

Blair's six-point "benchmark" for Iraq: A thinly disguised pretext for war

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Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair outlined six conditions for Iraq to meet in order to prove its "full, unconditional, immediate and active cooperation" with the United Nations demand for disarmament.

The six points were read out in parliament on March 12. They were drawn up with the ostensible purpose of responding to the urgings of undecided members of the United Nations Security Council that Britain clarify just what it was demanding from Saddam Hussein in order to avert war.

Far from being a compromise, Blair's six points were again designed to make war inevitable. The demands made include:

- * Saddam Hussein must publicly declare on national television in Arabic that his government has concealed weapons of mass destruction, but has now made a "strategic decision" to surrender them to the UN.

- * Iraq must account for and destroy stocks of anthrax and other biological and chemical weapons—an alleged 10,000 litres.

- * Permit 30 scientists and their families to fly to Cyprus for interrogation by UN inspectors.

- * Admit to possession of an unmanned drone aircraft discovered by inspectors.

- * Promise to destroy mobile production facilities for biological weapons.

- * Pledge to complete the destruction of all proscribed missiles.

There is a common thread running through all the "benchmarks" for Iraqi cooperation—admit you have been lying regarding every accusation levelled against you, admit to possessing weapons of mass destruction that hundreds of inspectors have failed to disclose and then throw yourselves on the tender mercies of Washington.

For Saddam Hussein to do so would be personally

suicidal—he is being asked to admit to a material breach of Security Council Resolution 1441—and would only be used by the US as proof that it was correct all along and that war should go ahead anyway.

Iraq did not feel in a position to dismiss the demands out of hand, given that hundreds of thousands of US and British troops are massed on its borders, and instead indicated that it may be willing to comply with the last five tests. Saddam could not agree to the televised confession that he had been lying, however, but might agree to a more general promise to disarm.

Nevertheless, the Ba'athist regime could not resist at least one counter blast that went some way to exposing the trumped up character of the charges levelled by the US and Britain.

On March 12, Iraq displayed what Chief UN weapons inspector Hans Blix had earlier insisted was a "drone aircraft" from which anthrax could be sprayed. US Secretary of State Colin Powell told the UN Security Council that the discovery of the plane showed that Iraq had been lying to UN inspectors and that its existence "should be of concern to everybody."

Iraq countered by stating that its only crime was to make a typing error, thus wrongly identifying the plane's wingspan. The plane when displayed was made of balsa wood, with a tiny engine. Officials of the Ibn Firnas State Company said it was a prototype designed for reconnaissance, jamming and aerial photography and has a range of just five miles, well within the UN's imposed 93-mile limit.

France has said it rejects Britain's proposal for a deadline for a declaration of war, even if this is extended for a few days beyond March 17. French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin said, "It's not a question of offering Iraq a few more days before resorting to force, but to resolutely advance in the

direction of peaceful disarmament marked out by inspections which are a credible alternative to war.” Conservative opposition leader Iain Duncan Smith said following a meeting with Blair that the prime minister had told him that a new UN resolution on Iraq is “now less likely than at any time.”

For its part, the Bush administration was not prepared to back Blair because it insists that its own intelligence is better than that of the UN and has found Iraq in material breach. The US said it supported the six points, but has not countersigned the British proposal. US ambassador to the UN, John Negroponte, said that if the council rallied around the British plan, the US would be prepared to accept “a very, very, very brief extension” of the March 17 deadline, but Washington appears to believe in the possible success of a resolution without any caveats. Sources are claiming the support of eight of the nine Security Council members necessary for a majority, with only Mexico holding out. They would then appeal to France, Germany, Russia and China to either acquiesce or abstain rather than use their veto.

If this is not the case and it looks like the resolution may be defeated, Spain—the co-signature with the US and Britain—has speculated that it may withdraw. Foreign Secretary Ana Palacio said, “Clearly, not putting it to a vote is a possibility which is being considered ... because a veto is undoubtedly something which has consequences for the United Nations system.”

But whatever finally happens to the measures outlined in Blair’s “side statement” to the existing UN resolution, its drafting once again illustrates how the path to war has been paved by a series of provocations cooked up by Washington and London.



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