

# Iraq and UNSCOM:

## A Crucial Test for U.S. Policy

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### Brief Analysis

**F**our years ago this month, Iraqi President Saddam Husayn tried to strengthen his hand against President-elect Clinton by rebuffing UN weapons inspectors, spiriting anti-ship missiles out of a former Iraqi naval base in Kuwait, and challenging no-fly zones in northern and southern Iraq. As he begins his second term, President Clinton faces a new challenge from Iraq, in the form of Baghdad's persistent refusal to allow UN weapons inspectors access to various sites in Iraq over the past year and Iraq's recent refusal to allow the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) to remove SCUD rocket motors from Iraq for technical analysis. The Administration's attitude toward Iraqi obstruction of UNSCOM will be a crucial test of the new national security team's approach toward Iraq: whether it will be characterized by further drift and inattention, or whether the U.S. will exercise the leadership needed to end Iraqi obstruction of efforts to dismantle its weapons of mass destruction (WMD), as a first step toward undoing the damage done to Washington's Iraq policy in recent months.

Iraqi Obstruction and U.S. Political Will: Throughout 1996, Iraq repeatedly obstructed UNSCOM inspections. In March, June, and July, inspectors were harassed and denied timely access to facilities. In several cases, the delays apparently permitted the Iraqis to destroy documents and remove proscribed equipment. In July, UN inspectors saw what probably were some of Iraq's remaining operational SCUD missiles being wheeled out of a facility they were barred from entering. And in November, Iraq prevented UNSCOM from taking the remnants of destroyed SCUD rocket motors out of the country for examination to determine whether Iraq is trying to pass off inferior, locally produced SCUD rocket motors, which it unilaterally destroyed, as the original motors from Soviet-built SCUDs (UNSCOM fears that the Soviet SCUD motors may still be at large in operational missiles). This issue remains unresolved, and UNSCOM chairman Ambassador Rolf Ekeus is expected to meet with Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz in February to once again discuss this matter.

> What made these repeated rebuffs possible was the lack of political support for UNSCOM at the UN Security Council. Not only have France, Russia, and China been opposed to using more forceful measures to bolster UNSCOM, but the United States seeking to avoid a crisis with its allies in the run-up to the Presidential elections in November acquiesced in a watered down UN response to Iraqi obstruction. Shortly after President Clinton first took office, in June 1993, the United States led the Security Council in issuing a statement that "warn[ed] Iraq of the serious

consequences of material breaches" of UN resolutions and "demand[ed] that ... Iraq immediately comply with its obligations," thus setting the stage for the United States to launch a Tomahawk missile strike against an Iraqi intelligence headquarters; last month, in response to the most recent Iraqi refusal to comply with UNSCOM, the Security Council with U.S. assent merely "deplor[ed]" Iraq's obstruction of UNSCOM's activities and dryly noted that "such action complicates" implementation of UNSCOM's mandate. If Washington does not provide UNSCOM with the political support it needs to accomplish its mission, backed up by a clear willingness to use force, Iraq will continue to obstruct UN inspectors while preserving -- and even augmenting -- its WMD capabilities.

**Iraq's Residual WMD Capabilities:** Thanks largely to the revelations following the defection of Husayn Kamil to Jordan in August 1995, it is now clear that Iraq retains greater capabilities in the WMD area than previously realized. Regarding chemical weapons, Iraq is believed to still have precursors, production equipment, and possibly large quantities of VX agent and munitions. VX is one of the most lethal nerve agents in existence, and it can be stored for very long time without losing its potency. In the area of biological warfare (BW), Iraq is believed to still possess cultures, production equipment, and inventories of agent and munitions. Some agents such as anthrax are shelf-stable for years and even decades under certain conditions. The problem with BW agents is that even minuscule quantities can be used to create a large stockpile in a matter of days, and that this can be done in small clandestine facilities that are very difficult to detect.

> Evidence of how difficult it is to detect a clandestine BW program, even with UN inspections, is provided by the fact that Iraq succeeded in keeping the purpose of its BW production facility at al-Hakam secret for four years after the 1991 Gulf War. Iraq claimed that al-Hakam had no ties to its BW program, and that it was being used to produce livestock feed and organic pesticides. It eventually became clear, however, that al-Hakam was actually configured to produce biological agents intended to kill humans, and that the production of feed and pesticide were simply cover activities. UNSCOM had the facility destroyed last summer.

As for missiles, it was determined last year that Iraq had conducted work since the Gulf War on converting its SA-2 surface-to-air missiles into surface-to-surface missiles. As a result, its entire inventory of SA-2s (hundreds, if not thousands of missiles) has to be monitored. Iraq also smuggled gyroscopes in 1995 from dismantled Russian SS-N-18 submarine-launched missiles for use in a planned Iraqi missile with a 2,000-3,000 km range that Iraq was (and probably still is) developing. Finally, and most importantly, UNSCOM recently concluded that Iraq has an operational SCUD capability -- including support vehicles, launchers, fuel, and operational missiles -- and that Baghdad has many more operational SCUDs than the 6-16 that UNSCOM previously believed it possessed.

> In the nuclear weapons arena, Iraq has weapon blueprints, know-how, and machine tools and equipment, and almost certainly is continuing its efforts to refine its weapon design through paper studies, theoretical calculations, and computer design work. It could probably create a nuclear weapon if it succeeded in acquiring fissile material from the former Soviet Union, and UNSCOM and U.S. intelligence would have to be very lucky to find out about it before it becomes too late to do anything about it.

> Finally, the implementation of UNSC resolution 986 ("food for oil") will enable Saddam to use the money formerly used for food price subsidies (c.\$1 billion a year) to try to smuggle in proscribed materials and rebuild his WMD capabilities. In addition, there is a risk that, under the provisions of UNSC 986, Iraq will be able to import materials that can be used for the chemical and biological warfare programs under the guise of humanitarian (agricultural or medical) purposes. Finally, the import of food and medicine under UNSC 986 will create new opportunities for smuggling due to the increased influx of goods into the country. As a result, the challenges for UNSCOM will increase, even if the oil sales under UNSC 986 will provide UNSCOM with an assured source of revenue for the foreseeable future.

**Conclusions:** How Washington handles Baghdad's recent rebuffs of UNSCOM will define the future of its policy

toward Iraq. The elimination of Iraq's WMD is an issue for which there is broad international consensus, so the United States can afford to be tough on this issue. And it has a ready-made opportunity to reverse the setbacks to its policy during the past year by confronting Iraq over the rocket motors that Baghdad is currently preventing UNSCOM from removing from the country. Washington needs to lay the groundwork now for military action against Iraq if the latter fails to cooperate with UN weapons inspectors or again restricts access to any facilities in Iraq that UNSCOM designates for inspection. The United States has both right and might on its side; if it doesn't use it, Washington can expect further challenges by Baghdad, further erosion of the Gulf War coalition, and ultimately the undoing of its Iraq policy.

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