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"Iraq Against the United Nations"

Editorial by U.S. Ambassador to India Robert D. Blackwill

Iraq Against the United Nations
By Robert D. Blackwill, U.S. Ambassador to India

At the end of the 1991 Gulf War, Iraq agreed with the UN to destroy its Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) completely and voluntarily. Since then, over 4,200 days have passed. During these twelve years, Iraq made no serious attempt to comply with this legal commitment to the United Nations. Indeed, Iraq's actions for more than a decade have demonstrated contempt for the UN Security Council, which has passed 17 successive resolutions demanding that Iraq demolish its WMD - all to no avail.

The 15 members of the Security Council unanimously approved the latest Resolution, 1441, on November 8, 2002. Here are some of UNSCR 1441's most important statements:

1. Iraq is in material breach of existing UN resolutions.
2. Iraq's non-compliance with Security Council resolutions poses a threat to international peace and security.
3. Iraq has not provided to the United Nations an accurate, full, final, and complete disclosure of its WMD programs.
4. Iraq has "a final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations under relevant resolutions of the Council."
5. Iraq will face "serious consequences as a result of its continued violations of its obligations."
6. The Security Council is "determined to secure full compliance with its decisions."

The language of UNSCR 1441 could not be clearer. Five months later, neither could Iraq's continuing defiance of the United Nations.

Iraq has not disarmed and has not given an accurate account of its WMD programs. Instead, the Iraqi leadership continues to lie, cheat and stall in order to retain its prohibited weapons. These efforts by Saddam Hussein include a cynical last minute willingness to dismantle some Al-Samoud missiles that violate UNSC restrictions. As President Bush has said, "I suspect that he will try to fool the world one more time. I suspect that we will see him playing games..." That is precisely what is currently happening.

Some observers point to the Al-Samoud ruse as "proof" that the weapons inspection regime is working and call for more time to be given to discover the rest of Iraq's missing WMD. According to the UN, this includes 26,000 liters of anthrax (remember the concern in India in late 2001 when a few grains of white powder that might have been anthrax showed up in some VIP offices; think of that and then consider the murderous effects of 26,000 liters of anthrax); 38,000 liters of botulinum toxin; 1.5 tons of VX nerve gas (one drop is enough to kill a person); 1,000 tons of mustard gas (Saddam Hussein in 1982 used mustard gas against massed Iranian troops); quantities of sarin gas (recall the March 20, 1995 sarin gas attack in the Tokyo subway in which eleven people were killed and 5,000 injured); and so on. This is a deadly catalogue of biological and chemical horrors. It is, therefore, obvious that the Al-Samoud missiles represent only a tiny portion of the Iraqi WMD arsenal that must be eliminated.

Inaccurate or misleading statements occasionally characterize the debate about Iraq. Here are examples.

Assertion: The United States is rushing into a war against Iraq, outside of the United Nations, which the US is determined to fight come what may.

Response: Three American Presidents have waited with the rest of the international community for 12 years for Iraq to live up to its obligations to the UN to destroy its WMD programs. America has not rushed to war; it has rushed to the United Nations, for more than a decade. Patience has been the hallmark of American policy toward Iraq since 1991. Patience, patience, and more patience. Secretary of State Colin Powell has spent hundreds of hours over the past five months working within the UN system to try to ensure that Iraq disarmed peacefully. How could the United States have made a greater commitment to the UN on this issue during this period?

Assertion: The US is about to conduct a unilateral military campaign against Iraq.

Response: American policy is not unilateral, and it will not be so in the future. All 15 members of the Security Council voted for UNSCR 1441 that demanded that Iraq disarm immediately or face "serious consequences." If military force has to be used as a last resort to destroy Iraq's WMD, the United States will be joined in this effort by dozens of other nations. This cannot accurately be described as unilateralism.

Assertion: The inspection regime is working and should be given more time before Iraq is faced with forcible disarmament.

Response: UNSCR 1441 did not send inspectors to Iraq to be detectives. Their mission was not to find Iraq's WMD through a game of hide and seek. Rather, Iraq was to indicate immediately and truthfully the precise locations of its WMD, or provide convincing evidence that these weapons had been destroyed. Iraq has done neither. The United Nations is not looking for a few missiles or artillery shells or piles of documents that restate familiar Iraqi misrepresentations, or for new maneuvers from Iraq designed to delay the moment of reckoning. Rather, the UN is insisting on clear and credible evidence that Iraq has made a strategic shift and decided to disarm. The Iraqis refuse to turn over to the UN all that they know would constitute full disarmament. The United States applauds the work of the inspectors and does not question their credibility. However, we do not believe that inspections can succeed without immediate, active and unconditional Iraqi cooperation, as called for in UNSCR 1441. That is not occurring. If Iraq were to tell the truth today about its WMD and destroy all of them, this crisis could end peacefully. But more inspectors and more time are not going to solve the fundamental problem of Iraqi non-compliance with UNSCR 1441, and 16 previous Security Council resolutions.

Assertion: The United States wants to turn Iraq into an American protectorate.

Response: If force has to be used, and in that event the people of Iraq are liberated, the United States will ensure that the citizens of Iraq will enjoy democratic governance as rapidly as possible. The US will not stay in Iraq one day longer than is absolutely necessary. After all these years of living under Saddam Hussein's tyranny, Iraq will finally be for the Iraqis.

Assertion: Containment of Iraq will deal with the threat the regime poses to the international community.

Response: Saddam Hussein's Iraq attacked Iran. Containment did not work. Saddam Hussein's Iraq attacked Kuwait. Containment did not work. To quote Mr. Jack Straw, the British Foreign Secretary: "None of the resolutions call for containment. They call for disarmament. Containment for us is rearmament for Saddam Hussein."

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Assertion: The United States is about to conduct a war against Islam.

Response: If military force becomes necessary because Saddam Hussein will not comply with the demands of the UN Security Council, a variety of Muslim states will join the coalition that will disarm Iraq. In addition, it is worth remembering that the United States in the last decade fought militarily to defend Muslims in Kuwait, in Bosnia, and in Kosovo. It should be clear that America has no quarrel whatsoever with the great religion of Islam.

Military conflict is not inevitable. The onus is solely on Saddam Hussein. He is the one who will finally decide in the near future whether there is to be war, or peace. Iraq can still meet its long-standing obligations to the United Nations and disarm without the use of force. But hopes are fading. Time is running out.

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