

2003

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Repository Citation

Meese, Alan, "Annan Leaves Door Open for U.S. Action" (2003). *Popular Media*. Paper 331.
http://scholarship.law.wm.edu/popular_media/331

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Your Voice

Annan leaves door open for U.S. action

On Feb. 8, while receiving an honorary degree at the College of William and Mary, U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan weighed in on the Iraq crisis. To his credit, Annan acknowledged that "the firm challenge issued by President Bush" led to U.N. Resolution 1441 and the inspectors' return to Iraq. This "firm challenge," of course, included the threat to disarm Iraq without U.N. authorization. Nonetheless, Annan urged America to obtain yet another such resolution before invading Iraq. The Iraq crisis is not for "any state alone," he said. Thus, only Security Council action could confer the "unique legitimacy" necessary for such an operation.

Multilateralists who decry "unilateral" American action as "illegitimate" found comfort in these remarks. Still, Annan did not expressly claim that Security Council authorization is categorically necessary for military action and with good reason: American-led action without Security Council approval might be necessary *and* legitimate.

Any suggestion that the United States plans to enforce 1441 "unilaterally" is incorrect. Bush has assembled a large coalition, including Britain, Italy, Spain, and 15 other European nations, as well as Australia, Turkey and several Persian Gulf states. Britain and Australia will provide combat troops. Others have promised support troops, including decontamination units in case of biological or chemical attack.

America will have plenty of company in any effort to disarm Saddam Hussein.

Still, France and Russia continue to resist enforcement of 1441. Both have oil interests in Iraq and stand to lose billions if Saddam falls. The intransigence of these nations — which hold vetoes over council action — raises the possibility of deadlock when the Security Council considers any additional resolution authorizing force.

What, then, of Annan's suggestion that Security Council authorization would provide a military effort "unique legitimacy?"

Although America should seek such authorization, the

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War and peace



Joe Fudge/Daily Press

Nancy Campbell, wife of Colonial Williamsburg President and Chairman Colin G. Campbell, is among those accompanying Kofi Annan, secretary-general of the United Nations, as he visits Colonial Williamsburg on Feb. 8.

United States must also maintain a credible threat to act without it.

History shows that nations may legitimately use force without Security Council consent. President Kennedy ordered a blockade of Cuba, an act of war to oust Soviet missiles from that island. There was no evidence of any plan to launch such missiles against the United States.

More recently, President Clinton conducted a 79-day bombing campaign against Serbia. The world accepted both actions as "legitimate." Neither received Security Council approval.

If anything, American-led action against Iraq would be *more* legitimate than the actions of Kennedy and Clinton, given Resolution 1441. Adopted unanimously in November, 1441 reaffirmed that Iraq was in "material breach" of resolutions ordering it to disarm. Secretary of State Colin Powell's presentation to the United Nations confirmed what open-minded people knew: Iraq will not disarm voluntarily.

Still, some might read Annan's remarks to suggest that Iraq should suffer "serious consequences" only if the Security Council passes yet another resolution.

Of course, it would be best if the Security Council authorized force. Still, Annan did not claim that such approval was absolutely necessary. Any such requirement would render 1441 meaningless. The resolution provides that Iraq "will" suffer serious consequences if it remains in material breach, not that it "might."

The resolution also provides that the cease-fire ending the Gulf War depends on Iraq's obedience to resolutions. Noncompliance would seem to void the cease-fire and justify military action.

Requiring a second resolution would allow one permanent member of the Council to abrogate 1441 by blocking any effort to enforce it. Ironically, such an interpretation would render illegitimate the very threat of force that goaded the Security Council into action. If members of the Security Council shirk their duties, nations that take 1441 seriously must act.

There was a time, perhaps, when it made sense to give the five permanent members of the Security Council a monopoly on the use of force. Those days seem long past. Once-great powers are in decline; others are in ascendance. The combined GDP of Spain and Australia equals that of Russia. Italy's GDP is larger than Russia's and nearly equal to that of France.

France's military power has been waning since Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo; its army is smaller than South Korea's.

As relatively minor powers, France and Russia are susceptible to parochial influences, such as their oil interests in Iraq.

In this new world order, there is no reason to prefer the views of either nation to those of Italy, Australia or Spain.

More important, we should not entrust such nations with the security of the United States.

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