

Unity—But on Whose Terms?

By Col. Dan Smith (Ret.) | March 3, 2003

The answer used to be effective disarmament of Iraq. Now it is the “necessity” to unite to enforce UN Security Council resolutions concerning Iraq, to be “relevant” in the 21st century by adhering to Washington’s demands.

The Bush administration accuses the French, Germans, and Russians of splitting the unanimity of the Security Council over the inspection and disarmament process in Iraq. Yet it is the White House, by its unwillingness to seriously consider any other alternative to war to unseat Saddam Hussein, that is fomenting the very division it decries.

Despite White House rhetoric about war as a last resort, it has been apparent for some time that the decision to employ the “last resort” had already been made. This was made crystal-clear by a senior diplomat from a non-permanent member of the Security Council who was told by Bush administration officials: “You are not going to decide whether there is war in Iraq or not... That decision is ours, and we have already made it. It is already final. The only question now is whether the council will go along with it or not.” (*Washington Post*, Feb. 25, 2003, p. 1) Another diplomat noted that the message his government is hearing is that a lack of support for the new U.S.-UK-Spanish draft resolution would be considered an “unfriendly act.”

That draft resolution is as deceptively simple as it is deceptive. One page long, it accurately summarizes the main Security Council demands of Iraq to cooperate in divesting itself of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and long-range delivery systems. But it also asserts what has not been demonstrated publicly either by “revelations” of governments (e.g., the UK government dossiers or Colin Powell’s Security Council presentation on February 5) or by the UN inspectors: that Iraq has actual WMD and long-range missiles or that it poses an imminent threat “to international peace and security.” Moreover, the draft resolution attempts to force the Council to endorse mil-

itary action by artfully sequencing three declarations. It proclaims that the Security Council,

- (1) “Determined to secure full compliance with its decisions and to restore international peace and security in the area,”
- (2) “Acting under Chapter VII of the charter of the United Nations,”
- (3) “Decides that Iraq has failed to take the final opportunity afforded to it in resolution 1441 (2002).”

All agree that the Security Council needs to press hard for Iraq’s full compliance. But a full-scale war now will only destroy the region’s relative peace that has existed for the past 12 years. Given Turkey’s demands to send its troops into northern Iraq and the strong prospect that the Iraqi Kurds will resist what they will regard as a Turkish invasion, war with Baghdad will inflame a new and unwanted conflict that, among other consequences, could threaten vital supply lines for advancing U.S. forces.

The second declaration, which refers to Chapter VII of the UN Charter (“Action With Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression”), is the linchpin of the draft resolution. This chapter authorizes action when non-military measures of dispute resolution (e.g., economic sanctions, interrupting communications, cutting diplomatic relations) have failed and the Security Council determines that a military response is “necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security.” But again, international peace and security are not imminently in danger, and as long as inspectors are present, will not be endangered—as was demonstrated during the 1990s.



Iraq may be slow in taking “the final opportunity afforded to it,” but it has cooperated from the beginning on process and—as chief UN inspector Hans Blix noted on February 25, is increasing its cooperation on substance—a point echoed in the French-German-Russian memorandum opposing the draft resolution tabled by the U.S. and its two partners. That memorandum also calls for:

- (1) increased pressure on Iraq (including the continued threat of military action),
- (2) an accelerated schedule for presentation of the inspectors’ work program to the UNSC (which will compel more active cooperation by Iraq and an objective yardstick for the Council to evaluate Iraq’s compliance),
- (3) firm timelines for inspections,
- (4) a report from inspectors assessing progress 120 days after the Security Council receives the work program.

As long as Iraq cooperates with the inspectors and complies with their requirements, it seems wrong-headed to launch a war whose ostensible objective is the same as the inspectors’: to disarm Iraq. Yes, suspicions remain. Blix has presented an advisory board of weapons experts a lengthy list of issues that remain unresolved. Only Iraq can clear the air on these points, and it must do so quickly. Otherwise, it will create the very consensus in favor of military action that the U.S.-UK-Spanish draft resolution has failed to forge among UNSC members.

And that—Why should the world throw in with the U.S. line against Iraq?—remains the original question with the elusive answer.

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