

UN Security Council stalls vote on US Iraq resolution

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Amid the escalating political and military debacle confronting the American occupation of Iraq, the US and Britain placed a draft resolution before the UN Security Council on Monday to secure its endorsement of the Bush administration's plans for so-called Iraqi sovereignty. An unelected interim government is to be selected by UN special envoy Lakhdar Brahimi, vetted by the White House and handed power on June 30.

Other members of the Security Council have met the US agenda with reservations. While couched in diplomatic and guarded language, France, Germany, Russia and China have all expressed opposition to the fact that the resolution leaves the US, not the "sovereign" Iraqi regime, effectively in control of the country. A vote has been stalled until Brahimi unveils the composition of the government, which he is scheduled to do this weekend. The resolution is likely to face amendment.

The resolution contains little information about the powers the US will hold over the Iraqi government. The most detailed sections are those calling on UN members to forgive Iraq's debt, provide money and send troops to help the occupation. It does not refer at all to the laws enacted by the US-controlled Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) since the May 2003 UN resolution 1483 placed Iraq under formal occupation.

Most significantly, the draft resolution makes no mention of, and therefore effectively leave in place, the Law of Administration, or interim constitution, that was drawn up by the US and rubber-stamped in March by the US-installed Iraqi Governing Council (IGC). The Law of Administration has entrenched long-term US control over the Iraqi state, its territory, military and economy, particularly its energy resources.

The interim constitution decreed that all laws enacted by the CPA remain in force unless an elected Iraqi government repeals them—when and if one exists. The CPA has created a number of supervisory and auditing

bodies that will wield effective veto power over the financial arrangements of government ministries. A US-appointed licensing commission has been created with extensive powers over the Iraqi media and communications industry, including to shut down news agencies.

The interim constitution explicitly placed the Iraqi military under US command. Iraqi governments are obliged to obey any UN resolution giving the occupation force a mandate to remain in the country. The draft UN resolution does precisely that, subject only to a "review" in 12 months. The resolution also leaves in place the US-controlled body created last year to supervise Iraq's oil industry. Representatives of the American government, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund vet every potential oil contract.

The draft resolution decrees that all Iraqis accept "these arrangements peacefully and in full". It gives the "multinational force"—i.e. the US-led occupation army—the "authorisation" to "take all necessary measures to contribute to the maintenance of security and stability in Iraq". Taken together, these clauses amount to a threat to anyone who refuses to accept the interim constitution and the UN resolution. Dissenting political parties risk being outlawed—the fate suffered by the movement led by Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr.

The fact that the "sovereign" Iraqi government is so transparently intended to be a US puppet—and therefore will have no legitimacy in the eyes of the Iraqi people—has been criticised by the European powers and China.

The French ambassador to the UN declared: "We think that the transfer of sovereignty should not only be ink on the paper. If the Iraqi people do not perceive this government as their own then I think we are all in trouble."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Moscow was not prepared to vote on the draft resolution until the

composition of the proposed government was known. Russia, he said, had “to judge whether the new government can be credible first and foremost in the eyes of Iraqis themselves”.

The Chinese ambassador to the UN, Wang Guangya, told the media: “It should say in the resolution that the [Iraqi] government has a final say whether the [US-led occupation] force should be extended and on major actions undertaken by the force.”

China has submitted specific amendments to the US-British resolution. The Chinese document, leaked to Associated Press, proposes that the resolution state: “The interim government shall exercise full sovereignty, in the political, economic, security, judicial and diplomatic areas, including the power to control and dispose of all the natural and economic resources, sign economic cooperation agreements and contracts, and enjoy judicial independence and the power to administer prisons in Iraq.”

Germany’s UN representative, Gunter Pleuger, declared this “an excellent paper because it raises a lot of the questions that we have raised too, and it makes a lot of reasonable proposals that we support”.

The reservations expressed in Paris, Berlin, Moscow and Beijing do not represent any newly-discovered concern for the rights of the Iraqi people. These governments support the continued presence of American troops in Iraq. All voted last May for resolution 1483, which gave the US total control over Iraq, its economy and its resources. Last October, they backed resolution 1511, which declared that the IGC “embodied” Iraqi sovereignty and thereby committed the UN to accept the interim constitution endorsed by the puppet body.

If most of Iraq were not in a state of semi-insurrection against the occupation, and the Bush administration were not being shaken by opposition and recriminations in the US itself, then it is highly likely that the European powers and China would have raised nothing at all.

The diplomatic maneuverings in the UN, however, reflect the growing pressure on America’s rivals to come to the assistance of US imperialism. The mounting failure of the Bush administration’s neo-colonial project in Iraq has profoundly destabilised the Middle East, where all the major powers have enormous economic interests. The instability is also a significant factor in the steady rise of oil prices. The economic fortunes of the European Union and China are particularly vulnerable if this trend continues.

At least in part, the requests that Washington accept a

formal weakening of its control over Iraq are motivated by a hope that this will dissipate the Iraqi resistance to the occupation, enable the country’s oil production to be ramped up and bring relative calm to the region.

The other powers are also seeking to exploit the crisis by linking their support for an ongoing occupation with demands that the US remove the obstacles to European and Chinese companies gaining contracts in Iraq’s “reconstruction,” and in the country’s oil industry in particular. Thus, the proposed Chinese amendment declares that the interim Iraqi government should be able to “sign economic cooperation agreements and contracts”.

Before the US invasion last year, French, Russian and Chinese oil corporations all held contracts to develop potentially lucrative Iraqi oil fields. They want them back.

To this point, the Bush administration has given no indication that it is prepared to horse-trade. Britain’s Tony Blair attempted to placate the opposition to the draft resolution by denying that the Iraqi government would have no power at all over the occupation forces. He told a London news conference: “If there’s a political decision as to whether you go into a place like Fallujah in a particular way, that has to be done with the consent of the Iraqi government.”

His overture to the European powers was rejected immediately by the White House. Secretary of State Colin Powell declared: “If it comes down to the US armed forces protecting themselves or in some way accomplishing their mission in a way that might not be in total consonance with what the Iraqi interim government might want to do at a particular moment in time, US forces remain under US command.”

Blair quickly backed down, with both governments declaring their agreement with each other.

Whatever the resolution is amended or not, it will not alter the fact that the Iraqi government which is installed on June 30 is the illegitimate product of a predatory and criminal invasion. The will of the Iraqi people can only find expression when all occupation troops are unconditionally withdrawn.



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