

JIC Assessment – 11 October 2002

IRAQ: THE RETURN OF UN WEAPONS INSPECTORS

Key Judgements

- I. Saddam is determined to retain Iraq's proscribed weapons programmes. He is confident that he can prevent UNMOVIC, operating on the basis of existing UNSCRs, from finding any evidence before military options start to close off in Spring 2003.
- II. Concealment and dispersal of sensitive items are the main elements of Iraq's strategy for dealing with UNMOVIC. The inspectors are hampered by poor preparedness and a lack of intelligence, so far, to guide them.
- III. Saddam will probably accept a new UN Resolution. If inspections are conducted under a tougher regime, and if specific intelligence on WMD locations is forthcoming in response to clear US determination to topple Saddam, UNMOVIC might find evidence of Iraq's WMD programmes.
- IV. In the short term, we do not expect a repeat of the blatant Iraqi policy of intimidation and obstruction that UNSCOM encountered. Widespread Iraqi obstruction would be seen as too obvious a challenge to the authority of the UN. But if inspectors come close to uncovering evidence of WMD, Iraq will employ a wide range of tactics to delay their work.
- V. Iraq will use all diplomatic efforts, backed up by its economic leverage on its neighbours, to undermine political support for a continuation of the inspections and sanctions.

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At the request of OD Sec this paper looks at Iraq's attitude and approach to dealing with the return of UN weapons inspectors. This paper starts from the premise that inspectors will return in the near future and assesses Iraq's concealment policy to deal with weapons inspections.

Introduction

1. Iraq announced on 16 September that it would permit the return of UN weapons inspectors, under the terms of extant UN Security Council Resolutions, for the first time since UNSCOM withdrew in 1998. The Iraqi leadership had for some time been discussing the re-admission of weapons inspectors, but only under certain conditions. The JIC had previously judged that Saddam would permit the return of inspectors, without preconditions, if he believed that the threat of large scale US military action was imminent and that his "concession" would prevent the US from acting decisively.
2. The Iraqi Foreign Minister indicated that he was under intense diplomatic pressure over the weekend 14/15 September to agree to the return of inspectors. [...] Saddam's decision to agree to their return now appears also to have been driven by a serious wish to avoid a new, strong UN Security Council Resolution.

Overall strategy

3. Intelligence indicates that Saddam is determined to retain Iraq's weapons of mass destruction which he considers to be a key part of Iraq's regional political and military power. Saddam is adamant that UN weapons inspectors should not be allowed to find and destroy the WMD capability that Iraq has been able to develop further in the 4 years since UNSCOM left in 1998. Iraq is confident that it can ensure the inspectors, acting under the terms of existing UNSCRs, will not be able to find anything when they return and that Iraq will retain its proscribed weapons programmes.
4. Iraq's tactics will be guided principally by the need to avoid military action which would threaten Saddam's regime. Whilst there is a credible military threat, Iraq is likely to co-operate with the inspectors and present them with sanitised sites, the result of a programme of concealment and deception. This will be backed by a political effort to focus the inspection

issue on as narrow a programme as possible (in scope, geography and time). Iraq will continue to pursue a "comprehensive solution" and argue for unwarranted interim "rewards", such as softening of sanctions or the no fly zones, for early reasonable behaviour. We judge that Iraq's obstruction may initially be limited, for fear of provoking early US military action, but that Saddam will incrementally test the extent to which the international community retains the political will to enforce Iraqi disarmament. [...] Iraq's deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz is confident that it will be easier to delay the inspectors once they arrive in Iraq.

Practical arrangements for return of inspectors

5. There have been some discussions within UNMOVIC about their preparedness to resume inspections in Iraq. Concerns focus on the limited technical knowledge of the sites and equipment to be inspected and poor quality of some inspectors. Blix and the IAEA have also expressed concerns about the lack of reliable information currently available to them.

6. The existing timetable of work for UNMOVIC is based on UNSCR 1284 (see box). Blix has stated that the precise details of UNMOVIC's modus operandi in Iraq will need to take account of any new UNSCR. Blix has made it clear that he would prefer to have any new UNSCR agreed before the inspectors return to Iraq. He has said that if the inspection regime is to be effective he needs four things:

- authority (including ability to freeze sites);
- practical arrangements including regional bases;
- a supporting threat (from the UN Security Council rather than forces on the ground);
- information on where to look.

7. [...] despite its public position, Iraq would reluctantly judge it had to accept a new UN Security Council Resolution. International pressure to do so would be overwhelming and rejection would trigger military action

Blix's timeline of action under UNSCR 1284

Sept 16 – Iraq accepts return of inspectors

Within 2 months – Preparation to resume inspections:

Oct 2 – agree modalities of inspection regime;

UNMOVIC advance party could arrive in Iraq by end of Oct;

By end Nov/mid Dec UNMOVIC should have established monitoring centres, started inspections and agreed programme to establish on-going monitoring and verification (OMV).

60 days after inspections start – UNMOVIC submits work programme to UN for approval, possibly by the end of Jan/Feb 2003.

Further unspecified period until UNMOVIC/IAEA report OMV is "fully operational", possibly March/May 2003.

120 days after the start of full OMV – Possibly by the end July/Sept 2003, UNMOVIC confirms co-operation in all respects by Iraq. At this stage the Security Council could recommend the suspension of sanctions. This recommendation is not automatic. Monitoring and verification continues.

Sanctions can be reimposed in event of Iraqi non-cooperation.

to overthrow the regime. A further round of technical talks might be required to take account of a new UNSCR. [...] Saddam may lose patience at the constant pressures on Iraq and refuse to co-operate. A resolution with such stringent conditions that it threatened Iraq's sovereignty or the regime's confidence in its concealment policy would clearly increase the likelihood of such a refusal. On balance, however, we judge that Iraq is likely to accept a new resolution, play for time and rely on concealment to deal with inspections.

8. In the short term, we do not expect the same level of intimidation and obstruction that UNSCOM encountered. But a policy of deniable obstruction is likely, where problems at individual inspection sites are blamed on over-zealous local Iraqi officials, avoiding too obvious a challenge to the authority of the UN. However, we cannot rule out a mistake by Saddam that would result in a serious breach of UNMOVIC's mandate and bring about the military attack he seeks to avoid.

Concealment tactics

9. A body of intelligence indicates that concealment and dispersal of sensitive items are the main planks of Iraq's strategy to deal with the return of weapons inspectors. Saddam has reportedly taken into account the experience gained during the UNSCOM inspections in the 1990s and believes he can exploit weaknesses in the inspection regime as laid out in UNSCR 1284. [...] (There are special rules, laid down in a MoU between Iraq and the UN in 1998, regulating inspections at eight contentious sites covering 32km² that were designated "presidential palaces" by Iraq). Iraq's current preparedness to be flexible on access to these sites should be seen in the light of this intelligence. Qusai also instructed that the production of sensitive materials be moved to other secret locations. We have little intelligence on these locations and Blix has expressed his concern at this weakness.

10. The concealment efforts are widespread. Iraq has had time to prepare for inspections; and stocks of chemical and biological weapons will be considerably smaller than after the Gulf War. Intelligence shows that steps were being taken to prevent weapons inspectors from finding any prohibited weapons, sensitive papers and documents, including by hiding them in residential buildings, schools and private homes. Duplicate and non-essential papers had been destroyed and the remaining archives had been split up and hidden in the homes of trusted officials. In the absence of specific intelligence, the prospects of successfully finding illicit material at such sites is very limited. And inspections would offer Iraq a useful propaganda weapon, allowing them to portray inspectors visiting apparently innocuous civilian locations. Iraq will use

widespread media coverage to exploit any UNMOVIC failures to find anything of significance at any sites, including presidential palaces, to undermine public opinion in the need for inspections. Iraq is likely to seek to move the onus of responsibility away from it having to prove its compliance onto the inspectors to justify their activity.

11. Iraq is also exploiting dual-use sites and mobile production facilities. Reporting indicates that the Iraqis are confident that any inspection of dual-use facilities will be unsuccessful since the equipment can be used for legitimate purposes and any incriminating raw material or prohibited product would be removed before any inspection. Iraq has developed transportable biological production facilities with the intention not only of making it harder to target them but also difficult to find them. Iraq may also have dispersed stocks of chemical and biological weapons away from suspect storage sites to avoid detection. Intelligence indicates that Iraq has explored unorthodox options for delivering chemical and biological weapons which means the weapons inspectors will have difficulty knowing what to look for.

12. [...] Iraq is confident in its concealment plans [...] The fact that Saddam is prepared, temporarily, to allow sensitive equipment out of his "immediate" control, indicates the importance he attaches to retaining chemical and biological weapons and ballistic missiles.

13. Although Iraq has repeatedly said that they have nothing to declare and no documents to reveal, the longer inspectors remain in Iraq the greater the likely impact on Iraq's development programmes. UNMOVIC are more likely to come up with evidence of proscribed activity at Iraq's missile facilities than those associated with the chemical, biological and nuclear programmes. We judge that production could continue at a much reduced level whilst inspectors were in-country. As the military pressure against Iraq increases, its concealment policy could be undermined by the Iraqi requirement to prepare its hidden stocks of chemical and biological weapons and missile systems for military deployment.

Prospects for concealment

14. Given Iraq's emphasis on concealment and the limited capabilities of UNMOVIC, we judge that without additional guidance to UNMOVIC, there is a serious risk that Iraq could prevent inspectors from finding conclusive evidence of its WMD programmes before military options start to close off in Spring 2003. Nonetheless, Iraq's concealment policy will face some real challenges. Inspections conducted under a tougher regime than allowed for under UNSCR 1284 could, for example, allow interviews to be conducted without an intimidating Iraqi

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presence, increasing the prospects for obtaining incriminating evidence. And the changed political context, including the clear determination of the US to bring about regime change, may itself encourage a greater intelligence flow, which could enable UNMOVIC to discover substantive evidence of Iraq's WMD programme.

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