

Bush hands UN an ultimatum on Iraq war

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The resolution presented to the United Nations Security Council Tuesday by Britain, Spain and the United States is an unprecedented ultimatum, not to Iraq, but to the entire world. The Bush administration is demanding unconditional support for the war of aggression it has decided to wage against an impoverished country that poses no threat to the American people.

US officials have begun campaigning for passage of the resolution, which authorizes military action against Iraq without saying so explicitly. American diplomacy on the question is a combination of threats and bribery.

Secretary of State Colin Powell was dispatched to China and Assistant Secretary of State John Bolton to Russia, two of three permanent Security Council members that are opposing the resolution and could veto it. Other State Department officials visited the non-veto-holding members of the council, including Angola, Guinea, Cameroon, Mexico and Chile.

As in the case of Turkey, whose support for the war has been purchased with \$15 billion in US cash and loan guarantees—and the prospect of Turkish influence over the huge Iraqi oilfield outside the northern city of Kirkuk—there will be direct financial bartering for votes. The *Los Angeles Times* wrote Tuesday, “US officials also concede that their diplomatic push may end up having to include ‘incentives’ in the form of aid, particularly for countries such as Cameroon, Guinea and Angola, the three African countries currently holding rotating seats on the Security Council.”

Reports of the atmosphere of intimidation at the Security Council read like the script of a bad gangster movie. The *Washington Post* cited one account of the Bush administration’s tactics, citing a “senior diplomat” of a member country. “You are not going to decide whether there is war in Iraq or not,” US officials told this diplomat. “That decision is ours, and we have already made it. It is already final. The only question now is whether the council will go along with it or not.”

The *Post* noted Tuesday, without apparent irony, that the issue according to the Bush administration is “whether council members are willing to irrevocably destroy the world body’s legitimacy by failing to follow the US lead.”

In the upside-down world of the US government and its media camp followers, legitimacy is determined exclusively by Washington and anyone who opposes US policy is by definition “illegitimate.”

Bush’s National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice declared, “We’re going to try to convince people that the Security Council needs to be strong.” Again, the world is stood on its head: siding with the United States, the global bully, demonstrates strength. Opposing an immediate military attack on Iraq, a small country devastated by a quarter century of wars and economic blockade, is equated with weakness.

The resolution introduced by Britain and backed by the US and Spain does not specifically mention military action because the Bush administration is well aware that such a proposal could not possibly be adopted. The vast majority of the governments represented at the UN and most of those on the Security Council oppose an American-British war against Iraq.

According to Bush aides, the resolution provides “legal cover” for governments like that of Tony Blair in Britain, which are defying the overwhelming sentiment of public opinion at home and fear the domestic political consequences of a war waged in defiance of the Security Council, as well as the possibility of war crimes prosecutions.

France, Germany and Russia are backing an opposing statement that calls for a continuation of UN weapons inspections in Iraq for another four months, with additional reports by chief weapons inspector Hans Blix during that time. The statement declares categorically that there is no evidence that Iraq possess either weapons of mass destruction or the capability to make them.

Representatives of these governments have made comments, public and private, which go well beyond the diplomatic language of their joint statement. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Yuri Fedotov dismissed the British-US resolution, calling it “disconnected from the realities in Iraq.” Another Security Council diplomat was blunter, denouncing the lies of US Secretary of State Colin Powell and the concocted evidence of Iraqi weapons and ties to

terrorist groups. He called the information supplied by the Bush administration “garbage, garbage and more garbage.”

None of the Security Council powers opposing the US war drive does so from the standpoint of a principled opposition to violence and war. The three regimes with veto power are themselves engaged in bloody repression or military adventures—France in Ivory Coast; Russia in Chechnya; China in Xinjiang, Tibet and against worker, peasant and student movements at home.

What brings them together, however, is a common fear of the incalculable consequences of the American policy of world domination. Hence the reference in their counter-resolution to the need to preserve “the unity of the Security Council.” They recognize that an American decision to go to war against Iraq in defiance of the Security Council would amount to a declaration by the world’s strongest military power that it is an international outlaw, prepared to recognize no authority but its own. This is already implicit in the US refusal to observe the Geneva Convention in the treatment of prisoners of war captured in Afghanistan, and its repudiation of the International Criminal Court, which has jurisdiction over war crimes.

Even more fundamentally, every capitalist regime fears the growing international radicalization of working people that American militarism is provoking. Dozens of governments were shaken by the spectacle of tens of millions of people marching in antiwar demonstrations worldwide on February 14-16. They fear that the actual launching of war against Iraq will spark a global political explosion.

With war perhaps only a fortnight away, sections of the American ruling elite have expressed trepidation about the likely outcome, both political and even military. Former US ambassador to the United Nations Richard Holbrooke, an aggressive advocate of American military intervention during the Clinton administration, wrote in the *Washington Post* over the weekend Bush’s policy was heading for a likely “train wreck.”

Former national security adviser (under Jimmy Carter) Zbigniew Brzezinski, in a column in the *Washington Post* last week, argued that the Bush administration had fueled suspicions in Europe that its demand for inspections and Iraqi disarmament was “essentially a charade,” to provide a pretext for war. “The manner in which the United States has reacted to European reservations regarding Iraq has created the impression that some US leaders confuse NATO with the Warsaw Pact,” he wrote. “An America that decides to act essentially on its own regarding Iraq could, in the meantime, also find itself quite alone in having to cope with the costs and burdens of the war’s aftermath, not to mention widespread and rising hostility abroad.”

The *New York Times*, in an analysis on Tuesday,

hearkened back to the most devastating US defeat of the twentieth century: “With large antiwar demonstrations expected again this weekend, Mr. Bush is also aware that the longer inspections go on, the greater the risk of declining public support ... any collapse in support at the United Nations will radiate out into a world already roiling with opposition to war. In that case, once war is under way, any significant setback in Iraq is likely to conjure up some of the ghosts of Vietnam...”

None of these concerns has slowed the Bush administration’s drive to war. Nor has the prospect that military victory will be neither as swift nor as easy as suggested by the most enthusiastic war hawks in the administration. According to a Vatican diplomat, the Pentagon has stockpiled 15,000 body bags at a naval air station in Sicily, anticipating possible casualties in the US invasion.

The Bush administration cannot slow down its drive to war on Iraq, let alone reverse course, for many reasons. Some are the products of its own actions: the massive military mobilization in the Persian Gulf, for instance, has an inexorable logic. It is virtually impossible to keep a huge force of more than 200,000 combat troops waiting for weeks for the signal to attack. They have to be used, or the whole operation must be ignominiously aborted.

US officials have also expressed concern that the group of countries lined up in support of the war—the so-called “coalition of the willing” (which might be better termed the coalition of the bought or browbeaten)—will break up if the standoff with Iraq continues more than a few weeks longer. Some allied governments—from Persian Gulf sheikdoms to Blair’s shaky regime in Britain—could collapse.

Above all, the Bush administration cannot change course because war has become its sole answer to the mounting social and economic crisis at home. Without the enormous distraction of war and the incessant alerts against the threat of terrorist attacks, how is the administration to induce the American public to ignore the reality of economic slump, financial turmoil, deepening poverty and social misery, and sweeping attacks on democratic rights? In the final analysis, the Bush administration’s drive to war is the product of the intensifying social contradictions within the United States.



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