

Testimony of Peter W. G. Boks, Managing Director, Saybolt International B.V.
Before the House Committee on Government Reform Subcommittee on National Security,
Emerging Threats, and International Relations
October 5, 2004

Mr. Chairman, distinguished members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for inviting me to speak before the Subcommittee today on the role of Saybolt International B.V. (“Saybolt”) in the administration of the United Nations Oil-for-Food Program (“the Program”) that operated in Iraq between 1996 and 2003. As a senior executive and manager of Saybolt, now and during that time, I am familiar with our role in the Program, which included monitoring the export of oil from specified locations in Iraq and, to a lesser extent, monitoring spare parts and equipment imported into Iraq for use in the oil industry. In addition, Saybolt coordinated studies that oil industry experts conducted on Iraqi oil production and infrastructure.

I will focus my remarks on the areas that your invitation asked me to address. The first area is Saybolt’s contracts with the United Nations. I will discuss how Saybolt won the contracts, the scope of the contracts, and how they compare with other contracts into which Saybolt typically enters. The second area is the legal, ethical, and due diligence procedures that Saybolt followed. The third area is the challenges that Saybolt faced in carrying out contractual obligations. I will discuss those challenges, and how both Saybolt and the United Nations addressed them. Finally, I will discuss what steps could have been taken, in my opinion, to make the Program as a whole more effective at preventing manipulation by the Iraqi government.

I. BACKGROUND ON SAYBOLT’S CONTRACTS WITH THE UNITED NATIONS

How Saybolt Won the Oil-for-Food Contract

Saybolt was selected as the independent oil inspection agent of the United Nations through a competitive bid process that was initiated by a request-for-proposal (“RFP”). The sixth paragraph of U.N. Security Council Resolution 986 (1995) directed the U.N. Secretary General to appoint agents to assist the Committee established by U.N. Security Council Resolution 661 (the “661 Committee”) with the task of monitoring the quantity and quality of exports of Iraqi oil under the U.N. Oil-for-Food Program. Pursuant to that authority, on June 11, 1996, the Commodity Procurement Section of the U.N. Procurement and Transportation Division issued a RFP, which included a request for provision of independent oil inspection agents.

We viewed the U.N. RFP as a good business opportunity to apply our almost 100 years of experience in inspection and analytical testing of petroleum products to a prestigious international project. We were also pleased that we would be contributing our know-how to a major program designed to serve the urgent humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people. Accordingly, on June 17, 1996, we submitted our Proposal to provide oil export inspection services. After some discussion of our proposal and a preliminary fact-finding mission, on November 29, 1996, Saybolt and the United Nations entered into a contract (the “First Contract” or “1996 Contract”) with an initial term of six months, subject to extensions of six-months each, at the sole discretion of the United Nations.

After the First Contract was extended for a total of slightly more than three years, another RFP process was initiated. In that process, we submitted our Proposal on February 11, 2000, and on May 29, 2000, the United Nations formally accepted that proposal and entered into a new contract with Saybolt that governed Phases VII through XIII of the Program (the “Second Contract” or “2000 Contract”).

Unique Features of the Oil-for-Food Contract

The contract under which Saybolt provided inspection services to the United Nations was in many respects a standard commercial contract, with a few notable differences.

First, our role was substantially different than the role we play in most of our commercial contracts. It is standard industry practice, and common practice for Saybolt, to be retained jointly by both buyers and sellers of oil. In this instance, however, we acted as independent inspectors verifying the quantity and quality of oil on behalf of a third party. Though we acted as monitors for the United Nations, I should point out that we were never involved in the transfers of funds related to oil purchased in the Program.

Second, there were significantly more third parties that had institutional or political interests or sensitivities in the performance of our contract with the United Nations than we encounter in other transactions. We were monitored and reviewed by the U.N. Security Council, other organs of the United Nations, and U.N. member states, most notably Iraq. As a result, the professionalism of our inspectors was particularly important to the performance of our duties.

Third, the negotiation process for this contract was different than what we encounter in other contexts. Saybolt typically negotiates the specific terms of contracts with clients. However, in this instance, the terms of the contract were dictated by the United Nations. Because of the importance of the project and our desire to ease the humanitarian crisis in Iraq, we were willing to agree to the terms specified by the U.N.

The Role of Saybolt in the Oil-for-Food Program

Saybolt performed two functions in the Program. First, Saybolt acted as a monitor. This monitoring role initially applied only to exports of crude oil from two export points authorized under the Program. Our monitoring responsibilities were later extended to include monitoring of imports of oil industry spare parts. Second, Saybolt coordinated three studies of the Iraqi oil industry by a group of experts called for under resolutions of the U.N. Security Council. Saybolt carried out each of these activities pursuant to contracts with the United Nations.

Saybolt was responsible for monitoring the quantity and quality of Iraqi crude oil loaded onto vessels from the Mina Al-Bakr offshore terminal in southern Iraq and from the port of Ceyhan in Turkey. These two locations were the only locations where Saybolt was asked to monitor the export of Iraqi oil to buyers, and they were the only authorized ports for export of oil under the Program. Saybolt was also responsible for monitoring the flow of oil near Zakho, along the Iraq-Turkey pipeline by which Iraqi oil was delivered to the Ceyhan port. Saybolt

began monitoring in 1996, after it received a Request to Commence Mobilization from the United Nations dated November 29, 1996.

Almost a year-and-a-half after Saybolt began monitoring oil exports from these locations, the United Nations awarded Saybolt a contract for additional inspection work related to the Program. Saybolt was asked to submit a proposal to monitor the storage, delivery, and utilization of spare parts that Iraq began to import for the purpose of maintaining and developing the Iraqi oil industry. Saybolt's proposal was accepted in a June 1998 amendment to the First Contract.

Beginning in 1998, Saybolt also coordinated the preparation of expert reports on the Iraqi oil industry called for by U.N. Security Council resolutions. The United Nations hired Saybolt to coordinate a study by a group of experts under U.N. Security Council Resolution 1153 (1998). The purpose of this study was to assess Iraqi oil production and transportation capacity, and necessary monitoring. In 2000, Saybolt was hired to coordinate another group of experts study, as called for under U.N. Security Council Resolution 1284 (1999). The purpose of this study was to review plans to import spare parts and equipment for the Iraqi oil industry, and their possible impact on production of Iraqi oil. In 2001, Saybolt was hired a third time to coordinate a study of the Iraqi oil industry by a group of experts under U.N. Security Council Resolution 1330 (2000). The purpose of this study was to evaluate in further detail proposed expenditures on equipment and spare parts for the Iraqi oil industry.

In 2003, following the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, the oil monitoring program ended. At that point, Saybolt had acted as the United Nations monitor for almost seven years, and had monitored more than 2600 loadings totaling approximately 3.4 billion barrels of oil over the life of the Program. As the program was being dismantled, the Second Contract was partially suspended on April 17, 2003, and was formally terminated by the United Nations on June 4, 2003.

II. DUE DILIGENCE PROCEDURES FOLLOWED BY SAYBOLT

Saybolt instituted several procedures to ensure fulfillment of our contract with the United Nations. These include the screening of inspectors, the sharing of information in real time with the United Nations, and ongoing internal monitoring of Saybolt operations in Iraq.

Employee Screening and Training

Saybolt inspectors were experienced in monitoring, and they received training designed to assist them in carrying out their duties as inspectors for the United Nations. As required by contract, individuals nominated to work as inspectors for Saybolt were approved by the United Nations. The United Nations reviewed their credentials. Before being deployed, the inspectors received extensive briefings in Rotterdam. They received comprehensive materials detailing their responsibilities. In addition, each member of Saybolt's team in the Program was required to certify that he had read and understood Saybolt's code of conduct.

Databases to Share Information with United Nations

Throughout the Program, Saybolt, like the United Nations, utilized a commercially-available electronic online database to ensure that each vessel loading was supported by a contract and a letter of credit that were approved by the Oil Overseers of the United Nations. Through this database, we provided information to the United Nations regarding each loading on a real-time basis.

On-site Monitoring by Saybolt Management

Our office in Rotterdam communicated directly with the team members stationed in Iraq and Turkey, as well as with the United Nations, on a daily basis. Through the database, our office in Rotterdam could ensure that actions taken in the field conformed to the terms of the contracts and letters of credit approved by the U.N. Overseers. There was an overall project coordinator located in our office in Rotterdam who carefully reviewed each contract and letter of credit approved by the U.N., and he instructed the inspectors as to which loadings were authorized and for what amount.

On several occasions, the Saybolt contract administrator in Rotterdam made visits to Iraq to coordinate and monitor the inspection activities. He made visits to the Ceyhan operation and later, as the Team Leader on three projects in 1998, 2000, and 2001, visited all Saybolt operations in Iraq. As the volume of oil export operations increased, and Saybolt began monitoring imports of spare parts, Saybolt also appointed a country manager, based in Baghdad, to oversee both the oil and spare parts monitoring operations. This manager routinely visited Saybolt operations at Zakho in the north of Iraq and the Saybolt operations at Mina Al-Bakr.

III. ADDRESSING CHALLENGES SAYBOLT FACED IN IRAQ

Facing Operational Difficulties Within Iraq

In performing their duties, Saybolt inspectors were often subjected to personal risks. Nearby military operations and violent attacks were not uncommon. As we have all seen in news reports from that time, Iraq did not always welcome the United Nations or its contractors. Iraq initially resisted the very idea of an Oil-for-Food Program. This political friction between Iraq and the outside world made our task especially delicate, because we were associated with the United Nations in the eyes of Iraqis. Coping with these physically and mentally challenging working conditions required courage and professionalism on the part of inspectors.

Difficult living conditions in Iraq often made performing daily tasks quite a challenge. The state of the Iraqi infrastructure was far worse than even we expected from our preliminary fact-finding missions. At the isolated, remote locations where our inspectors carried out their mission, it was often difficult to achieve the basic necessities -- food, electricity, water, transportation, and housing. Telecommunications equipment was primitive. Some days, we had neither electricity nor water at the Mina Al-Bakr terminal. The harsh conditions in Iraq were noted in the reports to the United Nations and were confirmed by a United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission ("UNIKOM") safety audit of the Mina Al-Bakr operations in April 1999. On some occasions, our inspectors at Mina Al-Bakr were stranded at the terminal without

electricity and without water. Mina Al-Bakr also had frequent air conditioning outages, leaving inspectors exposed to heat that sometimes reached 130 degrees for long periods at a time. Because of the high cost of placing telephone calls from Iraq, communications between our inspectors and their families were limited.

On the subject of difficulties we encountered in Iraq, I should note that we also struggled to arrange reliable, affordable transportation to and from the Mina Al-Bakr terminal, as we were dependent on aged transportation vessels to go to and from that terminal. Standard tasks became complex because we were operating in an environment subject to multilateral sanctions. It was not a simple process to obtain travel visas for our personnel going into Iraq, to clear our equipment through customs without unreasonable delay, to provide transportation within Iraq, or to arrange the means for our employees to pay for their basic living expenses while in Iraq.

Development of Method to Calculate Loading Quantities In Absence of Reliable Meters

The poor state of the Iraqi infrastructure not only impacted our employees, but it impacted our monitoring methods. As explained above, Saybolt's principal responsibility was to monitor the quality and quantity of oil loaded onto vessels at Mina Al-Bakr and Ceyhan. From the very beginning of the Program, Saybolt encountered difficulties in persuading the Iraqis to install and repair metering equipment at the Ceyhan and Mina Al-Bakr sites. When we arrived in Iraq, neither location had metering equipment calibrated to accurately measure how much oil was loaded onto the vessels. We informed the United Nations of this problem even before the Program began through our preliminary fact-finding report.

In the absence of metering equipment, Saybolt applied the best alternative method. This method, which is commonly used within the industry, used the capacity and calibration charts of the vessel in order to determine how much oil was loaded into the vessel. To determine how much oil was loaded onto a vessel, a Saybolt inspector would, prior to loading, measure the on-board quantity ("OBQ") of the vessel. Then, after loading, Saybolt would measure the ullage (the amount by which the vessel tank falls short of being full) and the temperature of the oil. Saybolt inspectors compared this data with the calibration tables to determine how much oil had been loaded onto the vessel.

The vessel calibration charts, however, sometimes were not accurate. For example, if a vessel hull had been scraped and dented inwards, the overall capacity of the vessel would be reduced. Repairs to the vessel could likewise change the overall capacity of the vessel. In addition, vessels sometimes accumulate residue from previous loadings, which changes the capacity of the vessel. Each vessel keeps a record of the variances from its calibration tables, when compared with the volume measured when the oil was offloaded. This record becomes the "vessel experience factor" ("VEF"). The VEF for a vessel is based on the average comparison between ship measurement and shore measurement for the last 10 voyages. The use of a vessel calibration chart and the VEF is an internationally recognized method for determining the quantity of oil loaded onto a vessel in the absence of calibrated shore tanks and/or meters. We followed the procedures set forth by the American Petroleum Institute and the Institute of Petroleum.

A weakness in using the calibration tables and the VEF of a vessel is that inspectors must rely on the records provided by the master of each vessel. Such records could possibly be manipulated without the knowledge of the inspectors.

At Ceyhan, any significant manipulation of the system was detectable because of the ability to compare the shore-tank measurement with the amount of oil reportedly loaded onto the vessel. Although the shore-tank measurements were not sufficiently accurate to be used as the primary means of measurement, they were a cross-check making it possible to uncover major inaccuracies.

At Mina Al-Bakr, the infrastructure deficiencies made it more difficult to detect manipulation. Shore tank measurements were not available. The shore tanks were severely damaged during the Iran-Iraq War, and then further damaged during the first Gulf War. The shore tanks that existed were not re-calibrated. The metering system at the loading site was not repaired sufficiently to ensure accurate measurements. Therefore, the inspectors were necessarily dependent upon the calibration tables and VEF data provided by vessel masters.

Saybolt attempted to address this problem in several ways. When the contract with the United Nations was first negotiated, Saybolt recommended that the volume of oil loaded onto vessels be measured with reference to the volume of oil measured at the port of discharge in addition to the loading port. This suggestion was not implemented. In addition, at the outset of the Program, Saybolt requested that the metering facilities at Ceyhan and Mina Al-Bakr be repaired and recalibrated. However, the meters, which were owned by the Iraqis, were not recalibrated. The contract between the United Nations and Saybolt specified the method of using the VEF of the vessel in order to determine the measurements, which, as noted, is the industry standard for measuring loadings of oil in the absence of calibrated metering equipment and/or shore tanks.

In January 1999, following discussion with the United Nations, Saybolt instituted a procedure to attempt to address the potential inaccuracy of the VEF based measurement system. The master of each vessel was required to sign a statement certifying the accuracy of the records provided to Saybolt. The United Nations was informed of this procedure and supported its implementation.

Adapting Inspection Procedure to Enhance Ability to Detect Topping Off

As noted above, the absence of meters was one of the most significant challenges Saybolt faced during the Program, inhibiting our ability to detect measurement discrepancies or unauthorized loadings at those locations. Despite our close monitoring of oil exports at Mina Al-Bakr, in early October 2001, we learned that the captain of the vessel Essex had alerted the U.N. and U.S. authorities that there had been two incidents of unauthorized "topping off" of the Essex at the Mina Al-Bakr terminal after Saybolt inspectors had completed their inspections of the Essex. Documents subsequently provided to Saybolt by the United Nations and others indicate that in May and August 2001, the State Oil Marketing Organization of Iraq ("SOMO") arranged to load on board the Essex vessel additional amounts of oil above and beyond that which was

approved by the SOMO contract with IbeX Energy France, the buyer of the oil loaded onto the Essex.

Saybolt immediately undertook an internal investigation to learn what happened and why, and it cooperated fully with other investigations of these incidents, providing extensive documentation to investigators. I headed our internal investigation. With respect to both incidents, we conducted extensive interviews of our staff, including our Team Leader on the Mina Al-Bakr platform, and reviewed all available documentation. Our investigation found no evidence that any of our employees were aware of the additional unauthorized loadings prior to the report by the Essex captain. We detailed our findings and the bases for our conclusions in a report that I personally presented in mid-October 2001 to the U.N. 661 Committee. That report is included in the documents previously provided to this Subcommittee. Our investigation of these incidents also attempted to determine whether there might have been incidents of topping off in addition to the two reported by the Essex captain. For all of the reasons detailed in our report, we concluded that it was extremely unlikely that this occurred.

Immediately after learning of the Essex captain's report, Saybolt put in place additional procedures to minimize the likelihood that such incidents could recur. As an interim measure, I instructed all team members at Mina Al-Bakr to remain on board vessels until they left port to ensure that there were no additional loadings. After further review, we put in place a procedure under which Saybolt employees sealed the valves on the vessel after loading was complete whenever the vessel did not leave the port immediately after loading for whatever reason. The seals contained numbers, which we noted. Before the vessel left the port, we returned to the vessel to inspect that the seal was still in place and that it was the same seal number. We are unaware of any topping off incidents that happened after we instituted these additional procedures.

Staffing for Spare Parts Monitoring

We also faced significant challenges in implementing our monitoring role in the spare parts side of the Program. Saybolt's contract with the United Nations authorized the employment of six monitors in the country who worked to verify the arrival and end-use of the spare parts that were purchased. Given the number of spare parts imported into Iraq under the Program, and the distance between locations to be monitored, it was impossible to closely monitor all spare parts at all locations. We communicated to the U.N. that we were not able to physically inspect all spare parts that arrived, and we informed them that additional staff would be required in order to be able to monitor the end-uses of the parts effectively. We also requested that our monitors be stationed throughout the country. However, the Iraqi government insisted that the monitors be stationed only in Baghdad, and the U.N. relented to this pressure.

IV. HOW THE PROGRAM COULD HAVE BEEN CONSTRUCTED DIFFERENTLY

Your invitation to testify today asked for our insights as to how the Program might have been constructed to better prevent Iraqi manipulation. I understand that others far more expert than I in the structuring of multilateral sanctions regimes have testified before you on this very point. Please allow me to preface my response by explaining that Saybolt is in the oil inspection business, and not the business of second-guessing the architects of the Oil-for-Food Program.

From first-hand experience, I know how complex and tumultuous the environment was in Iraq, and I can assure you that we collaborated with the United Nations, the U.S.-led Multilateral Interception Force (“MIF”), and Iraqi authorities to implement the best possible monitoring system, given the state of the infrastructure we encountered in Iraq. Nonetheless, in the spirit of joining a good faith dialogue, and with the benefit of hindsight, I can offer a few suggestions.

First, obtaining commitments to repair the necessary infrastructure could have strengthened the program. At various times during the Program, problems with the metering systems at Mina Al-Bakr, Zakho, and Ceyhan were brought to the attention of Iraqi authorities. Yet the meters were never brought into working condition. I do not know whether this is because Iraq was not permitted to import the necessary spare parts, or because Iraq was not forced to make the repairs as a condition of participating in the Program. Had these meters become functional and reliably accurate, our monitoring process would have been much less cumbersome and complex, and incidents such as the two 2001 Essex additional loadings could have been more easily detected.

Second, any attempt to monitor unauthorized exports of oil would have necessitated having monitors at other than the three export points authorized under the Program. As you know, Security Council Resolution 986 refers only to monitoring of oil exports through the Mina Al-Bakr terminal and the Iraq-Turkey pipeline. These were the only locations at which Saybolt was contracted to monitor oil exports. From prior testimony before this Subcommittee, we have heard reports of smuggling by roadways into Turkey, other offshore terminals in Iraq, or other cross-border pipelines. Had the scope of the monitoring mandate from the Security Council been broader, the United Nations and its inspection agents could have set up inspection checkpoints to detect illicit oil exports from these other locations.

Third, I think some U.N. official presence at the loading locations may have enhanced the likelihood of compliance with the Program. Saybolt is not a security organization and, in any event, represented a small fraction of those present at authorized export points. For example, at Mina Al-Bakr, there were some 80 Iraqis on the platform, and only a handful of Saybolt inspectors. Our role was as a monitor. When ships were loaded, our duty was to give the United Nations our best calculation as to how much oil was loaded onto the ship. When something went wrong, our duty was to tell the United Nations. Thus, rather than searching for smuggling, our role was to inform the United Nations of quantities leaving Iraq at the designated monitoring sites.

Thank you for your important work, and for the opportunity to address you today.