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## **The New Iraqi “Shell Game”**

# **The Strategy Iraq May Employ to Defeat UNMOVIC and IAEA Efforts**

**Working Draft**

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There is a danger in focusing so closely on the day-to-day developments in UN Inspections, or so much on Iraq's past actions, that Iraq's true goals get lost in the process. The same is true of efforts to analyze the UN inspection effort in terms of UNMOVIC and IAEA capabilities to meet past challenges and to round up the usual suspects. The fact is that Iraq's goals could be very different this time around, and the challenge of inspection could be very different as well.

### **The Problem of Iraqi Strategy**

Even in the early 1990s, many involved in assessing Iraq's actions could not understand why it simply did not totally comply with the IAEA and UNSCOM effort, get the UN out of Iraq, free itself of sanctions, and then go back to proliferation. Both analysts and inspectors became increasingly puzzled by Saddam's grim determination to conceal, at all costs, his weapons program as time went on and there was less and less to conceal.

From the viewpoint of Iraqi strategy, there were a number of good reasons to pursue an approach based on short-term compliance:

- No matter what the UN did, the human skills and knowledge necessary to proliferate would remain.
- Even if the UN did leave monitoring equipment in dual-use facilities indefinitely, Iraq could create a major rapid break out capability in chemical and biological weapons by converting such facilities in a matter of months. (It did this by converting a vaccine plant in less than four months to produce Anthrax well before it invaded Kuwait). There is no way to really disarm a modern state. Petrochemical, medical, food processing, and other commercial facilities, are steadily becoming more sophisticated throughout the developing world, and most countries are acquiring a potential break out capability that no arms control regime can halt.
- Iraq only had a massive amount of chemical and biological tactical weapons because it had stockpiled them to fight Iran and would have used them if the Iran-Iraq War had continued. Most had limited value in other types of wars, and were relatively crude designs with uncertain life spans. Retaining an old inventory of weapons for the wrong war made little sense versus getting rid of UN sanctions and focusing on more effective long-range weapons.
- Regardless of whether Iraq pursued highly lethal biological weapons or nuclear weapons, it needed only a relatively small number of high concealable weapons to intimidate or threaten its neighbors. This meant that concealing a very small amount of biological activity and nuclear weapons research might well meet Iraq's needs.
- The UN limits on Iraq's missiles -- 150 kilometers with 1,000 kilograms of payload -- left Iraq free to text new missile warheads, which it desperately needed. It only had crude unitary warheads at the time of the Gulf War that exploded on contact. It needed missiles that could set off a payload at the right altitude, and non-explosively disseminate chemical and biological weapons to be effective. Giving up older missile warheads and aging Scud bodies was not that great a sacrifice.

- Iraq's highest priorities in the new, post-Gulf War world were truly lethal biological or nuclear weapons, and "dusty" chemical weapons that can defeat a significant amount of Western protection gear. Old stocks, old weapons, and old facilities had limited value. In contrast, creating small new R&D cells for high speed centrifuges, infectious weapons like smallpox, new forms of coated micropowder forms of weapons like Anthrax, and basic research into miniaturizing Iraq's two implosion type nuclear weapons designs had high priority. Iraq could afford to give up most of its older efforts and could carry out the key development efforts it really needed with considerable confidence that it could conceal them from the IAEA and UNSCOM.
- The world really did not care how abusive Saddam Hussein's regime was at any other level. Once Iraq complied with UNSCOM and the IAEA, it could count on getting the political leverage to break out of other sanctions over time.

Experts have developed a wide range of explanations for why Iraq did not pursue these strategies. They include "nationalism," Saddam's pride and rigidity, bureaucratic momentum, and fear of losing the one possible deterrent to any new US attack to overthrow the regime. They also include the fact that Iraq was able to conceal its biological effort for the first four years, and still was able to conceal a substantial amount of its past R&D efforts in nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons (particularly in the centrifuge, coated biological micropowder, and persistent nerve gas areas through the expulsion of UNSCOM in 1998. Iraq may simply have felt throughout 1991-1998 that if it only held on for just another month -- or another year -- it could retain its older efforts, rather than sacrifice them.

### **The 1998-2002 Hiatus**

We have no way to know exactly what strategy Iraq pursued during 1998-2002. The CIA and British white papers describing Iraq's actions were necessarily circumscribed. The authors knew all too well that every facility and activity they named would allow Iraq to remove any signs of activity -- in fact, it almost forced it to do so, since every such facility was virtually labeled as a target. Moreover, the US and British intelligence efforts did face the grim problem that it was far easier to track import activity than get any idea of where they went and how they would be used.

Almost inevitably, the reports also focused on the "usual suspects." The facilities that have been used in the past, closed off to inspection, or were dual use in character. As UNMOVIC inspections have shown to date, such facilities cannot be ignored, but even if Iraq assumed that it would never again have to allow inspection, they could be suddenly targeted and destroyed -- just as similar facilities were hit in Operation Desert Fox. As a result, round up the usual suspects may tell little about Iraq's current capabilities, but involves a task with over 50 large facilities and hundreds of inspection points. UNMOVIC has talked in broad terms about 1,000 sites -- and these are largely sites from 1990.

Iraq could have pursued a mix of several strategies over the last four years that now greatly complicate the inspection process:

- Created a covert launch on warning or launch under attack capability of a limited number of Scuds and biological and chemical warheads scattered throughout the country, or some other last ditch attack methods including covert delivery or the use of drones. Such an effort might well go undetected.

- Created a new set of small, cell-like R&D and production facilities with new personnel and locations with no ties to 1990-1991 or records. Some UN inspectors believe this happened as early as 1995-1996.
- Carried out static, internal tests of new warheads, bombs, and weapons for much more lethal distribution of chemical and biological weapons. Such tests can be carried inside buildings, rather than in flight, and do not need telemetry, versus recoverable on board recording, if they are carried out in flight. Such efforts involve significant technical compromises, but are better than nothing.
- Used the “legal” missile R&D and production provisions of the UN Resolutions to test any prototype component advances and designs for much longer-range missiles.
- Created a small stockpile of Anthrax, or a similar non-infectious agent for which there is no vaccine, using modern, coated micropowders. Such an agent would have the lethality of small theater nuclear weapons.
- Developed and disperse an infectious weapon like smallpox as an ultimate vengeance or retaliatory weapon.
- Created a network of dual use facilities and civil R&D efforts with the goal of creating a break out capability and having a substantial R&D effort that no inspector could object to and that could not be challenged under the UN oil for food program.
- Carried out small cells for R&D into UCAVs and drones that would probably be undetectable.
- Laid the groundwork for a follow-on nuclear weapons by creating a cell-like centrifuge R&D and/or production effort, research into more advanced and smaller nuclear weapons like boosted designs, master the difficult problem of creating effective radiological weapons, bought Uranium ore or yellowcake for later use, and /or set up teams to try to buy FSU nuclear devices, many of which have comparative primitive protection systems.
- Created a complex of real and decoy efforts to conceal what is happening and focus US/UK intelligence and any UN efforts on the wrong targets and facilities. Iraq relies heavily on deception and decoys and some intelligence experts believe Iraq has done this.
- Segregated out the residual NBC weapons, devices, stockpiles, production equipment, and precursors to conceal only the highest value items – leaving the rest as possible sacrifices either as targets or hostages to inspection.
- Created a morass of confusing false trails, documentation, sacrifice facilities, and stockpiles for the event inspection was forced on Iraq. Offering the option of providing endless confusing documentation, opening up all facilities closed or used in the past, and seeming to reluctantly comply.

No analysis of UNMOVIC or IAEA capabilities, or the ability to disarm Iraq, can ignore these options and the fact Iraq may have pursued a totally different strategy than in the past. At the same time, Iraq could have overlayed any combination of these measures over its previous efforts. There simply is no way to tell. Defector reports to date have lacked credibility in all of these areas, and if intelligence knows, it obviously has every incentive not to say so.

## **Playing the Iraqi “Shell Game”**

Given this background, it should be clear why even the best UNMOVIC and IAEA effort can fail, only partially succeed, or end in doing nothing more than discover Iraqi “sacrifice” pawns. In fact, now Iraq has every incentive to appear to comply with UNMOVIC and the IAEA as long as it does not have to give up its real crown jewels. We have no way to know how sophisticated Iraq will be, or whether it will even be wiser this time than last.

What we do know is that these strategies and tactics could force UNMOVIC and the IAEA to search over a 1,000 areas and tie them down for months or years. At the end, they could also totally defeat the UNMOVIC and the IAEA efforts.

The good news is that US and British intelligence, and UNMOVIC and the IAEA, only have to get really lucky once. Any major Iraq mistake will probably be seen as a material breach. The bad news is that we may not get lucky – or lucky at the right moment in being able to actually get suitable political support and be ready in military terms.

Several technical points also need to be considered.

### **Modularity and Mobility**

At some point in the mid-1990s, Iraq seems to have shifted to creating parallel efforts with no trace to those carried out before the Gulf war, and using mobile facilities and modular elements like palletized assemblies that could be moved very rapidly. These are discussed in vague terms in the CIA and British white papers, but we have few details except for the fact Iraq seems to have mobile biological laboratories and containment facilities. As a result, we are talking about a giant shell game very different from the first round of UNSCOM efforts.

This part of the shell game is probably further complicated by the ability to divide research and development efforts into small cells which may not even know they are weapons efforts. There are many aspects of dual-use research that can be conducted on a civil level and then adapted for weapons purposes. It is also relatively easy to create a structure of small, isolated cells, few of which are smoking guns.

### **Dual Use and Break Out Capability**

Iraq already lost most of its major production and R&D facilities dedicated solely to the production of weapons of mass destruction. As a result, it has every incentive to shift to creating overcapacity in dual use civil plants with legitimate food processing, conventional weapons, medical, and chemical industrial purposes. Such facilities can be rapidly converted to WMD production -- Iraq mass-produced Anthrax in less than six months from a converted vaccine plant in 1989-1990.

Add in the prospect of mobile assemblies that can be put into the production chain or facility in hours or days, and small outside facilities to weaponize civil production, and you create a major potential break out capability that UNMOVIC may be able to monitor but never identify as a weapons facility.

### **Strategic Objective and Matters of Scale**

After the Gulf War, Iraq had immense inventories of weapons and material sized around going on with the Iran-Iraq War and the near certainty Iraq would have carried out massive biological

attacks in 1989 if the war had continued. The prospect of massive theater-level wars against an opponent with no capability to retaliate has largely disappeared.

Furthermore, most of the CB weapons were obsolete with poor dispersal mechanisms, fusing, and stability. This means Iraq could afford to destroy much of its older inventory during 1998-2002, or hide it in dispersed forms -- *provided it has not retained this inventory in case of war with the US*.

If Iraq is not planning for tactical war fighting with the US, Israel, etc.—and this is a key question -- all Iraq needs are to preserve its R&D base, technology base, and dual-use facilities. Such a change in scale of effort would radically reduce the size and detectability of the Iraqi effort.

At the same time, truly lethal mass attack weapons like smallpox have a virtually zero footprint. The same would be true of a small number of Anthrax or radiological weapons. Given Iraq's limited number of possible Scuds and air delivery systems, and the limits to its ability to carry out covert attacks. Even 10-20 concealed weapons of this kind could be adequate for its strategic purposes in bring Israel into the war, carrying out a martyrdom attack on the US, hitting at a key facility in the Gulf, etc. Virtually any facility could also be converted to a concealed storage facility or the necessary inventory could be kept permanently mobile.

### **Weaponization Research**

Iraq needs to make critical advances in improving the physical weaponization of its agents. Up until now, its missile warheads have been crude unitary devices with no non-explosive mechanisms to distribute the agent and no fusing to explode at the optimal altitude. Shells, bombs, and rocket warheads have been equally crude. We do not know their technology in covert devices, but we assume it is limited.

UNSCOM never came to grips with Iraq's ability to change this situation without every using any form of actual CB weapon, or to research reductions in nuclear weapons design. Since no trace to a WMD facility is necessary, Iraq may have done a lot. Similarly, UNMOVIC has no clear basis for dealing with such activity. The fact is, however, that the efficient design of weapons containers and dissemination can increase the lethality of a given CB weapon by 10 to 1,000 times, and reducing nuclear designs to sizes suitable for fighter or missile warhead size are critical.

### **Search Technology**

Most coverage of new search sensors tends to buy the manufacturer or project manager's claims. But some of these devices have been in development for over a decade, are still highly unreliable, and only have limited capability. There are operational problems, performance limits, high false alarm rates, and often a need for a costly integrated system whose overall effectiveness is, in itself, suspect.

### **Search Methods**

There is a long history of operations into search methodology. It calls for the inspector to counter the concealer by using false patterns of apparently predictable search methods, random search systems, different real goals from the apparent goal, etc. UNMOVIC has to do this in a political and media fishbowl, but it cannot hope to succeed if it is predictable and follows some kind of

political agenda. We need to get at whether there is a real versus apparent search pattern. That is a key story. Availability

### **Inspecting the Obvious**

Any activity listed in the CIA or British white papers, or some NGO report, has probably led the Iraqis to move it or create a credible cover story. The real issue is what do US and British intelligence know they have not made public and can they communicate it to the UNMOVIC and IAEA efforts, without it leaking in. (Major problems occurred with such leaks the last time around).

### **US and British Intelligence versus UN Inspection**

Much of the key activity will not occur in UNMOVIC and the IAEA. Inspection on the ground can only do so much, and UNMOVIC and IAEA have no other intelligence collection capability and only limited expertise and analysis staffs. The real effort may well be what US and British intelligence can do with their national technical means, plus a covert effort to attract defectors and get Humint, plus use US technical means.

This means key "inspectors" may not be UN at all, and key Iraqi violations may be detected by intelligence that will be undetectable by UNMOVIC. This could trigger major US strikes without warning if a key set of Iraq weapons is moved in ways the US detects and determines to be a time-urgent target.

### **Gray Areas versus Material Breach**

Blix has said that only the UNSC can determine what is a material breach. Be aware that major gray areas exist. These include dual use facilities, the issue of missiles having more than a 150 KM range, the purpose of drones and UAVs, medical research, food processing, etc. Iraq has also often said in the past that it forgot something or did not have records. Things will be a lot harder to characterize than may be apparent.

### **The December 8th Declaration**

The comprehensive declaration on December 8th will be reviewed largely at the UN headquarters and by national intelligence, not by inspectors. Inspection will only check it out over a much longer period of time. Iraq has every incentive to make this task as difficult as possible, to overreport, create red herrings, and hint at sacrifice pawns as a fallback position. A super long report burns up time, resources, patience, and lays the groundwork for explaining any minor violations as oversights in the rush to report, dual use activity, or defiance of orders. As a result, the effort in capitals and the UN headquarters to review the Iraqi declaration may well be a much more important near term story than what happens in Iraq.

### **Time and No End Game**

How do 300 searchers, with 80-100 men on the ground, search a major nation with hundreds or thousands of facilities and mobile assets? Very slowly and not comprehensively. There is a serious risk that UNMOVIC and IAEA will end up trying to prove a negative: The non-existence of efforts versus their existence.

There also is another major debate in the UN to come, regardless of what the inspectors find,. Only a limited number of sanctions are "lifted" even if Iraq is found to be disarmed. The key UNSCRs are open-ended. Sanctions on conventional and dual use arms imports still go on. So

does the requirement for monitoring. Please do not refer to the "end of sanctions" as if this will occur on a broad level without major new UN debates and new UNSCRs subject to a US veto.

### **Disarmament is Relative**

Finally, any form of disarmament in Iraq will still be relative. Some quiet DARPA studies of the future of technology indicate that any modern economy in the developing world can be rapidly converted to the production of biological weapons and advances in genetic engineering will make this far easier in the next 5-10 years.

Similar changes are taking place in dusty and fourth generation chemical weapons technology, and engineering smaller fission and more efficient radiological weapons. We will not truly disarm Iraq. The skills, human resources, and dual use facilities will remain. No matter how well UNMOVIC and the IAEA do, they cannot achieve more than forcing Iraq to rely on a break out capability.