

Why a New Security Council Resolution about Iraq?

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Brief Analysis

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) members are discussing in the corridors two proposals for a new Iraq resolution designed to restart UN inspections of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) by offering Saddam Husayn the prospect of some relief from sanctions. The details of the two competing proposals are important: for instance, the Russian-French proposal would put sanctions on an automatic phase-out that only a new resolution (which Russia, China, or France might veto) would stop, whereas the British-Dutch proposal offers Iraq the prospect that sanctions would be suspended, but the United States would have the opportunity each 120 days to veto it. Even more important than the details of these proposals, however, is evaluating how they affect the basic issues at stake in Iraq.

The Likely Impact of a New UNSC Resolution. Much is uncertain about the impact of any new UNSC resolution on Iraq, but there can be a high degree of confidence about three points:

- No elimination of Iraq's WMD programs. Saddam grudgingly cooperated during the mid-1990s with the destruction of most Iraqi WMD weapons and production facilities, but he retains some weapons. More important, he refuses to give up the key assets he would need to resume WMD production. It is naive to expect that a leader who has forgone \$130 billion in income so as to preserve his WMD arsenal -- not to mention one whose country has been bombed repeatedly to make him relinquish that arsenal -- will allow inspectors to do their job.
- No effect on the humanitarian situation. The acute humanitarian problems in Iraq do not come from a lack of cash. The existing UN oil-for-food program is funding large amounts of humanitarian imports that Saddam refuses to distribute; more than half the medicines imported under that program remain in warehouses. The detailed data from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) show that the average foodstuff availability in Iraq since 1990 has consistently been at or above 95 percent of the recommended optimal level, meaning it was always at or above 120 percent of the recommended minimum level (it never dropped below 2,270 calories per person per day, compared to an optimum 2,400 and a minimum 1,900). Yet, UN and nongovernmental organization surveys show that hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children suffer from malnutrition-caused stunting or wasting. The probable reason for this is that Saddam is preventing adequate food and medicine from reaching those groups and regions that most actively oppose him. Saddam's priorities are clearly revealed by his continuing disputes with the UN over the oil-for-food program. In

December, he insisted on underfunding baby formula by \$50 million to make room in the program for telecommunications and railroads, which he called humanitarian programs but which actually have internal security and military purposes. If, as Russia and France propose, Saddam is freed from tight UN restrictions on how to use these funds, less will go for humanitarian purposes and more for military infrastructure and industries.

- Fewer commercial problems for British and Dutch firms. The Iraqi government has signed agreements with major oil firms from France, Russia, and China, among others, to develop Iraq's fields once sanctions are lifted. To date, no such agreements have been signed with British firms, such as British Petroleum (BP), or with Dutch firms, such as Royal Dutch Shell. The British and Dutch governments' proposed UNSC resolution on ending sanctions would reduce the political barriers to such contracts, though there is no evidence that this is what motivates the British and Dutch governments; BP and Shell might in fact do better if Iraq is kept off the market, as they are investing heavily elsewhere; were they to invest in Iraq they would be unlikely to do as well as their competitors.

What Purpose Would a New Resolution Serve? U.S. policy toward Iraq is containment plus regime change. Any UNSC resolution should be judged by what it would do to advance those two goals.

Containment. On the negative side, a new UNSC resolution would allow a broader range of imports, both by liberalizing the import restrictions and by allowing Iraq to raise more revenue for imports (such as by allowing foreign investment in expanding Iraqi oil production). Iraq's skill at smuggling exceeds the UN's skill at monitoring a vast flow of imports; catching a small amount of WMD/military imports hidden among millions of tons of civilian goods is not easy, as seen by the U.S. record with drugs coming in from Mexico. A further worrying possibility is that inspectors would repeat the International Atomic Energy Agency mistake during the 1980s: Too eager to cooperate with Iraq, they might give it a clean bill of health and thereby impede international action to stop Iraqi proliferation.

On the positive side, the UNSC resolution will set up a new WMD inspections program that will send monitors and inspectors back into Iraq. The monitors would watch the known facilities capable of WMD production, which will aid the detection of any large-scale WMD production. The inspectors may be able to catch flagrant violations, even though (as explained above) the inspections are unlikely to stop Iraq from retaining its existing capabilities, including its hidden weapons. Plus, a new resolution would reinforce the international legitimacy of the constraints on Saddam, making the sanctions regime more durable and possibly reducing leakage (for example, the oil smuggling to Turkey could be brought under UN control).

Regime change. On the negative side, a new resolution could well create the perception that time is on Saddam's side. The prospect that sanctions will end someday soon would do much to reinforce his ability to buy loyalty at home. In addition, the restart of UN inspections would create pressures for the United States to bomb Iraq less often -- that is, to tolerate low-level challenges to the no-fly zone as was done before Operation Desert Fox. This would mean fewer U.S. strikes on Iraqi facilities, such as the communication network, which not only serve the regime's repressive apparatus but also threaten U.S. no-fly-zone enforcement. If Saddam is able to strengthen his repressive apparatus, that will significantly discourage those who might rebel or attempt a coup. And the U.S. willingness to support a new inspections regime may create the perception that Washington does not put priority on Saddam's overthrow. To a great extent, the regime change business is to a great extent about perceptions, and a new UN resolution could be a real shift on this front.

On the positive side, Saddam might not cooperate with a new UN monitoring and inspections regime. In that case, the United States would be well placed to argue that the only way to prevent Iraqi proliferation is through military action. If Iraq will not allow monitoring of known WMD sites, then the United States will have to hit not only at those sites but at the entire mechanism used to hide WMD programs, in particular the Special Republican Guard. Vigorous

U.S. military action could reinforce the perception that time is not on Saddam's side and that the United States is willing to take strong action to solve the Saddam problem. Plus, strikes against the Special Republican Guard and the intelligence organizations would weaken Saddam's ability to monitor and stamp out coup-plotters and popular opposition.

Conclusion. A new UNSC resolution on Iraq would be a gamble that could end up hindering the U.S. goals of containment and regime change as much as it helps them. What will determine the impact of the resolution will be how it is written, but more important how Saddam reacts to it. Therefore, the case for such a resolution is weak viewed from the perspective of America's Iraq policy, and any resolution should be accompanied by a clear declaration that the United States would use force in the event of Iraqi violations. The main reason to support such a resolution would be if this is judged to be important for overall U.S. interests with Russia, China, and Europe, including the need to demonstrate U.S. cooperation with those powers.

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