

Powell's Dubious Case for War

By Phyllis Bennis

U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell's presentation to the UN Security Council on February 5 wasn't likely to win over anyone not already on his side. He ignored the crucial fact that in the past several days (in Sunday's *New York Times* and in his February 4th briefing of UN journalists) Hans Blix denied key components of Powell's claims.

Blix, who directs the UN inspection team in Iraq, said the UNMOVIC inspectors have seen "no evidence" of mobile biological weapons labs, has "no persuasive indications" of Iraq-al Qaeda links, and no evidence of Iraq hiding and moving material used for Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) either outside or inside Iraq. Dr. Blix also said there was no evidence of Iraq sending scientists out of the country, of Iraqi intelligence agents posing as scientists, of UNMOVIC conversations being monitored, or of UNMOVIC being penetrated.

Further, CIA and FBI officials still believe the Bush administration is "exaggerating" information to make their political case for war. Regarding the alleged Iraqi link with al Qaeda, U.S. intelligence officials told the *New York Times*, "we just don't think it's there."

The most compelling part of Powell's presentation was his brief ending section on the purported al Qaeda link with Iraq and on the dangers posed by the al Zarqawi network. However, he segued disingenuously from the accurate and frightening information about what the al Zarqawi network could actually do with biochemical materials to the not-so-accurate claim about its link with Iraq—which is tenuous and unproven at best.

A key component of the alleged Iraq-al Qaeda link is based on what Powell said "detainees tell us...". That claim must be rejected. On December 27 the *Washington Post* reported that U.S. officials had acknowledged detainees being beaten, roughed up, threatened with torture by

being turned over to officials of countries known to practice even more severe torture. In such circumstances, nothing "a detainee" says can be taken as evidence of truth given that people being beaten or tortured will say anything to stop the pain. Similarly, the stories of defectors cannot be relied on alone, as they have a self-interest in exaggerating their stories and their own involvement to guarantee access to protection and asylum.

In his conclusion, Powell said, "We wrote 1441 not in order to go to war, we wrote 1441 to try to preserve the piece." It is certainly at least partially true that the UN resolution was an effort to "preserve the peace," although it is certainly not true that the U.S. wrote 1441 to preempt war. Rather, the Bush administration intended that the resolution would serve as a first step toward war.

Finally, the "even if" rule applies. "Even if" everything Powell said was true, there is simply not enough evidence for war. There is no evidence of Iraq posing an imminent threat, no evidence of containment not working. Powell is asking us to go to war—risking the lives of 100,000 Iraqis in the first weeks, hundreds or thousands of U.S. and other troops, and political and economic chaos—because he thinks MAYBE in the future Iraq might rebuild its weapons systems and MIGHT decide to deploy weapons or MIGHT give those weapons to someone else who MIGHT use them against someone we like or give them to someone else who we don't like, and other such speculation. Nothing that Powell said should alter the position that we should reject a war on spec.

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