Iraq: Attack on UN spurs plans for international military force

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The bomb attack on the UN headquarters in Baghdad has revived proposals for the deployment of international troops in Iraq. Behind the scenes at the Security Council in New York, the horse-trading has begun on a new resolution that would allow countries that had previously rejected the war to send their own troops to assist in the occupation of Iraq.

With the US facing mounting resistance to its occupation and a rising number of American fatalities, demands in Washington for international support have grown louder. In his last radio address, President Bush announced that there would be more foreign troops in Iraq and in future the UN would have a more a critical role.

The discussion presently centres on the possible deployment of contingents from Turkey, India and Pakistan. According to press reports, the Turkish government and army leadership have already agreed to send 10,000 soldiers to Iraq, who will later be supplemented by an additional 30,000. However, this decision has yet to overcome the parliamentary hurdle, where there are serious reservations inside the majority party, the AKP. A large majority of the Turkish population rejects any participation in the Iraqi occupation.

Political experts agree that it will eventually come down to NATO participation, including the involvement of German and French troops. "As the situation presents itself now," the German newsweekly *Der Spiegel* commented, the Social Democratic-Green Party coalition in Berlin "can hardly reach any other conclusion than to assist its most important ally on the military level as well."

The dispute over whether to make such a military commitment revolves around what political, economic and military concessions the US will have to make in return.

France, Germany and Russia insist on the US relinquishing authority as an occupying power—along with its monopoly over the oil revenues and the lucrative contracts for the reconstruction of the country—at least in part to the UN. So far, the role of the UN has been limited to purely humanitarian tasks. Moreover, Paris, Berlin and Moscow are calling for an interim government—which, unlike the present Governing Council, would not be handpicked by the US—and for elections as soon as possible.

The US wants to give up as little political and economic authority as possible and insists on keeping complete control of the military command. Secretary of State Colin Powell said that he would not agree to a shared military command. Any additional troops would have to be subordinate to the American supreme command.

As before the war, Germany and France are cooperating closely on their policy toward Iraq. The German government has adopted a reserved attitude in public, while the French have taken on the role of spokesman. Last week, French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin and his German colleague Joschka Fischer met in Paris to coordinate their attitude following the attack on the UN. The following day, in an interview with *Le Monde*, de Villepin sharply criticised America's Iraq policy.

It is now time "to move from the logic of occupation to the political logic of re-establishing Iraqi sovereignty," he said. "I do not believe that one can achieve anything by simply declaring war on terrorism and stressing security issues—even if one must obviously undertake everything in this area. I believe one must give priority to political measures that aim at returning control to the Iraqis concerning their own fate."

De Villepin insisted that the Governing Council be transformed into a "real provisional government" that could act independently and prepare elections to a Constituent Assembly by the end of the year. The legitimacy of such a provisional government could only be ensured through the United Nations and through all the countries of the region, as well as by organisations like the Arab League and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), he stressed—in a clear swipe at the US.

The German and French media are striving to present the UN as a "power for peace," legitimised by the will of the "world community," while insisting that, as an occupying power, the US lacks such legitimacy. Following the attack on the UN, the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* emphasised the "neutrality and non-partisan nature of the world organisation," which comes to "aid and not to occupy" the Iraqi people.

The UN special envoy, Sergio Vieira de Mello, who died in the attack, was praised effusively as a "man of peace." *Le Monde* claimed de Mello, contrary to the US, had succeeded in winning "the hearts and minds" of the Iraqis. "It is not an

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exaggeration to say that his role was to initiate the only positive development in Iraq since the end of the war and the fall of Saddam Hussein," the newspaper declared.

The Brazilian diplomat—who possessed two PhDs from the Sorbonne in Paris, spoke perfect French and was protected by French bodyguards—had always attached importance to preserving a certain distance from the occupying troops. The lack of protection of the UN building is said to have been due in part to his refusal to work behind security barricades manned by US soldiers.

The attack in Baghdad dealt a heavy blow to the myth of the UN's alleged non-partisan character. It has made clear that at least a section of the Iraqi resistance does not distinguish between the occupying troops and the United Nations.

In the wake of the attack, the UN will find it even harder to distinguish itself from the American occupation force. If it does not completely withdraw from Iraq—which Secretary-General Kofi Annan has already categorically excluded—the UN will be drawn, on grounds of security alone, into closer cooperation with the US troops and will be even more clearly identified as part of the occupying regime.

The alleged neutrality of the UN is a fiction. Although the Security Council did not explicitly authorise the US to go to war, it collaborated at every decisive point in setting the course that led to it. It imposed the sanctions, which over 10 long years cost the lives of half a million Iraqi children. It was responsible for the humiliating weapons inspections, which disarmed the country and delivered it up defenceless to the American attack. And by posing impossible ultimatums, it established the pretexts that the Bush government desperately needed in order to sell the war to the American public. After the fall of Baghdad, the UN legitimised the US-UK occupation and has, despite occasional friction, enjoyed a division of labour with them since then.

The governments of Germany and France promote the myth of UN neutrality as a means both of justifying their foreign policy interests to their own people and of pursuing these interests in opposition to those defended by Washington.

In view of the overwhelming opposition to the Iraq war that was expressed in Europe in the massive demonstrations earlier this year, the German and French governments can justify sending troops to Iraq only if they present it as a "peace mission" that serves "nation building" and the furtherance of peace and democracy.

In Berlin, Chancellor Schröder and Foreign Minister Fischer stereotypically stress that a military commitment in Iraq is not posed at present. That does not mean very much, however. The military policy of the Social Democratic-Green coalition consists of an endless number of broken promises. Schröder has also said that Germany has "its own national interests" in peace and stability in the Middle East and stressed the significance of the "work of reconstruction in Iraq" in this context. German military missions in the Balkans and Afghanistan were prepared through similar arguments.

Against the US, the UN serves Berlin and Paris particularly as a forum for pursuing their own economic and strategic interests in the Middle East. To a considerable extent, it was these interests that motivated their original rejection of America's war plans. On the one hand, they wanted to prevent absolute American supremacy in a region that is of great importance for Europe both as an oil supplier and as a market. On the other hand, they feared—correctly, as it turned out—that a badly prepared war would destabilise the region and plunge it into chaos. Therefore, Germany, France and Russia tried unsuccessfully to utilise the UN to halt the American war preparations.

Hardly had Baghdad fallen, when they changed their attitude. They strove for rapprochement with Washington and voted in the Security Council to sanction the occupation regime. Since then, the UN has served as a forum to raise their own claims in regard to a subjugated Iraq. They regard the increasing difficulties of the US as an opportunity to again exert influence on political events in Baghdad.

The logic of their politics means that Berlin and Paris will eventually send their own troops to Iraq. The leader of Germany's Christian Democratic opposition, Angela Merkel, has already expressed support for such an undertaking. If NATO plays a role in Iraq within the context of the UN and Germany has the capacity, "then we may not duck the issue," she said in a recent press interview.

This has nothing to do with "nation building" or bringing peace and stability. The task of such a military mission would be the oppression of a country that was conquered in an illegal war. It would not serve the interests of the Iraqi people, but, as Schröder states, the "national interest of Germany," i.e., of German big business.

Such a military intervention would inevitably place the German armed forces in the same situation already facing the American troops: that of an occupation army, acting with increasing brutality against the local population and thereby provoking ever greater resistance. In this respect, the response to the attack on the UN headquarters is a warning signal.

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