CHAPTER 3

"Sanctions with Inspectors"

Convincing Iraq to Come Clean

Iraq is a case of successful nonproliferation, yet the saga of Iraqi nonproliferation is an undoubted tragedy. The 1990–91 Gulf War interrupted a serious Iraqi crash program to enrich uranium for a nuclear weapon. In its wake, Saddam Hussein made significant concessions by destroying his stocks of chemical and biological weapons, admitting UN inspectors, and accepting continuous monitoring. But Iraq's coercers never appreciated how successful their coercive nonproliferation policies had been and so squeezed Iraq ever more until its leadership disengaged. Saddam sought sanctions relief by publicly conceding only those aspects of his WMD programs that coercers already knew about and secretly destroying the rest. Saddam and his advisers then made fewer concessions to coercion over time as they came to perceive that no amount of compliance would end sanctions (see table 3.1).

Scholarly breakthroughs in accounting for the Iraqi perspective have been possible since the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, when coalition forces captured many official records of the Saddam regime and shipped them to the United States. Saddam had made a habit of recording high-level deliberations with his advisers. These archival records shed rare light on the perspectives of a direct target of coercive threats.

Improving Existing Explanations

The lens of the assurance dilemma revises several conventional wisdoms about Iraqi proliferation. First, common explanations for Saddam Hussein's defiance of coercion point to threat credibility and severity. Sanctions were not tight enough, especially during the Bill Clinton administration, some argue.[1] Saddam and corrupt elites were not hurting because they passed on the pain to regular Iraqis and hoarded wealth for themselves. The UN's

Table 3.1 Iraq

Date	*Concessions*	*Threat credibility*	*Threat severity*	*Assurance credibility*	*Consistent with assurance dilemma?*
1981	No	High	Low	Low	✓
1991	Yes	High	High	High	✓
1991–93	Yes	High	High	Medium	✓
1994	No	High	High	Low	✓
1995	Yes	High	Medium	Medium	✓
1996–98	No	High	Medium	Low	✓
2002	Yes[a]	Higher	High	Low	×
2003	No	Higher	Higher	Lower	✓[b]

[a] Saddam readmitted inspectors, but there was no longer an actual program to concede.

[b] The magnitude of coercer demands was also an impediment to coercion after 1998.

Oil-for-Food Programme simply opened a loophole through which Saddam siphoned aid.[2] Others argue that Saddam perceived the United States to be casualty averse and therefore not credibly willing to use military force beyond occasional air strikes.[3] Or perhaps Saddam was willing to bear the costs of punishment in pursuit of an all-consuming goal of acquiring a nuclear weapon. These arguments contend that Iraqi behavior was driven by a fear of punishment. Coercion would have succeeded if only sanctions were tougher or the threat of force was more credible. Thus, speech evidence questioning the credibility or severity of compellent threats should accompany Iraqi defiance.

These explanations are unsatisfying against the empirical record—they are insufficient to explain the failures of coercion. Saddam and his coterie certainly insulated themselves from the harm that sanctions caused to the Iraqi people, but they did not think that the costs of sanctions were worth paying. They simply could not figure out how to have them removed. Coercive assurance provides a more compelling explanation. The assurance dilemma reveals in Iraqi documents perceptions of the unconditional nature of threats that accompanied defiance.

Second, some argue that Saddam was just irrational.[4] A mercurial dictator surrounded by sycophants and advisers too afraid to tell him the truth might make irrational choices. It would certainly seem crazy to declare victory after the Gulf War or to think that Iraq could defeat the United States in a ground war, as Saddam did.[5] But this view is also belied by the extensive documentary records available after the 2003 invasion and occupation. Saddam and his advisers did recognize the credibility and severity of imposed and threatened punishments, and they genuinely sought relief. Their behavior was affected by cost-benefit manipulations. A softer version of this irrationality argument in the literature has focused on misperceptions between Iraq and the United States, especially the failure of intelligence in

seeing a WMD program where there was none.[6] These arguments are no doubt true as applied to the United States, but I find more rationality on the Iraqi side about signals between a coercer and target. Moreover, in contrast to arguments that see a commitment problem in Saddam's inability to commit to not developing WMDs in the future, I find a commitment problem on behalf of the United States not to punish Iraq regardless of its behavior.[7] The chief obstacle to full WMD transparency was convincing Baghdad that sanctions could ever in fact be lifted.

Third, some argue that the United States asked for too much. US demands to cooperate with inspectors were perceived to be aimed at undermining Saddam's rule.[8] Asking for lists of former WMD facilities was akin to asking for a targeting list for air strikes. And as the inspections progressed, they requested access to buildings and information that were part of Saddam's personal security apparatus. The magnitude of coercer demands was too great to comply. I find evidence in favor of this explanation later in the 1990s, especially after 1998. By then the Clinton administration made it known, even more than it had previously been signaled, that US policy was in fact aimed at the removal of Saddam and that sanctions would remain as long as he was in power. Prior to 1998, there was still hope or at least discussion within Saddam's inner circle about whether and how to get UN sanctions lifted. This explanation holds some weight through the lead-up to the 2003 war as well.

Fourth, an explanation that took hold after the 2003 invasion for the failure of Saddam to admit his actual dismantlement of a WMD program was that he sought to deter domestic uprisings or regional rivals—Iran and Israel—by maintaining the fiction that his capabilities were intact.[9] I find no new evidence for this explanation. Instead, I find that Iraqi officials did not wish to come clean out of a fear of greater punishment if they did reveal their misdeeds. Blaming piecemeal Iraqi admissions about its own disarmament on third-party audiences needlessly complicates the plain evidence that Iraq simply did not want to admit the extent of its past WMD programs to coercers themselves. After a short post–Gulf War period of hedging to preserve the option of reconstituting his destroyed WMD programs, Saddam changed his strategy to maximize, as he saw it, the likelihood of having sanctions lifted. Part of this plan involved destroying and hiding evidence of past proliferation to speed the UN's declaration of Iraq's clean bill of health. Every new admission, Iraqis feared, would anger, provoke, and sustain suspicious coercers while making sympathetic defenders at the UN more hesitant to speak up. Using the assurance dilemma as a lens, I trace a clear pattern of Iraqi leadership endeavoring to admit only that which they thought that their coercers already knew. And when confronted with new evidence or the defection of Saddam's son-in-law Hussein Kamil in 1995 that leaked substantial new evidence of past programs, Iraq made new admissions to try to satisfy coercers. Most of the time,

information asymmetries between coercer and target exacerbated the assurance dilemma and kept the Iraqis from conceding new admissions. Ultimately, Saddam's fears of the consequences of making concessions that revealed new information to coercers were proven right. He was damned if he did and damned if he didn't.

Through this line of reasoning, this chapter builds on Målfrid Braut-Hegghammer's concept of the "cheater's dilemma," whereby the fragmented Iraqi bureaucracy struggled to coordinate compliance internally, as underlings feared that making new disclosures, even when authorized, would anger an unpredictable Saddam.[10] Braut-Hegghammer's story alone lays too much of the tragedy at the feet of internal Iraqi mismanagement when coercers themselves did not appreciate the assurance dilemma fears that kept Iraq from admitting the extent of its concessions before 1995 and could not see transparency for what it was after 1995. My argument builds on Braut-Hegghammer's to illuminate the ways in which the cheater's dilemma is also a problem of coercive assurance in a strategic interaction. In other words, it takes two.

This chapter offers a brief review of Iraq's nuclear program before describing the nature of international compellent demands directed at Baghdad. It shows that while Saddam and his advisers perceived many of these threats to be credible, they chose to defy when the threats were not perceived as conditional. I examine four phases of the case: the Israeli counterproliferation air strikes in 1981, the Gulf War, inspections throughout the 1990s, and the lead-up to the US invasion in 2003.

Iraq's Nuclear Program

After a 1958 coup, Iraq moved to secure enhanced nuclear assistance from the Soviet Union, eventually procuring a Soviet research reactor in 1959.[11] The reactor was constructed at Tuwaitha. Another coup in 1968 brought the Baath Party to power under the leadership of Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr and his deputy, Saddam Hussein. Some scientists at Tuwaitha began to discuss the option of a nuclear weapons program in the early 1970s, but no such order was given by Saddam until he came to power.[12]

Around 1973 Iraq developed an intent to hedge, as Saddam reorganized the Iraqi Atomic Energy Commission (IAEC) and told a group of scientists to explore the full nuclear fuel cycle. As part of this exploration, Iraq asked the Soviet Union for upgrades to the research reactor at Tuwaitha. Iraq also acquired a complex—dubbed Osirak—with two new types of research reactors from France, plus laboratory-scale reprocessing equipment. It initially asked to purchase a gas-cooled, graphite-moderated power reactor, which raised eyebrows for its weapons potential.[13] Iraq similarly asked Italy for proliferation-prone technologies, such as a reprocessing plant, but

settled for radiochemical and uranium fuel laboratories.[14] The reactors were placed under IAEA safeguards.

In a 1978 speech, Saddam articulated his ambition to have a nuclear option, saying, "We should generate the unusual capabilities of the Arab nation, including the capability to have a bomb, and that is no longer monopolized science. The atom is widespread and thorough science, and any country can produce the atomic bomb."[15] The following month, Saddam complained in a meeting that Israel's monopoly on nuclear weapons in the region allowed Israel to draw "red lines" and coerce Arab states.[16] Once Saddam came to power in 1979, he finally gave the order to explore a nuclear weapons option.[17] At an IAEC meeting in late 1979, the director of the Nuclear Research Center at Tuwaitha communicated to Iraqi scientific leaders that Saddam wanted the program to take a more "strategic" direction. Braut-Hegghammer reports that the scientists understood this to mean nuclear weapons.[18]

Opponents Mix Brute Force and Coercion

ISRAELI BRUTE FORCE

Iraq's progress exploring the nuclear fuel cycle alarmed the Israelis, who began to covertly target Iraqi scientists and equipment for murder and sabotage.[19] Israel first detected Iraqi nuclear intentions in 1974. After a 1978 Israeli cabinet meeting, officials were instructed to "delay the Iraqi nuclear program by all possible means."[20] In 1979 Israeli saboteurs attacked the facilities in southern France that had produced the reactor cores shipped to Iraq. They also destroyed the offices of SNIA-Techint in Rome, where Iraq's separation plant originated.[21]

These efforts culminated in the 1981 overt bombing of the Osirak reactor.[22] Israel privately considered the use of force as early as 1977 but did not make any public threats before launching the 1981 attack.[23] Yet Saddam perceived coercion. In September 1980 he said, "The Arabs, the Zionists, and the Americans are going to work hard against us because they are afraid, which is a problem."[24] Moreover, Braut-Hegghammer writes that the Iraqi regime "feared that Israel would not allow an Arab state to acquire nuclear weapons and believed Tel Aviv was prepared to use force to prevent this from happening."[25] Iraq prepared to withstand both conventional and nuclear strikes from Israel. This was the perception of a credible threat, but it did not dampen Iraq's nuclear ambitions.

Israel bombed the Osirak reactor complex on June 7, 1981.[26] Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin held a press conference two days after the raid and drew a clear red line: Iraq would not be permitted to develop a nuclear weapon. After invoking the Holocaust, Begin said, "Tell your friend, tell

anyone you meet, we shall defend our people with all means at our disposal. We shall not allow any enemy to develop weapons of mass destruction turned against us."[27] In a subsequent interview with CBS News, Begin reminded viewers that "this attack will be a precedent for every future government in Israel. . . . Every future prime minister will act, in similar circumstances, in the same way."[28]

SADDAM DEFIANT

Saddam was defiant after the Israeli attack. He concluded that the strike revealed that Iraq should devote even greater resources to the nuclear program.[29] Indeed, he claimed that he had "long expected" the strike and that future nuclear installations would be buried.[30] This translated as well into organizational action, as the scientists in charge sat down to develop concrete plans for nuclear weapons development.[31] The real effect was of pushing the program underground.[32] For example, Saddam instructed his scientific team after the raid to avoid sensitive foreign assistance that could tip off intelligence agencies.

Avoiding foreign procurement foreclosed the plutonium route to the bomb as well as large-scale centrifuge uranium enrichment. Iraq pursued multiple enrichment pathways, including electromagnetic isotope separation (EMIS), laser isotope separation, gaseous diffusion, and centrifuge enrichment. The IAEC was reorganized around this new effort in January 1982.[33] The EMIS path made the most progress, and in January 1986 Iraq successfully separated uranium isotopes.[34]

At a meeting between Saddam and senior IAEC members in April 1985, Vice Chairman Humam Abdul Khaliq made a promise: the nuclear program would fulfill its objectives by 1990. He did this apparently without consulting the other IAEC leaders.[35] By 1987 a special organization was formed at Tuwaitha—Group 4—dedicated to building a bomb.[36] Then Saddam made an ill-timed decision: in August 1990 he invaded Kuwait. The war came at the wrong time for a nuclear program that was making significant progress, successfully hidden. As a last-ditch effort, Hussein Kamil ordered a "crash" nuclear weapons effort after Saddam invaded Kuwait. The goal was to build a bomb in six months.[37]

THE GULF WAR

Despite a massive military buildup in the region and crippling sanctions, multilateral efforts could not compel Saddam to leave Kuwait. Though this effort was not aimed at nonproliferation coercion and therefore falls just outside of the scope of this chapter, its parallel exposure of the assurance dilemma is worthy of note. As Paul Avey concludes, "Saddam and his lieutenants believed that even if they withdrew from Kuwait, the American

military threat would remain."[38] On October 6 Saddam described his thinking to a Soviet interlocutor: withdrawal or no withdrawal, "you cannot bring an end to the American siege of Iraq."[39] "If America decided on war it will go to war whether I withdraw from Kuwait or not," he concluded.[40] And up to the last moment before hostilities began, on January 14, 1991, Saddam told Yemeni officials, "We have no guarantees if we withdraw. . . . Why should we surrender at the last moment?"[41] US air strikes began on January 17, and ground forces entered Kuwait and Iraq on February 24.

Saddam's invasion of Kuwait proved to be a strategic blunder. US brute force set back his nuclear program that had been on the verge of scaling up successful uranium enrichment.[42] While the counterfactual is impossible to know with confidence, Braut-Hegghammer and Gudrun Harrer both conclude that Iraq would likely have acquired nuclear weapons in the 1990s had Saddam not invaded Kuwait.[43] Iraq's reconstituted nuclear infrastructure, including the Tuwaitha facility, was destroyed by the United States during the Gulf War. Indeed, one of the US war aims was to degrade Iraq's ability to build nuclear weapons.

The United States was surprised to discover the extent of the Iraqi nuclear program after Operation Desert Storm.[44] Nor did Israeli intelligence know about Iraq's nuclear progress in the 1980s, only first beginning to hear about the clandestine enrichment program in 1989.[45] Reflecting later on the IAEA's failure to detect violations in Iraq, Director General Mohamed ElBaradei described his organization as "a beat cop with a blindfold."[46] The IAEA and coercers had been deceived.

Inspections and Coercion throughout the 1990s

After the Gulf War, the United States and Iraq engaged in nearly a decade of frustrating coercive diplomacy. UNSC Resolution 687 established UNSCOM—the UN Special Commission—and tasked with it verifying the dismantlement of the Iraqi chemical, biological, and missile programs. The IAEA, through its newly established Iraq Action Team, oversaw dismantlement of its nuclear program.[47] Resolution 687 prohibited Iraq from possessing any nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons or missiles above a range of 150 kilometers or facilities for their production.

Severe threats backed up these dismantlement demands, and the Iraqi government knew the stakes of not cooperating. Legally, WMD disarmament was a criterion for the Gulf War cease-fire, so a breach of Resolution 687 would void the cease-fire and default back to a state of war—a clear military threat. Painful economic sanctions also supported the coercive strategy. Iraq's $180 billion gross domestic product in 1990 tumbled to below half a billion in 1991 and recovered to just $20 billion by 1998.[48] Prior to its invasion of Kuwait, Iraq had relied on imports for 70 percent of its

food, medicine, and agricultural chemicals.[49] UNSC Resolution 661, passed on the day of Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, had imposed comprehensive multilateral sanctions and frozen all of Iraq's foreign assets. After the war ended, the sanctions remained. Resolution 687, passed on April 3, 1991, tied the sanctions to Iraqi cooperation with WMD inspectors.

Saddam's Iraq wrestled in private with how to respond throughout the 1990s. Four periods stand out. First, after displaying short-lived instincts to defy, Saddam ordered the destruction of all WMD stocks and from 1991 to 1993 attempted to hide the existence of such programs. Inspections then began to show a pattern of revealing only that which Iraq believed that its coercers already knew of its past program, Saddam fearing that revealing new information would only make his coercers seek to punish him more. Second, when his concessions did not result in sanctions relief, he lashed out in 1994 and attempted to manufacture a crisis on the Kuwait border aimed at breaking the coalition of sanctions supporters. Third, in 1995 the defection of Hussein Kamil was an inflection point in Iraqi strategy. Saddam came clean about the full extent of programs that he feared Kamil had now divulged to his coercers. Finally, from 1996 to 1998 Saddam became increasingly convinced that sanctions would never be lifted. He ultimately kicked out inspectors, believing that their presence, no matter his cooperation, could never relieve pressure on his regime. Throughout, the assurance dilemma was the primary driver of Saddam's behavior.

1991–93: DESTRUCTION AND HIDING

In the immediate aftermath of the Gulf War, Saddam was initially inclined to resume the nuclear project. "Perhaps emboldened by the vague terms of the cease-fire, Saddam ordered an immediate resumption of the centrifuge program," recalled the nuclear scientist Mahdi Obeidi, who ran Iraq's centrifuge research program. "Hussein Kamel [*sic*] became furious as I've ever seen him, urging us to redouble our efforts to produce enough enriched uranium for a nuclear weapon as soon as possible."[50] Equipment was brought out of hiding.

Coercion quickly changed Saddam's mind. Resolution 687 threatened renewed force, which Saddam wished to avoid. He then chose not to reconstitute old programs and instead allow inspectors into the country. But first he issued a broad order to destroy and cover up past WMD work,[51] which he and his advisers expected would make verification a relatively simple and short affair. In doing so, he followed the advice of Hussein Kamil, who, in Braut-Hegghammer's words, successfully argued that "Iraq should declare only what the UN and the IAEA already knew about."[52] In the spring of 1991, Kamil told Jafar D. Jafar, who was preparing the disclosure to the IAEA, "Don't write about anything except the activities that are known already."[53] Admitting to proscribed weapons would, in the view of

Minister of Foreign Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz, grant the United States a pretext to attack Iraq.[54] A 2004 CIA assessment agreed in retrospect that "Iraq initially tried to end sanctions without fully revealing WMD programs. . . . Iraqi leaders were optimistic that inspections and sanctions would end quickly. Their approach to inspections was to make sure that nothing was found to contradict their initial false declarations while they destroyed contradictory evidence" and thus "make its inaccurate assertions of no programs correct in a legalistic sense."[55] Compliance, in other words, included hope for relief from pressure—sanctions and looming war.

Iraq's strategy was informed by its perception of UNSCOM. The CIA described Iraqis as "shocked by the unexpected aggressiveness."[56] They feared handing over new evidence of their WMD programs that would enrage or empower the United States to make the case of further punishment and cause sympathetic UNSC member states to balk in their defense of Iraq. Saddam himself articulated his intuition on the assurance dilemma in a recorded meeting with advisers in August 1991. It was a feeling that would only grow deeper over the decade:

> SADDAM: One of the mistakes some people make is that when the enemy has decided to hurt you, you believe there is a chance to decrease the harm by acting in a certain way, but it won't. The harm won't be less.
> MALE 1: The enemy is determined; he has a plan he is following.
> SADDAM: And he is determined to follow his plan. . . . What did the Americans show us as a possible sign for partially decreasing their harm? We didn't see anything coming from them. I have given them everything. I mean, I have given them everything: the missiles, and the chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. They didn't give you anything in exchange, not even a piece of bread. They didn't give us anything in exchange, well, they have become worse.[57]

Saddam appears to be referring to his dismantlement of his WMD programs. In 2004 the CIA undertook a series of intelligence assessments called the "Iraq WMD Retrospective Series," which aimed in part to understand "how the Iraqis perceived and reacted to the international inspection process."[58] Among its key findings, the CIA's Office of Iraq Analysis assessed that "in 1991, Iraq secretly destroyed or dismantled most undeclared items and records that could have been used to validate the unilateral destruction, leaving Baghdad unable to provide convincing proof when it later tried to demonstrate compliance."[59]

Iraq's strategy of hiding its past proliferation involved a difficult balancing act between admitting what it thought coercers already knew and covering up what they did not. The Iraqis navigated it ham-handedly. At times, the hiding goal resulted in belligerence with inspectors. UNSCOM inspectors were blocked from multiple site visits, including the infamous

"parking lot incident" in September 1991, when Iraqis attempted to prevent inspectors from leaving a facility with sensitive documents containing details of Iraq's nuclear weapons efforts.[60] Suspicious facilities and documents also proved relatively easy to come by. UNSCOM's first conclusion in mid-1991 was that Iraq had not come fully clean in its declaration to the UN of WMD facilities.

True to a pattern exhibited throughout the Iraq WMD saga, Saddam continued to admit that which coercers could show that they knew already. For instance, in 1991 Iraq's Oversight Committee admitted its plans for a centrifuge facility at Al-Furat. Obeidi recalls that it did so "faced with evidence presented by inspectors."[61] The disclosure revealed Saddam's ambitions for large-scale centrifuge enrichment. That same year the Oversight Committee again responded to "evidence provided by inspectors" by revealing the Al-Atheer facility in Murayyib, where Iraq had conducted nuclear weaponization research.[62] When David Kay and his inspections team presented a choice between providing "better answers" on the past purpose of the facility or the destruction of the eight buildings at Al-Atheer, "rather than concede his intentions to produce nuclear weapons, [Saddam] granted permission to destroy al-Atheer," recalls Obeidi.[63]

When Saddam and advisers were reasonably confident that their secrets were safe, they did not admit past wrongdoing. In an example from Iraq's proscribed missile program, the CIA after 2003 discovered that he "hid documentation related to the consumption and unilateral destruction of Scud propellant because it would show that Iraq had produced its own oxidizer for its Scud-type ballistic missiles before 1991."[64] Obeidi was also tasked with the cover-up of the past purpose of the Engineering Design Center at Rashdiya (Iraq's centrifuge laboratory), which involved the extraordinary task of tearing it down to studs, removing topsoil, and constructing "an exact replica of the facility" without detectable traces of enriched uranium.[65] While his initial understanding for the cover-ups after the Gulf War was that Saddam sought to reconstitute the nuclear program at a later date, Obeidi concluded by 1993 that "as the inspectors had effectively denuded Iraq's machinery for building nuclear weapons, the deceptions had become less of a measure to preserve the program and more of a reaction against foreign pressure."[66]

These pendular cover-ups and revelations were a pattern that US officials labeled "cheat and retreat."[67] Indeed, they were interpreted by coercers as signs of Iraqi intransigence and duplicity. Yet the assurance dilemma suggests that this is the role of information in coercion. When targets think that revelations will cause coercers to lose control and punish unconditionally, they defy. When coercers share knowledge with their targets, we are more likely to see concessions.

As ad hoc as their admissions were, Iraqi leadership truly thought, in the assessment of the CIA, that it took "steps during this period that the regime

thought would alleviate Iraq's isolation."[68] Saddam did perceive the potential for sanctions relief. As another example, in November 1993, after objecting to it for two years as a breach of sovereignty, Iraq complied with UNSC Resolution 715 and accepted long-term UN monitoring of key facilities. In the CIA's retrospective assessment, Baghdad "hope[d] that this step would lead to the immediate lifting of sanctions."[69] It did not. Soon Saddam grew frustrated and grasped for other means of acquiring sanctions relief.

1994: LASHING OUT

Saddam lashed out in 1994 by trying to manufacture a crisis on the Kuwait border. He did so despite the pain of continued economic sanctions and despite the credibility of US threats of military force.[70] He hatched his plan after the September UNSCOM report disappointed hopes for sanctions relief. The idea was to move ground forces to the border and compel his coercers to lift sanctions in exchange for his backing down from a reinvasion. Saddam felt that there was some hope of success because of cracks that were emerging between the permanent members of the UNSC. The United States and the United Kingdom remained steadfast in their belief that paragraph 22 of Resolution 687, which provided for the lifting of sanctions on the approval of the UNSC, would be invoked upon verification of Iraq's complete disarmament.[71] France and Russia, however, supported lifting sanctions a little at a time to reward partial compliance.[72] It was this daylight that Saddam sought to exploit. In a recorded October 1994 meeting with political advisers, Saddam described his plan:

> We have moved two divisions. One of them is a Republican Guard division to Basra, and we have followed that with a third. This third division we have moved is what has made the Americans place its army on alert, because this means there are four Republican Guard divisions close to each other. . . . Together with the presence of army capabilities in depth, it became apparent to them [the Americans] that such a capability can carry out a serious action, I mean, this action will move the situation. . . . There is no idea that could serve the action of lifting the sanctions that the mind could come up with, without placing it in its correct context. . . . I have spoken about mobilization and I believe that mobilization must continue because the sanctions continue, and because the alternatives we could choose if we found out that the mean—or other means—are incapable of achieving the objective, our clear objective in this phase, which is the lifting of the sanction phase.[73]

Saddam hoped that UNSC members more willing to work with Iraq—France, China, and Russia—could help to turn the provoked crisis into sanctions relief. The United States resisted and managed to hold together the sanctions regime. Saddam backed down.

In the aftermath, Saddam's meeting with his advisers displayed even more skepticism consistent with the assurance dilemma. In early 1995, for instance, when Tariq Aziz briefed Saddam on questions from UNSCOM director Rolf Ekéus and the inspectors about procurement for the missile program, Saddam interrupted, frustrated with entangled demands: "Here we go again, we are going back to the missile issue? . . . When we close this file, then start looking for its key, then this means that it was not closed!"[74] He thought that his coercers were reneging on their implied coercive assurance. Later in the meeting when the biological weapons facility inspections came up for discussion as well, an incredulous Saddam bemoaned, "I am concerned that all of this is nothing but excuses." Aziz, while optimistic that the missile issue could be resolved, was similarly skeptical about US willingness to lift sanctions and replied that "when the technical and legal excuses are removed from America, then America will play a political role and say, 'I will not suggest lifting the sanctions against Iraq for political reasons,' ha, for reasons neither related to Ekéus nor to [inaudible]."[75] In a meeting the following June, Saddam and his advisers continued to feel that ongoing inspections became merely "a cover to extend the blockade [sanctions]."[76] In a meeting with Saddam, science adviser and later Iraq's liaison with UN weapons inspectors Amir Hamudi Hassan Al-Sa'adi compared sanctions to the harrowing Iran-Iraq War of 1980–88: "Even with the war going on between Iraq and Iran, it was not foreseen that the war would take so long. It was like lifting sanctions. Every year, we'd think it's coming this year. So every year, from even the moment it started, the Iraq-Iran war was going to finish this year, this year, and so on."[77] Saddam considered himself to be bereft of favorable options in the face of compellence.

Saddam and his advisers also questioned the likelihood of sanctions relief because of the role the United States as spoiler to the partial relief preferred by some members of the UNSC. Saddam assessed Rolf Ekéus's intentions:

> In this period, Ekeus is also interested in sending messages that would reassure us of their intentions, because when he speaks with non-aligned nations, he knows that we will hear about such discussions. . . . When he speaks with the Russians, he knows that we will hear about such discussions one way or another. He is afraid that April will come and Iraq has not received anything yet. At that time, Iraq will stand up and say, "Look we have accomplished all these achievements, but we did not receive anything in return, we do not have anything. Then we will review all of our previous positions."[78]

But Washington lingered as a spoiler: "The Americans are pressuring him more than he can stand," Tariq Aziz assessed.[79] When April came around, Saddam was indeed disappointed in the new UNSCOM report

that among other gaps included suspicions that Iraq was hiding a biological weapons program.

1995: SHARED KNOWLEDGE AND HUSSEIN KAMIL'S DEFECTION

Records of meetings among Saddam Hussein's inner circle are especially valuable evidence at inflection points that affect a variable associated with coercive control and the assurance dilemma. The defection of Hussein Kamil in August 1995 can perform one such test of theory. Kamil's sudden treachery leveled the information gap between Iraq and inspectors. Saddam much more freely made concessions that he no longer thought revealed new information to his coercers.

In the spring and summer of 1995, prior to Kamil's defection, Saddam had grown more defiant of and angrier about lingering issues in UNSCOM reporting. He was not inclined to make more concessions, nor did the threat environment suggest that he would. In April 1995 the UNSC, under pressure from China, Russia, and France to avert the humanitarian suffering of the Iraqi people living under sanctions, approved the Oil-for-Food Programme. Iraq could access up to $1 billion every ninety days to purchase food and medicine. The credibility of severe economic coercion against Iraq was declining. The CIA assessed that "by the summer of 1995, international will to sustain sanctions and inspections was dwindling."[80] Yet Saddam declined the lifeline. In July he responded daringly with his own threat to cut off cooperation with UN inspections if sanctions were not lifted completely.[81]

Before the defection of Hussein Kamil, what coercers knew of Iraq's WMD programs was discussed intently at a May 1995 meeting between Saddam and high-ranking officials. His advisers recommended admitting what coercers knew, without sharing new details. Tariq Aziz was not confident that Iraq could please the Americans with transparency, but he felt that Iraq could admit enough to satisfy members of the UNSC who were more sympathetic to relieving sanctions in part. Especially, he advised admitting that Iraq had had a past biological weapons program.[82] "Yesterday's [UNSCOM] file frustrated Russia and France because they saw a large gap they could not fight," Aziz argued. "Therefore, I have stated that if we solve the biological program problem . . . the French and the Russians will lay their plans on the table, and the Americans would discuss their plans, of course. They would then say, 'there is a point here and a point there,' at which point the serious discussion would start." Hussein Kamil also suggested some revelations but cautioned against too much sunlight:

> Sir, I will repeat, is it better for us to announce it or stay secretive? . . . Sir, about the nuclear program, we say that we have revealed everything. In addition, we have an unannounced problem with the nuclear program, and

> I think they know about it because there are working teams that are working and some of these teams are not known to anyone. . . . Truthfully, Sir, we have to be honest so that when the Resolution is issued, it will not only be based on the biological program because if it were, it would [include] the missiles tomorrow, and the nuclear program would be the day after, and so on.[83]

But Kamil went on about biological weaponization: "If we continue to be silent about the issue at hand, I must say that it is in our best interest not to reveal it." He advised seeking a workaround to account for the seventeen tons of biological agents that Iraq had already destroyed without admitting their sophistication or that they had been armed in warheads. He suggested, "Instead of us admitting to the biological programs, Sir, we should ask the specialists: 'How can we close [the issue of] the 17 tons? We do this and that and these are all the details that we have. How can we know when this file will be closed?'"[84] In July 1995 Iraq duly acknowledged a biological weapons program consistent with the evidence presented by UNSCOM but denied that agents had in fact been weaponized.

Everything changed on August 7, 1995, when Hussein Kamil fled to Jordan. In a matter of days, he was spilling the beans in interviews with UN inspectors and US intelligence. His revelations included the biological weaponization program that had produced warheads for Scud missiles in 1990, the crash program to obtain a nuclear weapon prior to the Gulf War, and details of an illicit procurement network in Europe.[85] A list of his revelations is included in an UNSCOM report from October 1995.[86] Baghdad scrambled to assess the damage. "Even the highest levels of leadership were unsure what Kamil could reveal," the CIA assessed.[87] Saddam put his internal security apparatus to work, and on August 14 Husam Muhammad Amin al-Yasin, the director of the National Monitoring Directorate, produced a report detailing the weapons programs of which Kamil had knowledge and that had or had not been declared to inspectors.[88] Iraq came clean about all of them. Obeidi recounts the manner of the admissions that Iraq attempted to pin on Kamil alone:

> Knowing that the game was up, the Oversight Committee moved to preempt the anticipated inquiries from the inspectors. They collected many documents from the WMD programs, along with remaining scattered materials such as a few tons of maraging steel and centrifuge jackets. They packed wooden and metal boxes full of microfiches, computer diskettes, videotapes, and photographs that had been kept hidden from inspectors throughout the early 1990s. Then they drove them to a chicken farm owned by Hussein Kamel in the Baghdad suburb of Haidar and locked all of the boxes in a henhouse. On August 18, an SSO [Special Security Organization] operative hinted to inspectors that they should investigate Hussein Kamel's chicken farm.[89]

According to the CIA retrospective in 2004, Kamil's defection was "the key turning point in Iraq's decision to cooperate more with inspections."[90] With the benefit of postwar clarity, the agency recognized "that the movement of documents to Husayn Kamil's chicken farm and their turnover to the UN represented a genuine attempt to come clean on programs albeit while saving face. . . . Captured documentary evidence and interviews support the idea that major concealment operations ended in 1995."[91] The Iraqi leadership had (correctly) "feared that Kamil . . . would reveal additional undisclosed information," and orders now came down to "release information to the UN without restrictions."[92] In sober meetings with Saddam in the fall after Kamil's defection, advisers demonstrated concern about admitting what had been proven already—for example, "concerning the biological weapons program." Tariq Aziz briefed Saddam in November: "It has been proven that we produced 200 bombs, and we must prove that they have been destroyed."[93] Iraq in November also finally felt the need to accept the Oil-for-Food Programme.

Yet Iraq's fears, driven by the assurance dilemma, came true in the wake of Saddam's new concessions to inspectors. Coercers did lose control of themselves. "Some of the information revealed in 1995, such as a more extensive weaponization effort for BW [biological warfare] aerial bombs, missile warheads, and spray tanks, was not previously suspected and surprised the UN, provoking deep suspicion of future Iraqi behaviors and declarations," the CIA assessed.[94] New information revealed through concessions "strengthened the West's perception of Iraq as a successful and efficient deceiver"[95] and "reinforced the prevailing analytical paradigm that the Iraqis had been successful in hiding evidence of significant WMD programs, proved that they had not intended to cooperate with the UN, and would only reveal or dismantle programs after being caught in a lie."[96] This was the wrong conclusion. Not only were the Iraqis attempting to come clean in 1995, but they were also continuing a pattern, consistent with the assurance dilemma: the Iraqis would reveal what coercers knew of their past behavior. By 1992 they had already destroyed their program. Yet they saw a path to sanctions relief through hiding their guilt from coercers who could use new evidence against them. Shared knowledge consistently led to concessions in Iraq.

Bush administration officials also learned the wrong lessons from episodes like the defection of Hussein Kamil and the chicken farm revelations. Vice President Dick Cheney claimed that the events "should serve as a reminder to all that we often learn more as a result of defections than we learned from the inspection regime itself."[97] And Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld similarly said in December 2002 that "things have been found [in Iraq] not by discovery but through defectors."[98] These are misinterpretations of the case. Yes, defectors revealed information, but the Saddam regime followed up on these revelations with new concessions and

admissions. The target responded to the knowledge of its coercers. It was the assurance dilemma at work.

1996–98: KICKING OUT INSPECTORS

By the end of 1995, Iraqi elites had gleaned the lesson of the previous half-decade: compliance would not beget sanctions relief.[99] The assurance dilemma hardened. UNSCOM responded to the Kamil revelations with a new probe into the "concealment mechanisms" of the Iraqi regime, which included more requests to visit military facilities and Saddam's palaces. The Iraqis, according to the CIA, interpreted this "new investigation as proof that WMD was being used as a pretense to bring about regime change"[100] and "deepened their belief that inspections were politically motivated and would not lead to the end of sanctions."[101] Saddam on multiple occasions framed to his advisers the choice he faced: Iraq could either "have sanctions with inspectors or sanctions without inspectors."[102]

These sentiments were shared in meetings with advisers from November 1995 to January 1996. Some blamed inspectors' refusal to resolve technical issues on their personal greediness and desire to keep receiving high UN salaries.[103] Others perceived hostile domestic politics in the United States that would have hindered their coercers from providing relief anyway. Vice President Taha Ma'ruf, speaking at a meeting with Saddam, reported that he sensed "the issue of implementing paragraph 22 [on sanctions relief] is no longer a technical or legal issue . . . rather a mere political issue, subject to the procedures and maneuvers of America in the next year. No matter how much we offer and cooperate and committees that come and go those people keep coming back. . . . They say something different every time or come up with a new way and so on."[104] Another of Iraq's three vice presidents, Taha Yassin Ramadan, concurred but assessed that US domestic politics would impede sanctions relief: "We are certain that in the political atmosphere now, America, and the elections, paragraph 22 cannot be imposed."[105]

The White House indeed would have faced domestic opposition to any sanctions relief. As Lee Feinstein, the director of policy planning at the State Department, recalled, "We had a hostile Congress that would have leapt down our throats had we drastically loosened the sanctions."[106] Rolf Ekéus, in retrospect, concurred that "the biggest problem UNSCOM faced was selling cooperation to the Iraqis. . . . [Our strategy] would only work if sanctions could be credibly removed after Iraq was decreed free of WMD. However, lifting sanctions was politically untenable for the American leadership."[107] Still, these domestic impediments to coercive assurance were quickly overshadowed by an explicit evolution of US strategy from coercion toward brute force.

In its second term, the Clinton administration began to make more obvious its desire for regime change in Iraq—a problem of demand magnitude.

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright infamously called in March 1997 for "a change in Iraq's government" and a "successor regime" to Saddam's, whose "intentions will never be peaceful."[108] The problem of coercive assurance remained, too, as Albright reminded, "We do not agree with nations who argue that if Iraq complies with its obligations concerning weapons of mass destruction, sanctions should be lifted."[109] The Clinton administration dubbed the policy "keeping Saddam in his box." Moreover, in October 1998 Congress passed the Iraq Liberation Act, which declared that it was now the policy of the United States to overthrow the government of Saddam Hussein. Speaking at the signing ceremony, President Clinton declared that "the United States looks forward to a democratically supported regime that would permit us to enter into a dialogue leading to the reintegration of Iraq into normal international life."[110] There is no evidence that the Clinton administration thereafter grappled with the assurance dilemma. David Palkki and Shane Smith, in their assessment of the recordings of internal Iraqi decision-making, find that "Saddam and his advisors were perfectly aware of American leaders' statements indicating that the sanctions would remain as long as Saddam was in power, and suspected that no amount of Iraqi compliance would satisfy the United States."[111] The CIA retrospective agreed in 2004 that "passage of the Iraq Liberation Act by the US Congress enhanced Iraqi suspicions."[112]

On August 5, 1998, Iraq announced that it would cease cooperation with UNSCOM and the IAEA. It said that it would restart cooperation on November 14 after US and UK threats to attack but reversed itself again, and inspectors left the country on December 16 ahead of Operation Desert Fox. On December 17–20 US and UK air strikes targeted suspected nuclear sites in Iraq.[113]

The assurance dilemma best explains why Iraq kicked out inspectors, despite the obvious military consequences it would face. As the CIA in 2004 concluded, the belief "that Iraq would never get a clean bill of health from the UN . . . was one factor that prompted them to cease cooperation with the UN in August 1998."[114] The records of Saddam's meetings at the time demonstrate such frustrations. In a meeting one week before kicking out UNSCOM inspectors and precipitating the Operation Desert Fox bombings, Saddam complained of the sincerity of his coercers' demands: "Iraq implemented 95 percent of the resolutions. Isn't that what Ekeus said? As for the five percent, it might take another ten years without getting results. We hardly accomplished 95 percent in three years. So, where are we going to end up if we pursue the five percent? . . . I am afraid, comrades, after all I said that you might think we still have hidden chemical weapons, missiles and so forth. We have nothing; not even one screw."[115]

In a brief discussion of the credibility of US threats at the same meeting, Taha Ma'ruf argued that the United States would not invade because "the American reputation is fading now in Somalia and other places. The last

attack on Iraq raised a torrent of criticism even by their close allies." Saddam concurred that "a comprehensive war" against Iraq was unlikely, but he did perceive that bombing was likely in the absence of negotiation. Saddam came down in the end on the importance of the more specific US reputation in its dealings with Iraq: "Based on our experience, I would say the worst possibility is more likely to happen and therefore, you have to be prepared for the worst possibility."[116] Saddam chose the punishment over more compliance. Soon US missiles were flying as part of Operation Desert Fox.

When the dust settled, Iraq was no more willing to comply with coercion. In the perceptions of Mahdi Obeidi, "Operation Desert Fox was intended to force Iraq's full cooperation with the UN inspections. But it had the opposite result" inside Baghdad.[117] Saddam refused any more inspections. In the aftermath, Tariq Aziz echoed Saddam's assessment of coercive assurance in his justification for keeping inspectors out: "It was enough to have sanctions. To have inspectors as well had been too much."[118] Coercion fails if its target expects to be punished regardless of its behavior.

The 2003 Invasion

The pattern repeated itself one final time in the lead-up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The George W. Bush administration once more aimed to coerce Saddam. "Maybe if he thinks we'll overthrow him, he'll change," President Bush hypothesized in his office at Camp David in February 2002.[119] National security adviser and political scientist Condoleezza Rice told him that academics would call it "coercive diplomacy." She recalls that the president "loved the term."[120] Its implementation was the rub.

The United States relied on sticks alone, primarily through the mobilization of military power, and did little to appreciate or mitigate the assurance dilemma as it did so. Rumsfeld recalled of the strategy, "President Bush believed that the key to successful diplomacy with Saddam was a credible threat of military action. We hoped that the process of moving an increasing number of American forces into a position where they could attack Iraq might convince the Iraqis to end their defiance."[121] But it did not. In his study of the lead-up the Iraq War, the historian Melvyn Leffler aptly observed that the Bush administration's strategy of coercive diplomacy "was adopted without resolving its priority—regime change or WMD elimination, without a careful assessment of the diplomatic tactics and political inducements that might be necessary to make it a success, and without a thorough examination of its consequences should it not work."[122] "Coercive diplomacy had the air of a cynical exercise," Steve Coll similarly concluded in a thorough history of the period, "a test designed for Saddam to fail."[123]

The assurance dilemma does not explain why Saddam readmitted inspectors after the UNSC passed Resolution 1441 in November 2002.[124] The head of the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC), Hans Blix, recalls an "almost frantic" effort to seek evidence and provide interviewees to UNSCOM's successors in UNMOVIC.[125] This is a test this book's theory fails. But Saddam had little to show, having already disarmed. Inspectors concerned themselves with dismantling Al-Fatah and Al-Samoud II missiles that exceeded the permissible range by just thirty kilometers. The evidence suggests that there was indeed nothing that Saddam could have done to avoid a US invasion.

Internally, President Bush seemed less committed to sincere coercion. In March 2002 he reportedly "waved his hand dismissively" to summarize his Iraq policy to a group of senators: "Fuck Saddam, we're taking him out."[126] In April 2002 Bush said in a press interview, "I have made up my mind that Saddam needs to go."[127] And US diplomat Richard Haass recalls a conversation about Iraq with Condoleezza Rice in July 2002 in which Rice interrupted him to say, "You can save your breath, Richard. The President has already made up his mind on Iraq," which Haass interpreted as though "the way she said it made clear [Bush] had decided to go to war."[128]

Still, on the war's doorstep, the president's advisers blamed the failure of coercive diplomacy on inadequate threats. "There is still hope," Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz assessed in a speech to the Council on Foreign Relations in January 2003, "if Saddam is faced with a serious enough threat."[129] Years later, President Bush would reflect on his thinking on the eve of war, still puzzled. "If Saddam doesn't actually have WMD, why on earth would he subject himself to a war he will almost certainly lose?"[130] They did not appreciate how unconditional their threats were perceived to be.

As Saddam continued to defy, two sources of momentum also seemed to push the United States toward war. First, arguments about preserving a US reputation for making credible threats began to trickle into decision-making. In early January 2003 Bush said to Rice, "We're not winning. We're probably going to have to go to war." "You have to follow through on your threat," concurred Rice. "If you're going to carry out coercive diplomacy, you have to live with that decision."[131] Second, mobilized military power began to introduce into the dynamic bargaining process incentives to employ it. Having mobilized tens of thousands of troops in support of compellence, the Pentagon communicated to the White House in early 2003 that they could not stay forward-deployed and at a high level of readiness for the duration of the hot summer. If the United States was to go to war against Saddam, it would be better if that order came in the spring, so that fighting did not have to contend with the heat.[132]

Washington abandoned coercive diplomacy and went to war in March. Puzzlingly, the White House issued a final ultimatum forty-eight hours

before US forces began the invasion of Iraq.[133] The last concession the US demanded was indeed for Saddam himself to step down and leave the country. He had no incentive to comply and did not. In March 2003 Bush privately held that "if Saddam Hussein leaves, we'll go in anyway."[134] Although the Bush administration did not rush to war, it was bound to be frustrated by a strategy of all threats and no coercive assurance.[135]

Iraqi elites indeed perceived US military mobilization through the lens of the assurance dilemma. Obeidi recalls that the head of the Military Industrialization Commission (MIC), Abdul Tawab, spoke at a security meeting of the MIC in February 2003 to say, "There is much talk about the ultimatums of President Bush and the United Nations weapons inspectors. They are creating a pretext for war, and they want to use our honorable scientists as tools for their hostile intentions."[136] Obeidi himself in February "sensed that an American invasion was inevitable. The U.S. troop buildup neared completion in northern Kuwait, with too many supplies and soldiers amassed to allow for a face-saving retreat."[137] And during a February 2003 dinner in Baghdad, IAEA director general Mohamed ElBaradei reported that his last attempts alongside Blix to implore the Iraqis to be more forthcoming about their past nuclear weapons program fell on deaf and defeated ears. The credible threat of US military force held little sway anymore. Husam Muhammad Amin al-Yasin, one of the Iraqi officials present, said to Blix, "You cannot help us, because this war is going to happen, and nothing you or we can do will stop it. We both know that. Whatever we do, it is a done deal." Amir Hamudi Hasan al-Sa'adi, Saddam's chief scientific adviser, nodded along next to Husam.[138] After the war, according to the CIA, Iraqi scientists who were captured and debriefed by US intelligence services "expressed surprise when a former US inspector came into the room to try to resolve old material balance issues because they felt it had been a ruse for US policy goals and not a legitimate concern."[139]

The Assurance Dilemma in Iraq

After his nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons infrastructure was wrecked in the Gulf War, Saddam destroyed his stocks of illicit weapons and submitted to what he thought would be a short inspections process. He did so to avoid another military attack and in the hopes of having crippling sanctions lifted; coercion pressured him into taking the concession gamble. But Saddam was soon disappointed. Punishing sanctions and occasional air strikes remained. As he authorized disclosures of past weapons programs according to the evidence in the possession of his coercers, he and his advisers came to conclude that nothing they could do would end the coercive punishments Iraq faced. Defiance became preferable. Saddam ceased cooperation with inspectors in 1998.

Iraq's coercers made little effort to communicate the contingency of their punishments. They did not demonstrate coercive control over themselves or their coalition, contributing to the failure of coercion. They also acquired a reputation for noncredible assurance in the eyes of Baghdad, built up over eight years of jockeying for sanctions relief only to see no end to punishment. Only shared knowledge, especially caused by the defection of Hussein Kamil, encouraged Iraq to be more forthcoming for a time.

The assurance dilemma lens is strongest in the period from 1993 to 1998, after Saddam abandoned his hedge to reconstitute WMD programs and before the passage of the Iraq Liberation Act that signaled that the United States sought regime change. From 1998 to 2003, it is possible that Washington no longer intended for sanctions against Iraq to be coercive. In service of a brute force goal, perhaps sanctions intended to starve Iraq of resources and keep Saddam conventionally weak. President H. W. Bush's national security adviser, Brent Scowcroft, certainly implied as much when looking back in 2003 he claimed that sanctions on Iraq "worked in the sense that [Saddam] was never able to rebuild his conventional army."[140] If the strangulation is the point, the punishment is not coercive because it does not demand a change in the target's behavior.