

Disarming Saddam—A Chronology of Iraq And UN Weapons Inspections

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Prior to the March 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1441 in November 2002 giving Iraq a “final opportunity” to comply with its disarmament requirements under previous Security Council resolutions. At issue was Iraq’s failure to provide an adequate accounting of its prohibited weapons programs or to convince UN inspectors that its weapons of mass destruction had been destroyed as Baghdad claimed.

UN weapons inspectors worked in Iraq from November 27, 2002 until March 18, 2003. During that time, inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the United Nations Monitoring, Verification, and Inspections Commission (UNMOVIC) conducted more than 900

inspections at more than 500 sites. The inspectors did not find that Iraq possessed chemical or biological weapons or that it had reconstituted its nuclear weapons program.

Although Iraq was cooperative on what inspectors called “process”—allowing inspectors access to suspected weapons sites, for example—it was only marginally cooperative in answering the questions surrounding its weapons programs. Unable to resolve its differences with Security Council members who favored strengthening and continuing weapons inspections, the United States abandoned the inspections process and initiated the invasion of Iraq on March 19.

Following is a summary of the major events of the decision to pursue, then abandon, UN weapons inspections in Iraq.

2002

January 29, 2002: In his State of the Union address, President George W. Bush labels Iraq a member of an “axis of evil,” along with Iran and North Korea. The president’s speech is the first of many statements by top U.S. officials on the dangers posed by Iraq. Several of these officials question the ultimate worth of arms inspections and advocate the overthrow of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein as the only way to guarantee that Iraq will not develop weapons of mass destruction in the future.

March 7, 2002: Iraqi officials meet with UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and UN Monitoring, Verification, and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) Executive Chairman Hans Blix to discuss arms inspections for the first time since 1998. UN officials fail to win the return of inspectors at this meeting or two subsequent ones that occur in May and July.

September 12, 2002: Amid increasing speculation that the United States is preparing to invade Iraq to oust Saddam Hussein, Bush delivers a speech to the United Nations calling on the organization to enforce its resolutions on disarming Iraq. Bush strongly implies that if the United Nations does not act, the United States will—a message that U.S. officials make more explicit the following week.

September 16, 2002: Baghdad announces that it will allow arms inspectors to return “without conditions.” Iraqi and UN officials meet September 17 to discuss the logistical arrangements for the return of inspectors and announce that final arrangements will be made at a meeting scheduled for the end of the month. The United States

contends that there is nothing to talk about and warns that the Iraqis are simply stalling. The Bush administration continues to press the Security Council to approve a new UN resolution calling for Iraq to give weapons inspectors unfettered access and authorizing the use of force if Iraq does not comply.

November 8, 2002: The UN Security Council adopts Resolution 1441. The resolution declares that Iraq “remains in material breach” of past resolutions and gives Iraq a “final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations” set out by Security Council resolutions stretching back to the end of the 1991 Persian Gulf War. It also strengthens UNMOVIC’s and the International Atomic Energy Agency’s (IAEA) powers to conduct inspections throughout Iraq, specifying that Iraq must allow “immediate, unimpeded, unconditional and unrestricted access” to “facilities, buildings, equipment, records, and means of transport which they wish to inspect.” UN inspectors are given the authority to prohibit the movement of vehicles and aircraft around sites to be inspected and have the right to interview anyone they choose, without Iraqi officials present, in any location they wish. Additionally, the resolution overrides a 1998 memorandum of understanding between Baghdad and UN Secretary-General Annan that had placed special conditions on inspections of presidential sites to which Iraq had previously denied the inspectors access.

The resolution also warns that Iraq will face “serious consequences” if it fails to comply with its disarmament obligations.

November 13, 2002: Iraq accepts Resolution 1441 in a letter to Annan from Iraqi Foreign Minister Naji Sabr.

November 27, 2002: UNMOVIC and IAEA inspections begin.

December 7, 2002: Iraq submits its declaration “of all aspects of its [weapons of mass destruction] programmes” as required by Resolution 1441. The declaration is supposed to provide information about any prohibited weapons activity since UN inspectors left the country in 1998 and resolve outstanding questions about Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction programs that had not been answered by 1998.

The resolution requires the declaration to be “currently accurate, full, and complete,” but UNMOVIC and IAEA inspectors tell the UN Security Council on December 19 that the declaration contains little new information.

December 19, 2002: Following IAEA and UNMOVIC briefings to the UN Security Council, Secretary of State Colin Powell states that the Iraqi declaration contains a “pattern of systematic...gaps” that constitute “another material breach” of Iraq’s disarmament obligations.

2003

February 5, 2003: Powell briefs the Security Council in an effort to persuade members that Iraq is subverting the inspections process. He publicly presents intelligence for the first time to support Washington’s claim that Iraq is hiding weapons of mass destruction and interfering with inspections. France, China, and Russia are not persuaded and support continued inspections.

February 24, 2003: The United States, United Kingdom, and Spain co-sponsor a new Security Council resolution saying “Iraq has failed to take the final opportunity afforded to it by Resolution 1441.” The same day, Russia and France submit a memorandum stating that military force should be a “last resort” and that force should not yet be used because there is “no evidence” that Iraq possesses weapons of mass destruction. The memorandum also says, however, that “inspections...cannot continue indefinitely. Iraq must disarm.” It further adds that Baghdad’s cooperation, although improving, is not “yet fully satisfactory.”

The memorandum proposes that the inspectors submit a program of work that lists and clearly defines specific disarmament tasks. Such a report is already required under Resolution 1284, which created UNMOVIC in 1999.

The memorandum also suggests “further measures to strengthen inspections,” including increasing staff and bolstering technical capabilities. Additionally, it proposes a new timeline mandating regular reporting to the Security Council about inspectors’ progress, as well as a progress report to be submitted 120 days after the program of work is adopted.

Neither measure is adopted.

March 7, 2003: UNMOVIC Executive Chairman Hans Blix tells the Security Council that Iraq’s cooperation with the inspectors in providing information about past weapons activities has improved, although Baghdad has not yet complied with its disarmament obligations. UNMOVIC and IAEA inspectors had stated during briefings to the Security Council on January 27 and February 14 that Iraq was gradually increasing its cooperation with the United Nations. Yet, both deemed the cooperation insufficient.

The United States, United Kingdom, and Spain co-sponsor another resolution stating that Iraq “will have failed” to comply with Resolution 1441 unless Baghdad cooperates with its disarmament obligations by March 17. The draft resolution implies that the council members would take military action if Iraq failed to meet the deadline.

March 17, 2003: After U.S.-led diplomatic efforts to build support for the new resolution fail, the United States decides not to seek a vote on it—a reversal of Bush’s March 6 statement that the United States would push for a Security Council vote on the resolution, regardless of whether it was expected to pass.

Annan announces that UN weapons inspectors will be withdrawn from the country.

Bush announces that Hussein and his sons have 48 hours to leave Iraq or the United States will initiate military action.

March 18, 2003: UNMOVIC and IAEA inspectors leave Iraq.

March 19, 2003: The United States commences military action. The United Kingdom, Australia, and Poland provide troops to the U.S.-led invasion.

May 1, 2003: Bush declares an end to “major combat operations.” U.S. forces had not discovered any Iraqi weapons of mass destruction since entering the country.

For more information on Iraq please see the Arms Control Association’s Iraq resource page online at <http://www.armscontrol.org/country/iraq/>.
