

The UN - An Imperialist Club

As the US war juggernaut began to move into place, a clamour rose from politicians and media from around the world that Bush should not lead the US to war unilaterally, but should "go through the UN". Which he did. This has now been summed up in many quarters as showing that the US rulers are still a little bit "reasonable" and that they still "know how to compromise"... and in any case, that at least war was put off, and perhaps there is still a glimmer of hope that the United Nations will somehow succeed in restraining the Bush gang from taking the final step. Is there any truth to this?

Even the most abject capitulation by the Saddam regime might not be enough to stop it. In a word. Whether or not the UN Security Council winds up issuing a resolution specifically approving a US-led war, its role differs in important ways from the 1991 Gulf War. The US imperialists have succeeded in reducing the UN from a forum where they played a pre-eminent role among the broader ranks of the imperialist powers, but where there was a substantial degree of negotiation and compromise, to an institution that either does what the US says or else gets marginalised by US power - in Bush's terms, "becomes irrelevant". Making this kind of adjustment to US relations with international institutions is an important part of the efforts of the Bush gang to achieve their vision of institutionalising and eternalising US global hegemony. But even unparalleled US hegemony does not mean it can dispense with junior partners completely. International organisations, from the UN to NATO, the international courts and so forth, will be given US backing, but only to the extent that they are fully compatible with US imperial interests.

Also importantly, Bush and Blair may tout their democratic credentials but it is common knowledge that if

you were to take a vote amongst the world's people today on whether war against Iraq is just and necessary, the result would be an overwhelmingly no. This would also be true within almost every individual country as well. Yet the US and British imperialists are proceeding nonetheless, and are fully aware that they will come out of this with their hands covered with the blood of innocent people. In this context, going to the UN was a trick designed to undermine opposition and lull important sections of the world's people, especially in the US and Europe, by convincing them that if war is indeed fought, it will be something other than a war for oil and empire. The UN disguises the class rule and interests of the imperialists in much the same way as national parliaments, which Lenin described as "talk shops", designed to lull the masses into passivity and conceal naked imperial interest in a fog of impotent, meaningless wordplay.

The other imperialist countries have been dragging their feet, quibbling with the US, not over whether or not to wage this war but when and how (as a French official told a *Washington Post* reporter), and, above all, who will get what when the fighting is over. Two months of sometimes obscure diplomatic squabbles at the UN and especially behind the scenes produced a resolution that exposes a great deal about all the powers.

The resolution represents a compromise between the US and the French-led UN opposition, but little compromise at all with Iraq. That country is damned if it goes along and damned if it doesn't. In a nutshell, Iraq is summoned to surrender its national sovereignty, as if it had already been totally defeated in war and no longer had any rights whatsoever as an independent nation. In return it would get nothing, not

even a promise that economic sanctions will be removed when Iraq fully complies. If Iraq refuses to accept these conditions, then Bush will have the excuse he needs. But even if Iraq accepts the conditions, that may not change the outcome. The US has already announced that if the inspectors find nothing, that would only prove that Saddam Hussein is hiding something!

Among the more flagrantly gangster requirements in this resolution is the fact that the inspectors have the right to make surprise raids anywhere, including mosques and Saddam Hussein's residences, which were previously considered private by UN consensus. Until recently, France argued that the only purpose of such a clause would be to present Iraq with a demand it could not accept. These intrusions are not intended to find any nuclear weapons production units or chemical weapons facilities hidden in a closet or under a bed, but they could be useful for loading precise co-ordinates into a killing cruise missile.

The resolution also orders that Iraq permit UN inspectors to "facilitate" the removal from the country of anyone they want, along with their families, for "interviews", supposedly to reveal Iraqi weapons schemes. The word "facilitate" is one of the few concessions the US made to international sensibilities, since the original American draft called for the inspectors to be armed and allowed to literally kidnap Iraqis at gunpoint, dragging them and their families abroad, whether they agreed or not. But even if people grabbed up by the UN inspectors appear to consent, how voluntary can it be when the choice is between delivering yourself and your family to the hands of the US now or risk having the Americans kill you and all your family when they invade if you refuse the offer? It will be no surprise if Bush gets whatever he

wants from these interviews.

The record should be set straight on these inspectors. It was not Saddam who put an end to inspections. The UN itself withdrew its personnel for their own safety in 1998 hours before US/UK bombing raids. In fact, according to former leading weapons inspector Scott Ritter, the inspectors helped provide targeting data for those raids. By that time, according to Ritter, the foreign teams had already verified the destruction of or themselves destroyed almost all the arms the UN had complained about. President Clinton unleashed bombs on Iraq again anyway.

The great UN diplomatic battle, led by France, to prevent the Security Council from being used as a rubber stamp for American ambition petered out ignominiously in a trail of commas and other petty changes. The version unanimously approved retains the formulation that Iraq is now "in material breach of its obligations", which Bush long ago said was sufficient authorisation for the US to attack. But both sides got some useful ambiguity. In an announcement marked by boundless cynicism, French President Jacques Chirac crowed that France had won the essence of the demands it made of the US: "France has never had but one aim in this negotiation, that Iraq be given the chance to disarm in peace." France can claim that it preserved its honour because the resolution does not explicitly authorise the US to unleash Armageddon automatically when the inspectors make their report but calls for further UN discussion, while Bush points out that all 15 members of the Security Council agreed not to insert any language that would impede the US from going ahead at whatever point it wants to. Nor does this criminal accord prevent France from doing what it did when diplomacy failed to protect its interests in the first Gulf War - joining it, whether Iraq disarms or not.

This is diplomacy at its finest.

Even Syria, the lone Arab state on the Security Council, unexpectedly went along with the tide. Asked who had negotiated this deal with the Syrians and what had been said to them, an unnamed senior US official replied, "I think Syria just ultimately saw where their interests were in this matter." The US ambassador to the UN, John Negroponte, undoubtedly responsible for making Syria "see reason", was in charge of terror attacks and torture raids on civilians in Nicaragua from across the border in Honduras during Reagan's "Contra" war on the Sandinista government. (Anyone who saw the film *Carla's Song* and remembers the schoolteacher who was crippled and had his tongue cut out by the Contras knows his work.) Syria may be about to become the neighbour of an American-occupied Iraq. Negroponte understands how to be persuasive.

The reasons for France's opposition to the US are as plain as could be. They have nothing to do with international law and respect for the UN, both of which France has previously brazenly defied when it came to its own colonial interests. Once excluded from the Gulf oil bonanza by US, UK and Dutch oil companies, France was an early supporter of Saddam Hussein. It has been said that in terms of building their respective geostrategic anchors for imperialist influence in the Middle East, Saddam was to France as the Shah of Iran was to the US. Each power built up its "own" regime against the other, although who was Saddam's master became a complicated question. France made it possible for Iraq to build a nuclear reactor, destroyed by Israel in a 1981 bombing raid that was certainly cleared by the US. In return for Iraqi oil, France shipped much of the advanced weapons Iraq used against Iran in the 1980-1988 war.

The US, too, encouraged and armed Saddam in that war and then

made sure neither side won. In 1991, when the US invaded Iraq, France protested at first, but then sent in 10,000 troops with tanks and combat aircraft to fight as part of the US-led coalition. France couldn't afford to stand aside and have no bargaining chips on the table. Then after the war, France once again tried to rebuild its relationship with Saddam, opposing the US over trade sanctions, reopening its Baghdad embassy in 1998 and condemning the US/UK escalation of air attacks at the end of that year.

Obviously France prefers the status quo in Iraq to the prospects of what Bush has in mind. But it also knows that it cannot stand up to the US. Diplomacy, in the end, is only a matter of getting what your guns could get you anyway, and France, as yet, does not have the guns. An unnamed "senior French official" told a reporter, "In a sense, we're trapped.... We have to choose our camp. Ultimately we will want to re-engage in Iraq. We have a strategic relationship there. We have a market." Former CIA director James Woolsey explained it like this: "It's pretty straightforward. France and Russia have oil companies and interests in Iraq. They should be told that if they are of assistance in moving Iraq toward decent government, we'll do the best we can to assure that the new government and American companies work closely with them. If they throw in their lot with Saddam, it will be difficult to the point of impossible to persuade the new Iraqi government to work with them."

Whilst so far bowing to the inevitable in an apparent repeat of its performance in the 1991 Gulf War, France is also madly upping spending to make it second only to the US in overseas "force projection", including building a second nuclear carrier. On the eve of the UN vote, the Bush government leaked a report about France's current world-class bio-warfare programme. Whether true or not (and why not, since the

US has the same), this was intended as a warning that no one is immune from being Saddamised by America.

Russia is in the same boat. France doesn't need the \$5 billion due to it from Iraq nearly as badly as Russia needs the almost \$8 billion it is owed. Lukoil, Russia's leading oil company (a private concern, but just as surely tied in to the government as America's oil giants), concluded major agreements for Iraqi oil in 1997. The company recently reported that the Putin government gave it "guarantees" that it will have access to Iraqi oil in the future. Moreover, because Russia has been excluded from the exploitation of the Third World since the fall of the USSR, Iraq has been even more important to Putin's plans.

Germany also deserves a word, since it has been so shabbily slandered as pacifist by the Bushites. As a loser of the Second World War that is particularly anxious to get back into the oil game, Germany has conducted extensive trade with both Iran and Iraq. Once again, oil explains a lot about foreign policy. But Germany's opposition to Bush has been greatly exaggerated. German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder apparently had to mouth opposition to the coming war to win the election, but that seems to be an old story. His ex-radical, Green Party Foreign Minister, Joska Fischer, tried to smooth over the US-Germany dispute by saying that, "Sometimes you have to live with differences in the family." Schroeder and Fischer reversed previously-announced German policy and said that Germany's small contingent of troops and tanks would stay in

Kuwait even if the US used it as a base for war. Germany and the Netherlands also agreed to take on the leadership and some of the burden of the US-led occupation of Afghanistan to free up US resources in the Gulf. Most importantly, even at the height of the public exchange of words, when Schroeder's Justice Minister was fired for comparing Bush to Hitler, the German government gave absolute assurances that it would not obstruct US use of its army base in Heidelberg, Germany, the headquarters for the US forces presently in Kuwait and a key component in US war plans. Yet Bush was so offended by even this empty opposition that a senior Pentagon advisor said that Germany could forget about winning a seat in the UN Security Council for the next generation and called for "regime change" in Berlin.

China is a special case in all this. A new capitalist ruling class seized power through a coup d'état after Mao's death, and it has become increasingly prey to imperialist depredations and dependent on foreign capital. It has little prospect of becoming a monopoly capitalist/imperialist country, and seeks to combine servility to imperialism with regional bullying on the model of India. China was given a seat in the victors' club (the Security Council) after the Second World War, but that seat was never intended for a socialist country. The US maintained the fiction that Chiang Kai-shek's Taiwan was the legitimate government in China until a period in the Cold War when Nixon tried to pull China into an alliance against the USSR.

From the start of the UN negotiations, China's opposition was the weakest. US officials told reporters off the record that China would be no obstacle. Chinese oil companies, now active in overseas investment, have entered into agreements for Iraqi oil, but China never had any intention of going up against the US. One of the consequences of capitalism in China has been a shift from oil self-sufficiency (necessary if a country is to maintain its independence from imperialism) to increasing dependence on oil imports. With that has come an increasing military vulnerability to the US; the latter would only need to block China's sea lanes, not even attack the mainland, in order to bring China's new rulers to their knees. (Or lower - if Blair is Bush's poodle, Jiang Zimen is his lap dog, grinning for the cameras on Bush's ranch when most other statesmen were at least yipping at Bush's heels in a show of defiance.) What a change from Mao's day, when socialist China was a bulwark in the world-wide struggle against imperialism, enthusiastically supporting the Vietnamese against the US at great cost to China itself, along with the Palestinians and other peoples of the Middle East and everywhere else.

What the ruling classes of these countries and others have in common is not any regard whatsoever for Saddam Hussein or an ounce of concern for the people of Iraq, or even any real opposition to the end of Saddam's regime, but their own thirst for oil and exploitation and a fear that they might be forced out of the looting of the Middle East and the world. ■

ERRATUM

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The following paragraph was omitted by error from the announcement of the results of the First Congress of the Maoist Communist Party [of Turkey and North Kurdistan – formerly the TKP(ML)]. The following paragraph should be inserted into the section entitled Revolutionary Internationalist Movement after the paragraph that ends "whilst continuing the two-line struggle". – AWTW

Our Congress salutes the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, under the leadership of Comrade Bob Avakian, which, in the heart of the centre of world counter-revolution, the imperialist USA, is raising the flag of proletarian internationalism and persevering in the fight for communism. To our class detachments in Colombia, the comrades of the Revolutionary Communist Group, and in Afghanistan, the Communist Party of Afghanistan, and to the Maoist Communist Party in Italy as well as revolutionary Maoists in Germany and Mexico and elsewhere, we send our salutes.

International Bureau of the Maoist Communist Party