

France Said No to US Led War against Iraq: Dominique de Villepin at the UN Security Council, February 14, 2003

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The government of president Jacques Chirac was a historical watershed. It was the last French government which refused to align itself with US foreign policy. It was the expression of an independent nation.

France had extensive oil interests in Iraq which were jeopardized by the US sponsored sanctions regime as well as the US-UK No Fly Zone imposed on Iraq in the wake of the Gulf War.

“French oil companies Total and Elf-Aquitaine won the rights to develop the \$3.4 billion Bin Umar project and the vast Majnoon field in southern Iraq. Total, which acquired Elf, had been unable to exploit these fields while the UN trade embargo against Iraq was still in place.” (Guardian)

France was considered a rival of the US. One of the unspoken objectives of the Iraq war was to exclude French oil companies from Iraq.

France through Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin opposed to the US-led invasion of Iraq at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

Video (French) Excerpts of Transcript (English) below

VILLEPIN (through translator): Thank you, Mr. President, Mr. Secretary General, ladies and gentlemen, ministers, distinguished ambassadors. I would like to begin by telling you how pleased France is and how pleased I am that on this decisive day the presidency of the Security Council is held by Guinea (inaudible).

I would like to thank Mr. Blix and Mr. ElBaradei for the presentation they have just given us. Their reports testified to regular progress in the disarmament of Iraq.

And what have the inspectors told us? That for a month Iraq has been actively cooperating with them, that substantial progress has been made in the area of ballistics with the progressive destruction of al-Samoud II missiles and their equipment, that new prospects are opening up with the recent question of several scientists. Significant evidence of real disarmament has now been observed, and that is indeed the key to Resolution 1441.

Therefore, I would like solemnly to address a question to this body, and it's the very same

question being asked by people all over the world. Why should we now engage in war with Iraq?

...

In response to the inspectors' questions, Iraq must give us further information in timely fashion so that we may obtain the most precise knowledge possible about any existing inventories or programs. On the basis of that information, we will destroy all the components that are discovered, as we've done for the missiles, and we'll determine the truth of the matter.

With regard to nuclear weapons, Mr. ElBaradei's statement confirmed that we are approaching the time where the IAEA will be able to certify the dismantlement of Iraq's program.

What conclusions can we draw? That Iraq, according to the very terms used by the inspectors, represents less of a danger to the world than it did in 1991, that we can achieve our objective of effectively disarming that country. Let us keep the pressure on Baghdad.

...

First, let us ask the inspectors to establish a hierarchy of tasks for disarmament, and, on that basis, to present us, as quickly as possible, with the work program provided for by Resolution 1284. We need to know immediately which priority issues could constitute the key disarmament tasks to be carried out by Iraq.

Secondly, we propose that the inspectors give us a progress report every three weeks. This will make the Iraqi authorities understand that in no case may they interrupt their efforts.

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We do not subscribe to what may be the other objectives of a war. Is it a matter of regime change in Baghdad? No one underestimates the cruelty of this dictatorship or the need to do everything possible to promote human rights. But this is not the objective of Resolution 1441. And force is certainly not the best way of bringing about democracy. Here and elsewhere it would encourage dangerous instability.

Is it a matter of fighting terrorism? War would only increase it and we would then be faced with a new wave of violence.

Let us beware of playing into the hands of those who do want a clash of civilizations or a clash of religions.

Is it finally a matter of recasting the political landscape of the Middle East? In that case, we run the risk of exacerbating tensions in a region already marked by great instability, not to mention that in Iraq itself the large number of communities and religions already represents a danger of a potential breakup.

We all have the same demands: We want more security and more democracy. But there is another logic other than the logic of force. There is another path. There are other solutions.

We understand the profound sense of insecurity with which the American people have been living since the tragedy of September 11, 2001. The entire world shared the sorrow of New York and of America struck in the heart. And I say this in the name of our friendship for the American people, in the name of our common values: freedom, justice, tolerance.

But there is nothing today to indicate a link between the Iraqi regime and al Qaeda. And will the world be a safer place after a military intervention in Iraq? I want to tell you what my country's conviction is: It will not.

Four months ago, we unanimously adopted a system of inspections to eliminate the threat of potential weapons of mass destruction and to guarantee our security. Today we cannot accept without contradicting ourselves a conflict that might well weaken it.

Yes, we also want more democracy in the world, but we can only achieve this objective within the framework of a true global democracy based on respect, sharing, the awareness of a true community of values and a common destiny. And its core is the United Nations.

Let us make no mistake. In the face of multiple and complex threats, there is no single response, but there is a single necessity: We must remain united. Today, we must together invent a new future for the Middle East.

Let us not forget the immense hope created by the efforts of the Madrid conference and the Oslo Agreement. Let us not forget that the Mideast crisis represents our greatest challenge in terms of security and justice.

For us, the Middle East, like Iraq, represents a priority commitment. And this calls for even greater ambition and boldness. We should envision a region transformed through peace; civilizations that, through the courage of reaching out to each other, rediscover their self-confidence and an international prestige equal to their long history and their aspirations.

Mr. President, in a few days, we must solemnly fulfill our responsibility through a vote. We will be facing an essential choice: disarming Iraq through war or through peace. And this crucial choice implies others. It implies the international community's ability to resolve current or future crisis. It implies a vision of the world, a concept of the role of the United Nations.

France therefore believes that to make this choice, to make it in good conscience in this forum of international democracy, before our people and before the world, the heads of state and government must meet again here in New York at the Security Council. This is in everyone's interest.

We must rediscover the fundamental vocation of the United Nations, which is to allow each of its members to assume responsibilities in the face of the Iraqi crisis, but also to seize together the destiny of a world in crisis, and thus to recreate the conditions for our future unity.

Thank you, Mr. President.

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