

# White House demands weapons inspectors abduct Iraqi scientists

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7 December 2002

The Bush administration is pressuring UN weapons inspectors to kidnap Iraqi scientists, spirit them out of the country and hand them over to US intelligence for interrogation. This latest scheme to concoct a pretext for war—in defiance of every tenet of international law and democratic rights—is a devastating self-exposure of the war camarilla in Washington.

According to administration officials, the scientists, together with their families, would be taken from Iraq—if necessary, against their will—and placed in a “witness protection program.” Thus the UN, at the bidding of Washington, would treat Iraqi civilians as criminals.

This proposal—worthy of Mafia gangsters—should be taken by world public opinion as an indication of the type of “democracy” the US intends to establish, at the point of a bayonet, should it succeed in invading and occupying the country.

In a meeting in New York on December 2, Bush’s national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, reportedly prodded chief UN weapons inspector Hans Blix to push ahead with the plan to abduct scientists. “Some American officials want the UN team to be aggressive in identifying scientists and demanding that they leave the country, perhaps without their permission,” the *New York Times* reported Friday. “Mr. Blix is said to be arguing that the UN cannot, in effect, abduct people against their will.”

White House Press Secretary Ari Fleischer on Friday dodged a question about whether the US was advocating the abduction of Iraqi scientists. “I can’t speak to all scenarios,” he said. “Obviously, if somebody is willing to leave the country, it’s a much easier matter.” Fleischer’s evasive reply stopped well short of a denial.

For his part, Blix angrily rejected the US proposal, declaring Friday: “We are not going to abduct anybody and the UN is not going to run a defection agency.”

There is much truth to the saying “The method is the man.” To characterize the Bush administration as a clique of political gangsters is not merely an epithet. It came to power on the basis of electoral fraud and intimidation, and is prepared to use criminal methods—from assassination and illegal imprisonment to kidnapping—to pursue its predatory objectives.

This latest proposal follows a full week of weapons inspections in which UN personnel have found no evidence to back up Washington’s allegations that the war-ravaged country is working to produce “weapons of mass destruction.” The more the inspections discredit Washington’s pretext for war, the more the administration dismisses their importance and seeks other excuses to launch an invasion.

It is measure of the contempt of the Bush administration for international law and world opinion that it demands all and sundry take as good coin information allegedly extracted from Iraqi scientists by their American captors. To suspect that such “proof” of Iraqi malfeasance could be tainted by the circumstances under which it was obtained—with unlimited scope for bribery, psychological intimidation, physical torture, or a combination of the three—would be condemned by the US as an outrageous affront. No doubt the offending party would find itself on Washington’s international enemies list, with all of the fateful consequences that such status implies.

As always, the US government offers the most benevolent explanation for its criminal intentions, claiming it is motivated by a desire to protect Iraqi scientists from retribution by Saddam Hussein. Administration officials have already made clear that they are prepared to offer green cards, homes and money to those who oblige the Bush administration with “proof” of Iraqi weapons violations. Should the kidnapped experts refuse to cooperate, on the other hand, they could be imprisoned as terrorist suspects or “illegal combatants,” or handed back to the Iraqi dictatorship to be dealt with by Hussein’s secret police.

In the eyes of the US government, the kidnapping of Iraqi scientists would have an additional benefit to providing a pretext for war. It would effectively destroy Iraq’s technological expertise, further undermining an economy already devastated by war and a decade of economic sanctions.

Washington’s eagerness to lay its hands on an Iraqi scientist has grown as the weapons inspections have gone forward. Inspectors have visited sites previously identified by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and others in the administration as weapons production facilities, finding no evidence substantiating these charges.

While publicly pledging “full cooperation” with the UN

inspectors, the White House has made it increasingly clear that it intends to go to war whatever the result of the weapons inspections. Bush's heavy-handed attempt to bully the inspectors has fueled resentment within their ranks.

"You bet there are differences," said Demetrius Perricos, who heads the biological, chemical and missile inspections, describing tensions between Washington and the inspectors. "The people who sent us here are the international community, the United Nations. We are not serving the United States; we are not serving the United Kingdom." He added that Washington had provided the inspectors with none of the intelligence it claims to have about existing weapons.

In a speech delivered at the Pentagon earlier this week, Bush mouthed a series of non sequiturs and absurdities in an attempt to do the impossible: pose as a supporter of the weapons inspections while dismissing them as irrelevant. Stating a theme that has become increasingly prominent in the administration's propaganda, Bush argued that a clean bill of health from the weapons inspectors will not signify Iraqi compliance with UN resolutions or spare the country from an American invasion.

"Inspectors do not have the duty or the ability to uncover terrible weapons hidden in a vast country," he said. "The responsibility of inspectors is to confirm the evidence of voluntary and total disarmament. It is Saddam Hussein who has the responsibility to provide that evidence as directed and in full."

Behind this doubletalk lurks a sinister meaning. What counts, according to the Bush administration, is the intelligence which the US claims to have about Iraqi weapons programs. This information—known only to the US government—is the standard against which Iraqi compliance or noncompliance is to be measured, not the findings of the weapons inspectors on the ground. Of course, incriminating testimony extracted by US officials from an Iraqi scientist would serve as additional "proof."

This cynical line sets the stage for the Bush administration to reject the declaration of weapons programs and "dual-use" technology that Iraq will submit on Saturday, in accordance with the recent UN resolution. Washington will declare any Iraqi statement that does not admit to banned weapons programs, whatever its content, a cover-up, and on that basis insist that Baghdad is in "material breach" of UN resolutions. The basis for this determination will be the bald assertion that the declaration is at odds with Washington's supposed intelligence on Iraqi weapons programs.

What if Iraq surprises the White House and admits to having weapons programs proscribed by the UN? In that case the US will likewise declare the country in "material breach." It is a classic and infinitely cynical "Catch 22." No matter what Iraq does, the US will claim the right to invade, occupy and seize the country's oil riches.

This is how White House spokesman Fleischer explained this "damned if you do, damned if you don't" scenario earlier this

week: "If Saddam Hussein indicates that he has weapons of mass destruction and that he is violating United Nations resolutions, then we will know that Saddam Hussein again deceived the world. If he said he doesn't have any, then I think that we will find out whether or not Saddam Hussein is saying something that we believe will be verifiably false."

The US media has dutifully echoed Bush's doubletalk about the weapons inspections. The *New York Times* editorialized Friday that "there is no way a group of 100 or so arms experts in a California-size country like Iraq" can find weapons of mass destruction. Having previously argued that the administration should proceed through the UN inspections regime, the newspaper's editorial board now dismisses the program as useless.

The *Times* has likewise echoed the administration's desire to secure "cooperation from knowledgeable Iraqis." On December 1 the *Times* foreign policy columnist, Thomas Friedman, published an op-ed piece intended to legitimize the scheme to capture Iraqi scientists and extract testimony about Iraqi weapons programs. As the *World Socialist Web Site* noted [See "Friedman of the *Times* executes an assignment for the Pentagon"], Friedman's column rehashed remarks recently made by Richard Perle, chairman of the Defense Policy Board and a rabid advocate of war against Iraq, to a meeting of British members of Parliament.

While UN officials have indicated that analyzing the Iraqi declaration could take weeks, and the inspections themselves as long as a year, the Bush administration has no intention of waiting. The military clock is already running, with tens of thousands of soldiers deployed within striking distance of Iraq and four aircraft carrier battle groups set to mass in the waters of the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean in the coming weeks.



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