ARMS CONTROL ASSOCIATION
The authoritative source on arms control

Published on *Arms Control Association* (http://www.armscontrol.org)

The Case for Iraq's Qualitative Disarmament

- Arms Control Today
- Biological Weapons
- Chemical Weapons
- Iraq
- Missile Defense
- WMD Terrorism

Scott Ritter

Efforts to resume weapons inspections in Iraq have long been at an impasse.It has been 18 months since inspectors from the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) were withdrawn from Iraq and six months since the Security Council created a successor organization to assume UNSCOM's mantle. Resolution 1284 established the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) in December 1999 and tasked it with verifying Iraq's elimination of its weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and ballistic missiles with a range greater than 150 kilometers.

Resolution 687, which had originally spelled out this obligation, was viewed by many in the Security Council (including Russia, France, and China) as no longer viable given UNSCOM's untidy link to Operation Desert Fox, the 72-hour aerial bombardment of Iraq conducted in December 1998. At that time, the United States and the United Kingdom had used an UNSCOM report to the Security Council that laid out the record of Iraqi non-compliance with inspections as justification for the bombing—before the Security Council had any chance to deliberate on the report and without any authorization from that body. The unfortunate fallout from this military action was that Iraq not only refused to allow the UNSCOM inspectors to return, but also rejected any future cooperation with the organization. The inspection process was dead.

In April 2000, the Security Council approved the organizational plan for the new inspectorate, in theory setting the stage for the return of weapons inspectors to Iraq. However, Iraq refuses to cooperate with either UNMOVIC or its executive chairman, Hans Blix, on the grounds that this new inspection regime is merely a repackaged version of UNSCOM. Furthermore, Resolution 1284 reduced Iraq's incentive to cooperate, stating that the Security Council would only suspend sanctions once Baghdad had complied with inspections, rather than lift them as agreed in Resolution 687. Iraq has made clear that it will never agree to anything less than the lifting of sanctions.

As the situation stands today, Iraq and the Security Council are deadlocked. There is no hope for the return of inspectors to Iraq anytime soon. With each passing day, concern increases over the status of Iraq's WMD programs because there are no inspectors in place to monitor them. Unless the Security Council can come up with a compromise, the situation will only continue to deteriorate.

What is often overlooked in the debate over how to proceed with Iraq's disarmament is the fact that from 1994 to 1998 Iraq was subjected to a strenuous program of ongoing monitoring of industrial and research facilities that could be used to reconstitute proscribed activities. This monitoring provided weapons inspectors with detailed insight into the capabilities, both present and future, of Iraq's industrial infrastructure. It allowed UNSCOM to ascertain, with a high level of confidence, that Iraq was not rebuilding its prohibited weapons programs and that it lacked the means to do so without an infusion of

advanced technology and a significant investment of time and money.

Given the comprehensive nature of the monitoring regime put in place by UNSCOM, which included a strict export-import control regime, it was possible as early as 1997 to determine that, from a qualitative standpoint, Iraq had been disarmed. Iraq no longer possessed any meaningful quantities of chemical or biological agent, if it possessed any at all, and the industrial means to produce these agents had either been eliminated or were subject to stringent monitoring. The same was true of Iraq's nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities. As long as monitoring inspections remained in place, Iraq presented a WMD-based threat to no one.

The success of the UNSCOM monitoring regime may hold the key to unlocking the current stalemate between Iraq and the Security Council. The absolute nature of the disarmament obligation set forth in Resolution 687 meant that anything less than 100 percent disarmament precluded a finding of compliance. There was no latitude for qualitative judgments. As such, the world found itself in a situation where the considerable accomplishments of the UNSCOM weapons inspectors—the elimination of entire categories of WMD and their means of production—were ignored in light of UNSCOM's inability to verify that every aspect of these programs was fully accounted for. Quantitative disarmament (the accounting of every last weapon, component, or bit of related material) took precedence over qualitative disarmament (the elimination of a meaningful, viable capability to produce or employ weapons of mass destruction).

If the Security Council redefines Iraq's disarmament obligation along more meaningful—and politically and technically viable—qualitative standards, UNMOVIC should be able to reconstitute UNSCOM's monitoring program and rapidly come to closure on all outstanding disarmament issues. If such a disarmament program is linked with the lifting of economic sanctions upon a finding of compliance, Iraq will almost certainly agree to cooperate.[1]

Disarming Iraq: 1991-1998

Verifying Iraq's complete disarmament was complicated by the fact that in the summer of 1991 Iraq, disregarding its obligation to submit a complete declaration of its WMD programs, undertook a systematic program of "unilateral destruction," disposing of munitions, components, and production equipment related to all categories of WMD. When Iraq admitted this to UNSCOM, it claimed it had no documentation to prove its professed destruction.

While UNSCOM was able to verify that Iraq had in fact destroyed significant quantities of WMD-related material, without any documents or other hard evidence, it was impossible to confirm Iraq's assertions that it had disposed of all its weapons. UNSCOM's quantitative mandate had become a trap. However, through its extensive investigations, UNSCOM was able to ensure that the vast majority of Iraq's WMD arsenal, along with the means to produce such weaponry, was eliminated. Through monitoring, UNSCOM was able to guarantee that Iraq was not reconstituting that capability in any meaningful way.

Ballistic Missiles

UNSCOM achieved its most dramatic success in the field of ballistic missiles. In his December 1992 report to the Security Council, then-Executive Chairman Rolf Ekeus noted,

All ballistic missiles and items related to their production and development, identified as requiring destruction...have been destroyed...considerable progress has been made in obtaining information from Iraq about its operational use of missiles since 1980 and the importation of missile components, and hence in establishing a material balance for these missiles. If analysis of this data does not reveal inconsistencies and if the information provided is not refuted by new evidence from reliable sources, the Commission would appear to have a practically complete picture of Iraq's past SCUD-derivative missile programs.

Over the next six years, UNSCOM continued to investigate Iraq's proscribed missile programs, and while

much new information was obtained, nothing ever altered the final conclusion of Ekeus' report.

Because of its success in tracking down Iraq's proscribed missile program, UNSCOM was able to turn its attention toward monitoring Iraq's indigenous missile research, development, and manufacturing capabilities a full year before any of the other weapons disciplines. As a direct result of this early foray into monitoring, UNSCOM was able to fully assess Iraq's capabilities in the field. The March 1993 inspection report of the first monitoring team spelled out the true extent of Iraq's capabilities:

There is no capability to mass produce missiles at the Centre[2] and very little capability to produce prototypes...lack of missile design and testing experience, qualified personnel, raw materials and equipment will significantly delay the near-term development of an Iraqi produced missile system. The Team predicts that even under conditions in which they would have sufficient amount of raw material and necessary equipment it will take several years for the Centre to successfully design, produce and test a prototype missile system (solid-unguided rocket) in preparation for mass production.[3]

Over the years, Iraq made several efforts to acquire the additional technology needed to improve its ballistic missile capabilities. Secret deals with Russia on guidance and control equipment, with Ukraine on rocket-propulsion technology, and with Romania on guidance and control and rocket-propulsion technology were all uncovered by UNSCOM before reaching fruition. All of these covert procurement efforts, although illegal, were in support of a permitted missile system, the 150-kilometer-range Al Samoud, rather than a reconstitution of Iraq's prohibited long-range missile programs.[4] UNSCOM's ability to detect and interdict these transactions only underscores the viability of its monitoring regime. Of note is the fact that once sanctions were lifted, such transactions would be legal as long as they were declared under the provisions of the export-import control regime set forth in Security Council Resolution 1051. Iraq would then have no reason to continue to pursue such covert (and illegal) procurement routes.

Chemical Weapons

Through its inspection activities, UNSCOM obtained reasonable information concerning Iraq's chemical weapons (CW) activities from 1981 to 1987, with the exception of data on the use of CW against Iran. Iraq consistently refused to provide details to UNSCOM regarding such use, probably because of the political fallout that such an admission would cause. While this refusal prevented a full accounting of Iraqi CW, Iraq could not still have viable CW from that period because the chemical agent would have long since deteriorated. As an internal UNSCOM working paper noted, an Iraqi declaration of CW use during the war with Iran was not required for any meaningful verification: "Taking into consideration the conditions and the quality of CW-agents and munitions produced by Iraq at that time, there is no possibility of weapons remaining from the mid-1980's."[5]

The same level of confidence did not exist concerning Iraq's CW activities during the final three years of its chemical weapons program, 1988-1991. The Iraqi leadership took a strategic decision in 1988 to improve its CW capabilities, resulting in the reorganization of the CW program. Iraq transferred precursor-chemical and CW-agent production capability from its premier production site, the Muthanna State Establishment, to alternative civilian sites in an effort to conceal its continued CW activities within Iraq's legitimate civilian chemical industry.

At the inception of the UNSCOM weapons inspection regime, Iraq put forward inaccurate and misleading declarations concerning this latter phase of CW activity. These false declarations were designed to understate the actual level of CW activity that transpired in Iraq from 1988 to 1991 and enable Iraq to retain a significant CW production capability regardless of its disarmament obligation.

UNSCOM inspectors were eventually able to uncover Iraq's incomplete declarations and track down much of the missing information regarding this critical period of Iraq's CW program. However, according to an UNSCOM presentation to the Security Council in early June 1998, there remained several priority issues that needed to be addressed before UNSCOM could issue a judgment on Iraqi compliance:

• the accounting for CW warheads for the Scud missile;

• the material balance for other Iraqi CW munitions;

• a full accounting of Iraq's attempt to produce VX nerve agent; and

• the material balance for equipment used to produce CW agent.[6]

These were technically valid issues that needed to be addressed in order to declare a full, quantitative disarmament. But given the Iraqi record of half-truths and outright false statements, UNSCOM had difficulty accepting any declaration by Iraq that was not backed up with documents or other verifiable evidence. The fact that Iraq maintained it did not have such documents meant that UNSCOM was faced with trying to prove a negative, which in and of itself is an almost impossible task.

What was overlooked in 1998 was the extent to which UNSCOM had actually eliminated Iraq's CW capability. The Muthanna State Establishment and most of Iraq's associated production equipment had been destroyed, either through aerial bombardment during Operation Desert Storm or under the supervision of UNSCOM inspectors. Iraq's stockpiles of CW agent had either been destroyed in the same manner or could be assumed to have deteriorated.

The two potential exceptions were VX nerve agent and mustard agent that had been loaded into 155 mm artillery shells. Iraq lied to UNSCOM about having a VX program until confronted in 1995 with irrefutable evidence that it had developed a capability to produce VX. In 1996, Iraq turned over specialized glass-lined production equipment associated with its VX program, which UNSCOM then destroyed.

The remaining question over Iraq's VX program hinges on the discovery of chemical traces unique to stabilized VX on several destroyed Scud warhead fragments that were excavated by UNSCOM in early 1998. Iraq disputes this finding, admitting that while it did succeed in producing stabilized VX on a laboratory scale, it never weaponized stabilized VX. The Iraqi argument appears to be valid. Producing significant stocks of VX for use on weapons that would still be viable today would have required an advance in CW technology that Iraq did not demonstrate.

Indeed, the glass-lined production equipment turned over to UNSCOM by Iraq in 1996 was intended for large-scale VX production, but it had never been used. In addition, the fact that UNSCOM conducted numerous inspections of ammunition depots, chemical production plants, and potential storage areas, using some of the most sensitive chemical detection technology available, and found no trace of CW agent minimizes the likelihood that Iraq maintains any significant stockpile of VX weapons.

The other issue is the mustard-filled artillery shells. Iraq declared to UNSCOM that it had a stockpile of 13,500 such shells on the eve of the Persian Gulf War. UNSCOM supervised the destruction of 12,747 of these shells, and Iraq declared that the remaining shells had been destroyed by aerial bombardment of two storage sites during Desert Storm. UNSCOM could find no evidence of any destroyed 155 mm shells at the main storage area, but it did discover four intact artillery shells lying on the ground in one of the storage sites. The mustard was tested and found to be 94-97 percent pure—a viable weapon. Given the purity of the mustard, UNSCOM made finding the remaining shells a priority.

Iraq denies having retained these shells; but regardless, a few hundred 155 mm mustard shells have little military value on the modern battlefield. A meaningful CW attack using artillery requires thousands of rounds. Retention of such a limited number of shells makes no sense and cannot be viewed as a serious threat.

Far more important to assuring Iraq's qualitative disarmament is disabling its production capability—a task that at first glance seems almost impossible. A 1998 UNSCOM document laid out all the possible ways Iraq could conceal a CW production capability.[7] The document noted that Iraq could either bury precursor chemicals or distribute them throughout its commercial chemical industry to disguise their true use. Likewise, it could distribute empty dual-use munitions to depots under the cover of legitimate use, bury them, or continuously move them around in trucks. The documents required to resume CW activity could, if microfilmed, be stored in a single briefcase.

Even more disturbing, the 1998 UNSCOM document noted that Iraq could readily distribute the main pieces of equipment needed for CW production throughout its commercial facilities, meaning that equipment that had a legitimate use in commercial chemical-related activity could also be used for CW manufacture. As long as this equipment was maintained at legitimate facilities, any hidden intent by Iraq to use it for illicit purposes would go undetected. "There is no single-use CW equipment, all pieces are dual use and could be justified at different locations," the document noted.

There was absolutely no evidence that Iraq was trying to hide CW production equipment. In its monitoring capacity, UNSCOM carried out extensive inspections of all of Iraq's civilian chemical manufacturing infrastructure and found no evidence of illicit stores of CW precursor chemicals. Precursor chemicals are difficult to hide from inspectors because the minimum amount required for any viable CW-agent production run is several hundred tons. Inspections of dozens of Iraqi munitions depots by UNSCOM also failed to turn up any illicit unfilled munitions.

However, the key to the qualitative argument is that individual pieces of CW production equipment are worthless unless they are assembled in a specific configuration, a unique combination that would be readily discernible to weapons inspectors. "Only the proper combination of different pieces of equipment in a particular configuration gives to...these pieces of equipment the status of a CW production facility," the UNSCOM document noted. The point is that all of UNSCOM's speculative fears concerning reconstitution of an Iraqi CW capability can be laid to rest as long as a viable monitoring inspection regime, one that would detect any specialized configuration of dual-use equipment, is in place—the kind of regime that existed prior to the withdrawal of inspectors in December 1998.

Biological Weapons

Perhaps the most misunderstood member of Iraq's WMD family, the biological weapons (BW) program has been described by Richard Butler, UNSCOM's executive chairman from July 1997 to June 1999, as "a black hole."[8] One of the principal reasons for such a bleak assessment is the prevailing atmosphere of mistrust that has clouded the issue from the start. Iraq denied having a BW program until June 1995, when UNSCOM confronted Baghdad with evidence of massive procurement of growth media that could not otherwise be explained. Even so, Iraq refused to admit it had an offensive BW program until after the 1995 defection of Hussein Kamal, the son-in-law of Saddam Hussein and former head of Iraq's WMD programs. At that time, Iraq admitted to having weaponized 25 Scud warheads and 157 bombs.

Despite the fact that UNSCOM destroyed the totality of Iraq's declared production facilities, equipment, and raw material associated with BW in 1996, UNSCOM experts, backed up by panels of qualified scientists from around the world, found Iraq's declarations regarding BW to be inadequate "scientifically, technically, militarily, and managerially."[9] The primary point of contention was the inability of the experts to verify, based upon the available documentation, most of the declarations made by Iraq concerning both the scope of the Iraqi BW program and what the Iraqis maintained they unilaterally destroyed in 1991. Inspectors could not account for the material balance for supplies, equipment, and material for the BW program, the production of BW agent, and the production of munitions (i.e., the filling of empty munitions with BW agent). The most frustrating aspect of this issue was that unlike the CW inspectors, who had hard facts contradicting the Iraqi position on VX, the BW inspectors had no evidence of Iraqi non-compliance; they simply refused to accept the Iraqi declaration as valid without records, documents, and physical evidence.

Because of this lack of substantive information, the BW inspection group implemented the most intensive of all UNSCOM's monitoring regimes, drawing in dozens of sites ranging from those involved in vaccine and pharmaceutical work to university-level research laboratories to beer-brewing factories and animal-feed production plants (which could conceivably be converted to mass-produce BW agent). Detailed protocols for each site were developed, and teams of highly trained biologists combed these sites repeatedly for any sign of wrongdoing by Iraq. But while UNSCOM and Iraq faced off over the inadequacies of the Iraqi BW declaration, the biologists responsible for monitoring Iraqi compliance found exactly that—compliance. In all of their inspections, the monitors could find no meaningful evidence of Iraqi circumvention of its commitment not to reconstitute its BW program.

Even "spectacular" finds, such as the widely publicized surprise inspection of the National Food and Drug

Examination Laboratory in September 1998, which resulted in exposing the existence of "Staff 7" (also known as the Biological Activities Staff) of the Special Security Organization, turned out to be more ordinary than originally thought. "Staff 7" was responsible for testing the food and other material brought in contact with Saddam Hussein and other senior government officials, nothing more.

One of the conclusions drawn from the extensive monitoring of Iraq's biological capabilities carried out by UNSCOM was that the overall level of Iraq's biological capability, in terms of available infrastructure, was very low. Vaccine and pharmaceutical development and manufacture had deteriorated dramatically because of the continued economic sanctions, and without a massive infusion of money and technology, they would continue to do so. The reality of the situation was that, regardless of UNSCOM's ability to verify Iraq's declarations regarding its past BW programs, the major BW production facility at Al Hakum had been destroyed, together with its associated equipment, and extensive monitoring of Iraq's biological infrastructure could find no evidence of continued proscribed activity. If weapons inspectors were once again allowed back into Iraq to resume monitoring along the lines carried out by UNSCOM, there is no reason to doubt that similar findings would be had, with the same level of confidence.

Nuclear Weapons

Under the arrangements set forth in Resolution 687, responsibility for overseeing the disarmament of Iraq's nuclear weapons capability was given to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Often overlooked in the debate about Iraq's nuclear capabilities is just how effective the IAEA was at destroying, dismantling, or rendering harmless Iraq's nuclear weapons capability. Despite every attempt by Iraq to retain some level of nuclear weapons capability, the massive infrastructure Baghdad had assembled by 1991 to produce a nuclear bomb had been eliminated by 1995. Al Atheer, the nuclear weaponization facility, had been destroyed—blown up under IAEA supervision—and all other major facilities related to Iraq's nuclear weapons program had either been dismantled or were subjected to one of the most stringent forms of ongoing monitoring and verification inspections ever implemented under a disarmament accord.

By 1996, the IAEA had established a seamless monitoring-based inspection regime that provided absolute certainty Iraq would not be able to reconstitute its nuclear weapons program short of acquiring a complete nuclear weapon abroad. While black-market transactions relating to the proliferation of nuclear weapons material is a serious issue, it is well beyond the mandate of IAEA inspections inside Iraq. There has been no evidence provided of any attempt by Iraq to acquire a nuclear weapon or major related components since 1991. (Iraq has attempted to acquire some dual-use items, fueling speculation about its intent, but all items were minor and would not have had any meaningful impact on a full-scale nuclear weapons effort.) Furthermore, given the high quality of the IAEA monitoring approach in Iraq, any such items, if not detected outright by IAEA inspectors, would have to be hidden by the Iraqis in a fashion that would preclude their use in any covert rearmament activity because any attempt at rearmament would be discovered by the monitoring inspections.

Despite the effectiveness of the IAEA at eliminating Iraq's nuclear capabilities, rumors of Iraq possessing a nuclear device persist. The main cause of such speculation is information provided by an Iraqi defector from the security services who fled Iraq in 1995 and came to the attention of UNSCOM in early 1997. The defector, to whom UNSCOM gained access through cooperation with supporting governments, possessed information pertaining to the methods and units used by Iraq to conceal its retained proscribed weapons from UNSCOM and the IAEA.

This information, especially as pertaining to the Military Industrial Commission Security Service, proved to be unerringly accurate and established the defector as a valid and potentially valuable source.[10] Based upon the defector's proven credibility, when he later provided UNSCOM with secondhand information about Iraq's continued possession of "a 20-kiloton nuclear bomb," UNSCOM had no choice but to take the allegation seriously. According to the defector, Iraqi security forces maintained a fleet of some 150 Mercedes trucks that were dedicated to transporting material associated with the Iraqi nuclear weapons program. These trucks were maintained in at least five depots around the Baghdad area. The defector provided detailed descriptions of the vehicles, including color schemes and license plate numbers, as well as information on convoy movement and the vehicle makeup of convoys associated with the movement of the "bomb."

Rolf Ekeus decided the defector's report should be thoroughly investigated. At the same time, the IAEA was involved in ongoing technical discussions with their Iraqi counterparts about gaps in the information provided by Iraq concerning its nuclear program. It was thought that the defector's report might also help answer some of the IAEA's remaining questions.

Of particular concern was incomplete information on the status of the final Iraqi design for a nuclear bomb and the disposition of design drawings and molds for the manufacture of the high-explosive lenses needed for an implosion device. The IAEA noted that several critical drawings were missing and that there was an inconsistency in the Iraqi story about the lens program. Iraqi authorities at first stated that, because their final nuclear weapon design called for the outer dimensions of the device to be reduced from 120 centimeters to less than 80 centimeters (in order to fit in the warhead of a Scud-type missile), the effort never went beyond the design stage as Iraqi engineers struggled to shrink the weapon. The Iraqis then conceded that they had in fact cast some lenses for testing purposes, and the IAEA and UNSCOM speculated that it was possible Iraq had manufactured three or four sets of high-explosive lenses.

Coordination between UNSCOM and the IAEA on this issue during the summer of 1997 resulted in the dismissal of the basic premise that Iraq had a "20-kiloton nuclear bomb." All evidence, including testimony from Hussein Kamal, clearly established that Iraq had not manufactured a nuclear weapon by the time of the Gulf War. In response to a question from the IAEA as to whether Iraq had tried to produce a bomb and whether such efforts were ongoing, Hussein Kamal replied,

Yes, but not now, before the Gulf War. First they studied 12 ton, then 9 ton and then 5 ton. These are weights of a device which they would make suitable for delivery. These were only studies…. All the time they worked to make it smaller but had never reached a point close to testing.[11]

Nevertheless, continued inconsistencies in the Iraqi story, combined with the refusal of the Iraqi side to provide the IAEA with an overall design concept of the nuclear device, made it prudent to examine every report that hinted at continued concealment activities on the part of Iraq. However, both UNSCOM and the IAEA were in agreement that for the defector's report to be credible, the material in question could only be components of a 20-kiloton device, not an actual bomb. Since 1998, the IAEA has gained access to additional documentation, in the form of log books pertaining to the production of high-explosive lenses, that further clarifies the issue of high-explosive lens manufacture by Iraq, thus eliminating one of the main concerns fueling ongoing speculation that Iraq continues to possess major nuclear weapon components.[12]

In conclusion, it is highly unlikely that the defector's claims concerning an Iraqi nuclear bomb are accurate. Unfortunately, speculation that Iraq has retained some nuclear capability simply will not go away. It is conceivable that Iraq could have retained certain components of a nuclear device. However, there is no credible evidence of this, and even if such material were retained, it would be of no use to Iraq, given the extent to which Iraq's nuclear program was dismantled by the IAEA. The best way to ensure that Iraq does not reconstitute its nuclear weapons program is to get IAEA inspectors back into Iraq, where they can resume their task of monitoring Iraqi compliance.

Iraq Today

The absence of weapons inspectors in Iraq since December 1998 has created a vacuum of available data on which to base an assessment of Iraq's current activities. Rushing to fill this void have been a series of speculative reports that have attributed certain capabilities to Iraq that are incompatible with what UNSCOM learned from eight years of experience with Iraq's WMD programs. The truth of the matter is, devoid of weapons inspections, no one knows for sure what has transpired in Iraq since the last inspectors were withdrawn. Conjecture aside, however, there is absolutely no reason to believe that Iraq could have meaningfully reconstituted any element of its WMD capabilities in the past 18 months.

From a WMD perspective, Iraq today is not the Iraq of 1991. What took Iraq decades to build through the expenditure of billions of dollars could not, under any rational analysis, have been reconstituted since

December 1998. Iraq's nuclear enrichment infrastructure has been reduced to zero, and Iraq lacks the funding, technology, and time required to reconstitute it. In theory, some practical work could have been carried out in the field of high-explosive lens development, but any serious effort would require the diversion of controlled stocks of specialized explosives that had been used for manufacturing the lenses, something that would be readily discerned once IAEA inspectors return to work.

In addition to the fact that UNSCOM was thoroughly monitoring all activity related to the Al Samoud missile project, the major facilities related to the development efforts of this permitted missile system were bombed and either destroyed or heavily damaged during Operation Desert Fox. When, in the summer of 1999, the CIA detected signs of reconstruction at these facilities, the Clinton administration immediately warned of an imminent threat. However, such assessments were not shared by the scientists and technicians of UNSCOM, who knew Iraq's capabilities better than anyone. One study, prepared in July 1996 by a British missile expert, set the tone for all reports that followed:

Even given a relaxation of the sanctions program, if there are no quantum jumps in the level of technology available to [Iraq], it should be many years before an indigenously designed, 150 kilometer range, Iraqi missile has the integrated range/payload/accuracy to militarily threaten even the immediate region.[13]

Nothing has transpired since 1996 that could remotely be construed as a "quantum jump" in Iraq's ballistic missiles capabilities.

Some U.S. government officials, media pundits, and former UNSCOM staff (including Rolf Ekeus and Richard Butler) fear that Iraq, if it indeed retained all the material that some in UNSCOM believe possible, could readily reconstitute its chemical- and biological-agent production capabilities. However, manufacturing CW would require assembling production equipment into a single integrated facility, creating an infrastructure readily detectable by the strategic intelligence capabilities of the United States. The CIA has clearly stated on several occasions since the termination of inspections in December 1998 that no such activity has been detected. The Iraqis do have enough equipment to carry out laboratory-scale production of BW agent. However, without an infusion of money and technology, expanding such a capability into a viable weapons program is a virtual impossibility. Contrary to popular belief, BW cannot simply be cooked up in the basement; it requires a large and sophisticated infrastructure, especially if the agent is to be filled into munitions. As with CW, the CIA has not detected any such activity concerning BW since UNSCOM inspectors left Iraq.

CIA assessments alone cannot certify that Iraq has no weapons of mass destruction; national intelligence systems have failed to detect WMD efforts in Iraq in the past. But because of the work carried out by UNSCOM, it can be fairly stated that Iraq was qualitatively disarmed at the time inspectors were withdrawn. While no one can say for certain what has transpired inside Iraq since then, the resumption of monitoring-based inspections would easily determine if Iraq had made any effort to reconstitute its WMD programs.

Moving Forward

Iraq has not fully complied with the provisions of Security Council Resolution 687. On this there is no debate. However, this failure to comply does not automatically translate into a finding that Iraq continues to possess weapons of mass destruction and the means to produce them. Resolution 687 demanded far more than the dismantling of viable weapons and weapons-production capabilities. Most of UNSCOM's findings of Iraqi non-compliance concerned either the inability to verify an Iraqi declaration or peripheral matters, such as components and documentation, which by and of themselves do not constitute a weapon or program. By the end of 1998, Iraq had, in fact, been disarmed to a level unprecedented in modern history, but UNSCOM and the Security Council were unable—and in some instances unwilling—to acknowledge this accomplishment.

Unfortunately, the quantitative standards for Iraqi compliance set forth in Resolution 687 are still in place today in the form of Resolution 1284, which emphasizes verifying material balance over resuming viable

monitoring activities. This is a formula for disaster, perpetuating the cycle of conflict with Iraq that led to the discrediting of UNSCOM. UNMOVIC will meet the same fate unless the Security Council takes measures to refocus the inspection regime on disarmament issues related to viable weapons and weapons-production capability, instead of engaging in a never-ending effort to account for every last vestige of Iraq's former WMD programs. UNMOVIC should move rapidly to the more important task of monitoring Iraq to ensure that its dismantled weapons programs are not reconstituted.

In this vein, Hans Blix should target his inspections carefully. Blix has made clear his desire to continue the same inspection tactics employed by UNSCOM, including no-notice inspections and aerial surveillance. While such rights are at the core of any credible on-site inspection regime, UNMOVIC's no-notice inspections should focus on facilities that have a legitimate bearing on WMD research, development, and manufacture. Blix should avoid pressure to continue aggressive inspections aimed at Iraqi presidential and security sites. Such inspections have historically produced little to do with disarmament, and given the misuse of sensitive information gathered by UNSCOM from such sites in the past, they would be viewed with mistrust not only by Iraq, but also by many members of the Security Council.[14]

One serious obstacle to the reformulation of Iraq's disarmament obligation by the Security Council is the current U.S. policy of removing Saddam Hussein from power, codified in the Iraqi Liberation Act of 1998. That law has so far failed to threaten Saddam Hussein in any meaningful way, but it has succeeded in precluding any significant diplomatic initiative by locking the United States into a unilateral policy that makes cooperation with Iraq impossible. If the United States is serious about disarming Iraq, it should repeal the Iraqi Liberation Act and work within the framework of the Security Council to formulate a policy that results in the rapid reintroduction of meaningful, monitoring-based weapons inspections into Iraq.

That will require the lifting, not simply the suspension, of sanctions. While it is true that the sanctions have retarded Iraq's ability to acquire technology that could aid any WMD reconstitution effort, Resolution 687 stated that a finding of compliance would trigger the lifting of sanctions. Sanctions are thus not an open-ended option. At some point, they will need to be lifted, and if a finding of qualitative disarmament, backed with the implementation of viable monitoring-based inspections, can be achieved, then there is no reason to keep sanctions in place.

The Security Council must also follow through on the promise it made in paragraph 14 of Resolution 687, which speaks of regional disarmament. While monitoring-based inspections in Iraq must be expected to last indefinitely, they cannot be expected to last in a vacuum. Unless arrangements are made to address WMD programs in Iran and Israel, as well as the regional proliferation of advanced conventional weaponry, Iraq will never accept perpetual disarmament.

What is needed is a Security Council resolution that concludes Resolution 687, supersedes Resolution 1284, and redefines the disarmament obligations of Iraq to meet more realistic qualitative benchmarks. In addition to verifying Iraqi compliance with these new benchmarks, the resulting inspectorate, whether a revamped UNMOVIC or a new agency, would be tasked with implementing a monitoring regime similar to the one UNSCOM had in place prior to its withdrawal from Iraq. Once Iraq's disarmament along clearly defined qualitative standards had been verified by weapons inspectors, and after a viable monitoring regime was in place to detect and deter any attempt at reconstituting its WMD programs, the Security Council would lift, not suspend, economic sanctions.

Refocusing inspection goals and objectives would not only capitalize on UNSCOM's many accomplishments in rooting out and disposing of Iraq's prohibited weapons, it would also help the Security Council regain some of its lost credibility and resume its role as a viable overseer of international peace and security. It also meets the original intent of the Security Council to eliminate Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programs, not its leadership. Such a policy, built on the precepts of diplomatic engagement, would promote peace and security more than any other alternative policy currently being considered. And that, of course, is what arms control and disarmament are all about.

NOTES

1. Author conversations with Iraqi government officials in 1999 and 2000.

2. The Ibn Al Haytham Missile Research and Design Center, which took over responsibility for Iraq's permitted ballistic missile programs in the aftermath of the Gulf War.

3. Azad Vekilov, "Ibn Al Haytham Missile Research and Development Center MT-1 (UNSCOM 49) Report on Interim Monitoring," March 22, 1992. UNSCOM document.

4. Resolution 687 permits Iraq to possess ballistic missiles with a range of 150 kilometers or less, as well as the means to produce them.

5. Igor Mitrokhin, "Concealment Aspect—Chemical Weapons," January 20, 1998. UNSCOM document.Igor Mitrokhin, "Concealment Aspect—Chemical Weapons," January 20, 1998. UNSCOM document.

6. Presentation by UNSCOM to the Security Council, June 3, 1998.

7. Mitrokhin, op. cit.Mitrokhin, op. cit.

8. Richard Butler, The Greatest Threat: Iraq, Weapons of Mass Destruction and the Growing Crisis in Global Security, Public Affairs: New York, 2000, p. 81.

9. Richard Spertzel, "Presentation of Biological Weapons Related Issues to the Security Council," June 3, 1998.

10. The Military Industrial Commission Security Service, also known as the Amn al Tasnia, is responsible for military-industrial facility and personnel security.

11."Conversation tete-a-tete with Lieutenant General Hussein Kamal Hassan al-Majid, 22 August 1995, 1:00-3:00 p.m., Amman, Jordan," UNSCOM document.

12.A separate investigation concerning the existence of a hide site near the Iraqi city of Najaf used to store materials relating to Iraq's dismantled centrifuge enrichment program was carried out by the IAEA and UNSCOM using information from the same defector—information that was, if anything, more detailed than that of the truck convoys. This investigation refuted the defector's information, casting a shadow over the viability of his other information.

13. UNSCOM ballistic missile team, "A Note on the Capabilities of Iraqi Machine Tools and Production Processes," July 8, 1996. UNSCOM document.

14. Operation Desert Fox made extensive use of information gleaned from UNSCOM inspections in targeting presidential palaces and security and military facilities throughout Iraq.

Scott Ritter, former weapons inspector and chief of the concealment unit for UNSCOM, is the author of Endgame: Solving the Iraq Problem—Once and for All.

1313 L St., NW, Ste. 130
Washington, DC 20005
Tel: (202) 463-8270 | Fax: (202) 463-8273
