

A Brookings Press Briefing  
IRAQ'S DECLARATION ON WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION  
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**Panelists:**

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**SUMMARY**

On December 7, 2002, Iraq presented its declaration of weapons of mass destruction capabilities to the United Nations. The United States and other permanent members of the UN Security Council also received copies of the nearly 12,000-page document, which is supposed to detail every element of Iraq's programs to develop chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons and long-range ballistic missiles. UN experts then began the process of reviewing the documents submitted by the Iraqi government and determining whether it meets Iraq's obligation to provide "an accurate, full, final, and complete disclosure" under new Security Council Resolution 1441. While Washington continues to assert that Iraq is hiding illegal programs to build weapons of mass destruction, Baghdad categorically denies having any such programs and appears to be cooperating with the weapons inspectors who are now on the ground inside Iraq. Clearly, the Iraqi report will help to determine the course of American policy as the Bush Administration prepares for a possible confrontation with the regime of Saddam Husayn.

On December 12, three Brookings experts and a former UN weapons inspector discussed the release of the report and its policy implications before an audience of the press. The session was moderated by Martin Indyk, Director of the Saban Center at Brookings and former Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs. Participating on behalf of the Brookings Institution were Kenneth Pollack, Director of Research at the Saban Center at Brookings and author of *The Threatening Storm: The Case for Invading Iraq*, and Michael O'Hanlon, Senior Fellow in the Foreign

Policy Studies Program. They were joined by David Kay, now Senior Fellow at the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, who formerly served in the International Atomic Energy Agency and led the UN team in charge of finding and destroying Iraq's nuclear weapons program after the 1991 Gulf War.

Although a full analysis of the declaration was not yet available, all three panelists offered a similar assessment of the Iraqi report and the progress of the weapons inspections, expressing skepticism about both the report's veracity and the ability of weapons inspectors to expose any deception by Baghdad. All agreed that Iraq's claims about its weapons of mass destruction capabilities are not credible and that the new report does not appear to address the inconsistencies and gaps exposed by previous weapons inspections. Their opinions differed, however, on the merits of Iraq's strategy and on whether or not Iraq is succeeding in its goal of impeding a U.S. move towards military action.

### **David Kay: Iraq's Strategy of Evasion**

The former weapons inspector opened his remarks by noting the growing sophistication of Baghdad's public relations campaign in handling the declaration and the return of UN inspections to Iraq. For example, Iraq skillfully managed the release of the report over the weekend so that media coverage focused on its sheer bulk and thus its apparent comprehensiveness. The following week the Iraqis released a staged publicity video of weapons inspectors wandering freely around one of the presidential palaces, with the implied message that the regime had nothing to hide. In this way the main news story of the first ten days of inspections was that Baghdad was cooperating fully with the United Nations. This effort demonstrated a good deal of planning and preparation.

According to David Kay, the same cannot be said for the United Nations' initial handling of inspections. For four years no one expected inspections to resume inside Iraq, and the inspectors only returned because of the Bush Administration's threat to launch a military campaign larger than the retaliatory missile strikes seen in the past. For this reason, the United Nations was unprepared to send in a new inspections team and the results have been apparent: tiny numbers of personnel (70 at last count), a two-week delay in supplying helicopters (and thus no mobility for inspections), and acute shortages of necessary equipment that the United Nations had failed to stockpile in advance. As a result, the Iraqi authorities have appeared much better prepared than the inspectors. This was the only the opening phase, however, and Kay expected the inspectors to mount a "recovery" in the period ahead.

One important factor, he said, is that the new UN inspections mission, UNMOVIC, now has a tool never available to previous inspectors: the ability to interview Iraqis inside the country without the presence of Iraqi security officials and video cameras. This is important because inspectors have gotten their most important sources of information in the past from Iraqis themselves. Kay cited one of the previous inspections team's largest discoveries, which came when an Iraqi scientist accidentally divulged the existence of the huge al-Furat factory for producing centrifuges; an Iraqi official later told the inspectors that the scientist had been shot for his mistake. Even if inspectors conducted unobserved interviews, they would still have to overcome the understandable fear and even paranoia of most Iraqis. To this end, inspectors now have the right to remove Iraqi scientists and engineers from Iraq, along with their families, in order to conduct freer interviews outside the country. This would be a powerful technique, but the inspectors have not yet made use of it. (There are also some practical issues – such as the probability of a wave of unexpected "heart attacks" among Iraqi scientists before inspectors can interview them.)

Regarding the report itself, Kay expressed wariness about trying to “look at the table of contents and write a book report”; nevertheless, he did venture some preliminary judgments on the basis of the report’s nine-page table of contents and his conversations with experts involved in analyzing the report. In general, he said, the report appears to offer no new information on Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction: the section on nuclear weapons, for example, is almost an exact duplicate of the report Iraq delivered in 1998. The report is consistent with Iraq’s assertions that no prohibited weapons activities have taken place since 1991; thus, every section of the report gives 1991 as its timeline. The only new information in the report (though this had yet to be confirmed) appeared to relate to the foreign companies and countries that assisted Iraq in developing its weapons of mass destruction programs during the 1980s. This would be significant, since throughout the weapons inspections of the 1990s Iraq consistently refused to reveal which companies had helped it build its programs. Kay suggested Iraq might well try to embarrass its foreign enemies by naming companies tied to prominent politicians in the United States and Western Europe.

The other important feature of the report, according to Kay, is the extensive list of dual-list facilities built after 1991, including tanneries, distilleries, petrochemical plant, advanced machine tool companies, and other sites capable of producing weapons-related material. This demonstrates Iraq’s obvious desire to make inspections last as long as possible and “buy time” in order to ward off a U.S. attack. There are three reasons why Iraq believes this strategy could succeed. First, the ephemeral unity of the Security Council is already breaking down, and is certain to break down even more over time. Second, the antiwar movement is already building around the world and will only increase its support in the future. Third and last, Iraq understands the political and economic costs the United States will have to pay in order to keep 200,000-300,000 troops in the Persian Gulf for a long period of time.

For all of these reasons, Kay said, Baghdad is following a strategy of cooperating outwardly with the weapons inspections for as long as possible. It is the responsibility of the United Nations to speed up the process. Yet UNMOVIC shows no sign of having any strategy to find answers quickly; rather, its main goal appears to be to move carefully and methodically and not to disturb the Iraqi government.

### **Kenneth Pollack: Options for U.S. Policy**

The next panelist, Kenneth Pollack, similarly suggested that with the release of the report, Baghdad may be gaining the upper hand in the inspections process. In his view, the United States based its push for a new UN resolution and a new inspections process in the expectation that one of two possible scenarios would result. In the first scenario, either the Iraqi authorities would block the inspections in some way or the inspectors would uncover Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, thus providing the “smoking gun” desired by the international community before any military action. In either case, the result would be a U.S. war on Iraq. In the other possible scenario, inspections would lead to the actual disarmament of Iraq: the regime would comply with the resolution and Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction would be destroyed, either by the inspectors or by Iraq itself. Yet now those two scenarios appear to be the least likely of all, largely because of the factors already discussed by David Kay.

According to Pollack, Iraq has adopted its “smartest strategy,” recognizing that the presence of the inspectors prevents a war and it is in its interest for them to stay as long as possible. The regime is apparently confident that if it handles the inspectors properly, they will never be able to

find its weapons of mass destruction; the “clean” declaration Iraq presented to the United Nations is clear evidence of this belief. As in the 1990s, Baghdad appears to have succeeded in convincing most people around the world that the burden of proof lies not on Iraq, but on the inspectors: in other words, that it is they who must prove that Iraq really is hiding prohibited weapons. The fact that this is absolutely false, according to the terms of the original Resolution 687, is also absolutely irrelevant in the view of the world.

At the same time, Pollack said it was no surprise that the inspectors have failed to locate weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. By about 1994, even UNSCOM ceased finding weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, with three notable exceptions to the rule: the defection of Husayn Kamel, which revealed a good deal of important information (and which was not in any way due to the inspections), and two intelligence breakthroughs that led to the discovery of Russian ballistic missile gyroscopes and traces of VX nerve gas on the fragments of some SCUD missile warheads. In fact, according to former inspectors, UNSCOM only managed to surprise the Iraqis in 6 out of about 240 no-notice inspections, and the current UNMOVIC team shows no sign of wanting to carry out aggressive inspections of the kind conducted by the teams of the early 1990s. If current trends continue, Pollack said, we are likely to see nothing but “successful” inspections, with inspectors going from place to place, seeing everything they want and finding nothing. Over time, Iraq will succeed in convincing more and more people that it is complying and that it really does not have any weapons of mass destruction.

Pollack went on to evaluate the options remaining to U.S. policymakers. The first option is simply to continue with inspections; yet it seems extremely unlikely that the inspections will actually uncover the “smoking gun” or convince Baghdad to disarm. For those who still require proof that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction, the best evidence is the declaration itself, which fails to address any of the gaps the UN inspections mission identified when it closed its operation in 1998. At that time, UNSCOM compiled a massive document detailing every problem still outstanding between it and the Iraqis: every unanswered question, such as where the VX chemical precursors and additional chemical munitions were, or why the number of chemical munitions used in the Iraq-Iraq war, according to the log books, was so much lower than the figure given by Iraq. Yet the Iraqi report makes no effort even to address these outstanding questions.

Another problem with the inspections is that the threat of war which backs them up cannot be sustained indefinitely. While there is no strategic reason why the United States has to go to war immediately, political problems will make the use of military force less and less feasible after this year. For example, the message the Gulf states have been sending Washington has begun to change. Until about a month ago, the message was that the Gulf states wanted the United States to overthrow Saddam Husayn’s regime, but that we should wait until we obtained a UN resolution, could field a large coalition, and made some steps toward reviving the Arab-Israeli peace process. Now, the conversation between Washington and the Gulf has changed dramatically. The feeling now is that the United States has to invade this year, because governments in the Gulf are taking too much domestic criticism for their pro-U.S. stance. If an invasion does not happen now, the Gulf states simply will not be able to support one later in 2003 or 2004; their domestic political situation will not allow it. In all likelihood, public opinion elsewhere in the world and in the United States itself, as well as the U.S. armed forces, cannot be kept on hold for much longer.

If the Bush Administration wants to go to war now, how does it do so? According to Pollack, one option would be to concentrate on the Iraqi declaration, which is the single most obvious lie Iraq is likely to give. According to language the United States put in the new resolution, lying on the declaration is a “material breach,” and Iraq has effectively done that. This does not mean the U.S. government has to declare Iraq in material breach right away, especially since the United States is still several weeks away (both diplomatically and militarily) from being able to

declare war. It does mean, however, that the Administration has to move quickly to finish its military preparations and begin building what President Bush has called a “coalition of the willing” to disarm Iraq. This coalition may not be as large as the 1991 Gulf War coalition; but the Administration has made unheralded progress in building support in Europe, and will probably be able to build a much larger coalition than most people expect.

The other option is to wait and allow the inspections to play out a while longer, while encouraging the United Nations to mount a series of aggressive inspections in the next month or two. The United States could ask the inspectors to request specific documents or to interview certain specific scientists in the hope of finding the “smoking gun”; even if the Iraqis evade and obstruct in minor ways, that could help Washington build its case against Iraq. In some ways, this would be a better approach, because if the strategy worked the United States would be able to convince more states to join a coalition of the willing.

This strategy also carries real risks, however. First, it is doubtful whether the United Nations is willing to accept American guidance at this point in time. Hans Blix, the head of UNMOVIC, has repeatedly said he will not take Iraqi scientists outside the country, and it is not even clear whether he would be willing to interview them in country. The inspectors are deferring to the Iraqis in ways the old UNSCOM teams did not—for example, by not carrying out inspections on Fridays. The evidence thus suggests it is unlikely that the inspections teams will accept U.S. directions to make the inspections more aggressive.

Second, the strategy is based more or less on the hope that Iraq will make a mistake or the United States will have some other stroke of luck. For instance, a defector could elude the Iraqi *mukhabarat* (secret services) and flee the country with new information. Yet if this happens, it will probably not be through the inspections, since the *mukhabarat* will simply have too much control over the people who are being interviewed. Barring luck, finding any weapons of mass destruction will be extremely difficult. The U.S. government has large amounts of information to indicate that Iraq still has a large weapons of mass destruction program, but has no good information about where it is located. Throughout the 1990s, even when the United States did find new intelligence about where weapons were located, it was almost invariably the case that the site was sanitized long before the inspectors could reach it. The Iraqi authorities have simply gotten too good at hiding their weapons of mass destruction.

In short, Pollack concluded, the Iraqi declaration proves that Baghdad is not taking this last chance to comply with the UN demands for full disclosure and disarmament. If the Administration does want to go to war, there is a real risk in allowing inspections to go on for another month or two. Each time the inspectors go to a site, find the Iraqis to be cooperative, and find the site clean, it reinforces the notion of those people here and around the world who want to believe Iraq is telling the truth; and it makes it harder, not easier, for the United States to build its coalition.

### **Michael E. O’Hanlon: A Case for Peace?**

As a war skeptic, Michael E. O’Hanlon said there was a serious case for war with Iraq, even though he and others were still searching for an alternative. Saddam Husayn’s behavior in his own country and his possible behavior with nuclear weapons are such a serious concern that the United States must think carefully about whether it can afford to leave him in power. O’Hanlon said he had been advocating a coercive UN strategy that could avoid war by forcing inspections and disarmament on Iraq, yet he was becoming less and less confident that this strategy can work. In his view, the

likelihood of war had risen dramatically now that Iraq had released its report. In a point of disagreement with the other panelists, he added that Iraq's strategy was not actually very intelligent, precisely because it puts the United States in a difficult position which U.S. policymakers realize will only worsen over time. For this reason, it was highly probable that the Bush Administration would make the decision to go to war soon after the holidays.

What hope remains for those who would prefer not to see the United States go to war? According to the speaker, there are still some arguments to be made for this position, although he expressed pessimism about their viability. For example, one could begin by arguing that nuclear weapons are the most important issue. Just as Kay and Pollack have argued, the possibility that Saddam Husayn will develop a nuclear bomb is the most worrisome, because he has not had one thus far and there is no way of knowing how he would behave. The scenario in which Iraq ships a nuclear device into New York harbor and detonates it seems very unlikely; rather, Saddam Husayn's behavior in the region could become much more dangerous and aggressive if he felt his nuclear weapons insured him against American retaliation.

At the same time, there is good reason to believe that the inspections process can work much more effectively against nuclear weapons than against chemical and biological weapons. Nuclear facilities can be distributed in various locations and hidden underground, but it is difficult to hide them under the guise of some legitimate use or to make them mobile, as Iraq may have done with its chemical and biological weapons programs. Even a less aggressive inspections team such as the current one might be able to gather enough information to prevent a major reconstitution of Iraq's nuclear program. Thus, if the United Nations were to continue inspections for a couple of years and implement long-term monitoring thereafter, it might be possible to keep Saddam Husayn from developing a nuclear bomb, even if the inspectors could not find his biological and chemical agents. In O'Hanlon's view, this is the most serious argument against going to war.

It is also possible to argue that Iraq has not disclosed its weapons in the report simply because it is afraid of the consequences. Saddam Husayn may fear that if he were to reveal his existing or past weapons programs, not only would his position suffer in the region and inside Iraq, but the United States would also use his admission of illicit activity to justify war. In this view, Iraq may be trying to retain its existing weapons, but will not be able to produce them on a large enough scale to be dangerous in the future. Saddam knows he has to be careful to keep his stocks hidden; to judge from the past twelve years, when Iraq has been under constant U.S. observation and has not used its weapons of mass destruction, he is unlikely to use them anyway. Even if Iraq manages to keep some chemical and biological weapons, one could argue, this is not a great threat.

A serious case thus can be made for stopping short of war. Yet it may be extremely risky to base U.S. strategy on either of these arguments. In the case of Iraq's nuclear weapons, it is always possible that inspections will fail to find a "basement bomb" program, even though the chances of that are relatively low. More important, the credibility of both the United States and the United Nations is now at stake. Even if the United States believes it can live with a Saddam Husayn who has chemical and biological weapons, his open defiance raises huge questions about the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence and the credibility of the UN Security Council. As President Bush said, the Security Council must be taken seriously. Iraq's weapons are a major concern, but there are also much larger issues that have arisen in the process of dealing with this problem.

In this context, Iraq's failure to disclose any of its weapons programs in its declaration is discouraging. Over the previous summer, O'Hanlon said, he and other Brookings scholars had set certain conditions for the credibility of weapons inspections in Iraq. They argued that Iraqi weapons scientists had to be available for interviews, perhaps outside Iraq. They also agreed that Iraq would have to show some progress towards eliminating his weapons of mass destruction. For example, Saddam Husayn would have to admit to at least a certain amount of chemical agents and allow those

to be destroyed very quickly while the threat of U.S. military force was still credible. In this way, Saddam would no longer be in control of the situation, and the United States would be able to use its threat of military force to produce some disarmament. Now, with the Iraqi declaration, that hope appears to be evaporating.

So where do we go from here? According to O'Hanlon, military considerations probably require that if the Administration is going to wage war, it must make a decision soon. Despite extensive ongoing preparations, the United States still has only around 60,000 troops in the Persian Gulf region; it has yet to call up key military units such as the 101<sup>st</sup> Air Assault Division, the Third Mechanized Infantry Division, the First Cavalry Division, and the Third or First Marine Expeditionary Force. If four divisions of this size were deployed to the Gulf, they and their support would amount to well over 100,000 troops; in that case, the war will have to be fought, because the United States cannot simply send 150,000-200,000 troops to the region and then pull them back. Meanwhile, the entire process of calling up reservists, deploying those four divisions, and unloading in Kuwait will probably take a month and a half to two months of serious effort. If the war has to be fought in wintertime, or in early spring at the latest—an assumption the speaker said he supported—then the decision will have to come in January.

To conclude, O'Hanlon wondered whether there might be one final alternative besides war. Perhaps the United States could announce to the world and to Iraq that the declaration is intolerable—a material breach, and one sufficient to justify military action. It could then give Iraq one last chance to disclose its weapons programs. It would be important for the United States to remind the world that there is proof of Iraq's illicit activities, and not just in form of American or British intelligence. In so doing the United States could rely the entire legacy of UN inspections: the inconsistencies in documents Iraq has provided or that Iraqi defectors have revealed. At a minimum, there is ample proof that the Iraqi regime has chemical weapons and biological precursors it has not disclosed. On the basis of this information, the United States could issue an ultimatum, informing the world that Baghdad is lying and it has one final chance to comply. If there is any way to avoid war, this might be the last possibility.

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