

US seizes Iraqi UN documents to further war drive

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The Bush administration's seizure of the 12,000-page weapons declaration turned over by Iraq to the United Nations last Saturday is a measure of its desperation to manufacture a pretext for war.

In what amounted to an act of extortion, US diplomats entered the offices of the UN's chief weapons inspector Hans Blix and took control of the documents only hours after they had arrived in New York City. Earlier, Blix had announced that UN personnel intended to review the documents before providing each member of the Security Council with a copy by the end of the week.

Washington has since turned over copies to the four other permanent members of the council—Britain, France, Russia and China—while it intends to provide the ten temporary members with an edited version, ostensibly to prevent the leaking of documents spelling out techniques for making biological, chemical and nuclear weapons.

This outright theft of the declaration provides Washington with considerable leeway in fabricating a case against the Iraqi regime. US officials claimed that their only concern was to ensure the material was copied in a secure environment—"You can't send this stuff out to Kinkos (a US commercial copying outfit)," one official said. Its unilateral possession of the documents, however, opens up the ability to forge incriminating material or eliminate exculpatory information.

Washington is expected to press for an emergency Security Council meeting within the next two weeks to demand that Iraq be declared in "material breach" of the UN weapons inspections resolution passed last month. This would provide the pseudo-legal justification for war.

Anyone who believes that Washington would not stoop to forgery to make its case for war is ignorant of American history. In the last Persian Gulf War, the administration of Bush senior launched its attack after having claimed that satellite photos had shown a quarter of a million Iraqi troops massing on the Saudi border. In

fact, the photos had clearly shown that Iraqi forces were already withdrawing from Kuwait. The resolution approving the US buildup in the Vietnam War was passed after government officials falsely claimed US Navy ships were subjected to an unprovoked attack by Vietnamese gunboats in the Gulf of Tonkin.

Now Washington is preparing a fraudulent dossier on Iraq's alleged development of weapons of mass destruction in order to wage a war that is aimed at establishing a US protectorate over Iraq and bringing the oilfields of the entire Persian Gulf securely under American hegemony.

Having seized control of the Iraqi declaration gives the Bush administration a distinct advantage, particularly under conditions in which both US and British intelligence are admitting that they have no concrete evidence that any barred weapons programs exist. Stepped-up inspections of sites in Iraq supposedly linked to weapons production have likewise failed to turn up any proof of US allegations.

The seizure of the Iraqi declaration is a damning exposure of the impotence of the UN and its essential role as a forum for organizing imperialist aggression against the oppressed countries. In an interview with the British Broadcasting Corporation, UN Secretary General Koffi Annan described the US action as "unfortunate," while weakly denying charges that the international body was serving as a puppet for US interests.

US officials pressured the Colombian ambassador to the United Nations, who occupies the Security Council presidency this month, into turning over the documents. Colombia's acquiescence to Washington's demands was secured both through intimidation and a bribe.

Secretary of State Colin Powell traveled to Bogota on the eve of the Iraqi declaration, announcing that the US will give a substantial increase in military aid to the rightist regime of President Alvaro Uribe, over and above

\$537 million already proposed for next year. While Powell had repeatedly put off a trip to the Colombian capital, it was rescheduled once the Colombian ambassador became president of the Security Council.

Several governments represented on the Security Council, including Syria, Mexico and Norway, have voiced protest over US actions, particularly over the decision to provide nonpermanent members with incomplete documents.

While being provided only with “sanitized” documents with substantial portions eliminated, these 10 temporary members of the Security Council will be asked to rule on whether Iraq has met the demands of the Security Council resolution requiring it to turn over an “accurate, full and complete declaration.”

This declaration covers not only Iraq’s alleged weapons programs, but also civilian enterprises involving the wide variety of biological, chemical or nuclear materials that could potentially be used in weapons production. In concocting an indictment of Iraq, the US is expected to seize upon so-called dual-use technologies, which include chemical or biological materials and processes widely used in industry, and cast them as covert weapons programs.

Among the material that is to be edited out of the declarations turned over to the temporary members of the Security Council are lists of weapons manufacturers which supplied the regime in Baghdad and government officials who negotiated these arms deals. This information would make it plain that government officials and corporations in both the US and Britain aided and abetted Iraq’s development of chemical and biological weapons programs when it was at war with Iran in the early 1980s. It is feared that such revelations would undercut the attempt to whip up hysteria over the alleged existence of such programs today.

“It’s hard to justify in terms of national security,” former UN weapons inspector David Albright said in regard to censoring material on previous weapons deals. “But I suppose it can be justified in terms of avoiding national embarrassment.”

Washington’s gangster-like heist of Iraq’s declaration is a measure of the Bush administration’s determination not to allow its timetable for war to be delayed by weapons inspections, diplomacy or the pretense of adherence to international law.

More than 60,000 US troops have already been massed near Iraq’s borders while the massive firepower of four aircraft carrier battle groups is being brought together in

waters near the Middle Eastern country. Pentagon planners have designated January and February as the preferred months for war, both because of the cooler weather and longer nights, which provide night-vision-equipped US forces with an advantage.

The chief of the US Central Command, General Tommy Franks, has arrived in Qatar together with approximately 1,000 US and British commanders and headquarters staff to conduct an exercise dubbed “Internal Look,” which is described as a dry-run for the command-and-control apparatus that would be employed in an Iraqi invasion. The same code name was used for a similar exercise conducted on the eve of the last war in the Persian Gulf more than a decade ago.

The barbaric nature of the war that Washington is preparing was spelled out in a document the White House presented to Congress this week warning that it is prepared to use “overwhelming force”—including nuclear weapons—in response to any Iraqi chemical or biological attack on invading US troops. The document, entitled “National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction,” has raised fears in the Middle East that an invasion could trigger the first act of nuclear warfare since the US bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.

At the same time, the Pentagon announced that it reserves the right to plant land mines in Iraq as part of its assault on the country. *USA Today* reported that US forces have stockpiled the anti-personnel devices in Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and on the British island colony of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, where US forces are also based.

Previously, Washington had pledged that by 2003 the US military would halt the use of land mines throughout the world, with the exception of the Korean peninsula. Every year, the deadly weapons claim the lives of up to 20,000 people, 80 percent of them civilians and at least a third of them children. They continue to kill long after military operations end.

A Pentagon spokesman said that land mines continued to play a “vital and essential role,” and that US commanders would be allowed to use them in a war on Iraq.



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