

Iraq Crisis after the Blix Report: Diplomatic and Military Options

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Brief Analysis

On January 27, Hans Blix, director of the UN Monitoring, Verification, and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC), delivered a straightforward report to the Security Council regarding Iraqi compliance with arms resolutions. Twelve years after taking up the obligation to disarm under UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 687, Baghdad still does not genuinely believe that it needs to disarm. Hence, asserting that inspections will work if given time is rather naive. Many in Europe have made this very argument, claiming that the Blix report is just the beginning of a long-term process. Yet, the mission of the inspectors under UNSCR 1441 (passed in November 2002) is to confirm that Iraq has made the decision to disarm and to verify that disarmament has in fact taken place; the Blix report shows that neither of these criteria has been met.

Contrary to much of the recent media analysis on the subject, the Blix report clearly demonstrates that Iraq has failed to comply with its procedural and substantive obligations under UNSCR 1441. For example, this resolution gives inspectors the right to take overhead photographs in Iraq, but Baghdad still objects to flights made by U-2 planes for this very purpose. Iraq also bars inspectors from making helicopter flights, claiming that the helicopters would likely be shot down unless the Iraqi military was previously informed about their destination. Moreover, the UN had maintained that in-country interviews with Iraqi scientists would take place in a UN facility, which would

have offered a reasonable prospect of confidentiality. Instead, Blix and International Atomic Energy Agency director general Mohamed ElBaradei agreed that the interviews would be held in the Iraqi government-owned al-Rashid Hotel -- the most bugged hotel in the country -- essentially eliminating the potential value of such interviews. Iraq's record on substantive compliance with UNSCR 1441 is even worse, especially in the area of missiles. For example, convincing evidence shows that Baghdad has worked on more powerful missiles with ranges exceeding the limitations mandated by the Security Council.

Washington has numerous pieces of evidence that, collectively, offer a convincing picture of Iraq's continued pursuit of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Yet, many of the most compelling facts are difficult to explain to the general public because of their highly complicated nature.

PATRICK CLAWSON

International discord over Iraq policy is rooted not so much in the question of how much time to give the inspectors, but rather in a failure to define the purpose of the inspections process. For example, if the inspectors discovered a stockpile of Iraqi nuclear weapons, the U.S. and European leaders would likely react quite differently. Many in Europe would interpret this as a sign that the inspections process was working and should continue, whereas many in the Bush administration would argue that this violation justified military force to disarm Saddam Husayn.

For years, Europeans have advocated a policy of containing Iraq, and they see inspections as the best way to accomplish this. Indeed, a good case can be made for containment: inspections and sanctions have limited the scope of Iraq's WMD programs; other global dangers may be more urgent than Iraq; a new war in Iraq could destabilize the Middle East. Yet, containment is not what the UN Security Council unanimously approved in November 2002. The United States would not have approved UNSCR 1441 in the first place had it been based on containment, and Washington has accordingly rejected attempts to reinterpret the resolution as a call for containment. UNSCR 1441 offers Saddam one last chance to disarm, and that is what the Bush administration will insist on.

Perhaps time will help resolve the disagreement over containment. If Saddam continues on his current path of offering progressively greater resistance to inspectors, Europe may eventually agree that inspections cannot achieve disarmament. Indeed, Iraq is already posing significant problems for the inspectors. Baghdad recently accused UNMOVIC personnel of being spies, and several street demonstrations have been held in protest of the inspectors. The regime has also failed to explain anomalies that have arisen during the inspections process. For example, one Iraqi air force document shows that Iraq used only 13,000 chemical bombs during the Iran-Iraq War instead of the 19,500 such bombs that the regime had claimed elsewhere; Baghdad has provided no explanation for the missing 6,500 munitions. In any case, the Bush administration is likely to give inspections more time than media reports suggest; it has typically moved slowly on major issues, and it may well exhibit the same approach to Iraq.

PHILIP GORDON

Europeans are not convinced that time has run out on Baghdad; they have strategic, cultural, and historical reasons for being more hesitant to go to war than Washington is. First, Europe has had much more devastating experience with war than the United States. Second, Europeans are deeply skeptical about whether a war could liberate Iraq, given their own failed attempts at administering Middle Eastern countries in the past. Third, European countries have large Muslim populations, so many governments are worried about the potential spillover effects of a war. Finally, the September 11 attacks occurred in the United States, not Europe; consequently, Europeans do not see the urgency of the Iraq issue or its linkage to their national interests.

Opinion polls show that many Americans, like Europeans, feel that the inspectors need more time. Would time help the Bush administration sway U.S. and European public opinion in support of war? After UNSCR 1441 was adopted, many thought that it would lead to one of two clear-cut scenarios: Baghdad would either completely reject

inspections (in which case the international community would readily agree to use force) or turn over all of its WMD programs and materials (in which case the United States and its allies would not pursue regime change). The actual outcome, however, has been somewhere in between. At the time UNSCR 1441 was adopted, France and other European skeptics gave signs that they would, in the end, fall in line with the United States if Washington demonstrated a firm determination to disarm Iraq by force. But now it appears that the French are trying to make it difficult for the United States to go to war, and they may well veto any new resolution authorizing the use of force. For each day that the inspections continue without finding a "smoking gun," the movement toward regime change is weakened. If Washington decides to allow more time for inspections, the process will become even more difficult to halt in favor of war. Hence, if war is deemed necessary and inevitable, the Bush administration may be better off enforcing UNSCR 1441 sooner rather than later.

NATO members are skeptical about a war in Iraq as well, but the organization itself would not block the United States or any other member state from participating in such a campaign. NATO did, however, reject initial U.S. entreaties to commit to multilateral action. In any case, NATO's most valuable contribution to remaking Iraq would likely be in the area of postwar reconstruction.

MICHAEL EISENSTADT

The debate about inspections obscures the current thrust of U.S. policy: using inspections to create favorable political conditions for the use of force against Iraq with the goal of achieving regime change. If war seems inevitable, it is because U.S. policymakers have already concluded that the only way to disarm Iraq is through regime change, and that the only way to achieve regime change is through external military intervention.

Practically speaking, the major U.S. military deployments to the Gulf limit the ability of policymakers to defer military action for much longer. First, the region has insufficient training areas for such a large force. Second, the army's ability to rotate personnel will be limited due to the fact that four of its six deployable heavy divisions will likely be sent to the Gulf. Third, pulling forces from the region with the intention of returning them in the autumn could harm U.S. credibility with allies. Fourth, delaying operations until summer would mean that allied forces would have to fight under adverse environmental conditions, including intense heat and frequent sandstorms. This could produce significant heat casualties and degrade the speed and effectiveness of military operations. In toppling Saddam, speed is of the essence; the longer the war, the more time he will have to harm his people, Iraq's infrastructure, and Iraq's neighbors. The United States can ill afford the inefficiencies that operating in the summer entails.

Vietnam taught the United States that domestic support for war is critical to success. U.S. forces will not be fully prepared for several weeks yet, and in the time that remains, the Bush administration should bolster domestic and international support for military action, particularly since international aid may be crucial for postwar reconstruction efforts in Iraq. Yet, if the administration cannot make the case for war to these varied constituencies in the coming weeks, there would be little to gain by further delay. If necessary, the United States could launch a successful military intervention largely on its own, even without the help of Turkey or Saudi Arabia. Unilateral action would be riskier, however, and failure to gain broad support could have severe consequences for the United States down the road.

This Special Policy Forum Report was prepared by Ayca Ariyoruk.

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