

Deadline for Hussein

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The U.N. Security Council has spoken, and Secretary of State Colin Powell is receiving well-deserved praise for producing a unanimous vote for a tough resolution. But President Bush had it right: The hard part begins now. As the president has said, there have been 16 Security Council resolutions against Iraq, and Saddam Hussein has not disarmed. This, the president has declared, is his last chance. Will Hussein see it that way? Will there be a moment of truth, and, if so, when will it come?

Hussein has demonstrated unmistakably over the past 11 years that he is determined to possess weapons of mass destruction (WMD). At any point during this period he could have had sanctions lifted if he had been prepared to do what was required of him by the cease-fire resolutions that ended the Persian Gulf War: Reveal all his WMD programs, plans and capabilities and accept disarmament. From the beginning he failed the test of Security Council Resolution 687 of April 1991 when he refused to turn over all the documentation on the location of facilities, components and subcomponents of his WMD programs. From the beginning, he failed his responsibility to cooperate with the inspection regime. The inspectors were not supposed to find his programs; he was supposed to reveal them. Instead, he hid them and continued to engage in their development even while U.N. inspectors were in the country.

His determination to preserve his WMD capabilities was not about avoiding humiliation, as some suggest. Rather, it was about preserving his ability to pursue his regional ambitions and designs. In particular, Hussein has viewed nuclear weapons as the necessary shield behind which he will be protected as he reverts to the practice of invading his neighbors when he decides his interests require it. Will we be so quick to try to stop him once he has nuclear weapons? He calculates that we will be deterred, given the costs to our troops, and he is determined to acquire this capability.

But is he determined to acquire this capability if it means his own demise? Many have said that Hussein is homicidal, not suicidal, and that when faced with the alternatives of survival or acceptance of disarmament, he will accept disarmament.

Maybe, but I doubt Hussein feels he is truly being faced with that choice. In his mind, he believes he has been able to maneuver inspection regimes before, and this one, despite the toughened language and anywhere-anytime

provisions, ultimately will be no different. And he may be right.

For the key to the success of the inspection regime is Iraq's cooperation, and that is the test the administration must emphasize. The moment of truth will thus come for the resolution and for Hussein not at the moment the inspectors go to Iraq. It will come when Iraq, on Dec. 8, must provide a full accounting of all its WMD sites, programs, capabilities, developments and personnel.

Hussein will certainly try to create the impression that he is complying with the resolution. No doubt he will turn over voluminous quantities of documents; he may even turn over materials he has heretofore hidden. But he will not turn over the crown jewels of his WMD programs -- especially in the nuclear and biological areas. He will count on the chief inspectors -- Hans Blix and Mohamed El Baradei -- not wanting to declare he is in violation of his obligations before they have even sent full inspection teams into Iraq.

The temptation on the part of the inspectors will be to declare that Iraq has taken a step in the right direction and that they remain willing to work with it, but that it is of course up to the Security Council to decide whether Iraq is in compliance and what steps to take. Will France and Russia be willing to declare this is the moment for the use of force? Unlikely.

But there should be no mistake about the consequences of letting Hussein get away with a partial disclosure of his WMD programs and efforts after 30 days. He will know that he can continue to hide what he is doing, that it will be tolerated, and that the new resolution will be more about containing what he is doing than about disarming him. Maybe he will understand that it will be more difficult to pursue his aim -- and that he will have to pursue it with even greater stealth -- but he will also believe that the game remains, and that he need not stop pursuing nuclear weapons and more destructive means of delivering biological and chemical agents.

Regardless of the inspection regime, the prospect of finding what he does not want us to find is very limited without help from those in Iraq who know where the most sensitive work is being done. And unfortunately, the message that partial disclosure will be tolerated is hardly likely to encourage them to step forward -- even if the inspectors can insist on talking to scientists and others without their Iraqi minders. (Bear in mind that Blix has already indicated that he sees problems with bringing such Iraqi scientists, officials and their families outside the country.)

All this does not mean we are now trapped by the resolution. But it does mean that the stakes in ensuring full disclosure on Dec. 8 are very high. If disarmament is the objective, the only possibility of achieving it without war will depend on Hussein's understanding that anything less than full disclosure is, in fact, the trigger for war. Anything less than that will put us on a slippery slope that allows Hussein to play for time, make sure the inspectors find nothing in the early going -- or find only what he wants them to find to "prove" he is cooperating.

President Bush has set the stage for disarmament. Now he must condition the French, the Russians and the rest of the world to understand that the moment of truth comes not with the inspectors' arrival but with the character of Iraq's disclosure on Dec. 8. ❖

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