

Week 6: The un-United Nations

On Monday, March 10 Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary General warned the United States not to go to war with Iraq without the support of the UN Security Council. He said, “The members of the Security Council now face a great choice. If they fail to agree on a common position and action is taken without the authority of the Security Council, the legitimacy and support for any such action will be seriously impaired.”

The current proposal on the table of the UN Security Council is a resolution that authorizes war anytime after March 17, unless Iraq proves before then that it has disarmed. This resolution requires nine “yes” votes from the council’s 15 members – also, in order to pass, France, Russia, and China must not veto. Today, however, the US agreed to extend the deadline beyond March 17.

The UN Security Council is currently at a standstill on the matter. The United States is currently backed by Britain, Spain, and Bulgaria. Countries against military action against Iraq, preferring instead for more time for inspectors to examine Iraq’s weapons programs are Russia, China, France, Germany, and Syria. This leaves Angola, Cameroon, Guinea, Mexico, Chili, and Pakistan as swing voters – although Pakistan has announced they will abstain from the vote.

The six swing countries have proposed a 45-day delay to the US resolution. The US, faced with almost certain defeat in the Security Council, budged by agreeing to a short extension to their March 17 deadline, but refused to accept 45 days as the length of the extension.

In the meantime, President Bush has launched a phone campaign to try to win the support of other countries. Bush telephoned the leaders of Turkey, Japan, Spain, China, South Africa, Angola and Oman.

The Non-Aligned Movement, 115 countries on the United Nations General Assembly, in an attempt to generate new ideas for dealing with Iraq, is holding meetings today and Wednesday. It is the intent of these meetings to help resolve the divisions that have appeared in the Security Council.

Finally, Britain's support of the United States' actions may be beginning to fade. Tony Blair has faced harsh criticism from Britain – his popularity is decreasing. As a result, Britain is gradually leaning toward a less aggressive resolution to the conflict. Even more, Britain is hesitant to back the United States without the support of the UN Security Council.

The UN Security Council is divided, and if the United States moves to war without the consent of the Council, it will be violating the UN charter. I suppose then Iraq won't be the only country violating UN agreements.