

Nuclear Arms Inspections in Iraq

Jan 17, 2002



Brief Analysis

Since September 11, there has been increased concern about terrorists using weapons of mass destruction (WMD). It is thus natural to return to the issue of Iraq, a country that has used chemical agents against Iran and its own citizens. Indeed, Iraq violated the Non-Proliferation Treaty before 1990 and, prior to the Gulf War, was estimated to be a year away from developing workable nuclear weapons.

The Inspections Regime

The United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) fulfilled inspection duties in Iraq from 1991 to 1998; UNMOVIC took over that role in 1999. UNMOVIC is more aligned with the rest of the UN system, rather than being supported by the major Western countries that have contributed much of the personnel and finances for UNSCOM.

Two UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions are particularly relevant to the inspections. UNSC 687, passed in 1991, states that sanctions would be lifted if Iraq were to eliminate all of its WMD and cooperate with an inspection and monitoring program. UNSC 1284 was passed in 1999 and reflected a lower ambition about what is required from Iraq and also what Iran would get in return. Iraq only has to show cooperation with UNMOVIC and progress toward WMD control, rather than eliminate all WMD. In return, sanctions on Iraq would be suspended, not ended. Neither resolution supercedes the other, and both are still valid.

Should inspections once again resume, UNMOVIC has a right to immediate, unrestricted, and unconditional access. Resolution 1284 requests UNMOVIC to draw up no later than sixty days after it has "started to work in Iraq" -- a work programme to be submitted for approval by the Security Council. After that initial period, the work program may be expanded to include other sites, though that must also be approved by the UNSC. UNMOVIC is a subsidiary organ to the Security Council and Iraq has the possibility to turn to the council with any grievances it might have.

Unlike in a criminal case, UNMOVIC is not required to adhere to a "burden of proof" that Iraq still possesses or is producing WMD. Similarly, there is no time limit within which UNMOVIC must produce specific evidence. Instead, the committee's objective is to inspect and review all evidence until, with reasonable certainty, inspectors can state that Iraq is WMD free, and that its dual-use production capabilities are being carefully monitored.

UNMOVIC's Work

Since 1998, the last date during which inspectors were actually inside of Iraq, UNMOVIC has diligently followed possible illegal developments in Iraq using many different methods. First, UNMOVIC inspectors have made arrangements with an American and a French company to monitor media reports for any stories of potential relevance. The American firm has identified approximately 100,000 media reports about Iraq or WMD, but found less than one percent to be relevant to UNMOVIC's work. Nonetheless, the media can be a very valuable tool, particularly when it makes use of defectors' stories about Iraqi WMD. Second, information on Iraq has been gathered through satellite images provided by various UN member states. UNMOVIC has access to a 14,000-picture archive against which it can compare new pictures.

A third reliable source of information is direct intelligence. In order to protect the information and integrity of the

inspection team, all data passed to UNMOVIC is tightly controlled and withheld from other organizations or governments. The information goes to only two people at UNMOVIC: the chairman and the officer in charge of intelligence, who is at present a New Zealand general. If inspections resume, intelligence information will be compared with other sources and, if it is deemed to be valid, will be passed on to the chief of operations and then directly to the chief inspector for that area.

Even with all of these sources of information, there are clear advantages to using human inspectors, which explains the importance of UNMOVIC achieving access to Iraq. Inspectors can get inside buildings to see the "hardware," while satellites can see only building types. Inspectors can solve unanswered disarmament issues and monitor installations. Additionally, they can monitor imports and make sure that they are being used for peaceful programs.

What Can Be Established

There will always be a "residue of uncertainty" about whether Iraq is complying fully, not hiding some weapons or weapons-production capability. Nuclear arms are the simplest to find, as they leave "fingerprints" in the form of distinct chemical trails. However, chemical weapons (such as those used by Iraq on its own populace and on Iran) and biological weapons (such as those found hidden on an Iraqi chicken farm in 1995) are much harder to trace.

That doubt will become much stronger as long as inspections are suspended. UNMOVIC hopes that Iraq will come to see the benefits of inspections. Inspections would help Iraq to make the very case that it has been putting forward for years -- namely, that it has no WMD. If Iraq wants to be rid of sanctions, it should be more cooperative on this issue. Inspections are a privilege, not a penalty, and inspectors can provide a credibility that Iraq simply cannot establish on its own.

◆ This Special Policy Forum Report was prepared by Alan Lowinger.

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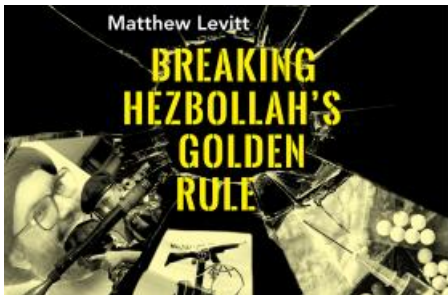
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