

UN vote on Iraq: Paris, Berlin and Moscow bow before Bush

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The United Nations Security Council's unanimous vote Thursday to support Resolution 1511 drafted by the United States represents a grotesque cave-in by the European powers, Russia and China in the face of sustained pressure from Washington. Syria's backing for the resolution underscores the impotence of the Arab bourgeoisie in face of America's military drive to secure its hegemony over the entire Middle East.

There is no doubt that every one of the 15 votes in support of a manifestly illegal occupation carried out in direct violation of the UN Charter was cast out of consideration for the geopolitical interests of the governments involved. In each case, the question of whether to support Washington's criminal war was decided on a quid pro quo basis involving either promised rewards—trade preferences, aid, etc.—or threatened punishment—economic sanctions or outright military aggression.

Washington had agreed late on Wednesday, October 15 to postpone the Security Council vote to give Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin time to persuade France and Germany to accept the draft. This took only a 45-minute video conference call to German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and French President Jacques Chirac while they were attending a European Union summit in Belgium, itself a measure of the unprincipled character of their previous objections to the US war and occupation of Iraq.

The amendments proposed by the three all focus on efforts to replace direct colonial rule of Iraq by the US-led occupation forces with a United Nations force and eventually a puppet Iraqi regime. Russia, France and Germany sought by means of this diplomatic maneuver to secure for themselves greater access to Iraq's oil resources by weakening Washington's stranglehold, while at the same time to diffuse the rising wave of opposition to the war and subsequent occupation in Iraq, the Middle East and in Europe itself.

Putin, Schröder and Chirac are painfully aware of the steadily deteriorating situation in Iraq as expressed in the daily attacks on US, British and other occupation forces and the anger that exists throughout the Arab world. Russian Ambassador Sergey Lavrov called the future of Iraq a matter of national security. "If we do not find a way which is mutually acceptable to all to do Iraq right, the region will suffer," he warned. "International stability will suffer. Our security interests will suffer."

Schröder and Chirac in particular head governments that evaded the anger of the massive antiwar protests that took place last February only because they did not join Britain's Tony Blair and

Spain's Jose Maria Aznar in fully backing Washington. To participate in the US occupation would land them in the Iraqi quagmire and place them in the political firing line at home as well.

Even so, none of the European powers will countenance open defiance of Washington, both for fear of arousing the anger of the Bush administration and because they do not wish to do anything that will reignite the simmering political opposition to war with all this implies for the stability of their own governments. Instead they agreed to back the US-drafted resolution after a few cosmetic changes had been made—while rejecting US appeals for troops and additional finances to help with Iraq's reconstruction.

The resolution preserves the dominant role for the US by confirming that the Coalition Provisional Authority will remain the overarching power in Iraq and by declaring that the Iraqi Governing Council, handpicked by the US occupation authority, "embodies the sovereignty of the State of Iraq." The UN is promised a strengthened role in the political and economic reconstruction process—but only as circumstances, particularly security, permit. The resolution likewise "invites" the Quisling Iraqi Governing Council to present by December 15 a timetable for the drafting of a new constitution and the holding of national elections. This too, however, is required only "as circumstances permit."

Some commentators have noted that the UN resolution is a diplomatic victory for Washington, but stressed that it has a somewhat symbolic character. This is certainly true insofar as it will not immediately relieve the US by ensuring a flood of additional troops and money to help pay for its occupation.

But even here the impact of the decision by Berlin, Paris and Moscow should not be dismissed. So far, the US has formally set aside \$20 billion for Iraqi reconstruction, while Japan has pledged about \$1.5 billion, Britain \$919 million and the rest of the European Union just \$232 million. US officials have made clear that they see the UN Security Council vote as a means of stepping up pressure for more money to be made available by the 75 countries that will meet at the donors' conference to be held in Madrid on October 23 and 24. US allies such as Australia's John Howard and Japan's Junichiro Koizumi have urged greater involvement by France and Germany and Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini said, "I would expect a greater degree of generosity and willingness than I might have expected before this resolution was adopted."

Of greater political import, however, is that the resolution serves to lend political legitimacy to a beleaguered Bush administration, at a time when opposition within the US to the war and to its outcome is growing and Bush's popularity rating is at an all-time low. A poll released this week shows that Bush's popularity dropped to 53 percent in August from 58 percent in July and that 57 percent of respondents want Bush to pay more attention to the country's economy and less to the war on terrorism. By comparison, Bush's popularity rating was 74 percent during the invasion of Iraq, and 86 percent immediately after September 11, 2001. Whatever caveats they wish to place on their assent, Germany, France and Russia have still approved a US occupation of Iraq and provided it with the fig leaf of UN backing.

Syria's backing for the resolution is the Damascus regime's response to the naked threats of US military aggression made against it. The Bush administration has accused Damascus of supporting terrorist activities in Iraq as well as in the Occupied Territories and of seeking to develop weapons of mass destruction. Bush expressed support for Israel's air strike on a Palestinian refugee camp near Damascus, and the day before the UN meeting the US House of Representatives voted 398-4 to sanction Syria for its alleged ties to terrorist groups and purported efforts to obtain nuclear, biological and chemical weapons.

The Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Act also calls on Damascus to end its "occupation" of Lebanon. It gives the White House a range of options for sanctioning Syria, but more importantly creates the climate where direct military action can be prepared, either by the US or Israel. Meanwhile, US officials leaked reports of Israel deploying nuclear-armed submarines in a clear threat of annihilation if Syria were to respond to Israel's military provocations.

Hours before the UN vote was taken, Syrian President Bashar Assad had told the Organisation of the Islamic Conference summit in Malaysia, "The world has discovered that the war of 'liberation' of Iraq has liberated the Iraqi citizen of the state, the institutions, the sovereignty, dignity, food, water and electricity.... The Iraqi citizen has become 'liberated' from the gift of life, and everyone, without exception, has discovered that the excuses which led to war lacked credibility."

This nationalist rhetoric aside, Syria—like all the Arab regimes—has no intention of clashing with Washington. Damascus is hoping—one suspects with little conviction—that by bowing to US threats it can avoid Iraq's fate.

A factor in the calculation of the Europeans is the hope that UN backing will strengthen the hand of Secretary of State Colin Powell against the so-called "hawks" in the Pentagon led by Vice President Dick Cheney and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. Blair for one has insisted to his European counterparts that engaging with Washington is the only way to prevent the more unilateralist elements within the Pentagon from advancing an even more aggressive foreign policy.

Whether or not Rumsfeld is downgraded in the Bush administration, however, Washington's militarist ambitions will only be encouraged by the cowardice of the European bourgeoisie. Threats already being made against Syria, Iran and North Korea—Bush's so-called "axis of evil"—will become more strident

still and not even the major powers will be exempt from US sabre-rattling.

Speaking in California on the day of the Security Council vote, Bush reiterated his doctrine of "preventive war," arrogating to himself the right to launch unprovoked military aggression against any country that Washington perceives as a potential threat. "America is following a new strategy," said Bush. "We are not waiting for further attacks. We are striking our enemies before they can strike us again." He made the remark on the eve of a trip to Asia and while sharing the platform with California's governor-elect Arnold Schwarzenegger. The *New York Times* noted in its account of the speech that the latter's "Terminator" movies came to define an image of America round the world that is more vivid than most White House policy papers." In this case, the image and the policy were in sync.

Also on the day of the UN vote, US ambassador to NATO, Nicholas Burns, called an extraordinary meeting of the transatlantic military alliance in order to challenge the creation of a new security and defence policy for the European Union. The call was made as the EU was meeting to discuss greater defence collaboration as part of its efforts to agree a new constitutional treaty.

Burns attacked any such plans as representing "one of the greatest dangers to the transatlantic relationship." Significantly, Blair's support for the EU military initiative and collaboration with France and Germany have angered Washington and led to warnings of a possible rift. The Bush administration will clearly not countenance the British government's efforts to be a "bridge" to Europe if Blair forgets for one moment that he is above all else Washington's vassal.

The latest debacle at the Security Council is another damning rebuttal to all those forces who held up the European powers and the United Nations as a possible counterweight or a check on US aggression. Once again the UN has been exposed as a pliant instrument of the imperialist powers and of the US in particular.

Opposition to war and colonialism can be developed only in conflict with the governments in Washington, London, Paris, Berlin and Moscow, not in alliance with any one of them against another. It means the forging of an international movement of working people to advance a programme that opposes the economic and social system that gives rise to war—capitalism—and the creation of a new social order that places the essential needs of the masses for jobs, decent wages, housing, health care and education at the centre of economic life.



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