

News from U.S. Rep. John Spratt (D-SC)
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U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C.
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Skelton, Spratt: Keep Inspections Going

WASHINGTON – U.S. Reps. Ike Skelton (D-MO) and John Spratt (D-SC), the lead Democrats on the House Armed Services Committee, today sent the following letter to President Bush. The letter urges the President to give the Security Council arms inspectors additional time.

January 27, 2002

The President of the United States
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

You took our case against Iraq to the United Nations on September 12, 2002 and called upon the Security Council to compel Iraq to comply with Resolution 687 and other resolutions related to it. A month later, Congress passed H. Res. 114 granting your request under the War Powers Act for authority to use force against Iraq. Many of us who voted for that resolution implored your Administration first to obtain the sanction of the Security Council for a new, tougher regime of arms inspections. On November 8th, through the deft diplomacy of Secretary Powell and Ambassador Negroponte, the United Nations Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 1441, implementing the new, tougher regime of inspections that we were seeking.

Resolution 1441 requires the Government of Iraq to declare its weapons of mass destruction and to disarm, subjecting all such weapons to dismantlement and destruction. To this end, the resolution broadens the powers of UNMOVIC (the United Nations Monitoring, Verification, and Inspection Commission) and the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Association), and directs the Government of Iraq to grant immediate, unrestricted, and unconditional access to suspect facilities as well as to weapons scientists and engineers.

Despite the breadth of this resolution, we knew that this would be a difficult and time-consuming mission, especially if Iraq did not cooperate in good faith. Tougher inspections seem warranted, however, because of the success of early UNSCOM and IAEA inspections. As Chief U.N. Weapons Inspector Dr.

Hans Blix noted in his presentation to the Security Council today, in the first several years after the Persian Gulf War, arms inspection uncovered and destroyed far more weapons of mass destruction than we destroyed in the war itself.

During the early 1990s, UNSCOM and IAEA discovered and disassembled 40 nuclear research facilities, including an uranium enrichment plant and a laboratory-scale plutonium separation plant. UNSCOM located and destroyed 40,000 filled and unfilled chemical munitions, 480,000 liters of chemical agents, 1.8 million liters of precursor chemicals, and eight types of delivery systems, including missile warheads. Though UNSCOM had less success destroying biological weapons, it was able to identify the production of 19,000 liters of botulinum; 8,400 liters of anthrax; and 2,000 liters of aflatoxin, and it was able to destroy the laboratories and production facilities at al-Hakam. UNSCOM also accounted for 817 of 819 Soviet-supplied SCUDs. By the time UNSCOM left, the Government of Iraq had become more devious at concealing its unconventional weapons, and UNSCOM documented the existence or likelihood of more weapons than it actually found.

We watched with interest the update of the United Nations Monitoring, Verification, and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) before the Security Council this morning. UNMOVIC has picked up where UNSCOM left off, conducting 260 inspections so far, while the IAEA has conducted 139 inspections. In their presentations today, Dr. Blix and Dr. Mohammad Al Baradei of the IAEA were critical of Iraq's level of cooperation in some important respects and noted areas where more cooperation was needed, including the status of unaccounted for VX munitions, the maximum range of Iraq's missiles under development, and Iraqi efforts to import uranium and other materials relevant to a nuclear weapons program. However, both made it clear that the inspections process still holds promise, and we urge you to weigh carefully the advantages of allowing the inspections to continue.

You have a letter from more than 120 of our colleagues urging more time for arms inspection and continued commitment to working through the Security Council. We share these sentiments. As Prime Minister Tony Blair has said, the inspections need not take many months, but investing more time in them should aid our diplomatic efforts as well as our military plans.

Here are some of the advantages we see in allowing the inspections to continue:

- # We understand the difficulties of deploying troops in a desert theater and keeping them on stand-by for a long time, but these troops serve a purpose. They back up the arms inspectors, giving them credibility and leverage. The inspectors should be allowed to

use this leverage, and we should exploit it as well, in an effort to avert war and disarm Iraq by credible threat of war. General Myers's recent comments indicate that maintaining the troops in theater will not have any adverse impact on readiness for the next few months.

- # We doubt that UNMOVIC and the IAEA will discover and destroy all of Iraq's unconventional weapons, but any chemical and biological weapons that the inspectors do discover and destroy will be weapons that cannot be unleashed on our armed forces in any military action against Iraq. By the same token, the information the inspectors glean from the sites they visit should be invaluable in selecting targets in any such war.
- # We have no doubt that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction and is hiding them, but the case will be more compelling to the Security Council and the rest of the world if UNMOVIC and IAEA can uncover such weapons and prove Iraq's mendacity and deceit. The United States cannot wait indefinitely for such proof, but, given the relatively short period of inspections under Resolution 1441 so far, some additional time is worth taking.
- # We believe that whatever action against Iraq is ultimately taken, it is to our advantage that it be taken with the sanction of the Security Council. Key countries in the region, especially Turkey and Saudi Arabia, will find it far easier to justify their participation if force is undertaken with the backing of the Security Council. Tactically, there are immense advantages of a broad-based coalition, particularly one that includes Turkey and Saudi Arabia. We can assemble troops in multiple locations, as opposed to assembling mainly in Kuwait, and we can attack Iraq through multiple vectors, enhancing surprise, rather than channeling our forces through a few predictable routes from Kuwait.
- # We believe that it will be far easier to form a broad-based coalition if the coalition is operating under the auspices of the Security Council, but even if the Security Council's sanction is not obtainable, it will still be easier to form a broad-based coalition if we have worked in earnest with the Security Council, only to have Saddam Hussein remain defiant and uncooperative. The coalition countries with us on the take-off are likely to be with us on the landing and partners in our effort to stabilize Iraq in the aftermath of any war.
- # We remain concerned that planning for the aftermath -- humanitarian assistance, reconstruction, and governance --

remains insufficient. As we have argued since last fall, such plans should be in an advanced stage before commencement of any conflict. The transition from combat operations to stabilization could be swift in many regions of Iraq, requiring ready-to-go plans and the coordination of many governmental and non-governmental elements that will play a role in these efforts. We know that your Administration has made progress in this effort, but additional time would enhance our readiness for these contingencies, and would allow your Administration time to brief Congress on post-conflict planning.

We urge you to continue with the arms inspection process so long as it holds reasonable promise of success and provides the tactical and strategic benefits described above.

Respectfully,

Rep. Ike Skelton
Rep. John Spratt