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Why We Know Iraq Is Lying

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Eleven weeks after the United Nations Security Council unanimously passed a resolution demanding — yet again — that Iraq disclose and disarm all its nuclear, chemical and biological weapons programs, it is appropriate to ask, "Has Saddam Hussein finally decided to voluntarily disarm?" Unfortunately, the answer is a clear and resounding no.

There is no mystery to voluntary disarmament. Countries that decide to disarm lead inspectors to weapons and production sites, answer questions before they are asked, state publicly and often the intention to disarm and urge their citizens to cooperate. The world knows from examples set by South Africa, Ukraine and Kazakhstan what it looks like when a government decides that it will cooperatively give up its weapons of mass destruction. The critical common elements of these efforts include a high-level political commitment to disarm, national initiatives to dismantle weapons programs, and full cooperation and transparency.

In 1989 South Africa made the strategic decision to dismantle its covert nuclear weapons program. It destroyed its arsenal of seven weapons and later submitted to rigorous verification by the International Atomic Energy Agency. Inspectors were given complete access to all nuclear facilities (operating and defunct) and the people who worked there. They were also presented with thousands of documents detailing, for example, the daily operation of uranium enrichment facilities as well as the construction and dismantling of specific weapons.

Ukraine and Kazakhstan demonstrated a similar pattern of cooperation when they decided to rid themselves of the nuclear weapons, intercontinental ballistic missiles and heavy bombers inherited from the Soviet Union. With significant assistance from the United States — warmly accepted by both countries — disarmament was orderly, open and fast. Nuclear warheads were returned to Russia. Missile silos and heavy bombers were destroyed or dismantled — once in a ceremony attended by the American and Russian defense chiefs. In one instance, Kazakhstan revealed the existence of a ton of highly enriched uranium and asked the United States to remove it, lest it fall into the wrong hands.

Iraq's behavior could not offer a starker contrast. Instead of a commitment to disarm, Iraq has a high-level political commitment to maintain and conceal its weapons, led by Saddam Hussein and his son Qusay, who controls the Special Security Organization, which runs Iraq's concealment activities. Instead of implementing national initiatives to disarm, Iraq maintains institutions whose sole purpose is to thwart the work of the inspectors. And instead of full cooperation and transparency, Iraq has filed a false declaration to the United Nations that amounts to a 12,200-page lie.

For example, the declaration fails to account for or explain Iraq's efforts to get uranium from abroad, its manufacture of specific fuel for ballistic missiles it claims not to have, and the gaps previously identified by the United Nations in Iraq's accounting for more than two tons of the raw materials needed to produce thousands of gallons of anthrax and other biological weapons.

Iraq's declaration even resorted to unabashed plagiarism, with lengthy passages of United Nations reports copied word-for-word (or edited to remove any criticism of Iraq) and presented as original text. Far from informing, the declaration is intended to cloud and confuse the true picture of Iraq's arsenal. It is a reflection of the regime's well-earned reputation for dishonesty and constitutes a material breach of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1441, which set up the current inspections program.

Unlike other nations that have voluntarily disarmed — and in defiance of Resolution 1441 — Iraq is not allowing inspectors "immediate, unimpeded, unrestricted access" to facilities and people involved in its weapons program. As a recent inspection at the home of an Iraqi nuclear scientist demonstrated, and other sources confirm, material and documents are still being moved around in farcical shell games. The regime has blocked free and unrestricted use of aerial reconnaissance.

The list of people involved with weapons of mass destruction programs, which the United Nations required Iraq to provide, ends with those who worked in 1991 — even though the United Nations had previously established that the programs continued after that date. Interviews with scientists and weapons officials identified by inspectors have taken place only in the watchful presence of the regime's agents. Given the duplicitous record of the regime, its recent promises to do better can only be seen as an attempt to stall for time.

Last week's finding by inspectors of 12 chemical warheads not included in Iraq's declaration was particularly troubling. In the past, Iraq has filled this type of warhead with sarin — a deadly nerve agent used by Japanese terrorists in 1995 to kill 12 Tokyo subway passengers and sicken thousands of others. Richard Butler, the former chief United Nations arms inspector, estimates that if a larger type of warhead that Iraq has made and used in the past were filled with VX (an even deadlier nerve agent) and launched at a major city, it could kill up to one million people. Iraq has also failed to provide United Nations inspectors with documentation of its claim to have destroyed its VX stockpiles.

Many questions remain about Iraq's nuclear, chemical and biological weapons programs and arsenal — and it is Iraq's obligation to provide answers. It is failing in spectacular fashion. By both its actions and its inactions, Iraq is proving not that it is a nation bent on disarmament, but that it is a nation with something to hide. Iraq is still treating inspections as a game. It should know that time is running out.

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