

A Nightmare to Love:

*How the peace movement can use Bush's
"almost desperate attempts" to "destroy the arms inspection"*

By Jeremy Brecher

A nightmare scenario is facing the Bush administration.

Imagine that Iraq continues to let UN arms inspectors inspect without impediment. By the December 8 deadline for reporting on its weapons of mass destruction, the Iraqi government makes an extensive declaration of activities and materials that might be used to make such weapons but also might have other purposes. The Iraqis then allow the inspectors to inspect all the sites they wish to enter. If the inspectors find some materials that might be used for weapons of mass destruction, they destroy them. The inspectors report to the Security Council; then most countries except the U.S. and Britain declare that, whether or not Iraq once had weapons of mass destruction, it no longer does. Enforcement of sanctions begins to crumble and world pressure to lift them builds.

To prevent this scenario, the Bush administration is working frantically to discredit the inspection process. As former assistant secretary general of the UN Hans von Sponeck recently put it, "No one, not even the casual reader, can miss the almost desperate attempts by the U.S. authorities to destroy the arms inspection before it's properly begun."

Bush administration officials have systematically tried to smear the inspectors professionally and personally. They are maintaining that even the most trivial actions by Iraq would justify an attack. As the inspectors entered Iraq, U.S. and British warplanes fired on Iraq; when Iraqi anti-aircraft returned the fire, the U.S. (unsupported by any other country, even Britain) maintained it was a "material breach" of UN resolu-

tions, something it claims would justify war against Iraq.

The Bush administration is claiming that it, not the Security Council, has the right to determine whether Iraq has complied with the inspection requirements. "The UN can meet and discuss, but we don't need their permission," says White House chief of staff Andrew Card. It is claiming the right to decide what will replace the existing Iraqi government; indeed, it has even proposed to install an American general as Iraq's ruler.

The Bush administration is opposing anything, such as the lifting of sanctions, that would give Iraq an incentive to cooperate with inspections. Indeed, it abruptly insisted that the UN Security Council place new restrictions on the "oil-for-food" program. According to *The New York Times*, "Other Council diplomats were frustrated that the United States insisted on the revisions to the list as the deadline approached... Most Council nations were hoping to avoid getting into it again until sometime next year, to avoid undermining the weapons inspections." Evidently the Bush administration is not so averse to "undermining the weapons inspections."

Finally, the Bush administration continues preparing for war. It is pre-positioning planes, tanks, and fuel in the region and conducting a stealth mobilization of the reserves. Its top officials are running around the world cutting deals to buy support with a share of the spoils of war as a bribe.

The Bush administration is undoubtedly preparing to escalate this strategy after December 8. With stunning cynicism, it declined to make its intelligence information

on Iraq's weapons programs available to the UN inspectors until after December 8. Could it possibly be planning to then release intelligence designed to show that the inspectors have been conned by the Iraqis?

Of course, if the inspectors then inspect Iraq and don't find the weapons that the U.S. government has alleged are there, it will be a bit embarrassing for Washington. But the Bush administration has a remedy. There's no need to find an arsenal of weapons of mass destruction to justify attack on Iraq; all that's necessary is for Iraq to continue denying it has such an arsenal. As President Bush recently put it, should Saddam Hussein "again deny that this arsenal exists, he will have entered his final stage with a lie. And deception this time will not be tolerated. Delay and defiance will invite the severest of consequences."

There is one problem with this strategy: The overwhelming majority of Americans, not to mention the peoples and governments of the rest of the world, want the inspection process to work. The "almost desperate attempts by the U.S. authorities to destroy the arms inspection before it's properly begun" could boomerang if war opponents make an issue of them. Those desperate attempts provide us a golden opportunity to appeal to the American public. Peace advocates can lay out what the U.S. can and should do if it really wants inspections to work:

- Stop smearing the inspectors.
- Stop claiming that trivial inspection problems justify war.
- Stop military operations against and provocative overflights of Iraq.

- Stop claiming that the U.S., not the Security Council, has a right to determine what's a violation.
- Recognize that the U.S. does not have the right to decide who will govern Iraq.
- Halt the movement of war materiel to the region.
- Stop mobilizing the reserves (something many reservists and their families will welcome).
- Stop bribing other countries by promising a share in the spoils of war.
- Provide full disclosure to Congress and the American people of all offers made to other countries regarding oil rights, construction contracts, defense commitments, debt reduction, immigration policy changes, and any other valuable considerations offered in exchange for war support.
- Stop threatening to go to war over what Iraq does or doesn't put on a piece of paper.

Laying out what is necessary to make the inspection process work provides a positive alternative to current policies. Equally important, it sets in relief all that the Bush administration is doing to ensure the inspectors' failure.

The Bush administration is hardly likely to accede to any such demands. But it doesn't have to for the peace movement to win.

Starting with Kofi Annan's response the day after George Bush's September 12 address to the Security Council, the UN and the countries opposing a war have carefully preserved a face-saving way out for President Bush. They have repeatedly

praised him for forcing the international community to deal with the "Iraqi problem" so that he can claim credit for the success of the inspection process. If he does so, peace advocates may shudder at the hypocrisy, but we'll know the super hawks have lost a round.

Of course, instead of claiming the inspections as a success, the Bush administration may go on sabotaging the inspection process, even though the American people and the whole rest of the world want it to work. But if they do, they will court political isolation abroad and at home.

Kofi Annan recently observed that "poll after poll" showed Americans were eager for the President to act with the United Nations. Going to war on a flimsy pretext, Annan pointed out, would draw opposition not only from Security Council nations but also from ordinary Americans who have expressed a desire for Mr. Bush to work with the United Nations in confronting Iraq.

The "almost desperate attempts by the U.S. authorities to destroy the arms inspection" give those "ordinary Americans" good reason for opposing the drive toward war. The antiwar movement should not ignore this gift.

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