

The History and Future of UN Inspections in Iraq

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Despite speculation about possible ongoing Iraqi efforts to produce or procure weapons of mass destruction, no one has been able to put forward clear evidence that the Iraqis are actually doing this, although they have certainly done so in the past.

The dilemma the international community has faced since inspectors withdrew from Iraq in late 1998 is that no one knows what, if anything, the Iraqis are currently doing. The US government has made it clear that it is less interested in finding out than it is interested in comprehensive disarmament of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), or regime change. The United States rejected Iraq's offer in September to allow the United Nations to resume inspections under the UN's Monitoring, Verification and Inspections Commission (UNMOVIC).

Despite some press reports to the contrary, even the eight presidential palaces were to be open to unfettered inspections, although Iraq would have the right to send diplomatic representatives to accompany them. Such arrangements had longstanding United Nations approval.

After years of demanding that the Iraqi government allow inspectors to return immediately, once the Iraqis agreed to do, the United States claimed that the inspections do not work and that the only way to ensure that Iraq rids itself of WMDs was to demand a complete overhaul of the previously agreed-upon inspections regime and its replacement by new protocols.

Was the first inspections regime-the United Nations Special Commission on Iraq (UNSCOM)-really such a failure? The record seems to indicate otherwise.

As a result of the inspections regime imposed by the United Nations at the end of the Gulf War, virtually all of Iraq's stockpile of WMDs, delivery systems and capability of producing such weapons were destroyed. During nearly eight years of operation, UNSCOM oversaw the destruction of 38,000 chemical weapons, 480,000 liters of live chemical-weapons agents, forty-eight missiles, six missile launchers, thirty missile warheads modified to carry chemical or biological agents, and hundreds of pieces of related equipment with the capability to produce chemical weapons.

In late 1997 UNSCOM director Richard Butler reported that UNSCOM had made "significant progress" in tracking Iraq's chemical weapons program and that 817 of the 819 Soviet-supplied long-range missiles had been accounted for. A couple of dozen Iraqi-made ballistic missiles remained unaccounted for, but these were of questionable caliber. In its last three years of operation, UNSCOM was unable to detect any evidence that Iraq had been concealing prohibited weapons.

Meanwhile, in its most recent report, the International Atomic Energy Agency-which, unlike UNSCOM, was able to engage in inspections without harassment and delays by Iraqi authorities-categorically declared in 1998 that Iraq no longer had a nuclear program.

The periodic interference and harassment of UNSCOM inspectors by the Iraqis was largely limited to sensitive sites too small for advanced nuclear or chemical weapons development or deployment. A major reason for this lack of cooperation was Iraqi concern-later proved valid-that the United States was using the inspections for espionage purposes, such as monitoring coded radio communications by Iraq's security forces, with the use of equipment secretly installed by American inspectors. Subsequent efforts to inspect the Baath Party headquarters

in Baghdad as the site at which to demand unfettered access led to Iraqis refusal and subsequent withdrawal of UNSCOM inspectors.

By seeking to dismiss the credibility of United Nations inspectors, the United States is effectively undermining any multilateral law-based system of non-proliferation in favor of a unilateral military-based system of counter-proliferation, where the United States alone can determine which countries under what circumstances can develop certain kinds of weapons and where the United States would have the right to invade any country that would seek to do otherwise.

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