

UNMOVIC in Iraq: opportunity lost

Trevor Findlay and Ben Mines

In November 2002 the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC), in partnership with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), resumed international inspections in Iraq after an absence of nearly four years. UNMOVIC had been established by the UN Security Council in December 1999 in the hope that a new organisation would attract greater co-operation from Iraq than its predecessor, the UN Special Commission on Iraq (UNSCOM).¹ However, it was not until the US Administration of President George W. Bush threatened credible military action that Iraq agreed to admit UNMOVIC inspectors (as well as readmitting those of the IAEA²) to its territory. Unfortunately, US patience ran out before UNMOVIC was able to fulfil its mandate. It and the IAEA were withdrawn in March 2003, after just four months of inspections, prior to US-led military action. Despite the brevity of its operations in the field, however, UNMOVIC's experience has yielded valuable lessons for future inspection and verification regimes. This chapter examines the history and achievements of UNMOVIC, from its inception to its withdrawal from Iraq, and its likely future.

UNMOVIC: establishment, organisation and capabilities

As part of the ceasefire that ended the 1991 Persian Gulf War, the UN Security Council demanded that Iraq divest itself of its nuclear, chemical and biological weapons capabilities and of its delivery systems with a range greater than 150 kilometres (km).³ UNSCOM, a specially created international inspection agency, and the IAEA were mandated to verify that Iraq was complying with these requirements. Among the achievements of UNSCOM and the IAEA's Iraq Action Team—responsible for nuclear inspections in Iraq—were the discovery of an offensive

biological weapons (BW) programme, a VX nerve agent capability, long-range missiles capable of delivering weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and a clandestine nuclear programme. The inspectors successfully destroyed significant quantities of ballistic missiles, chemical munitions and agents, and closed down a BW facility and an entire nuclear weapons research and production capability.⁴

But Iraq never did produce a credible complete and final accounting of its capabilities and what had become of them, particularly in respect of its BW programme.⁵ UNSCOM and the IAEA inspectors were also faced with persistent Iraqi non-cooperation, harassment and dissembling. They had therefore not been able to completely verify Iraqi disarmament, nor to put completely in place the planned long-term Ongoing Monitoring and Verification (OMV) system designed to prevent Iraq from re-acquiring WMD capabilities. The inspectors were forced to withdraw in December 1998 to avoid air strikes carried out by the US and the UK in a failed attempt to compel Iraq to co-operate fully.

Formation and mandate

UNMOVIC was created by Security Council Resolution 1284 on 17 December 1999 as a replacement for UNSCOM. The new body inherited its predecessor's responsibilities, as well as being mandated to strengthen UNSCOM's OMV,⁶ now to be known as the Reinforced Ongoing Monitoring and Verification (R-OMV) system. The IAEA retained its separate role with regard to nuclear matters. Swedish diplomat Dr Hans Blix, former Director General of the IAEA, was appointed UNMOVIC's Executive Chairman.⁷ Controversy attended his appointment after American critics pointed out that it was during his tenure at the IAEA that Iraq was able to establish an illicit nuclear weapons programme under the nose of the agency's nuclear safeguards regime.⁸

A 16-member College of Commissioners was also appointed.⁹ Chaired by the Executive Chairman, it was to meet at least every three months to provide him with advice and guidance. He would be required to consult it on major policy decisions. The role and membership of the college elicited allegations that UNMOVIC would have less political independence than UNSCOM, but such fears never materialised.¹⁰

Organisation and capabilities

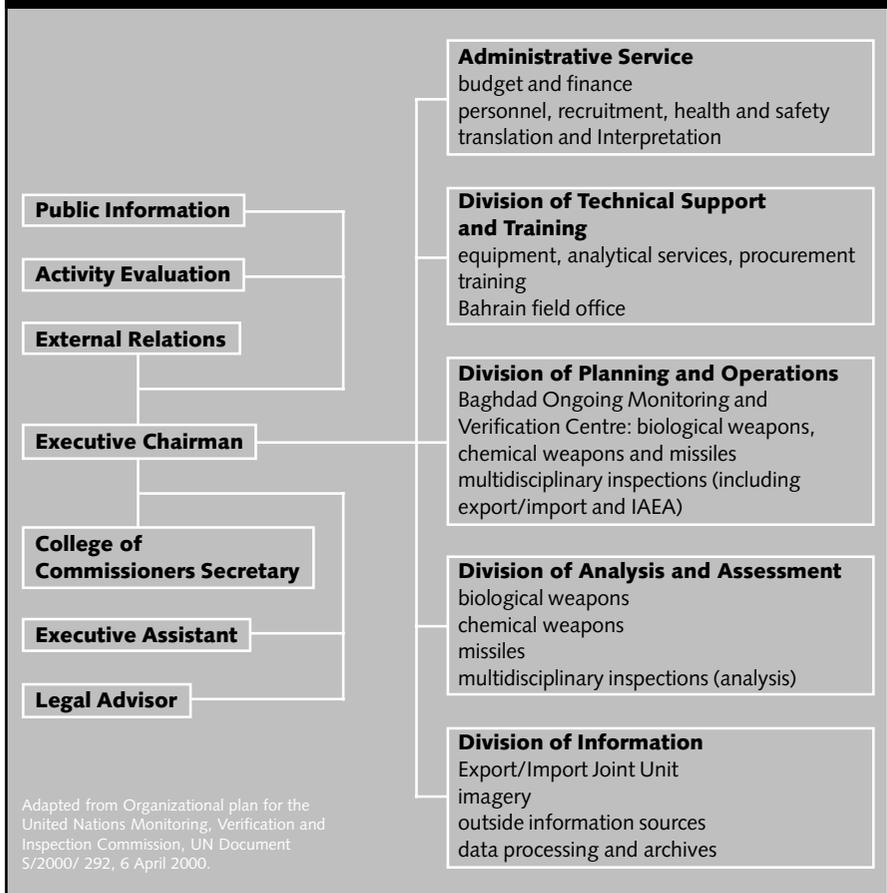
UNMOVIC drew heavily on the experience of its predecessor, as well as acquiring its assets and archives and some of its personnel. However, it became a much

more capable organisation than UNSCOM had been, partly because UNSCOM had laid much of the groundwork, but also because UNMOVIC used the three years between its establishment and the deployment of its inspectors to Iraq to great advantage.

The Commission, which, despite its withdrawal from Iraq, still exists, comprises, besides the Executive Chairman and his support office, an Administrative Service and four main divisions—Technical Support and Training; Planning and Operations; Analysis and Assessment; and Information (see figure 1).¹¹

The Division of Planning and Operations is responsible for the planning and execution of all monitoring, verification and inspection activities, including proposing sites for inspection, planning the objectives and timing of inspections and deciding the composition of inspection teams. It has four principal units—biological weapons,

Figure 1 UNMOVIC organisational chart



chemical weapons, ballistic missiles, and multidisciplinary inspections and operations. The multidisciplinary unit was formed on the recommendation of the 1999 Amorim panel¹² which reviewed UNSCOM's operations and concluded that such teams could better investigate sites hosting multiple activities. The division also has responsibility for the verification and monitoring of any proscribed items imported by Iraq and investigating any dual-use items, as part of the Export/Import Joint Unit with the IAEA. It also has responsibility for the R-OMV system.

The Division of Information gathers, processes and archives information from several sources, including that garnered from both UNMOVIC and UNSCOM inspections, overhead imagery, open sources (notably from the Monterey Institute and a French research institute) and intelligence provided by UN member states (notably the US and the UK, but also possibly France, Germany and Israel).¹³ Because of the long period that elapsed between the end of UNSCOM inspections and the commencement of UNMOVIC inspections, and the resulting paucity of information about Iraq's weapons programmes between 1998 and 2002, information from open sources and intelligence was particularly important.

The Division of Analysis and Assessment is responsible for processing information in order to focus the work of the inspections, provide a basis for the R-OMV and assist the Export/Import Joint Unit. The Division has the same four units as the Division of Planning and Operations and each unit liaises directly with its counterpart to identify new sites for inspection and assess Iraq's compliance.

Finally, the Division of Technical Support and Training provides UNMOVIC with all the equipment and supplies needed for inspections in Iraq, such as logistics, transport, communications and security. These activities were implemented in Iraq from the Baghdad Ongoing Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Centre (BOMVIC) for both UNMOVIC and IAEA inspections. It is also responsible for the Larnaca (Cyprus) and Bahrain field offices and for running the training programmes for staff and inspectors.

The waiting game: UNMOVIC before inspections

A key difference between UNMOVIC and its predecessor was that UNSCOM was launched straight into inspections, while UNMOVIC had the benefit of three years of preparation. UNSCOM arrived in Iraq and performed its first inspection in May 1991, barely a

month after being created by Resolution 687. By contrast, UNMOVIC was able to use the waiting period to determine priority sites for inspection, carefully analyse the information on Iraq's WMD programmes and capabilities, consolidate and learn from the experiences of its predecessor, create a well-trained force of inspectors and refine its monitoring and inspection methods.

As instructed in Resolution 1284, UNMOVIC focused on identifying 'unresolved disarmament issues' and 'key remaining disarmament tasks'. To this end it assembled unresolved disarmament issues into interrelated clusters to obtain a better overall picture of Iraq's WMD programmes and to assess the significance of the gaps in its knowledge and hence what still needed to be verified.¹⁴

Staff training—which under UNSCOM had been largely the responsibility of member states—was now organised and conducted solely by UNMOVIC (although with some support from governments). The Commission instigated a rolling programme of training on a wide range of topics—the past work of UNSCOM; the origins, mandate and legal framework of UNMOVIC; the scope and nature of Iraq's weapons programmes; monitoring and inspection techniques; and health and safety. It also included a cultural training package which covered the history, economy, politics and society of Iraq with regional, social and religious themes (UNSCOM had been accused of cultural insensitivity). UNMOVIC also ran advanced discipline-specific training courses once experts had been through the initial training course, focusing on biological, chemical or missile inspections. The first training course ran from July to August 2000 and trained 44 experts from 19 countries. With the completion of this and four more courses and the recruitment of 42 professional core staff in New York, UNMOVIC was in a good position by the end of 2002 to commence inspections at short notice. Courses were still running in February 2003, bringing the total of experts on the roster to 380 from 55 nations.

Technology

UNMOVIC also had better technology than UNSCOM. Both the surveys and the inspections conducted in Iraq by UNMOVIC were greatly assisted by significant improvements in technology since 1998. Detection devices were now smaller, lighter, faster and more accurate. They included miniature radiation sensors, portable chemical and biological weapon detectors and ground-penetrating radar. Multi-channel analysers (MCAs) were used to detect and analyse gamma radiation from

radioisotopes and neutron radiation from plutonium, while a gamma spectrometer was used to identify highly enriched uranium. Importantly, as nuclear activities often require exotic metals, x-ray fluorescence spectrometers were used to distinguish between various metal alloys. For its part, the IAEA used environmental sampling techniques developed for improved nuclear safeguards verification to monitor water, air and vegetation. The equipment used to survey Iraq's watercourses was so sensitive that it could detect the permitted use by Iraq of radioisotopes for medical applications. Information technology developments also helped UNMOVIC. For instance, the IAEA and UNMOVIC databases were linked and cross-disciplinary analysis not previously available was used to look for patterns and connections.

UNMOVIC's capabilities were also to be enhanced by the establishment of two regional offices, the freedom to fly into Baghdad rather than an airport several hours' drive away, a fleet of British, Canadian and Russian helicopters, access to colour satellite images, including images from commercial providers, and the use of *Mirage* and U-2 aircraft for extra reconnaissance (although the latter took some time to arrange). It was also planned to obtain data from unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), but these were never deployed because of lack of time before UNMOVIC's withdrawal.

The build-up to UNMOVIC's entry into Iraq

The first signs of movement in the Iraqi position on allowing inspectors to return began in the early part of 2002, prompted by US and British intimations that the use of force could not be ruled out if Iraq continued to defy the Security Council. The Foreign Minister of Iraq held talks with the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, on 7 March and again on 1 and 3 May. Technical talks were also held between UNMOVIC and an Iraqi delegation, headed by General Amer Al-Sa'adi, the main point of contact for UNSCOM on chemical and biological weapons. Pressure was increased by the US release in September of intelligence information on Iraq's alleged import of aluminium tubes for use in uranium enrichment centrifuges. The now infamous British dossier on Iraq's alleged WMD was published on 24 September 2002.¹⁵

On 8 November 2002 the Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1441, declaring that Iraq had been and continued to be in 'material breach' of its

obligations and calling on it to co-operate ‘immediately, unconditionally and actively’ with UNMOVIC. It ordered Baghdad to provide UNMOVIC and the IAEA with ‘immediate, unimpeded, unconditional, and unrestricted access to any and all, including underground, areas, facilities, buildings, equipment, records, and means of transport which they wish to inspect’. The two bodies could impose no-drive and no-fly zones around suspect sites and could destroy, impound or remove any armaments, materials or records. They were also entitled to receive comprehensive lists of and ‘immediate, unimpeded, unrestricted, and private access to all officials and other persons’ whom they wished to interview in a mode or location of their choosing, without the presence of Iraqi observers. Gone were the special procedures for the inspection of the eight presidential sites of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein—negotiated by Kofi Annan in February 1998¹⁶—as were the confidential ‘understandings’ previously reached with Iraq by the first UNSCOM Executive Chairman, Rolf Ekéus. The inspectors’ premises were to be protected by UN guards, and UNMOVIC and IAEA personnel were to have unimpeded entry to, and exit from, Iraq, and the right to import and export any equipment and material they required.

Not only was UNMOVIC’s mandate now tougher and more intrusive than that of UNSCOM; it was also politically more compelling. Unlike Resolution 687 establishing UNSCOM, Resolution 1284 established UNMOVIC specifically under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, leaving no doubt that compliance with the resolution was mandatory. It was also, unlike the initial UNSCOM resolution, adopted unanimously (even Syria voted in favour). Resolution 1441 also explicitly stated that failure to comply at any point ‘shall constitute a further material breach of Iraq’s obligations’, which would be reported to the Security Council for immediate assessment, with the possibility of ‘serious consequences’. This was the first time such a direct threat of force had been made in a resolution concerning the UN inspection regime. Previously, it had been linked indirectly as part of Iraq’s ceasefire obligations.¹⁷

Several deadlines were imposed by Resolution 1441. Iraq was given seven days to notify the Security Council that it would comply and 30 days to provide a ‘currently accurate, full and complete declaration of all aspects of its programmes to develop chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles, and other delivery systems’. UNMOVIC was to begin inspections within 45 days and report to the Council 60 days thereafter, but earlier if Iraq was failing to comply.

On 13 November 2002 Iraq informed the Security Council of its decision to comply with the resolution ‘without conditions’. An advance team of 30 staff lost no time in travelling to Baghdad with Dr Blix and IAEA Director General Dr Mohamed ElBaradei on 18 November for talks with Iraqi officials on the practical arrangements for the return of inspectors and to prepare premises and organise logistics to permit the resumption of operations. On 7 December a crucial deadline was met when Iraq provided, more than 24 hours before it was required to do so, what purported to be the required ‘accurate, full, and complete declaration’. Comprising over 11,807 pages, with 352 pages of annexes and 529 megabytes of data, the declaration was detailed, technical and partly in Arabic.

The inspectors return: 27 November 2002–17 March 2003

The first inspectors arrived in Iraq on 25 November. Although they numbered only 11, they covered all areas of UNMOVIC’s work. This paved the way for inspections to begin early—just two days later, on 27 November, when three sites previously inspected by UNSCOM were visited. Several more inspections were conducted, unimpeded by the Iraqis, on successive days. These early inspections were low-key affairs, designed to test Iraqi co-operation, while also attempting to re-establish a baseline of information (‘re-baselining’) to facilitate future inspections. On 3 December the first presidential site was inspected, again without serious incident, although access was delayed.

The first two weeks yielded only a few inspections per day and were general rather than discipline-specific. They were carried out by the small advance team from UNMOVIC and the IAEA’s Iraq Action Team—renamed the Iraq Nuclear Verification Office (INVO). However, as the number of inspectors in Iraq grew, inspections steadily intensified.¹⁸ From 14 December they began in earnest, averaging eight per day, with discipline-specific teams focusing on their own particular area of interest. Each inspection team contained on average eight inspectors, but their numbers ranged from as many as 40 and as few as two.

In its 111 days in Iraq, UNMOVIC conducted 731 inspections at 411 sites—of which 88 had not been inspected previously¹⁹—while the INVO conducted 237 nuclear inspections at 148 sites, including 27 new sites, covering over 1,600 buildings.²⁰ Of the UNMOVIC inspections, 219 (30 percent) were conducted by missile teams,

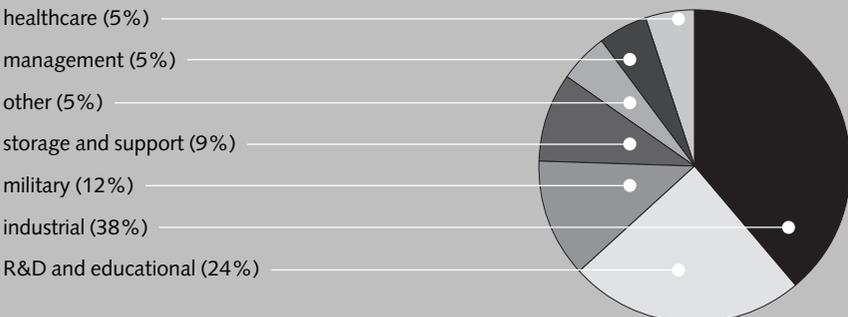
205 (28 percent) by biological, 161 (22 percent) by chemical and 146 (20 percent) by multidisciplinary teams.

Figure 2 provides a breakdown of the types of site inspected by UNMOVIC. Industrial sites represented the majority (which included food, medicine, ammunition and missile-related production plants²¹) followed by research and development and military sites. Most of the sites were located around Baghdad or the northern city of Mosul, inspections of the latter being facilitated by the opening of a regional field office there. Another regional field office was planned for the city of Basra but the inspectors left before it could be established. This would have opened up the southern part of Iraq to more thorough inspection and monitoring and increased the element of surprise. In the end only seven sites were inspected in the southern third of the country.

In addition to inspections, the INVO also conducted 125 surveys, including 42 at locations not previously visited by the IAEA. The surveys included land- and vehicle-based sampling, the teams travelling over 8,000 km to visit state-run industrial and military locations as well as urban areas. The INVO also conducted a radiometric survey of Iraq's main watercourses from 9 to 19 December.

The pattern of inspections by UNMOVIC and the INVO shows two distinct phases. From November until the beginning of 2003, the focus was on re-establishing a baseline for the declared sites by assessing any changes in activity, personnel or equipment since inspectors left in 1998. Newly declared sites were also visited in this phase and all sites were assessed against Iraq's 7 December declaration. From

Figure 2 Types of sites inspected by UNMOVIC



Adapted from 13th quarterly report of the Executive Chairman of UNMOVIC to the Security Council, UN Document S/2003/580, 30 May 2003.

mid-January onwards UNMOVIC and the INVO began an investigative phase designed to identify and pursue leads obtained from inspections, Iraqi documents or information from other sources, including intelligence. This phase was characterised by the re-inspection of key sites. Among those inspected on several occasions were:

- Al Qa Qaa, a large industrial complex responsible for the explosive filling of long-range missile warheads; it was inspected by nuclear, chemical, missile and multidisciplinary teams (30 inspections);
- Tuwaitha, the former main site of Iraq's nuclear programme (18 inspections by INVO teams);
- the Al Mamoun plant, involved in making missile propellant (18 inspections);
- the Al Kadhimiya plant, producing guidance and control systems for missiles (16 inspections); and
- Al Mutasim, involved in making missile motors (16 inspections).

The inspectors were still fully engaged in this phase of their operations when they were withdrawn.

The extent of Iraqi co-operation

In sharp contrast to their handling of UNSCOM, the Iraqis did not prevent entry to any site that UNMOVIC sought to visit and delays in gaining access were minimal, even when inspections were no-notice or undeclared. Iraq also assisted UNMOVIC with infrastructure such as premises. UNMOVIC used a variety of intrusive techniques, including air, chemical and radiological sampling, photography and video, tagging of equipment and document collection, without Iraqi interference. Iraq also established two commissions to search for proscribed items and documentation. The first, appointed on 20 January 2003, allegedly located four 122mm chemical warheads and two aerial bombs for biological agents.

There were two key areas where Iraq was unco-operative and used delaying tactics. The first concerned helicopter flights and surveillance flights by U-2 and *Mirage* aircraft, despite the fact that similar aircraft had been used by UNSCOM. Iraq eventually conceded on allowing all UNMOVIC aircraft to operate freely in Iraq, including in the no-fly zones.²² The first U-2 flight took place on 17 February. A French-supplied *Mirage* aircraft conducted its first mission on 26 February. The two aircraft procured digital imagery that could be delivered to UNMOVIC headquarters

within hours. UNMOVIC intended to supplement these sources with Russian surveillance aircraft with a night-vision capability and German-supplied UAVs. UNMOVIC also leased helicopters which were used for aerial surveillance as well as transporting inspectors around the country.

The second area of difficulty related to interviews with technical and scientific personnel without the use of tape recorders or the presence of Iraqi minders—a key demand of the Security Council. Iraq eventually relented and 26 interviews—14 by UNMOVIC and 12 by the IAEA—were conducted from 5 February until the end of inspections, all under the conditions stipulated by UNMOVIC and the IAEA.

In his reports to the Security Council, Hans Blix was careful to distinguish between Iraq's co-operation in process and co-operation in substance. While co-operation in the former was good, in the latter Iraq continued to be evasive and misleading. Its supposed 'currently accurate, full and complete declaration' of 7 December was farcical, mostly comprising a compilation of Iraq's past supposedly accurate full and complete declarations. In his briefing to the Council on 7 March 2003 Blix identified at least 100 unanswered questions, many relating to uncertainty surrounding the amounts of anthrax and vx nerve agents that Iraq had declared but had not adequately accounted for.²³

Iraq was clearly continuing to engage in a campaign of deception and denial, and one that was apparently more sophisticated than ever, thanks to its experience in handling UNSCOM and the intervening years that it had had to prepare for the inspectors' return. Ironically, though, this time the Iraqis had much less to hide, since they had not been as successful in reconstituting their WMD programmes as had been alleged. The US-led Iraq Survey Group (ISG), comprising Australian, American and British inspectors, still in Iraq at the time of writing, may eventually reveal the real extent of both their WMD plans and their campaign of denial and deception.²⁴

UNMOVIC's achievements

Findings

In their four months of inspections, UNMOVIC and the INVO found little evidence that Iraq either still possessed WMD or was engaged in new or reconstituted programmes to produce them.²⁵ Some proscribed items were uncovered but they were

not the 'smoking gun' that had been alleged to exist. No stockpiles of chemical or biological weapons were found. While US intelligence had alleged the existence of mobile BW laboratories, UNMOVIC could find no trace of them. The vehicles it did discover turned out to be mobile agricultural research units. Although the US subsequently found more vehicles after its invasion of the country in March 2003, it appears now that their purpose was as Iraq had claimed—filling hydrogen balloons to assist in weather forecasting for artillery use.²⁶ With regard to the US allegation that Iraq had developed UAVs for WMD delivery (under Resolution 687, UAVs were subject to the same 150 km-range limit as missiles), UNMOVIC concluded, after discovering one, that instead they were likely to have been for surveillance purposes.

The IAEA concluded, for its part, that Iraq had been unable to reconstitute its nuclear weapons programme. It also arrived at negative findings on two specific issues. First, it concluded that the aluminium tubes illegally imported by Iraq, allegedly for use in centrifuges for uranium enrichment, were in fact for use in rockets. Second, it quickly determined that documents obtained from US intelligence alleging an Iraqi attempt to obtain yellowcake (milled uranium oxide, U₃O₈) from Niger were crude forgeries.²⁷ While it is now widely agreed that the documents were fakes, the UK continues to maintain that it had independent intelligence about such a bid, although it is not clear whether it shared this with the IAEA.

The most prominent discovery by UN inspectors resulted from analysis of Iraq's six-monthly declaration, provided in October 2002, before inspections started, which revealed information on two types of surface-to-surface missiles, the Al Samoud 2 and the Al Fatah. Flight test data were analysed in February 2003 by a panel of international experts from China, France, Germany, the UK, Ukraine and the US, convened by UNMOVIC,²⁸ which concluded that the Al Samoud 2 was capable of exceeding the 150 km-range limit. Iraq also declared the acquisition of a large number of surface-to-air missile engines, which violated the arms embargo imposed by Resolution 687. The engines could also be modified for use as longer-range missiles.

It was also discovered that the casting chambers at the Al Mamoun facility, which had been destroyed by UNSCOM because they were intended to be used in producing the proscribed Badr-2000 missile, had been refurbished and were judged to be able to produce missile motors capable of ranges greater than 150 km.

Disarmament activity

The scale of disarmament of Iraq by UNMOVIC was minor compared to the complex and large-scale destruction activities overseen and undertaken by UNSCOM. Between 1 and 17 March 2003, when inspections ceased, UNMOVIC supervised the destruction at Al Taji of 72 missiles, along with 74 empty warheads, five engines, three launchers and three command and control vehicles. This still left a further 25 missiles, 38 warheads, six launchers, six command and control vehicles and 326 engines remaining to be destroyed. Inspectors also verified the destruction of numerous other items associated with the missile programme, such as drawings and manufactured parts, at Al Wazariyah, the Al Samoud Factory and the Al Fatah Factory. The same process at several other sites—Al Kadhimiyah, Al Qudis and the Al Fedaa Hydraulic Factory—had not yet commenced when inspectors were withdrawn from Iraq. The two casting chambers at Al Mamoun were destroyed under UNMOVIC supervision by cutting each into at least 16 pieces which were then buried and encased in concrete.

UNMOVIC was also able to complete disarmament tasks that were started but never finished by UNSCOM because of its withdrawal. Fourteen 155mm artillery shells filled with mustard gas were destroyed at the Muthanna State Establishment. The remaining 49 litres of agent and empty shells were also destroyed. UNMOVIC chemical teams also discovered and destroyed a litre of a mustard gas precursor (thiodiglycol) at the Al Basil Jadriya complex in January 2003. Iraq claimed, probably truthfully, that the chemical had been left by the previous occupants of the site and was not being used by the current scientific staff. No further evidence was found that work was being carried out on the precursor or mustard gas.

Another inspection team found 12 undeclared 122mm rockets with empty chemical warheads at the Al Ukhaider ammunition depot, while Iraq itself 'located' four more warheads at Al Taji. An UNMOVIC inspection of this site turned up two more warheads. Although some of the warheads contained liquid, analysis revealed that it was simply water. All 18 were due for destruction before the inspectors were withdrawn.

UNMOVIC's record

By 17 March 2003, differences in the Security Council over continuing Iraqi non-compliance reached a head. China, France, Germany and Russia on the one hand

and the US and UK on the other clashed heatedly over whether a second resolution was needed to authorise the use of force if Iraq were found to be in non-compliance with Resolution 1441. The impasse led to the US declaring its intention of acting unilaterally. On 18 March, two days after Washington advised the UN that the inspectors should leave for their own safety, UNMOVIC and the IAEA withdrew from Iraq. So ended the second round of international inspections. Bombing by US and British aircraft began on 20 March and the coalition invasion began soon after.

Many observers and significant numbers of Security Council member states, including China, Russia, France and all the non-permanent members, felt that UNMOVIC had not been given enough time to fulfil its mandate. While Iraq had not been proactive in assisting the inspectors and had continued to prevaricate about its past programmes, it had nonetheless co-operated sufficiently to permit UNMOVIC and the IAEA to carry out their tasks unhindered and had consistently backed down on specific issues when pressure was applied by the Council.

UNMOVIC had barely been in the country three months. It had not yet completed its second phase, had only just begun receiving overhead imagery and had not installed monitoring equipment. It had yet to open an office in Basra and had interviewed only a tiny number of the scientists and officials that it wished to interview. While it had received some intelligence from UN member states, it was clear that more was available and might be provided in the coming months. The failure of US and coalition forces and the ISG so far to uncover much more than UNMOVIC did has retrospectively enhanced the latter's reputation.²⁹ Calls for the ISG to be given more time and vastly greater resources reinforce the notion that UNMOVIC itself should have been afforded these. The difficulty for UNMOVIC, even if had been given more time and resources, was the perennial challenge that all verifiers, including the ISG, face—verifying a negative, in this case the absence of Iraqi WMD capabilities.

UNMOVIC appeared at all times to act professionally and efficiently, despite the adverse conditions. Among these were the failure of Western states to provide adequate intelligence early enough and fully enough to permit it to move more quickly. Also difficult for UNMOVIC were the insinuations and carping from critics within or associated with the US Administration about its alleged shortcomings. Blix, as the head of an international organisation that was supposed to balance

the interests of all UN member states, including Iraq, could clearly not engage in an open, all-out debate with his critics without further harming UNMOVIC's reputation. On the contrary, his official reports to the Security Council and public comments were models of tact, balance and diplomacy.

This was despite the intense pressure endured by UNMOVIC from the US and the UK to provide more critical language in the reports in order to emphasise Iraq's lack of compliance. Before Blix's 14 February 2003 report, the US National Security Advisor, Condoleezza Rice, met him in New York to insist on reports which were more specific and would declare Iraq in violation of Resolution 1441 to provide a pretext for war. Further pressure was exerted by US Secretary of State Colin Powell in his 5 February 2003 presentation to the Security Council. He presented evidence that Iraq was continuing to hide weapons and deceive inspectors to demonstrate that Iraq had not accepted the Security Council's offer of a 'final opportunity' to disarm. An attempt by France, Germany and Russia to bolster the inspections with a plan to treble the number of inspectors in Iraq was swiftly rejected by both the US and the UK. UNMOVIC thus faced demands from all sides of the Security Council to achieve results faster and more definitively. But, even as the inspections in Iraq intensified, so too did the US build-up of forces—a telling sign that time was running out for UNMOVIC and further compounding the pressure.

One failure by UNMOVIC to fulfil its mandate that was much criticised by US officials was Blix's understandable reluctance to attempt to remove Iraqi scientists (accompanied, presumably, by their families) from Iraq for interview. Plans were, however, being developed, before UNMOVIC's withdrawal, for them to be interviewed in another Arab state or possibly Cyprus. Some commentators suggest that this would not have helped much. Scientists might still have felt too intimidated by the Iraqi regime to divulge much information of use. Since the invasion of Iraq, the US appears to have had little success in inducing Iraqis to talk, and those who have agreed to do so have revealed little or have actually denied the existence of WMD programmes or plans.

UNMOVIC's future?

It seems unlikely that UNMOVIC will be allowed to return to Iraq to complete its mandate. Hans Blix retired at the end of June 2003 and, although he has been

replaced in the interim by the Deputy Executive Chairman, Dr Demetrius Perricos, there is no indication that a permanent head is to be appointed. Security Council Resolution 1483 of 22 May 2003 postponed a decision on the mandates and future responsibilities of UNMOVIC and the IAEA in Iraq, tacitly accepting the role of the US and the UK in further verification work there.

UNMOVIC nonetheless continues to exist and is maintaining a readiness to return to Iraq if requested. Despite some looting, BOMVIC remained intact after the conflict and could be made operational at reasonably short notice. Even with a reduced staff and logistical capability, UNMOVIC could support between five and eight inspection teams and conduct 10 site visits per day, drawing on the more than 300 inspectors that remain on its roster. However, the continued lack of security in post-war Iraq, including for UN personnel, means that it is unlikely that the UN Secretary-General would allow UNMOVIC to return to the country in the foreseeable future, even if the US agreed.

The UNMOVIC case has demonstrated that an international inspection body can perform creditably. It was able to prepare itself well, deploy quickly, use technology skilfully, organise itself efficiently, maintain its impartiality and produce sober, balanced reports of a high technical standard. It was also able to successfully follow intelligence leads and reach quick and decisive conclusions. Unlike UNSCOM, it successfully avoided being taken advantage of by any UN member state, avoided unnecessarily offending Iraqi sensibilities and managed to parlay strong Security Council support into Iraqi co-operation, if not proactive engagement and full compliance.

The UNMOVIC experience demonstrated once more that the full support of the Security Council, or at least of its permanent membership, is essential for such a multilateral verification endeavour to succeed. In the UNSCOM case, one cause of failure was French and Russian reluctance to press Iraq to comply and to give UNSCOM full political support for its intrusive inspections. In the case of UNMOVIC, failure was caused by impatience on the part of the US and ultimately a preference for military means. The US played a contradictory game, providing initial strong political support and technical assistance to UNMOVIC while at the same time withholding and delaying its provision of crucial intelligence information and tolerating unsupported criticism of UNMOVIC from within the Administration.

For the moment UNMOVIC is in limbo. France and perhaps Russia will not permit it to be abolished, but the new overlords of Iraq, the UK and the US, will not permit it to redeploy, despite the fact that it could carry out useful work, presumably in co-operation with the ISG. Meanwhile, the European Union is considering how UNMOVIC's expertise and experience might be retained for future use. For example, UNMOVIC's rosters of experts could be maintained and combined with those the UN already has, for use by the Security Council when needed. Consideration could also be given to storing basic monitoring and verification equipment and other capabilities in the same way that the UN has stores of military materiel for peace-keeping operations. Whether the idea of a permanent UNMOVIC as a standby mechanism for future Iraq-type cases is feasible remains to be seen. It may have a certain deterrent value and actual utility if urgent action is needed. However, its relationship to other verification and inspection organisations and arrangements would need to be carefully considered to avoid harming them. In addition, the expense of maintaining an UNMOVIC-in-waiting that is constantly ready for use might be too high for UN member states to contemplate at the present stage.

A further consideration is that, as the cases of Iraq, North Korea and Iran show, solutions to non-compliance problems tend to be unique. The UNMOVIC experience itself further demonstrates—in political, operational and technical terms—both the exciting possibilities of, and the potentially daunting constraints on, multilateral verification endeavours.

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Trevor Findlay is Executive Director of VERTIC.

Ben Mines is VERTIC's Arms Control and Disarmament Researcher. He has a PhD in Zoology from the University of Cambridge and a BA (Hons) in Biological Sciences from the University of Oxford.

Endnotes

¹ For a review of UNSCOM see Stephen Black, 'Verification under duress: the case of UNSCOM', in Trevor Findlay (ed.), *Verification Yearbook 2000*, The Verification Research, Training and Information Centre (VERTIC), London, 2000, pp. 115–129.

² Iraq had permitted routine inspections of its declared peaceful nuclear facilities and material in accordance with its IAEA safeguards agreement, but not the intrusive 'challenge' inspections mandated by the Security Council after the Gulf War.

³ UN Security Council Resolution 687, 3 April 1991.

⁴ Summarised in United Nations, 'Report of the First Panel established pursuant to the Note by the President of the Security Council on 30 January 1999 (S/1999/100), concerning disarmament and current and future ongoing monitoring and verification issues', UN document S/1999/356, 27 March 1999.

⁵ United Nations, 'Letter dated 27 January 1999 from the Permanent Representatives of the Netherlands and Slovenia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council', UN document S/1999/94, 27 January 1999.

⁶ First mandated in UN Security Council Resolution 715, 11 October 1991.

⁷ United Nations, 'Letter dated 26 January 2000 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council', UN document S/2000/60, 27 January 2000.

⁸ United Nations, 'Fourth consolidated report of the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency under paragraph 16 of the UNSC Resolution 1051 (1996)', as presented to the Security Council in 'Note by the Secretary General', UN document S/1997/779, 8 October 1997.

⁹ The membership comprised representatives of Argentina, Brazil, Canada, China, Finland, France, Germany, India, Japan, Nigeria, Russia, Senegal, Ukraine, the UK and the US, and of the United Nations Department for Disarmament Affairs.

¹⁰ Richard Butler, *Saddam Defiant: The Threat of Weapons of Mass Destruction, and the Crisis of Global Security*, Phoenix, London, 2000, p. 239.

¹¹ The organisational plan for UNMOVIC was presented in United Nations, 'Note by the Secretary General', UN document S/2000/292, 6 April 2000.

¹² United Nations, 'Report of the First Panel established pursuant to the Note by the President of the Security Council on 30 January 1999 (S/1999/100), concerning disarmament and current and future ongoing monitoring and verification issues', UN document S/1999/356, 27 March 1999.

¹³ By its very nature, information about such intelligence sources is difficult to confirm.

¹⁴ The unresolved disarmament issues were listed in the form of clusters in 'Unresolved disarmament issues: Iraq's proscribed weapons programmes', UNMOVIC working document, 6 March 2003, which was presented informally to the Security Council. A draft work programme was submitted to the Security Council for its approval on the very day that UNMOVIC completed its last inspections before leaving Iraq. 'Draft work programme', UNMOVIC document, 17 March 2003.

¹⁵ British Government, *Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Assessment of the British Government*, The Stationery Office, London, 24 September 2002, available at www.official-documents.co.uk/document/reps/iraq/iraqdossier.pdf.

¹⁶ 'Memorandum of Understanding between the United Nations and the Republic of Iraq', 23 February 1998.

¹⁷ UN Security Council Resolution 1154 of 2 March 1998 had come close to threatening the use of force in asserting that 'any violation would have severest consequences for Iraq'.

¹⁸ For a detailed log of the inspections see VERTIC's online database of UNMOVIC and IAEA weapons inspections at www.vertic.org/onlinedatabase/unmovic.

¹⁹ United Nations, '13th quarterly report of the Executive Chairman of UNMOVIC to the Security Council', UN document S/2003/580, 30 May 2003.

²⁰ '15th consolidated report of the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency under paragraph 16 of the UNSC Resolution 1051 (1996)', UN document S/2003/422, 14 April 2003.

²¹ The breakdown of industrial sites inspected was as follows: processing and production plants: 49 percent; food and medicine production plants: 22 percent; ammunitions production plants: 9 percent; missile-related production plants: 16 percent; other production facilities: 4 percent. United Nations, '13th quarterly report of the Executive Chairman of UNMOVIC to the Security Council'.

²² Iraq sent a letter on 10 February 2003 to UNMOVIC approving the use of U-2 and other aircraft for surveillance without any conditions.

²³ Hans Blix, 'Briefing of the Security Council, 7 March 2003: Oral introduction of the 12th quarterly report of UNMOVIC', UNMOVIC, 7 March 2003; and United Nations, '12th quarterly report of the Executive Chairman of UNMOVIC to the Security Council', UN document S/2003/232, 28 February 2003.

²⁴ The Iraq Survey Group (ISG) replaced the US Army's 75th Exploitation Task Force in Iraq from 7 June 2003 and assumed the task of searching for and eliminating WMD. In addition to WMD, the ISG was tasked to collect and exploit documents and media related to terrorism, war crimes, prisoners of war and persons missing in action, and other matters relating to the former Iraqi regime. See 'Briefing on the Iraq Survey Group', US Department of Defense, available at www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2003/tr20030530-0231.html.

²⁵ See 'Implementation of United Nations Security Council resolutions relating to Iraq', IAEA General Conference document GOV/2003/50-GC(47)/10, 8 August 2003; and United Nations, '13th quarterly report of the Executive Chairman of UNMOVIC to the Security Council'.

²⁶ Peter Beaumont and Antony Barnett, 'Blow to Blair over "mobile labs"', *The Observer*, 8 June 2003, Guardian Unlimited, <http://observer.guardian.co.uk/iraq/story/0,12239,973195,00.html>.

²⁷ Mohamed ElBaradei, 'Status of nuclear inspections in Iraq: an update', Statement to the UN Security Council, 7 March 2003.

²⁸ The Russian expert was unable to attend.

²⁹ Frank Ronald Cleminson, 'What happened to Saddam's weapons of mass destruction?', *Arms Control Today*, vol. 33, no. 7, September 2003, www.armscontrol.org.

