

# Crunch Time for the Security Council

By Col. Dan Smith (Ret.) | March 11, 2003

In his March 6th prime time news conference, President Bush made his case for why, with or without UN authorization and support, the United States remains adamant that Saddam Hussein and his regime will be removed from power. The reasons proffered were not new: a threat to regional and world stability and peace; disregard for the human rights of Iraqis; links to terrorist organizations, including al Qaeda; and, failure to fully and immediately comply with UN resolutions dating back to 1991.

The motive for the news conference seems to have been twofold: reverse the steady slide in support for war, especially a war without UN sanction; and a preemptive strike to nullify the effect of an overall positive report to the Security Council by Hans Blix, head of the UN Monitoring, Verification, and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC), and Mohamed El Baradei, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief. And this latter reason once again brought to center stage the question of the real motive for war: disarmament, in which case the president should have waited for the inspectors to report, or regime change. Bush left no doubt about the real motive: “We will be changing the regime of Iraq for the good of the Iraqi people.”

Commentary by news analysts seemed quite guarded as to the probability that many minds had been changed to support the White House. And Bush’s ultimatum to the Security Council that “It’s time for people to show their cards, let the world know where they stand when it comes to Saddam” is sure to deepen the split among the permanent members over the wisdom of going to war when the inspection regime is gathering momentum.

Indeed, even before the presidential news conference, China expressed its support of the French-German-Russian declaration, and Chile, one of the rotating Council members, said it would not support the U.S.-British draft resolution if it came to a vote. Meanwhile, France was appealing to traditional allies to support its no-war-now position. Last month, a summit meeting of 52 African nations issued a statement supporting France’s stance on an Iraq war.

Three of the countries signing the declaration—Guinea, Cameroon, and Angola—are also current members of the Security Council. Thus four of the six “swing votes” necessary for passage of a resolution (nine are needed, with no veto from any permanent member) are on record opposing the United States’ position.

Thus the March 7 reports by the chief inspectors may be crucial for determining how quickly the Bush administration can move. El Baradei has already reported categorically that Iraq possesses no nuclear weapons, and that position did not change—nor will it. Bush effectively challenged Hans Blix by flatly declaring that “The world needs him to answer a single question: has the Iraqi regime fully and unconditionally disarmed, as required by Resolution 1441, or has it not?”

Blix of course could not affirm this, nor was this his intent. Instead, even as he commended Baghdad for improved cooperation on both process and substance, he provided a “cluster list” of disarmament issues that remain open because Iraq has failed to provide detailed documentation about or to make available for interviews the scientists involved in destruction of chemical and biological weapons and components. Each cluster ends with recommendations for action by Iraq that could be used as a yardstick of Baghdad’s level of cooperation.

Blix also revisited the allegations that Iraq uses mobile bioweapons trucks to evade inspectors and has extensive underground facilities. His intent here was, like the Bush news conference, double-barreled.



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He reaffirmed that inspections of trucks (used for food testing) and of buildings and soil (using ground penetrating radar) had found no proscribed activities. But he also implicitly criticized Council members with advanced intelligence capabilities for the scarcity of information being provided for the inspectors to investigate. Information, Blix said, would be more valuable than a doubling of the UNMOVIC staff.

The inspectors' reports were sufficiently telegraphed ahead of time to induce hesitation among the pro-war party, especially Britain, which proposed compromise language modifying the original U.S.-British draft. That modification will be discussed over the next few days, giving Iraq a further small window of opportunity to improve measurably its cooperation with the inspectors.

How much time? Blix reminded the Council that although inspections can be carried out quickly, disarming and monitoring Iraq cannot be accomplished overnight. Monitoring is a long-term effort. Disarmament needs not years, not weeks, but months. The British modification is unlikely to suggest even that much time. Nor can the White House be expected to allow it—unless unremitting pressure to comply with the international will and international law is brought to bear on both Baghdad and Washington.

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*(Dan Smith <dan@fcnl.org> is a military affairs analyst for Foreign Policy In Focus (online at [www.fpif.org](http://www.fpif.org)) is a retired U.S. army colonel and Senior Fellow on Military Affairs at the Friends Committee on National Legislation.)*

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