

UN shuts down Iraq inspection program

Alex Lantier
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On June 29, the UN Security Council approved a US- and UK-sponsored resolution shutting down the UN Monitoring, Verification, and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC), which headed the UN's search for nonexistent Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in the run-up to the 2003 US invasion of Iraq. UNMOVIC's funding, provided by Iraq, is to be returned to the new, US-controlled Iraqi government. Its archives and equipment are to be safeguarded by the UN and overseen by the office of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

The UN resolution was mainly designed to stifle public discussion on the main pretext for the US-led invasion of Iraq—Iraqi possession of WMD—which was shown to be a lie. The Security Council voted 14-0 in favor of the resolution, with Russia abstaining.

Zalmay Khalilzad, who became US ambassador to the UN in late March 2007 fresh from a posting as US ambassador to Iraq, announced in May that an “emerging consensus” was forming to “move to bring [UNMOVIC] to a close appropriately.” US attempts to pass such a resolution initially ran into opposition. Russia argued that, in line with article 7 of UN Security Council Resolution 1441 (passed with US approval in 2002, to pressure the UN to approve the war drive against Iraq) UNMOVIC inspectors should officially certify that US-occupied Iraq had no WMD. It soon became clear, however, that no Security Council member seriously intended to bring up the issue of the false and criminal underpinnings of the US case for war.

In the lead-up to the war, UNMOVIC and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), charged with checking for potential Iraqi nuclear weapons, emerged as thorns in Washington's side. Their top officials, Hans Blix of UNMOVIC and Mohammed ElBaradei of the IAEA, did not fall into line behind Washington's lies about Iraqi WMD, issuing detailed

refutations of points raised by then-US Secretary of State Colin Powell and President George W. Bush in their briefs for war with Iraq.

Blix's February 15, 2003 presentation to the UN, for instance, dismissed Powell's claims that Iraq had mobile biological and chemical weapons labs that were being used to evade UN inspectors. “The reported movement of munitions at the site could just as easily have been a routine activity,” Blix stated. “In no case have we seen convincing evidence that the Iraqi side knew in advance that the inspectors were coming.” ElBaradei's matching report stated bluntly, “We have to date found no evidence of ongoing prohibited nuclear or nuclear-related activities in Iraq.”

When Bush claimed in a March 8, 2003 press conference that Iraqis were not presenting their weapons for destruction—even as Iraq destroyed its al-Samoud missiles on international television—Blix commented, “We are not watching the breaking of toothpicks. Lethal weapons are being destroyed.”

The UN inspectors became targets for derision and character assassination in the US press.

In May 2003, two months after the initial US invasion, the US barred UNMOVIC and the IAEA from returning to Iraq. This was widely and correctly seen as an admission that there were no Iraqi WMD to be found.

Since the US invasion, UNMOVIC has existed on “standby,” inspecting Iraq remotely via satellite images and news reports. Nonetheless, UNMOVIC and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) have continued to be problematic for the US occupiers of Iraq.

In October 2003, IAEA chief Mohammed ElBaradei wrote a letter to the UN Security Council noting “widespread and apparently systematic dismantlement” of Iraqi equipment that had potential nuclear applications, which the US had not prevented. The two

organizations also helped confirm that US forces had completely ignored the massive al-Qaqaa ammunition dump in Iraq, which was ransacked by looters. Such events highlighted the limited importance that US military commanders assigned to Iraqi weapons, even though the entire Iraq war initially had been justified by fear of these weapons.

The sidelining and then termination by the US of UNMOVIC has not, however, squelched official discord over the US-led campaign of lies and WMD hysteria that led to the invasion of Iraq. These surfaced in UNMOVIC's final report on its activities, published on June 27, which pointed out in somewhat diplomatic terms that that the US campaign against Iraq was based on lies and provocations. It notes, "Despite some skepticism from many areas within the international community, in hindsight, it has now become clear that the U.N. inspection system in Iraq was indeed successful to a large degree, in fulfilling its disarmament and monitoring obligations."

In a not-so-veiled reference to pre-war US government claims that the UN was missing large stockpiles of Iraqi WMD, it continued, "The UN's verification experience in Iraq also illustrates that in-country verification, especially on-site inspections, generates more timely and accurate information than other outside sources such as national assessments."

The UNMOVIC report acknowledged that the US-led campaign against Iraq placed Hussein's regime in the impossible position of proving that it did not have WMD: "It became almost impossible for Iraq to provide convincing evidence that would remove doubt that even more evidence remained undisclosed."

Implying that US and British haste to invade Iraq prevented it from completing its work, UNMOVIC noted, "Had UNMOVIC not been under such a stringent time constraint, the inspections could have been more detailed and thorough and many issues which emerged could have been pursued to a conclusion allowing greater confidence in the inspection process."

The report was also careful not to go too far in antagonizing forces that control the UN, which chose to suppress the findings of UNMOVIC's research on more than 200 foreign suppliers who had provided Iraq with critical technology and materials from the mid-1970s to 1990. Such research would have found

massive transfers of arms and technology to Iraq by US, British, French and German companies as well as by the USSR—especially when these countries were arming Iraq against Iran during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War.

Individual members of the UN arms-control organizations have commented more frankly on the US war drive against Iraq. Hans Blix told an interviewer in 2005, "The US and the UK chose to ignore [our reports] and to base their action upon their intelligence.... We didn't want an invasion; we wanted inspections."



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