

Dismantling Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction: A Progress Report

Feb 5, 1997



Brief Analysis

UNSCOM was established in April 1991 to monitor along with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Iraqi compliance with Resolution 687 (the cease fire resolution that concluded the 1991 Persian Gulf War). Resolution 687 requires Iraq to dismantle its weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and links the lifting of the near total ban on Iraqi oil exports to the fulfillment of this obligation. Iraq has failed to do so, however, and consequently it has forgone more than \$100 billion worth of oil revenues. As a result, Iraq remains isolated politically and economically, its infrastructure continues to deteriorate, and the Iraqi people struggle daily with hardship and deprivation.

Iraq's Policy: Concealment and Obstruction

Iraq has from the outset pursued a policy intended to mislead the international community regarding its compliance with Resolution 687. It has consistently tried to deceive UNSCOM through disclosures and declarations couched in confusing and contradictory language. Iraq, furthermore, has tried to discredit members of UNSCOM and their work. As a result, Ambassador Ekeus spends more than 50 percent of his time defending the consistency and fairness of UNSCOM, and maintaining political support for its activities.

In the fall of 1995, following the defection of Husayn Kamil (who previously oversaw the WMD effort), Iraq appeared to turn a new page in its relationship with UNSCOM. It handed over reams of data concerning its WMD programs, and a new openness characterized its dealings with UNSCOM. In January-February 1996, however, Iraq did an about face and resumed its deceptive practices and policies of concealment and obstruction. In response, UNSCOM decided to systematically focus on uncovering Iraq's "concealment mechanism" for WMD. This mechanism is overseen, however, by the same organization responsible for protecting the regime: the Special Republican Guard. Attempts to inspect Special Republican Guard facilities that UNSCOM suspected concealed missiles led to standoffs with the Iraqis in March and June 1996. This led Ambassador Rolf Ekeus to conclude an agreement with Iraqi deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz in June 1996, in which Iraq agreed to permit UNSCOM access to all facilities, while UNSCOM undertook to respect Iraq's "legitimate" security concerns. Following the agreement though, the Iraqis continued to obstruct UNSCOM inspectors, often designating facilities that UNSCOM wanted to inspect as "presidential areas" off limits to foreigners. And most recently, Iraq has prevented UNSCOM from removing SCUD rocket motors from the country for technical analysis overseas. Ambassador Ekeus will be meeting with Tariq Aziz later this month to discuss this issue further.

Progress Toward Iraq's Disarmament

Much of UNSCOM's efforts in Iraq have focused on reconciling data concerning Iraqi weapons acquisitions and production with what is known about Iraqi weapons use and destruction, in order to establish a "materials balance." A crucial source of success in this area has been UNSCOM's proven ability to handle sensitive information provided by UN member states with the utmost confidentiality. UNSCOM's relationship with various governments is essential

to its work because many possess information about Iraqi procurement activities. Although most were originally reluctant to provide UNSCOM with such sensitive and potentially embarrassing information, the commission has gained a level of trust concerning the discretion with which it handles such sensitive material.

The commission has put together a fairly complete picture of Iraq's weapons procurement effort. As a result, it is clear that small but significant quantities of weapons remain unaccounted for. Iraq is believed to possess an operational "missile force" that is larger and more capable than previously believed, including operational missiles, launchers, support vehicles, fuel, and most ominously chemical or biological warheads. Iraq is also believed to possess the ability to produce chemical and biological agents, and might have stocks of these as well. However, UNSCOM remains confident of its ability to detect renewed production of chemical or biological agents by Iraq.

The Security Council and Iraqi Compliance

In the past year, the UN Security Council has become increasingly complacent. It apparently believes that the situation in Iraq is under control due to UNSCOM inspections and the existence of a relatively comprehensive monitoring system intended to ensure that Iraq does not resume its WMD program. One sign of this complacency is the fact that in the past year, despite repeated Iraqi obstruction, the Security Council failed to declare Iraq in "material breach" of its obligations under Resolution 687. The result has been even greater Iraqi obstruction. Thus, in early January 1997, Iraq rebuffed even relatively innocuous UNSCOM requests for documents, the removal of chemical bombs from Iraq for examination, and declarations regarding their Ababil 100 missile program (a 100 km range ground-to-ground missile that uses the rocket motor from the SA-2 surface-to-air missile). In each case, the Iraqi government pointed to the Security Council's lack of support for UNSCOM as its justification for noncooperation. Thus, UNSCOM will need the full political support of the Security Council and, in particular the United States if it is to succeed in its efforts to dismantle Iraq's surviving WMD arsenal and production capabilities.

A final issue facing the international community is how to address the possibility (however unlikely) of Iraqi compliance with those sections of Resolution 687 that require it to dismantle its WMD programs. There are varying perspectives on this issue among the permanent members of the Security Council: some insist that full compliance should result in the lifting of the oil embargo altogether as required by 687, but the United States insists that the oil embargo should remain in place (excepting the limited sales allowed under Resolution 986) until Iraq fulfills all relevant UN resolutions. The United States fears that if the oil embargo were to be lifted, it would be impossible to get sufficient support in the Security Council to reimpose the embargo if evidence were to surface that Iraq had resumed its WMD programs. One way to reconcile these divergent approaches is to simply suspend the oil embargo if Iraq is found to be in compliance with Resolution 687, rather than to lift it permanently. A suspension would come up for renewal periodically, and if Iraq were found to be cheating, the United States could simply veto continuing the suspension of the oil embargo. Of course, it is highly unlikely that Iraq will be found in compliance with Resolution 687 any time soon, but should it be, the Security Council might consider this option.

◆ This Special Policy Forum Report was prepared by Greg Saiontz.

Policy #235

RECOMMENDED



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Iran Takes Next Steps on Rocket Technology](#)

Feb 11, 2022



Farzin Nadimi

[\(/policy-analysis/iran-takes-next-steps-rocket-technology\)](#)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Saudi Arabia Adjusts Its History, Diminishing the Role of Wahhabism](#)

Feb 11, 2022



Simon Henderson

[\(/policy-analysis/saudi-arabia-adjusts-its-history-diminishing-role-wahhabism\)](#)



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

[Podcast: Breaking Hezbollah's Golden Rule](#)

Feb 9, 2022



Matthew Levitt

[\(/policy-analysis/podcast-breaking-hezbollahs-golden-rule\)](#)

TOPICS

[Proliferation \(/policy-analysis/proliferation\)](#)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

[Iraq \(/policy-analysis/iraq\)](#)

