



# Newsweek War in Iraq



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## We Had Good Intel—The U.N.'s

**The inspectors were 'HUMINT.' They were far more accurate, it turned out, than billions of dollars of satellites**

By Fareed Zakaria  
Newsweek

Feb. 9 issue - "We were all wrong," says weapons inspector David Kay. Actually, no. There was one group whose prewar estimates of Iraqi nuclear, chemical and biological capabilities have turned out to be devastatingly close to reality—the U.N. inspectors. Consider what Mohamed ElBaradei, head of the U.N. nuclear agency, told the Security Council on March 7, 2003, after his team had done 247 inspections at 147 sites: "no evidence of resumed nuclear activities ... nor any indication of nuclear-related prohibited activities at any related sites." He went on to say that evidence suggested Iraq had not imported uranium since 1990 and no longer had a centrifuge program. He concluded that Iraq's nuclear capabilities had been effectively dismantled by 1997 and its dual-use industrial plants had decayed. All these claims appear to be dead-on, based on Kay's findings.

Regarding chemical and biological weapons, the U.N. inspectors headed by Hans Blix conducted 731 inspections between November 2002 and March 2003. Despite claims by the U.S. government of the existence of specific stockpiles of weapons and active weapons programs, they found no evidence of either. In his reports to the Security Council, Blix was always judicious. "One must not jump to the conclusion that they exist," he said. "However, that possibility is also not excluded."

Blix wanted more evidence, arguing that the Iraqis were not providing trustworthy accounts of the destruction of their previously existing chemical and biological stockpiles. He asked that the Iraqis do more to convince him. Regarding missiles, despite administration claims that Iraq was churning out Scuds, the inspectors found none. They did, however, find some prohibited medium-range missiles, and were in the process of destroying them when the war began.

Why were the inspectors right and the administration wrong? Partly this has to do with political pressure. The CIA had been battered for 30 years by accusations from the right that it was soft on the Soviets, soft on the



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**Did the White House knowingly misrepresent intelligence on Iraq?**

No. The administration was misled, too

Yes. Bush and Cheney knew the intelligence was wrong

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Chinese and most recently soft on Saddam. (Never mind that in almost every case, the agency was more accurate in its assessments than its neoconservative accusers. It lost the political battle.) The U.N. inspectors could actually make their assessments without fear. (Some in the administration did try to scare them. "We

will not hesitate to discredit you," Vice President Cheney said to Blix before he began his job.)

More important, the inspectors were actually there on the ground and the American government was not. Some reports suggest that the United States did not have a single credible informant in Iraq before the war. The inspectors, on the other hand, were talking to scientists, engineers and bureaucrats for months. Yes, the officials were often trying to deceive them. But the inspectors were also picking up information along the way. We now all agree that the key missing ingredient in Iraq was human intelligence. Well, the inspectors *were* human intelligence. They were far more accurate, as it turned out, than billions of dollars of satellite and audio technologies. "What inspectors can often most valuably assess is not just the capabilities of the regime but its character and intentions," explains George Perkovitch, a leading nonproliferation expert at the Carnegie Endowment.



Consider that with other rogue states—North Korea, Iran and Libya—American intelligence has also been wrong about WMD programs, except in those cases where it *underestimated* all three countries' developments. Why? Because Washington has no good human intelligence and no inspections to provide information. (Iran allowed a few inspections under old rules that are now discredited.) Washington has no diplomatic presence in any of these countries. And since we're not going to invade them any time soon, inspections might be the best option.

Inspections work if they are intrusive and coupled with threats of sanctions and the use of force. There is considerable international agreement on the need for tougher standards. EIBaradei, in his recent interview with NEWSWEEK, argued for tighter export controls, more inspections and a lower tolerance for enrichment and reprocessing activities (which could lead to weapons-grade material). But for such a system to work, for countries to agree to inspections, they would have to be directed by an international body.

The lesson here is not that force should never have been used. David Kay's picture of Iraq—an irrational, dysfunctional kleptocracy with a nasty history of WMD—was a danger and would have required action at some point. The real lesson is that international bodies like EIBaradei's can work. When supported by American power, they can actually accomplish more than even the world's sole superpower acting alone.

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