

## Strategic Insight

### Iraq War Will Not End Inspection Challenges

by Jeffrey W. Knopf

Strategic Insights are authored monthly by analysts with the Center for Contemporary Conflict (CCC). The CCC is the research arm of the National Security Affairs Department at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. The views expressed here are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Naval Postgraduate School, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

March 1, 2003

Debates on Iraq have largely boiled down to two options: giving inspections more time or giving up on inspections and going to war instead. This framing of the debate, coupled with administration comments that time is running out for inspections, create an impression that war would represent the end of the inspection effort. War, however, will not end inspections; it will involve only their temporary suspension. After any successful military intervention by a U.S.-led coalition, inspections will have to be resumed, most likely in a format similar if not identical to the current inspection regime.

If war comes, the United States and its coalition partners will target as much of Iraq's chemical, biological and nuclear weapons programs as they can. Given the extent of Iraq's concealment efforts, however, it will be impossible to be confident that all key sites have been identified or that they have been fully destroyed by military strikes. For this reason, U.S. objectives in a post-war Iraq include locating and destroying any remaining Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (WMD). To be sure that Iraq is disarmed of its existing stocks of and potential to produce WMD will require the resumption of inspections.

The goal of bringing about greater Iraqi cooperation with weapons inspectors has been one of the main reasons the United States has given for seeking to force regime change in Baghdad. A cooperative Iraqi government would make a huge difference, but even in a cooperative environment significant inspection challenges will remain. Three factors will make necessary assertive inspection activities. First, new governing authorities are unlikely to have full knowledge about Iraq's weapons programs. If a U.S. military or civilian official is appointed to run the country, or the UN appoints one or more civilian administrators drawn from other parts of the world, such administrators brought in from outside Iraq will not have been privy to the secret details of Saddam's WMD efforts. Even if a new government of Iraqi nationals is created, however, the new leaders are unlikely to have insider knowledge. All the officials closest to Saddam will most likely have been killed or fled the country, but if any of Saddam's confidants remain in Baghdad the United States may not trust anyone from Saddam's inner circle enough to allow them to become the new Iraqi leader. A new government led by Iraqi nationals is more likely to be drawn from the exile community and areas of the country not currently under Baghdad's control. Hence, the post-war authorities, whoever they are, will almost certainly not themselves know what Iraq possesses or where it is located.

The first step after a war, therefore, will be to find out where Iraq kept records of its WMD activities. Inspections will be necessary to verify whether details in the records are accurate, and if site visits reveal that inventories do not match written records then further inspection work will be needed. Even more problematic, the records of Iraq's WMD programs are unlikely to be complete, either because Iraq never kept complete records or because key documents were destroyed or are never located. Even if every weapon and weapon-related material or facility mentioned in Iraqi records is destroyed, a great deal of further effort will be required to determine whether anything has been overlooked. Site visits and further detective work to verify the accuracy and completeness of Iraqi records are exactly what past and present inspections have entailed, and the fact the same tasks will remain after a war means much the same inspection activities will also be required.

A second possible problem could create a need for coercive inspection efforts as well: after a war, central authorities might not control all parts of Iraqi territory. More than a year after the defeat of the Taliban, the Karzai government in Kabul still does not exercise authority over sizable portions of Afghanistan. The same situation could arise in Iraq given its divisions into Shiite-, Sunni-, and Kurdish-dominated regions. Areas not under central government control might contain weapons or WMD-production facilities, and it is not hard to imagine that the local leader in such an area might view possession of a few chemical warheads as a useful bargaining chip. In such conditions, negotiations to gain access for inspectors could once again become necessary, and the United States and its partners would again have to decide whether to threaten to use force as a way to gain cooperation with inspectors. Unless the United States wants either to occupy every inch of Iraqi soil or to abandon the goal of disarmament, the U.S. government will have to think about how it wants to manage potentially adversarial inspection scenarios even in a post-Saddam Iraq.

The third and greatest challenge will arise because removing Saddam does not guarantee full Iraqi cooperation. Many Iraqis might welcome Saddam's departure but, because of nationalist pride or suspicion of U.S. motives, still not wish to assist the United States and its partners in eliminating Iraq's WMD potential. It is unrealistic to expect that all the scientists and other individuals who have worked in Iraqi weapons programs will voluntarily step forward and turn over all the materials and paperwork in their possession. Some will cooperate, and this will greatly facilitate the disarmament process, but others might keep their secrets in an effort to maintain parts of the Iraqi program. If the United States and its partners want to be sure they have destroyed every weapon of mass destruction and closed down every research and production program, they will have to follow up aggressively on every piece of information they acquire. The kind of detective work involved—looking for and pursuing leads, seeking to make surprise visits, tying up loose ends—is exactly what the inspectors currently in Iraq are doing.

In short, even after a successful war, vigorous, long-term inspection work will be required. The Bush administration is apparently considering putting U.S. military and intelligence personnel in charge of such efforts. Such a choice, however, has disadvantages. A new U.S. team would take time to get up to speed, and valuable time would be lost before the U.S. team gained the experience and knowledge that the current inspectors have. In addition, American military and CIA personnel would make especially attractive targets for anti-U.S. forces in the region. The

U.S. government might decide that it does not want to expose its personnel to the risk and that a UN team would not face as much danger and hostility. The greatest problem, however, is that a U.S. team, especially one containing intelligence agents, might arouse suspicions that would increase Iraqi resistance to cooperating and complicate relations with other Arab states. Some people in the region and elsewhere who oppose a war remain skeptical that Iraq even possesses WMD, and they might charge that any stockpiles or facilities uncovered by U.S. military or CIA personnel were planted there. Such charges would be less credible if an international team under UN auspices makes the initial visits to new sites. For these reasons, it is quite possible that post-war inspections might be conducted by the same agencies that are presently at work in Iraq: the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC), headed by Hans Blix, and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), headed by Mohamed ElBaradei.

Some commentators fear a war will mean the end of inspections as a nonproliferation tool; others hope for this. Both are wrong. In almost any scenario that leads to Saddam's ouster, including a war, inspections will still be needed after he is gone. Moreover, the UN and IAEA will probably still retain a role in conducting these inspections. For this reason, it is important for U.S. government personnel not to do or say anything that would undermine UNMOVIC or the IAEA prior to the possible start of military operations in Iraq. The stronger the inspection teams are on the day war begins, the better the position they or other inspectors will be in to resume inspection activities after the war.

The United States and its partners have many important tasks to plan for in a possible post-war Iraq. Part of this effort must involve planning how to conduct inspections. The real question is not whether or not inspections are a good idea; the only question that remains is how to make the necessary inspections as effective as possible.

For more topical analysis from the CCC, see our [Strategic Insights](#) section.

For related links, see our [Middle East Resources](#), [WMD Proliferation Resources](#), and [Homeland Security & Terrorism Resources](#).