipulates that “The President may deny a request to inspect any facility in the United States in cases where the President determines that the inspection may pose a threat to the national security interests of the United States.”

Meanwhile, there is ample evidence that the Pentagon is continuing the extensive development of germ warfare capabilities under the cover of research for defense against biological attacks. Plans were revealed earlier this year for testing warheads containing live microbes at the US Army’s Edgewood Chemical Biological Center in Maryland.

And, as is now well known, US biological warfare laboratories are continuing the development of more lethal strains of anthrax, one of which was used in the fatal attacks carried out, apparently by one of the Pentagon’s own scientists, in October 2001.

There is little danger that the United Nations will attempt to impose sanctions on the US for violating international treaties regarding “weapons of mass destruction.” The present crisis is demonstrating once again the role of this body as an instrument utilized by the US and the other major powers to provide a multinational fig leaf for policies of aggression and exploitation directed against the oppressed and former colonial countries.

The “international law” repeatedly invoked by Bush as grounds for preemptive war against Iraq applies only to the poor and relatively powerless nations of the world. For itself, US imperialism recognizes only the law of the jungle.



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