

The arms inspection charade

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The recent brouhaha over the resignation of U.N. arms inspector Scott Ritter, an American, is understandable.



Ritter, a former Desert Storm Marine and dedicated U.N. civil servant, is a dyed-in-the-wool believer in the evil of Saddam Hussein's continued rule in Iraq. Unfortunately, he ran afoul of the worst attributes of U.N. and nation-state politics.

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Ritter dedicated seven years of his life in the attempt to discover where Saddam has hidden his weapons of mass destruction and to destroy them. The U.N. gave him this mission and he assumed his U.N. bosses, as well as the U.N. Security Council were serious about it. Unfortunately, the U.N. is a captive of its collective membership and the rules of U.N. diplomatic engagement, which treats all representatives of sovereign nations as moral equals.

The U.N. weapons inspections in Iraq are the longest-running sideshow in modern diplomatic history. Everyone knows that Saddam has chemical and biological weapons in his current arsenal. Everyone at the U.S. State Department and at U.N. Headquarters knows that he is hiding that capability from the U.N.'s inspectors.

One would expect that the inspectors would wish to advance rapidly and unexpectedly on suspected Iraqi weapons sites, and Ritter certainly did. Unfortunately, such lightning raids would preclude Saddam's moving such weapons to alternative hiding sites. Confused? Welcome to the topsy-turvy world of U.N. diplomacy.

Diplomats at the U.N., as well as our own State Department, hate to fail. Failure means the possible introduction of military means, and diplomats generally hate the military. Military



violence reminds the diplomats that it was their failure that led to military action.

Based on this simple and wrongheaded thought process, U.N. diplomats continue to treat Saddam and his thugs as moral equals in the vain hope that a diplomatic and peaceful solution can be found.

Of course, Saddam could be considered the moral equal of a snake, but I hate to impugn the reputations of belly-crawlers by comparing the two in the same sentence. Still, U.N. diplomats continue the charade, no matter that what they do makes no practical sense.

So long as the U.N. weapons inspectors find little or nothing, the status quo remains. More conferences will be conducted. More diplomatic notes will be sent. More press conferences will be held.

All of this activity suggests progress where none has actually occurred. The U.N. is no closer to separating Saddam from his weapons of mass destruction than it was immediately following the Gulf War. In fact, the situation may have worsened. Iraq's megalomaniac dictator has had years to further develop his capabilities in this arena.

Nobody in this administration wants another military confrontation with Saddam. Frankly, America could not sustain it. The president and Congress have nearly succeeded in gutting America's former military might.

The U.S. military today is a mere stone's throw from being "hollow" again. Knowing this,

our diplomats at the State Department are loath to push for truly effective arms inspections, and the U.N., for its part, continues to favor any and all diplomatic means which permit them the illusion of progress.

The diplomatic rules of engagement compel U.N. diplomats to treat war criminals like Saddam Hussein and Tariq Aziz like fellow statesmen. The truth is, of course, that Saddam and Tariq lie regularly to the U.N. When they are caught in a lie, they simply change their story and lie again.

U.N. Resolution 1154 promises "severe consequences" if Iraq fails to cooperate with the U.N. weapons inspectors.

The "Butcher of Baghdad" seems unimpressed with current sanctions and the threats of more. He cares nothing for the lives of his own people, and he knows that to step down from power means his own death. The dictator's credo is, no doubt, that the deaths of thousands are preferable to his own.

Ritter just figured out that his U.N. masters were a good deal less interested in being successful than he was. His conscience would not permit him to remain part of the charade and continue to serve to no good end. In Ritter's own words, "The only honorable response was to resign, ending my relationship with an organization whose mission I had believed in."

Scott Ritter has demonstrated something rarely seen in today's political leaders and U.N. or U.S. civil servants. He has demonstrated the moral courage to do what he felt was right, and resigned in protest to expose the duplicity of his superiors.

Most others in government service would quietly dissemble in order to keep their positions and their salaries secure.

A number of U.S. congressional committees have asked Ritter to appear before them to explain further his rationale for quitting.

Let's hope our elected representatives are listening.

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