

CAMSAW CRAPPER JAN 03

Weapons Inspections: The Facts

Let us suppose that we are a big superpower and, for whatever reason, we want to ensure that Saddam Hussein does not have access to Weapons of Mass Destruction. Then how do we go about this? Is war the only answer? What of inspections? Have they ever worked? Can they work again? Let's find out...

Inspections were instituted in the name of UNSCOM under Security Council Resolution 687, passed on 3 April 1991. This resolution also redefined the conditions for economic sanctions to be lifted. These sanctions had been instituted in SCR 661 on 6 August 1990 in response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. SCR 687 links inspections and economic sanctions so that "sanctions would be lifted once Iraq had complied with... disarmament, and had accepted a long-term monitoring programme." ¹

In 1994, Warren Christopher, Clinton's then Secretary of State, wrote that the "US did not believe that Iraq's compliance... is enough to justify lifting the embargo." ² Despite this, inspections continued until October 1998 with only five problems in 300 inspection operations. Inspectors had recognised protocols for inspecting sensitive sites including presidential sites and were apparently working well. These protocols were the result of considerable negotiation and the personal intervention of Kofi Annan. Former UN weapons inspector (and Republican supporter) Scott Ritter has said that:

"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"³

Apparently then the weapons inspectors were working effectively. So what happened?

On 30 October 1998 the Security Council wrote a letter responding to an Iraqi request for clarification of when sanctions would be lifted (sanctions that, according to UNICEF, contributed to the deaths of some 500 000 under-fives between 1991 and 1998). Several members of the Security Council were floating the idea of reviewing sanctions with a view to winding them up. The UK and US vetoed this idea at which time the Economist observed that "Iraq interpreted this as confirmation of its long-held – and plausible – belief that, even if it did come clean on all its weapons, no American administration would lift the oil embargo so long as Mr Hussein remained in power." ⁴ This despite resolution 687. On 31 October, the next day, Iraq announced non-cooperation.

Fourteen days later however Baghdad retracted its statement of non-cooperation in the face of US and UK threats of force. The weapons inspections resumed on 18 Nov 1998. This lasted only until mid-December however for it was then that Richard Butler, UNSCOM head, was instructed by the US ambassador to the UN to withdraw from Iraq; Operation Desert Fox, a Clinton-ordered bombing campaign, was about to begin. In the event, Desert Fox lasted only four days and achieved, apparently, nothing but the death of UNSCOM.

It is worth noting that UNSCOM's death was made more likely by consistent reports at the start of 1999 that the US used UN weapons inspectors in Iraq as cover for spying on President Saddam Hussein. The Washington Post reported that the US had received intelligence information from UN weapons inspectors⁵ and the New York Times reported that such reports, including details of suspicions of Scott Ritter and others that UNSCOM had been manipulated by the CIA, were "dimming any chances that the inspection system [would] survive." ⁶ UNSCOM disintegrated soon after.

After UNSCOM: UNMOVIC

In Dec 1999, Security Council Resolution 1284 formed UNMOVIC, the next inspection commission. UNMOVIC did not enter Iraq until Nov 2002. Despite this, the effectiveness of an inspections programme is not compromised according to Scott Ritter:

"What took Iraq decades to build through the expenditure of billions of dollars could not, under any rational analysis, have been reconstituted since Dec 1998."⁷

But, even so, why the delay? The short answer is that Washington has been deliberately restraining and undermining UNMOVIC at every turn. In May 2002, a top US Senate foreign policy aide said, "The White House's biggest fear is that UN weapons inspectors will be allowed in."⁸ The motive for this can only be that the US wants war for whatever reason. But let's examine the evidence for this claim of undermining:

1. The US joined other Security Council members in urging UNMOVIC not to confront Iraq when they refused them entry (Aug 2002).
2. The UK and US have demanded that weapons inspectors have vastly increased rights to inspect; In Tony Blair's words, "anyone, anytime, any place" (p60). This is not the basis on which UNSCOM operated (effectively). These powers make it easier to manufacture incidents of Iraqi non-compliance or, as a US intelligence officer said in Feb 2002, the White House "will not take yes for an answer."⁹
3. As we have already seen, US intelligence was known to have infiltrated UNSCOM. In June 2002, a clever Washington leak revealed that the CIA had been directed to capture or kill Saddam Hussein. Scott Ritter, and others, agree that this makes Iraqi compliance unlikely simply because of Saddam's desire to remain alive.
4. On 4 July 2002, Kofi Annan's negotiations with Iraq with respect to the entry of UNMOVIC were severely compromised by a Pentagon leak regarding the US's military intentions on Iraq. The talks subsequently failed.¹⁰

The upshot of this and other US manoeuvres has been that a new UN resolution has been passed (SCR 1441) that adheres to the "anyone, anytime, any place" policy. This resolution is designed to fail: Baghdad is going to find compliance very difficult without sacrificing some sovereignty. If Iraq doesn't comply however Washington will claim (very dubiously) that they pursue war legally which is very important for domestic approval. Washington's continual compromising of the inspectors' duties also gives them scope to argue that inspections are inadequate though they point, somewhat fallaciously, at Baghdad for the cause of this.

A key point, in addition, is that if Iraq does not have weapons, then there is no way for it to satisfy the US: if the inspectors don't find weapons, it'll be assumed that they just can't find them and Iraq has omitted to declare them. If weapons *are* found, then the US are likely to accuse Iraq of being at fault.

If all goes to (Washington's) plan then they will have ample opportunity to declare Iraq in material breach and war will commence. **Be very sure though:** This is NOT a war about weapons of mass destruction...

Notes

1. p46, "War Plan Iraq" by Milan Rai.
2. Cited in p46, "Neighbours, Not Friends" by Dilip Hero.
3. Arms Control Today, June 2000.
4. The Economist, 7 Nov 1998.
5. The Washington Post, 7 January 1999.
6. The New York Times, 8 January 1999. (See also www.globalpolicy.org/security/issues/irq99dx1.htm)
7. Cited in p68, "War Plan Iraq" by Milan Rai.
8. p38, Time magazine, 13 May 2002.
9. p1, Guardian, 14 Feb 2002.
10. p61, "War Plan Iraq" by Milan Rai.

Information

1. For details on the situation in Iraq with regard to sanctions and war, go to www.casi.org.uk
2. If you're interested in participating in anti-war activities see www.camsaw.org.uk or email info@camsaw.org.uk
3. The next big national demonstration against the proposed war on Iraq takes place in London on February 15. It is hoped that 1 000 000 people will attend. To get on one of the buses going down from Cambridge, email info@camsaw.org.uk
4. Details of other upcoming anti-war activities are on the CamSAW website (www.camsaw.org.uk)