

# UN Sanctions and Iraq's Saber-Rattling

Oct 8, 1994



## Brief Analysis

**T**hrough inflammatory rhetoric and troop movements in southern Iraq near the Kuwaiti border, Saddam Hussein is once again provoking crisis and possible confrontation in the Persian Gulf. Using some of the strongest language since the Gulf War, Baghdad has warned that "every party will bear the consequences" if the United Nations does not take steps toward lifting the embargo on Iraqi oil exports. Troops movements suggests a potential return to military conflict along Iraq's borders; threats that "every Iraqi will be turned into a missile" suggest a possible resort to terrorism. In either case, it would mark a clear shift away from Saddam's "charm offensive" strategy.

Though Saddam's intentions are always difficult to discern, for now his actions seem to be more political than military in nature and directed toward achieving several objectives, including:

- \* focusing the international media spotlight on the UN sanctions regime and the "hardship" it is imposing on the Iraqi people. Baghdad is probably targeting Third World public opinion, especially in those countries now sitting on the Security Council. Nonetheless, the Iraqis may hope to move European and American audiences as well;
- \* portraying as unreasonable the U.S. position, which requires compliance with all relevant components of UN resolutions as a prerequisite to the lifting of sanctions;
- \* splitting the Council's five permanent members (the "Perm 5") more deeply than they have been in the past with the goal of isolating the United States and Great Britain;
- \* signaling to the Iraqi people that the regime can still defend Iraqi "rights and sovereignty." As debate in the Security Council about the sanctions regime evolves, military confrontation is possible.

### Why now?

The Iraqis want out from under the sanctions regime. However, lifting the sanctions regime is linked to Iraqi compliance with relevant Security Council resolutions, including UN Security Council resolution 687. That resolution sets out several requirements which Iraq must fulfill, including accounting for and destroying weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and accepting a long-term monitoring program to assure that Iraq does not try to reacquire WMD capability in the future, renunciation of terrorism, acceptance of Kuwait's sovereignty and the Kuwaiti-Iraqi border as demarcated by a special UN commission, accounting for the missing Kuwaitis who were taken to Iraq during and after the Gulf war, and the establishment of a reparations fund.

Strictly speaking, under Article 22 of UNSC Resolution 687, Iraq would be permitted to resume exporting Iraqi goods (including oil) once it meets all of the requirements associated with the resolutions's provisions concerning WMD. Iraq would be permitted to import goods once the other requirements in UNSC 687 are met. However, most observers believe that once Iraq is able to begin exporting oil, the sanctions regime will -- for all practical purposes -- have lost its effectiveness.

On October 10, Rolf Ekeus, the chairman of the special commission set up to implement the WMD provisions of

UNSC 687, is scheduled to present a report to the Security Council on Iraqi compliance with the WMD requirement. In that report, he is expected to state that Iraq has met all the resolution's WMD requirements except for long-term monitoring. He is also expected to indicate that a long-term monitoring system is now in place and that a trial period can begin.

The issue at debate is how long that trial period should be. Taking a broad interpretation about the relationship between specific requirements in all relevant resolutions -- not just UNSC 687 -- the United States and Britain are arguing that Iraq must show a more general "pattern of compliance," including, for example, respect for Iraq's minorities. Therefore, Washington and London contend that there should be no specific probationary period. On the other hand, France and Russia are arguing for a much more narrow interpretation of the linkages between the resolution requirements. That leads them to favor a six-month test period for long-term monitoring after which sanctions on exports would be lifted, assuming satisfactory Iraqi compliance. Both approaches do agree that Iraq must recognize the sovereignty of Kuwait and the UN-demarcated border before any sanctions are lifted.

Iraq is clearly trying to influence the forthcoming debate. Over the past week its rhetoric has become much more shrill and threatening. It has contained several themes, including warnings that Iraq will look for other means to defend itself if there is not an end to the sanctions regime, and a demand that Ekeus include in his report several specific suggestions, including a six-month test limit and a statement that Iraq has already fulfilled its obligations under UNSC 687 itself. For now, Iraqi troop movements in the south are meant to reinforce the seriousness of these statements.

What's next?

If schedules hold, Ekeus will present his report on Monday, October 10. The Council is under no obligation to act upon or even comment on the report at that time. (It is possible, though, that Russia, France or others may make a motion to have the President of the Council make some type of statement at the time of the Ekeus meeting.) More likely, however, the Council will take up the report and the issue of long-term monitoring at its next Iraqi sanctions review, scheduled for mid-November. Meanwhile, Iraqi bombast and maneuver can be expected to continue.

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