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Lessons for Handling Iran From the Sad Saga of Iraq

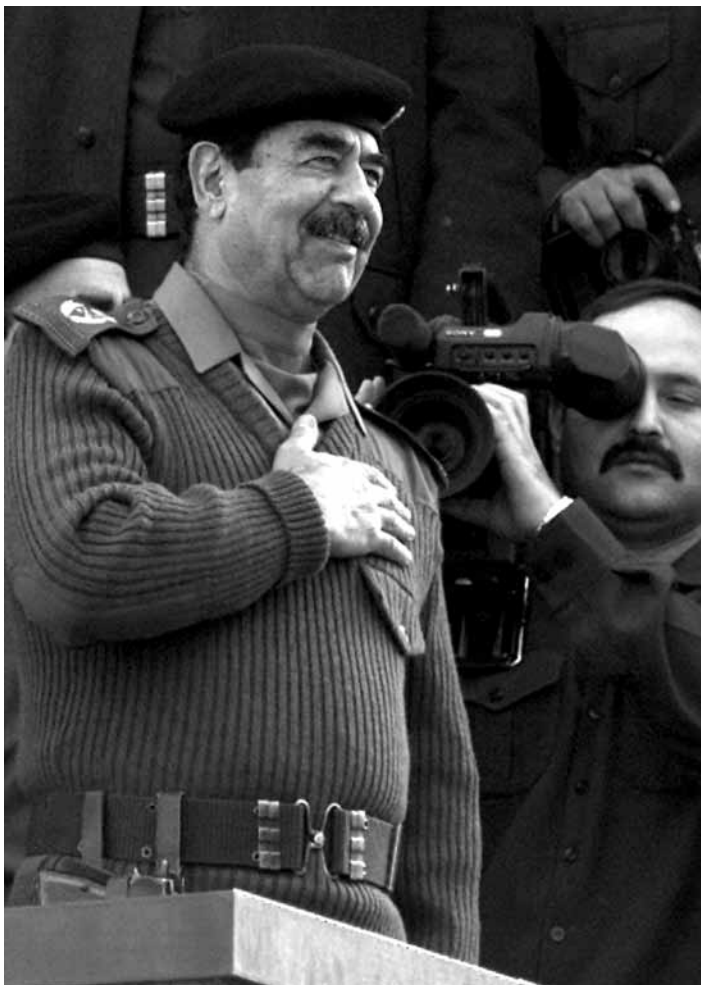
Ten years ago this month, the United States and the United Kingdom announced the invasion of Iraq to remove the weapons of mass destruction (WMD) allegedly possessed by Saddam Hussein's brutal regime and to prevent their use by or transfer to terrorist networks such as al Qaeda. That no such weapons existed was less a symptom of flawed intelligence than the U.S. leaders' obsession with achieving regime change in Baghdad and their consequent willingness to distort evidence on WMD toward that end. This distortion, along with failures by the press and Congress to exercise due diligence in evaluating the assertions of the executive branch, blinded the public to contravening information on Iraqi WMD that was readily available during the six weeks preceding the attack. Ironically, the most important sources of this ignored information were the very inspectors that the international community had forced Iraq to readmit the previous fall. There are lessons here for current efforts to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Regime change in Baghdad, not nonproliferation, was the prime motivation behind the U.S.-British invasion of Iraq in March 2003.
- Rather than relying on intelligence to assess the status of Iraq's WMD programs, the Bush and Blair governments cherry-picked intelligence products to buttress the case for invasion.
- In the fall of 2002, the threat of military force was instrumental in persuading Saddam Hussein to allow the return of inspectors, but by March 2003, their enhanced monitoring was removing the principal justification for invasion:
 - o The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) exposed the documents on uranium from Africa as forgeries.
 - o The IAEA determined that Iraq's high-strength aluminum tube imports were being used for artillery rockets, not for centrifuges to enrich uranium.
 - o The UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) site visits disproved "Curveball's" allegations about Iraqi mobile laboratories producing biological weapons.
- o Iraq's violation of UN-imposed range limits for ballistic missiles was being redressed by UNMOVIC-supervised destruction of the offending systems.
- In each of these cases, personnel from the IAEA or UNMOVIC played a critical role.
- But the information they collected from the field and their conclusions presented to the Security Council on March 7, 2003, did not alter U.S. invasion plans.
- Today, the United States is better positioned to resolve the Iran nuclear challenge than it was with Iraq.
 - o U.S. intelligence is more objective and reliable.
 - o The UN Security Council is more united.
 - o The U.S. government is cooperating with and listening to the IAEA.
- The U.S. priority must be to strengthen IAEA safeguards rather than impose regime change.

“[Richard Dearlove, head of the British foreign intelligence agency, MI6] reported on his recent talks in Washington. There was a perceptible shift in attitude. Military action was now seen as inevitable. Bush wanted to remove Saddam, through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and [weapons of mass destruction]. But the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy. The [National Security Council] had no patience with the UN route, and no enthusiasm for publishing material on the Iraqi regime’s record.”

—*Secret minutes of a July 23, 2002 meeting of British Prime Minister Tony Blair’s senior foreign policy and security officials, known as the Downing Street Memo, drafted by Matthew Rycroft, aide to David Manning, foreign policy adviser to Blair*



Karim Sahib/AFP/Getty Images

Iraqi President Saddam Hussein salutes the crowd during a military parade in Baghdad in November 2000. According to the 2004 “Comprehensive Report of the Special Advisor to the DCI on Iraq’s WMD,” Hussein abandoned his pursuit of weapons of mass destruction in the 1990s, but wanted to recreate these capabilities after sanctions were removed and Iraq’s economy stabilized.

Background

March 19, 2003, marked the opening round of the brief U.S. “shock and awe” campaign against Iraq, which soon morphed into a grinding nine-year war. By the time the last U.S. troops departed at the end of 2011, the war had cost the lives of 4,800 U.S. military personnel, had left over 32,000 Americans wounded, and had added an extra \$700 billion to the U.S. national debt. For the Iraqis, the human toll was much higher—more than 168,000 combatants and civilians killed and 2.7 million Iraqi citizens internally displaced. Iraq’s economy was devastated and its society was ever more fractured along sectarian lines.

It will be up to Iraqis to debate whether their country now has a brighter future than it otherwise would have had without foreign invasion and occupation in the first decade of the new century. But it is uniquely incumbent on Americans to understand who and what were responsible for an enterprise that proved so costly in terms of U.S. lives lost, money spent, international reputation tarnished, and a campaign against al Qaeda diverted. Moreover, for those interested in stemming and reversing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) worldwide, understanding the U.S. experience with Iraq has great relevance for sorting out the contemporary issue of how best to ensure that Iran’s nuclear program remains peaceful. While the two situations are different in fundamental ways, the similarities between U.S. efforts to prevent proliferation in Iraq 10 years ago and U.S. efforts today against Iran are too close for comfort.

The Case for Invading Iraq

The strongest emotional case for invading Iraq was built on the insinuations of the George W. Bush administration that Saddam Hussein’s regime was complicit in al Qaeda’s September 11, 2001, attacks on New York City and Washington. Senior officials spoke explicitly and implicitly of the connection between the perpetrators of those attacks and the regime in Baghdad.

In his May 1, 2003, “Mission Accomplished” speech, Bush asserted that the “liberation of Iraq” had “removed an ally of al Qaeda.”¹ Throughout the buildup to invasion, Vice President Dick Cheney frequently claimed that Mohammed Atta, a plotter of and participant in the September 11 attacks, had met with an Iraqi intelligence officer in Prague, a report that was rejected by the U.S. intelligence community.² Bush and Secretary of State Colin Powell stated or implied

that Iraq and al Qaeda had a partnership, or that Iraq had provided al Qaeda with weapons training, but such claims were also not substantiated by the intelligence community.³ Not surprisingly, in light of the misleading and inaccurate statements made by senior administration officials, early post-invasion opinion polls from April to December 2003 showed that a majority of Americans believed Hussein was personally

Bush announced that Iraq had made efforts to obtain “significant quantities of uranium from Africa.”⁸

‘There Is No Doubt’

The administration generally made its case against Iraq in absolutist language, dropping any ambiguities or qualifications. The evidence of nuclear program reconstitution was declared “irrefutable” by Vice

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involved in the September 11 terrorist attacks.⁴

The intellectual and legal case for invasion relied heavily on charges that Iraq possessed (non-nuclear) WMD and was continuing to pursue specific WMD programs (including an effort to develop nuclear weapons) in violation of its treaty obligations and UN Security Council resolutions. But the rhetorical clincher was often delivered by evocative references to nuclear weapons—ironically, the one category of WMD the administration acknowledged that Iraq did not yet possess. Bush issued a stark and misleading warning in Cincinnati on October 7, 2002: “Facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof—the smoking gun—that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud.”⁵

The most sensational charges in the Bush administration’s case for war involved Iraq’s alleged reconstitution of the nuclear weapons program Hussein had pursued prior to the 1991 Persian Gulf War. This pitch was first presented publicly by Cheney in an August 2002 speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars in Nashville.⁶ The administration subsequently pointed to specific Iraqi efforts to obtain material needed to build centrifuges that could enrich uranium to the potency needed for use in the core of nuclear weapons—the most difficult challenge in building a bomb. Bush reported in the fall that the United States had intercepted high-strength aluminum tubes used in the construction of centrifuges on their way into Iraq and noted Iraq’s reconstruction of facilities at “sites that have been part of [Iraq’s] nuclear program in the past.”⁷ In his January 2003 State of the Union speech,

President Cheney.⁹

Carefully qualified intelligence community formulations—including those reflecting moderate or low confidence judgments—were replaced in public pronouncements by bold expressions of fact such as:

- “We know that Iraq has at least seven of these mobile, biological agent factories”;¹⁰
- “There can be no doubt that Saddam Hussein has biological weapons”;¹¹
- “They have amassed large clandestine stocks of biological weapons including anthrax and possibly smallpox”;¹²
- “There is no doubt [Hussein] is amassing [WMD] to use against our friends, against our allies, and against us.”¹³

The most easily accessible sources of information for members of Congress prior to the March 2003 invasion were found in the unclassified, 25-page version of the October 2002 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on Iraqi WMD programs¹⁴ and in the public statements of administration officials allegedly based on this assessment.

Even the original unclassified version contained important clues that the public case was being hyped, raising disturbing questions about the validity of the estimate’s definitive conclusions.

Careful attention to the qualifying language in the

very first paragraph, describing the emergence of the threat timeline, should have made readers wary: “[I]f left unchecked, [Iraq] probably will have a nuclear weapon during this decade.”¹⁵ This twice-qualified prediction was particularly misleading.

“[P]robably...during this decade”—that is, probably within eight years—hardly constitutes a clarion warning of imminent threat.

Second, “the conditions for reaching the predicate, “if left unchecked,” did not apply at the time of the estimate and were even less relevant five months later. Iraq was already then in a tight box with no clear way out. Indeed, the UN sanctions and no-fly zones that had been imposed constituted significant limitations. The potential growth in Iraqi delivery system capabilities had already been significantly checked as a result of the U.S. 1998 “Desert Fox” air strikes. Moreover, additional obstacles to Iraq’s proliferation options were re-imposed by the return of on-site inspectors soon after the NIE was released, four months before the eventual invasion.

Lawmakers were also entitled to read the longer, highly classified version of the Key Judgments and main text of the NIE when it was first published, but only inside the secure spaces of the congressional intelligence committees. (In July 2003, nearly all of the classified Key Judgments language was declassified and made available to the public.)

The classified version contained additional clues that the public case was exceeding its evidentiary base. For example, the last sentence of the estimate’s short

opening paragraph noted that the assistant secretary of state for intelligence and research had an alternative view on the principal conclusion of the NIE. If not dispositive, the fact that the head of one of the few intelligence agencies responsible for all-source analysis was registering a major dissent on the most important judgment in the estimate at least suggested that the conclusions were not a “slam dunk,” as CIA Director George Tenet had famously assured Bush.¹⁶

Backing the UN Inspectors... As Long As Convenient

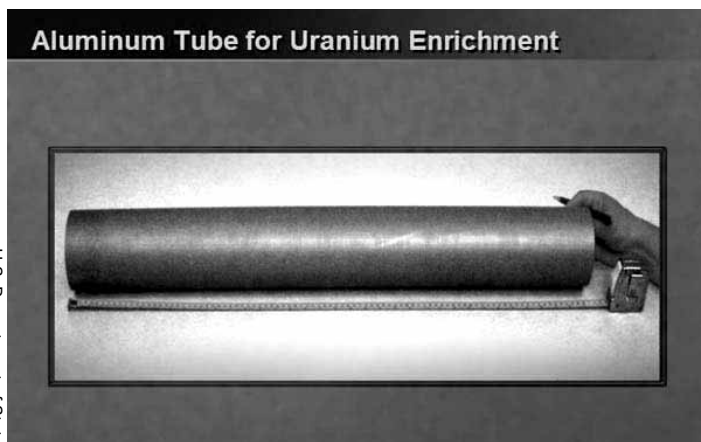
The main thrust of Congress’s October 2002 resolution to authorize the use of force¹⁷ and UN Security Council Resolution 1441 in November 2002¹⁸ was to secure Iraq’s compliance with its disarmament obligations under previous council resolutions. Key among the demands of Resolution 1441 was the requirement that Iraq provide the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) with “immediate, unimpeded, unconditional, and unrestricted access” to facilities, records and persons relevant to discharging the mandates of those entities.

The congressional resolution enhanced the credibility of warnings by the Bush administration that the United States would use military force if Hussein continued to defy the international community. Whatever the actual motives of senior Bush administration officials and individuals in Congress, preventing WMD proliferation in Iraq was the central rationale presented in these documents.

By the end of November 2002, the international inspectors were on their way back into Iraq for the first time in four years. Shortly thereafter, Iraq’s suspect facilities and activities came into much clearer focus as a consequence of this return.

The road to resolving UN suspicions was rocky and serpentine, but by March 2003, the on-site inspectors had made considerable progress in settling the most contentious and worrisome issues. They had found that the documents cited as evidence for Iraqi attempts to acquire uranium from Africa were forgeries. They had confirmed that the high-strength aluminum tubes alleged to be bound for uranium-enriching centrifuges were actually being used for artillery rockets. They had looked inside the reconstructed facilities suspected of housing resumed nuclear weapons development and found no evidence of nuclear work.

IAEA Director-General Mohamed ElBaradei



U.S. Department of State

Secretary of State Colin Powell used this slide in his presentation to the UN Security Council on February 5, 2003. In spite of the prior conclusions of intelligence analysts at the departments of State and Energy, Powell alleged that the tubes were intended for uranium-enrichment centrifuges. The International Atomic Energy Agency reported March 7, 2003 that Iraq was using them for rocket production.

The International Inspectors

There were two entities responsible to the UN Security Council for monitoring Iraq's compliance with its obligations under the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) and the cease-fire agreement Baghdad signed with the Security Council in March 1991. Inspectors from both organizations—the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC)—were active in Iraq from late November 2002 until just days before the U.S.-British invasion began in late March 2003. IAEA inspectors are frequent visitors to Iran's declared nuclear facilities today.

- The IAEA, based in Vienna, promotes the peaceful use of nuclear energy and technology and monitors its use around the world. It was established in 1957 as an independent, autonomous agency, reporting to the United Nations and the UN Security Council. Among its other functions, the IAEA serves as a global watchdog for ensuring compliance with the NPT and other nuclear agreements. The IAEA and its director-general, Mohamed El-Baradei, were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005 for their efforts to prevent nuclear energy being used for military purposes. The current director-general is Yukiya Amano.
- UNMOVIC was established by UN Security Council Resolution 1284 in 1999. It replaced the former UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) that had been established in 1991 after the Persian Gulf War with the mandate of verifying Iraq's compliance with international obligations to destroy its stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons. Hans Blix served as the commission's executive chairman from March 2000 to June 2003. UN Security Council Resolution 1762 terminated UNMOVIC's mandate and ended its operations in June 2007.

consequently reported on March 7 that “[a]fter three months of intrusive inspections, we have to date found no evidence or plausible indication of the revival of a nuclear weapons programme in Iraq.”¹⁹

A similar, if less definitive, story emerged with respect to biological and chemical weapons. Inspectors found proof that the “first-hand” accounts of mobile biological weapons laboratories from the intelligence source dubbed “Curveball” were bogus. UNMOVIC Executive Chairman Hans Blix reported on March 7 that “[n]o underground facilities for chemical or biological weapons production or storage were found so far.”²⁰

The most lethal delivery systems for chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons were Hussein's ballistic missiles. Although the U.S. intelligence community assessed that Iraq might have retained up to a few dozen Scud variant 630 km-range missiles manufactured before the 1991 war—it was subsequently discovered there were none—the newer and shorter-range missile then being produced was the al Samoud.

Because flight tests of this missile exceeded by 30 kilometers the 150-kilometer range ceiling established by the United Nations in 1991, this system represented a clear (if also militarily insignificant) skirting of Iraq's cease-fire obligations. Accordingly, the UN forced Hussein to accept the elimination of his entire inventory of what was by then Iraq's most capable ballistic missile system.

No Authorization in New York Or Washington

On February 14, ElBaradei reported to the UN Security Council that his inspectors' activities had moved from the “reconnaissance phase” to the “investigative phase,” determining whether Iraq was attempting to revive its defunct nuclear weapons program. Blix informed the council that Iraq was cooperating with UNMOVIC inspectors, but that more time was needed to resolve open issues.

On March 7, ElBaradei and Blix reported to the council that they were continuing to make progress. ElBaradei reported that the IAEA had found no evidence or plausible indication of the revival of a nuclear weapons program, explicitly refuting U.S. charges that Iraq was seeking massive supplies of “yellowcake” (uranium concentrate) from Africa, and was importing high-strength aluminum tubes and ring magnets for centrifuges to enrich uranium.²¹

Blix reported that UNMOVIC had found “no underground facilities for chemical or biological production or storage” and “no evidence of proscribed [biological weapons] activities.” Moreover, Iraq had

accepted UNMOVIC's determination that al Samoud ballistic missiles had exceeded the permissible range limits and had begun destroying them under UN supervision. Blix also advised that it would take months yet, not years or weeks, to resolve the key remaining disarmament tasks, given accounting discrepancies between items known to have been produced and available documentation of the elimination of those

items.²²

In a radio address the next day, Bush explained that "we are doing everything we can to avoid war in Iraq," but that "it is clear Saddam Hussein is still violating the demands of the United Nations by refusing to disarm." He argued that Iraq was "engaged in a willful charade" and concluded that "the inspection teams do not need more time."²³

Prelude to War

Although ample evidence exists that the Bush administration was beginning to contemplate an invasion of Iraq in the fall of 2001, the case for such drastic action was first made to the public at the end of August 2002. Congress insisted at that time on an intelligence assessment, ultimately delivered on October 1, before it would provide the requested authorization for using military force. Five months later, Secretary of State Colin Powell and the British government also pressed for explicit endorsement of such action by the UN Security Council, which the council did not provide.

AUGUST 26, 2002—Vice President Dick Cheney speaks at a Veterans of Foreign Wars convention in Nashville, outlining the case for war against Iraq for the first time publicly.

SEPTEMBER 12, 2002—President George W. Bush addresses the UN General Assembly, urging action on Iraq.

OCTOBER 10, 2002—Congress passes a resolution authorizing the use of military force against Iraq.

NOVEMBER 8, 2002—UN Security Council adopts Resolution 1441, stating that Iraq was in material breach of previous Security Council resolutions and offering Baghdad a final opportunity to disarm.

NOVEMBER 27, 2002—Inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) enter Iraq and resume on-site monitoring for the first time in four years.

JANUARY 28, 2003—Bush delivers his State of the Union address to Congress, outlining justifications for using force against Iraq.

FEBRUARY 5, 2003—Powell addresses the UN General Assembly, presenting evidence that Iraq was continuing to pursue weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

FEBRUARY 8, 2003—UNMOVIC team searches key biological weapons site identified by the source known as "Curveball" and finds his claims fraudulent.

FEBRUARY 14, 2003—UNMOVIC chief Hans Blix reports to the UN Security Council that Iraq is cooperating with inspectors, but more time is needed; IAEA Director-General Mohamed ElBaradei reports "no unresolved [nuclear] disarmament issues."

MARCH 1, 2003—UN deadline to begin disarmament arrives; Iraq destroys first four al Samoud missiles.

MARCH 7, 2003—ElBaradei tells the Security Council that Niger-Iraq contract documents dealing with yellowcake (uranium concentrate) are "not authentic" and that high-strength aluminum tubes are "not likely" to have been used for uranium enrichment. Blix reports continuing progress, saying that "it would not take years, nor weeks, but months" to fully verify chemical and biological disarmament by Iraq.

MARCH 8, 2003—Bush gives radio address emphasizing the WMD threat posed by Saddam Hussein's regime.

MARCH 17, 2003—Bush delivers televised speech giving Hussein 48 hours to surrender.

MARCH 19, 2003—U.S.-British invasion of Iraq begins.



Two Iraqi al Samoud short-range ballistic missiles found by U.S. Marines in Iraq on March 31, 2003, are shown in this photo. The al Samoud, a potential delivery system for chemical or biological warheads, was the only UN-prohibited weapon system found in Iraq. Inspectors from the UN Special Commission had been overseeing the destruction of these missiles prior to the U.S.-British invasion, which began March 19.

Rather than adjust their assessments on the basis of the new information that suggested Hussein did not then pose a WMD threat, the United States and the United Kingdom sought instead to persuade the Security Council to authorize military action on the basis of claims about WMD programs that were based on intelligence assessments developed months before. The U.S.-British attempt to convince the Security Council fell well short of what was needed to gain UN legitimacy—either moral or strictly legal.

U.S. allies France and Germany, as well as Russia and China, would have voted against the use of force had an actual Security Council vote occurred. Even in the unlikely event that a slim majority could have been achieved, the measure would have failed, because three of the opponents (China, France, and Russia) wielded the veto as permanent members of the council.

In the end, the four countries initially contributing military forces to the 2003 invasion (Australia, Poland, the United Kingdom, and the United States) formed a pale shadow of the robust coalition participating in the expulsion of Iraqi forces from Kuwait in 1991. Fighting

Iraq the second time around was largely an Anglo-American military campaign, not an international enforcement effort.

If the Bush administration could not prevail in the United Nations, it had better luck in the U.S. Congress. Despite efforts by senators such as Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) and Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.), who argued that Congress had a constitutional duty to vote before any invasion of Iraq could be launched, most members showed little appetite to revisit the issue. In spite of the subsequent collapse of the evidentiary case behind allegations that had been made before the fall vote, there was neither a vote nor even a full-scale debate in March on the impending attack.

What We Now Know About What Hussein Had Then

We now know from the postwar Iraq Survey Group final report²⁴ that UNMOVIC and the IAEA were accurate during February and March 2003 in their assessments of nuclear and missile issues and precise in identifying what was still needed from Iraq on

biological and chemical weapons. In retrospect, it seems reasonable to concur with their expectation that the remaining issues could have been resolved in 2003.

- Hussein’s WMD inventories from the 1980s—consisting of chemical weapons and biological weapons—had been completely destroyed either during or shortly after the international coalition’s war to liberate Kuwait in 1991.
- The nuclear weapons program was likewise dismantled by UNSCOM and never reconstituted.
- The Scud and al Hussein short-range ballistic missiles, which had been left over from the attacks on Israel and Saudi Arabia during the 1991 war and which were capable of carrying WMD warheads, had been destroyed under international supervision after that war.
- The even shorter-range al Samoud missiles Hussein had tried to introduce into his inventory,

with ranges only slightly above the capabilities permitted by the cease-fire agreement, were being eliminated by the Iraqis (albeit under duress) in the weeks prior to the invasion—a destruction process monitored by the international inspectors of UNMOVIC.

Iran Is Not Iraq, But the Situations Rhyme

In 2002, Bush fatefully labeled both Iran and Iraq, along with North Korea, part of an “axis of evil.” Yet there have long been significant differences between the two.

During Hussein’s reign, Iraq separately invaded two of its neighbors; in spite of some tense bilateral relationships, Iran has not committed such blatant acts of aggression. Hussein initiated chemical weapons strikes (on both Iran and his own people); Iran never has. Hussein long sought to acquire nuclear weapons and maintained an interest in doing so even after the 1991 war; Iran’s activities and intentions after halting a clandestine nuclear weapons development program in 2003 are ambiguous, but the clerics at the helm



Behrouz Mehri/AFP/Getty Images

Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei speaks during Friday prayers in Tehran in November 2002. Although he does not wield absolute power in Iran’s complicated political system, Khamenei has consolidated his control over other power centers during recent years and retains the ultimate say on strategic issues.

continue to voice rhetorical support for the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and further declare that the development, possession, and use of such weapons is immoral.

Although the historical relationship between the IAEA and Iran has been troubled, to say the least, there has been nothing comparable to Iraq's eviction

Indeed, the political inconvenience for the Bush administration of the 2007 NIE on Iran, reporting that Iran's nuclear weapons program was halted in the fall of 2003, bore witness to the fact that the reformed analytical process had become driven more by evidence than by the political desires of the White House.

Fortunately, synchronization of policy approaches

[The six powers] negotiating with Iran over that country's nuclear program now appear to be seeking a solution that puts a premium on achieving greater program transparency and more intrusive inspection rights rather than on removing enrichment capabilities or changing the regime in Tehran.

of international inspectors in 1998 and four-year ban on visits. Throughout Tehran's disagreements over the scope and nature of permitted inspections, Iran has continued to allow visits to declared nuclear facilities.

There are also numerous parallels in the challenges the world community faces today with regard to Iran and ten years ago with regard to Iraq. In both cases, the United States assessed that prohibited activities had been conducted in secret and that international inspectors had not been granted the necessary degree of access to perform their UN-authorized mission.

Moreover, both countries have been subject to severe sanctions because of their noncompliant behavior with regard to international agreements. And both lost the ability to fully exploit their enormous oil wealth as a consequence. Like Iraq in 2002, Iran has been and remains a serious terrorist and human rights concern for the international community.

This Time, a Better Outcome?

In spite of the difficult challenges presented by Iran's nuclear program, the United States and the international community are better positioned to deal with Tehran now than they were with respect to Baghdad a decade ago in a number of respects.

First, as a result of intensive internal executive-branch and congressional reviews of U.S. intelligence failings, the United States implemented extensive structural and procedural intelligence reforms in 2004. It now has a more objective and reliable estimative process concerning Iran than it had concerning Iraq.

among permanent members of the UN Security Council has also improved dramatically. Lopsided support for UN Security Council Resolution 1929 on Iran in 2010 stands in stark contrast to the deep UN divide on Iraq in March 2003. Moreover, the detailed IAEA conclusions in the agency's November 2011 report appear broadly consistent with the evidence and conclusions of the U.S. intelligence community and have been generally accepted by all permanent members of the UN Security Council.

Perhaps most importantly, the Obama administration and the other five members (China, France, Germany, Russia, and the United Kingdom) of the group that is negotiating with Iran over that country's nuclear program now appear to be seeking a solution that puts a premium on achieving greater program transparency and more intrusive inspection rights rather than on removing enrichment capabilities or changing the regime in Tehran.

Yet a cautionary note is in order concerning the way Iranian capabilities and motivations are still often mischaracterized in the press and by members of Congress. Even Obama's nominee to be CIA director, John Brennan, recently provided a very misleading statement in congressional testimony regarding what is known about Iranian intentions when he claimed that Tehran "remain[s] bent on pursuing nuclear weapons and intercontinental missile delivery systems."²⁵ With the intelligence community continuing to be agnostic on whether or not Iran has decided to actually build nuclear weapons or whether Tehran intends to build

and deploy ICBMs, such definitive declarations seem irresponsible. The Iraq WMD fiasco reminds us that the consequences of straying from sound evidentiary analysis can be far from trivial.

Policymakers will need to be vigilant in their efforts to discern objective reality and will need to be patient, persistent, and pragmatic during negotiations in the weeks and months ahead to avoid another “war of choice” in the region. A firm resolve to faithfully follow a prudent path in meeting the challenges of Iran’s nuclear program would be a fitting commemoration of this month’s 10th anniversary of the unnecessary war against Iraq.

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