

Bugging, bribes and bullying: US thuggery in advance of UN vote

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The Bush administration's methods in seeking to obtain UN sanction for war with Iraq are indicative of the real character of the impending military action: the United States government is acting as an international gangster, not only in its treatment of Baghdad, but in relation to the other members of the Security Council.

For weeks the US government has been exerting pressure, in the form of bribes and threats, on the six countries whose votes on the Security Council are still considered up for grabs—Angola, Cameroon, Chile, Mexico, Guinea and Pakistan. According to a front-page report in the British newspaper the *Observer* March 2, the US campaign has also included the systematic bugging of telephone and e-mail conversations of the UN representatives of many of these states.

The report in the *Observer*, headlined, “US Dirty Tricks to Win Vote on Iraq War,” charges that the US National Security Agency (NSA) has been intercepting conversations on both home and office telephones, as well as e-mail messages sent by delegates to their governments. The intensified surveillance operation was reportedly ordered by Condoleezza Rice, Bush's national security adviser.

The newspaper, apparently tipped off by security officials of unidentified European governments, even obtained the telephone number of the NSA official, Frank Koza, who allegedly heads the spy campaign, and called him up at his office in the Regional Targets section of the agency.

A memo written by Koza January 31 called for a “surge” of surveillance against the UN Security Council delegations, aimed at determining “policies,” “negotiating positions,” “alliances” and a “whole gamut of information that could give US policymakers an edge in obtaining results favorable to US goals or to head off surprises.”

The reaction of US government officials and the American media to this exposure is itself noteworthy. White House press spokesman Ari Fleischer refused to comment, but did not deny the US was bugging the UN representatives of other countries. The *New York Times* did not even report the charge, while the *Washington Post* published a brief account quoting several UN diplomats dismissing the significance of American spying on their deliberations. “It goes with the territory,” one was quoted as saying.

Unnamed “senior administration officials” ~~Paul~~ had eavesdropped on French and Russian conversations during negotiations last fall that led to the adoption of Resolution 1441. The *Los Angeles Times*, citing “current and former US officials familiar with operations of the NSA,” described “a long-standing US practice of spying at the United Nations,” which includes electronic eavesdropping at other UN offices, including those in charge of peacekeeping operations. James Bamford, author of two books on the NSA, told the *Times* that the US government had pressed for the UN headquarters to be located in New York City in 1945 to make such bugging easier.

None of the media reports took note of the glaring contradictions in the US posture towards the UN. On the one hand, Bush administration officials declare that war is necessary to uphold the authority of the UN Security Council against alleged Iraqi defiance. On the other hand, the US government targets the Security Council for espionage and outright subversion.

Four countries on the Security Council—the US, Britain, Spain and Bulgaria—are supporting the draft resolution authorizing war with Iraq. Five countries—Russia, China, France, Germany and Syria—have declared their opposition. The remaining six nations out of the total of fifteen are the principal targets of US threats and blandishments, because they have not yet committed themselves definitively for or against the resolution.

As the ardently pro-war *Washington Post* observed March 2: “Their indecision is not over war with Iraq; all have indicated dislike of the US measure and prefer a compromise that would allow inspections to continue, with a future deadline. What they remain undecided about is whether to risk opposing the United States.”

In other words, these six governments see themselves threatened by the United States, not Iraq—something the leading daily newspaper in the US capital does not even bother to conceal. If they were free to vote as they chose, the US-backed war resolution would be heavily defeated.

There is good reason for these six countries to fear the United States. Press accounts in recent weeks have documented the unprecedented degree of coercion—financial, diplomatic and even military—being applied by the Bush administration to these supposedly sovereign and independent countries. All have been

reminded of the fate of Yemen, which joined with Cuba to oppose the US in a Security Council vote authorizing the first Persian Gulf War in 1991. Then-Secretary of State James Baker warned Yemen that it would be casting “the most expensive vote in history.” Three days later, the US cut off nearly all aid to the impoverished country.

The US has ample leverage over most of these countries, and has not hesitated to use its advantages ruthlessly.

Angola—The United States is the biggest market for Angolan exports, mainly oil, and the biggest foreign investor, through Chevron-Texaco’s longstanding role in the oilfields in the enclave of Cabinda. The US government underwrites Angolan contracts worth \$200 million to Halliburton, the big oilfield services company formerly headed by Richard Cheney. Because of lingering antagonism to the MPLA government, which received Soviet support during the Cold War against the CIA-backed UNITA rebels, Angola is still excluded from access to US markets under the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA).

Guinea and Cameroon—The two former French colonies in west Africa have preferential access to US markets under AGOA and the Generalized System of Preferences. The AGOA, passed in 2000, provides that favored countries in sub-Saharan Africa must “not engage in activities that undermine United States national security or foreign policy interests.” An amendment passed by Congress in August 2002 allows the US government to end a country’s trade preference if it “has not taken steps to support the efforts of the United States to combat terrorism.” Given that the Bush administration portrays the invasion of Iraq as an extension of the “war on terror,” a vote against the US could become the pretext for cutting off preferential treatment for exports of oil from Cameroon and bauxite, gold, diamonds and coffee from Guinea.

Pakistan—A longstanding US ally during the Cold War, it served as the principal base for CIA-backed Islamic fundamentalists, the precursors of both the Taliban and Al Qaeda, fighting against the Soviet Army in Afghanistan. After September 11, the military regime of General Pervez Musharraf opted for all-out collaboration with the US military attack on Afghanistan, and was rewarded with a \$1 billion debt write-off and the dropping of trade restrictions imposed when Pakistan tested its first nuclear bomb in 1998. Given the widespread public opposition to a second US war against a predominantly Muslim country, Pakistani support would require even greater infusions of cash.

Chile—The stick being used here by the US is Chilean entry into the North American Free Trade Agreement, which was tentatively approved by US and Chilean negotiators late last year. The US trade representative has not yet given Congress 90-day notice of submission of the deal for ratification. A Chilean “no” on the Security Council would likely cancel the agreement. US pressure is also being exerted on the Chilean military apparatus, which has had close ties to the US going

back to the CIA-backed coup in 1973 that put General Augusto Pinochet in power. Secretary of State Colin Powell made an oblique reference to the coup in a recent meeting with Chilean envoys in Washington.

Mexico—Already bound tightly to the US by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), 80 percent of Mexico’s exports go north. The government of Vicente Fox has sought a delay in tariff reductions on the import of chickens and other farm products, set to take effect in January, to cushion the impact on Mexican agriculture. The Bush administration has agreed to one deferral, but is to take up the issue again later this month.

Two senior US State Department officials, Marc Grossman and Kim Holmes, visited Mexico City last week, threatening that Mexico would pay a “very heavy price” for opposing the US on war with Iraq, according to press accounts. The British magazine the *Economist*, describing the Grossman visit, said that an unnamed US diplomat “has given warning that a Mexican No could ‘stir up feelings’ against Mexicans in the United States. He draws comparisons with the Japanese-Americans who were interned after 1941, and wonders whether Mexico ‘wants to stir the fires of jingoism during a war.’”

This report of US blackmail, together with other anecdotal accounts of bribery and browbeating, led to questioning of White House press spokesman Ari Fleischer. According to the transcript of his February 25 news briefing, Fleischer bristled at questions about what the administration was offering Mexico in return for its vote:

Fleischer: “I haven’t seen the story. And you already have the answer, about what this will be decided on. But think about the implications of what you’re saying. You’re saying that the leaders of other nations are buyable. And that is not an acceptable proposition.” (Laughter)

The hardened cynics in the White House press corps guffawed as Bush’s spokesman declared vote-buying unacceptable. Fleischer then walked out of the briefing.



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