

UN resolution on Iraq: a cynical cover for US aggression

The WSWs Editorial Board
9 November 2002

With its unanimous vote Friday on a US-British resolution threatening “serious consequences” if Iraq does not comply with a new weapons inspections regime, the United Nations Security Council has given the Bush administration an international cover for the war it is planning against the Arab nation.

The resolution is a thoroughly cynical document, which deliberately sets forward requirements that Iraq cannot possibly meet. It thereby satisfies the aims of Washington—to fashion the pretext for launching a war that is already well in preparation, without requiring the US to obtain prior authorization from the Security Council.

While portrayed by the Bush administration and the media as a compromise reached through intense negotiations over substantive matters, the resolution, in fact, represents a bowing by permanent Security Council members France, Russia and China to intense pressure from Washington.

Syria’s vote for the resolution is one more demonstration of the utterly treacherous and reactionary role of the Arab national bourgeoisie, which is ever ready, notwithstanding its Pan-Arab pretensions, to curry favor with US imperialism by backing its crimes against the Arab masses.

Speaking in the White House Rose Garden, Bush made clear that the US sees the resolution as a legitimization of its war plans. He left no doubt that his administration will seize on any alleged “noncompliance” as the excuse for full-scale war. “With the passage of this resolution,” he said, “the world must not lapse into unproductive debates over whether specific instances of Iraqi noncompliance are serious. Any Iraqi noncompliance is serious...”

Bush continued: “America will be making only one determination: Is Iraq meeting the terms of the Security Council resolution or not? The United States has agreed to discuss any material breach with the Security Council, but without jeopardizing our freedom of action to defend our country. If Iraq fails to fully comply, the United States and other nations will disarm Saddam Hussein.”

Speaking in London, British Prime Minister Tony Blair echoed Bush’s saber-rattling, telling Baghdad, “[D]efy the United Nations’ will, and we will disarm you by force.”

Initially, both France and Russia had insisted that the Security Council take a second vote on whether to authorize military action against Iraq in the event that the country was found in noncompliance with the weapons inspection regime. That demand, however, was dropped in the face of Washington’s intransigence.

In the end, the resolution promises only that the Security Council will meet to “consider the situation” should Iraq be charged with interfering with weapons inspections. The wrangling over diplomatic language was, in the end, driven by the desire of the other Security Council members to secure political cover for their capitulation to Washington.

The US will portray the resolution as a UN sanction for an unprovoked war of aggression. While initially the Bush administration had voiced contempt for any UN role, in the face of US opinion polls showing large

majorities opposing a unilateral US attack, and mounting protests both internationally and at home, it ultimately decided that the pursuit of a UN fig leaf was worth the effort.

France, Russia and China achieved little more than face-saving language in the final resolution, which does not specifically authorize a unilateral US attack, but does not prohibit one either. Each side is free to interpret its language as they see fit. The other members of the Security Council are free to discuss, while the US and Britain are free to invade.

France, Russia and China have all opposed a unilateral war against Iraq from the standpoint of their own substantial interests in the country’s oil wealth. Russia’s Lukoil has the largest interest—a 23-year, \$3.5 billion contract to develop the huge West Qormah oilfield. The French state-owned TotalFinaElf is close to completing negotiations on a deal to exploit the Majnoon oilfield, with reserves estimated at up to 30 billion barrels. China National Petroleum Corp., meanwhile, has a contract to develop part of the Rumaila area.

All three governments recognize that a US invasion under the pretext of enforcing UN resolutions concerning “weapons of mass destruction” will have as its central aim the consolidation of US control over Iraq’s oil reserves, second only to those of Saudi Arabia. Washington’s plans to conquer Iraq and rule it by means of a US military occupation government undoubtedly will include the handing over of the country’s oilfields to US-based energy corporations.

Behind the scenes there have been negotiations aimed at securing some guarantees that in the event of a US-led war, Washington’s European allies would hold on to some of their interests. Those close to the administration in Washington, however, indicate that nothing has been promised.

The resolution passed by the UN only underscores Washington’s use of the weapons inspections issue as a pretext for war. Leading former inspectors have insisted that Iraq’s military arsenal has already been effectively destroyed during the seven years of inspections that followed the last Persian Gulf war. The new resolution, moreover, includes terms that are directed at eliminating not weapons, but Iraq’s sovereignty and right to self-defense.

UN diplomats congratulated themselves on passing a resolution with “no hidden triggers” for military action against Iraq. Indeed, the triggers are out in the open. Included in the measure are provisions that were opposed by the UN weapons inspectors themselves as not only unnecessarily provocative, but unrealizable.

The first such “trigger” is the declaration that Iraq “has been and remains in material breach” of its obligations under prior UN resolutions. Not even a pretense is made of waiting to see what weapons inspectors will discover if sent back into Iraq. Instead, this language effectively justifies the US launching a military attack, whatever Baghdad does.

The document goes on to set a 30-day deadline for Iraq to provide an “accurate, full and complete declaration” of not only its alleged weapons programs, but also all nonmilitary chemical, biological and nuclear

research programs or facilities. Given the country's extensive petrochemical industry, UN officials have warned that Baghdad cannot possibly complete such an accounting in one month.

"Even if the Iraqis wanted to comply, and I am not clear that they do, I doubt that they could comply with this resolution," said Denis Halliday, the former assistant general secretary of the United Nations. Halliday, who resigned his post over an economic sanctions regime against Iraq that he described as "genocidal," added that the approved resolution includes provisions that are "designed solely for a war by Mr. Bush."

If the Iraqi regime is found to have made "false statements" in its report to the UN, it is deemed in "further material breach" of UN resolutions and subject to military attack. Given the Bush administration's wild charges concerning weapons programs and Iraqi denials that they even exist, it is a foregone conclusion that Washington will accuse Baghdad of lying.

The 30-day deadline was set not to meet any pressing threat from Iraqi weapons, but to ensure that a pretext for war would be provided in advance of the period determined by the Pentagon as the optimum for a US invasion—January or February.

Other provisions in the resolution are so provocative that they will either be rejected by Iraq and provide Washington with an immediate *casus belli*, or be accepted and enforced, resulting in what amounts to a military occupation of the country.

The document demands that Iraq grant weapons inspectors "immediate, unimpeded, unconditional, and unrestricted access to any and all, including underground, areas, facilities, buildings, equipment, records and means of transportation." It allows them to declare no-fly-no-drive zones around any facility that they wish to enter, excluding people, vehicles and planes from the area. Finally, it provides for "sufficient UN security guards" to protect them.

This means that Iraq must accept an unlimited number of armed troops accompanying inspectors roaming the country at will, forcing their way into any and every facility they choose, and closing down entire areas as they see fit. This amounts to de facto foreign military control over the country.

The "rules of engagement" of these armed forces are not spelled out, but will most likely be set by the Pentagon. Will the blue-helmeted UN troops be authorized to shoot Iraqi officials or civilians found to have violated a suddenly imposed exclusion zone? The resolution is silent on this question.

While the final resolution did not include language from earlier drafts allowing member states of the UN to directly send their own forces to "protect" inspectors, neither did it preclude such a deployment. There is little doubt that the US will step up pressure to include its own armed units on the ground in Iraq.

Moreover, the resolution specifically abrogates a 1998 UN Security Council resolution setting terms for the inspection of eight facilities used by Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and other top Iraqi officials. That resolution provided for a diplomatic presence along with the inspectors. Instead, the new resolution insists that the inspectors and their armed guards will have "unconditional" access to these facilities "equal to that at other sites."

It also insists that the UN inspection agencies "shall determine the composition of their inspection teams and ensure that these teams are composed of the most qualified and experienced experts available."

Before inspectors were withdrawn at Washington's insistence in 1998, it was revealed that many of the US personnel involved in the operations were covert CIA agents and members of elite special operations military units who knew nothing about weapons inspections. They were there to spy on the Iraqi regime and prepare provocations.

There is no doubt that such forces would again be sent into the country. In the meantime, however, the Bush administration has publicly declared its support for killing Saddam Hussein. Thus, the UN resolution demands

unrestricted access to the Iraqi president's homes and offices by trained killers sent by a regime that has advocated his assassination.

The resolution further states that the inspectors will have "the free and unrestricted use and landing of fixed and rotary winged aircraft, including manned and unmanned reconnaissance vehicles." Given the recent use of an unmanned CIA drone to assassinate six individuals in Yemen, this provision raises another ominous threat.

The Iraqi regime is required to turn over any scientists or other officials whom the inspectors wish to interview. It specifies that the UN inspection agencies "may at their discretion conduct interviews inside or outside Iraq" and "may facilitate the travel of those interviewed and family members outside of Iraq."

This sets up a system that can easily be turned into a forced expatriation of Iraq's scientific community, further undermining the country's shattered economy and industrial base. Those asked to leave the country together with their families will be subject to intense pressure to defect and provide damning information—true or invented—on Iraq's weapons programs. Offers of positions and money will doubtless be made to those who comply, along with threats of retribution against those who refuse.

Finally, the resolution declares that "Iraq shall not take or threaten hostile acts directed against any representative or personnel of the United Nations or any member state taking action to uphold any council resolution." This language is expressly intended to prohibit any Iraqi resistance to relentless US bombings and missile attacks in no-fly zones unilaterally declared and enforced by Washington and London in northern and southern Iraq.

While these zones were imposed without the sanction of any UN resolution, Washington claimed they were intended to uphold other UN measures providing for the protection of the Kurdish minority in the north and the Shia in the south. In reality, the enforcement of these zones has flagrantly violated UN resolutions guaranteeing Iraq's sovereignty. No Security Council protest has been voiced on this score, however.

Meanwhile, the US has used the no-fly zones to wage a low-intensity air war against Iraq aimed at wiping out its air defense systems in advance of a US invasion.

The new resolution not only bars Iraq from combating this aggression, but makes any shot fired against US and British planes bombing Iraq targets a further pretext for war. It is no accident that on the eve of the UN vote, the Pentagon was once again screening for the media previously classified videos of Iraqi anti-aircraft fire directed at US warplanes.

Taken as a whole, these conditions are aimed at inflicting a complete and thoroughgoing humiliation on Iraq, stripping it of the last vestiges of national sovereignty. Aside from giving the Bush administration multiple pretexts to wage war, the resolution is also meant to undermine the current government in Baghdad. If Iraq accepts the resolution, every effort will be made to cast the Iraqi regime as powerless in an effort to foment a military coup.

The Security Council's support for such a reactionary neo-colonialist intervention stands as a stark refutation of any illusions in the supposed progressive role of the United Nations or in the ability of Washington's imperialist rivals to serve as a brake on the global eruption of US militarism.



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