

Bush advisor tells British MPs: war against Iraq regardless of UN findings

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One of President Bush's top security advisers, Richard Perle, told British members of Parliament (MPs) at a November 15 all-party meeting that the United States intends to attack Iraq even if United Nations inspectors fail to find any weapons.

Perle is the chairman of the Defense Policy Board, an advisory panel to the Pentagon. He said that a "clean bill of health" from Hans Blix, who heads the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNSCOM), would not prevent the US from declaring war on Baghdad. "All [Blix] can know is the results of his own investigations. And that does not prove Saddam does not have weapons of mass destruction," Perle insisted.

If evidence from even one witness came to light of Saddam Hussein's weapons programme, he continued, this would be enough to trigger a military onslaught. He told the British MPs: "Suppose we are able to find someone who has been involved in the development of weapons and he says there are stores of nerve agents. But you cannot find them because they are so well hidden. Do you actually have to take possession of the nerve agents to convince? We are not dealing with a situation where you can expect cooperation."

Two days prior to these remarks, Perle gave an even more provocative interview to the *Guardian* newspaper, in which he said Iraq was only the first in a series of countries that the US would target. Others included Iran, Syria and North Korea. Referring to North Korea's admission that it had a nuclear weapons programme, Perle declared, "There are some people you can't do deals with. You could not do a deal with Hitler, and you can't do a deal with Saddam Hussein or with North Korea."

Perle's statements underscore the cynicism behind the Bush administration's official support for renewed

weapons inspections. Sending in the UN was never more than a manoeuvre to provide both a cover and a pretext for going to war. The deceit was forced on the US by the reluctance of its European allies.

But if the inspectors' findings do not provide the necessary pretext, they will be ignored in favour of some other excuse, even if this is the word of just one man. It should be noted that the US is publicly offering a Green Card to any Iraqi scientist willing to proclaim the existence of a secret weapons programme.

Few MPs at the November 15 joint-party meeting had any desire to make a public issue of Perle's remarks, given the prevailing view in British ruling circles that the UK must do everything necessary to placate the Bush administration if it is to continue to enjoy a role on the world stage. Moreover, the Blair government is attempting to uphold the fiction that the resumption of weapons inspections is an honest and serious attempt to avoid war.

It was left to a former defence minister who is now a marginalised Labour Party backbencher, Peter Kilfoyle, to complain: "America is duping the world into believing it supports these inspections. President Bush intends to go to war even if inspectors find nothing."

Perle's remarks received little coverage in the press, where Bush's decision to utilise the services of the UN has been portrayed as a retreat, under European pressure, from his unilateralist posture. This grossly distorted and self-serving version of events has an important political function. Labour Party "lefts" and those newspapers that tend to reflect their views have latched onto the façade of "multilateralism" and UN legality to justify acquiescing in an imperialist assault on Iraq.

Typical of this species of deception and self-delusion is an op-ed piece by Hugo Young in the November 19

Guardian, headlined “Bush Now Seems to Accept that This Must Be a UN War.” Regarding UN weapons inspections, Young asserts, “The pattern of [Iraqi] obstruction will need to be conclusive before war starts. This is because Bush has become, in effect, an internationalist.”

Thus, Young suggests, it is no longer legitimate to oppose a war against Iraq. “[T]he issue now... is not the simple one of American superpowerdom and whether Blair should be tailgating in its wake,” he writes.

Perle’s every utterance was a refutation of such wishful thinking. In the *Guardian* interview published November 13, he expressed open contempt for the leaders of the major European powers and for the UN. Of the reluctance of Germany, France and others to back a war against Baghdad, he said, “I think Europe has lost its moral compass. Many Europeans have become so obsessed by the prospect of violence they have failed to notice who we are dealing with.”

Of German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, he said, “Germany has subsided into a moral numbing pacifism. For the German chancellor to say he will have nothing to do with action against Saddam Hussein, even if approved by the United Nations, is unilateralism.” As for France, he added, “I have seen diplomatic manoeuvre, but not moral fibre.”

Of the Swedish leader of the UN inspections program, Perle declared, “If it were up to me, on the strength of his previous record, I wouldn’t have chosen Hans Blix.”

Perle is among the more vocal of a hard core of hawks that dominate the Bush administration. Both Vice President Richard Cheney and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld have made clear that they do not believe the UN inspectors will succeed in disarming Iraq, while earlier this year Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz (a close associate of Perle) ordered a CIA report on why Blix, who headed the International Atomic Energy Agency during the 1980s and 1990s, failed to detect Iraqi nuclear activity.

Having got what it wanted from the UN, a means to legitimise war with Iraq, the Bush administration has become increasingly hostile and threatening. On the day the UN inspectors arrived, the Bush administration mounted a provocation that could well have ended any possibility of their continued presence in Baghdad. F-16 fighter aircraft bombed two anti-aircraft sites near

the northern city of Mosul, after the Iraqi artillery allegedly fired on US war planes patrolling the so-called “no-fly” zone. White House spokesman Scott McClellan then claimed that any such Iraqi threats against US or British war planes could constitute a “material breach” of the UN resolution, and justify the launching of an American invasion.



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