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RENEWED INSPECTIONS IN IRAQ: CAN THEY SUCCEED?

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Inspections aimed at uncovering and destroying Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and long-range missiles began auspiciously soon after the end of the Gulf War in 1991. At the outset, the inspectors, who were sent to Iraq under a UN Security Council (UNSC) mandate, uncovered an extensive and previously unknown nuclear program, started to locate and destroy large quantities of chemical weapons, and tried to account for all the ballistic missiles that Iraq acquired and used both in the Iran-Iraq War and during the Gulf war against Israel and Saudi Arabia. However, Iraq initially denied the existence of a biological weapons program and managed to conceal major parts of other prohibited activities. Moreover, as time went by, Iraqi intransigence slowed the pace and reduced the effectiveness of all inspections.

Under the UNSC resolutions, Iraq was required to present to the inspectors a Full, Final and Complete Disclosure (FFCD) document. In practice, it only supplied information, the major part of which the inspectors knew anyway or would have come by during their activities. The result was that there were many versions of the FFCD, each one more elaborate than the previous one because of new information that came to light. Still, even the last of these is not believed to be complete. Although the inspectors

gained ground, exposing more and more hidden facts, Iraq slowly managed to shift the burden of proof onto the inspectors. It demanded that any accusation by the inspectors be accompanied by evidence of its correctness, and it turned down many requests for new information on the grounds that the information did not exist. In addition, it intimidated inspectors by shooting at them, endangering flights, and physically preventing them from entering sites before evidence could be removed – thereby violating the inspectors' UN-mandated rights.

For its part, the UN Security Council gave progressively less backing to the inspectors and agreed to new concessions to Iraq, including restrictions on access to "sensitive sites" and "presidential palaces," which further weakened the effectiveness of the inspections. Nevertheless, towards the end of 1998, Iraq completely halted all cooperation with the inspectors, making it impossible for them to function, and after it terminated their activities, they were withdrawn in mid-December on the eve of the Anglo-American bombings known as Operation "Desert Fox."

For four years, there have been no inspections in Iraq, and newly published evidence strongly suggests that Iraq has renewed its efforts to acquire WMD and long-range missiles. Had it

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been willing to renounce these ambitions, Iraq could have become prosperous again and the plight of its people would have been a thing of the past. Its choice not to do so clearly reflects its intentions.

UNSC Resolution 1441, adopted unanimously on 8 November 2002 and accepted six days later by Saddam Hussein, paves the way for renewed inspections. This resolution imposes strict obligations and requirements on Iraq. However, even if all formalities are met, the success of the work is not assured. On the formal side, the Resolution requires Iraq to provide a complete declaration of its programs to develop nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and their means of delivery not later than 8 December 2002. On the practical side, it obliges Iraq to provide unfettered access to all sites, programs, documentation and personnel, facilities and means, and to facilitate the inspections operations by allowing security, flights, travel and the activities of the inspectors.

Of the inspectors' tasks, the simpler one is to assess the *veracity* of the Iraqi declaration. It can be assumed that the Iraqis will provide a multitude of details that, if checked meticulously, will consume all the time and manpower available to the inspection team until it is required to produce its first report, sixty days after the beginning of the inspections.

The more important and difficult task will be to assess the *completeness* of the declaration. In other words, the inspectors will have to look for things that are not declared, for hidden facilities and activities, materials and documentation. In order to do this, the inspectors will essentially play the role of detectives, looking for and uncovering hidden facilities, activities and materials. They will have to take nothing for granted and to be thorough and intrusive, relying on specialized equipment and methods and on their wits to reveal the concealed.

In carrying out their tasks, the inspectors will

face a variety of challenges. The Iraqis are masters of concealment, and many of the suspect sites observed by satellites and overflights will probably prove to be innocuous or even "red herrings," misleading the inspectors and wasting their precious time. Sensitive sites, such as hospitals and mosques, can be used to hide proscribed activities. Much of the documentation will have been "doctored" or otherwise prepared with the same purpose in mind. Many of the people interviewed will not tell the truth, because of their belief in what they are doing, because of loyalty to the regime, or perhaps because of mortal fear, even though the Resolution provides for a safe haven for them and their families.

What are the chances of success? Should Iraq decide to come clean, this will be evident from the start: Iraq will lead the inspectors to sites where the proscribed work took place and allow them to destroy weapons and related materials and equipment. The inspectors will then need to ensure that everything has been disclosed. But since Iraq has already denied involvement in any forbidden WMD- or missile-related activity, the chances of this happening are low.

If Iraq decides to hold unto its weapons, the task facing the inspectors is indeed daunting. A relatively small number of inspectors will have to face a hostile regime and search for the proverbial needle in the haystack in a very large country. They will have to ensure that their priorities are correct, persevere in their efforts, and refuse to gloss over seemingly minor infractions and inaccuracies but instead report them immediately to the Security Council. They cannot provide a clean bill of health based on information supplied by Iraq and must enjoy unflagging support by the Security Council in the search for information of their own. Only the full exercise of their mandate promises a reasonable chance of success.