



National Security Report

Background and Perspective on Important National Security and Defense Policy Issues,

Written and Produced by

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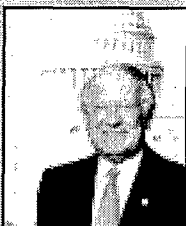
Volume 2, Issue 5

Chairman, House National Security Committee

November 1998

From the Chairman...

Coming on the heels of the collapse of the Soviet empire, the coalition victory over Iraq in the 1991 Gulf War seemed to hold the promise of a new era. Our crushing defeat of the Iraqi army seemed to codify America's standing as the world's "sole superpower"



Eight years later, the promise of those heady days has not been fulfilled, and our troubles with Saddam Hussein seem to reflect our troubles elsewhere in the world. In fact, Saddam has been increasingly able to claw his way out of his diplomatic, economic, military and strategic isolation. Today, Saddam Hussein is as close to slipping out of his "box" as he has been since the Gulf War ended in 1991. According to Scott Ritter, a former United Nations weapons inspector, Saddam may

Saddam Hussein: Slipping out of the box

be only six months away from developing the chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction that we have sought to keep out of his hands. And the viability of the United Nations inspection regime is very much in doubt. Despite the devastation it suffered during Desert Storm, the Iraqi military still maintains significant capabilities. And if Saddam finally succeeds in developing and fielding an arsenal of chemical or biological weapons he will pose an even larger threat to the region and to American interests.

In recent weeks, the Administration has tried to make the case that Saddam remains boxed in and isolated. Yet, the Saudis and our other allies in the region have distanced themselves from us over the years. It may be that the U.S. is increasingly the one that

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U.S. Policy Towards Iraq: Conceding Defeat?

Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's most recent and most serious challenge to the international community — halting all cooperation with United Nations weapons inspectors — has brought the United States the closest to war with Iraq since 1991. However, the United States has again refrained from military action in exchange for

a last-minute promise from Saddam Hussein that he will allow UN weapons inspectors to resume their work unconditionally. This continuing pattern of Iraqi behavior — placing obstacles in the path of weapons inspectors and then removing them in the face of a threatened military response — has raised new questions regarding the credibility of the United States and the effectiveness of efforts to prevent Iraq from reconstituting its ability to develop or use weapons of mass destruction.

Nearly eight years after the Gulf War dislodged Iraqi troops from Kuwait, Saddam Hussein is still in power. U.S. policy toward Iraq continues to be one of containing Iraqi aggression while attempting to dismantle the Iraqi programs for weapons of mass destruction. However, this policy has been increasingly buffeted by strong political cross-currents that have called into question the long-term resolve and ability of the United States to bring about the desired changes in Iraq. Saddam Hussein's repeated challenges to the authority of the international community have left the coa-

lition of states that defeated him frustrated, fatigued, and divided over the proper balance between "carrots" and "sticks." Iraq's most recent act of defiance has sought to exploit these divisions. Moreover, debate continues over whether the crux of the problem in Iraq is Saddam Hussein's continuing drive to acquire and maintain weap-

ons of mass destruction or, more broadly, his seemingly unshakable grip on power.

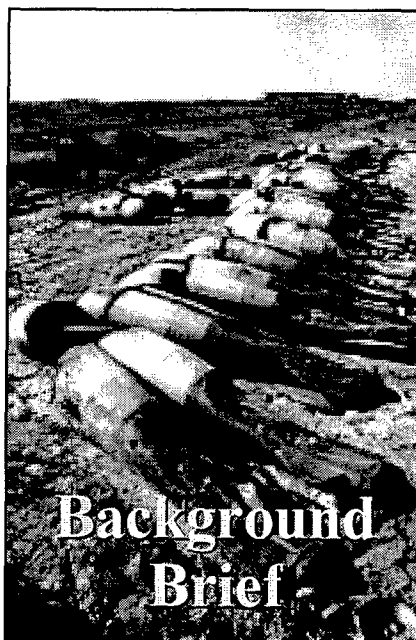
As a result of its invasion of Kuwait, economic sanctions were imposed on Iraq, and these sanctions remain in place today. In addition, as a consequence of its Gulf War defeat, Iraq was forced to accept stringent disarmament conditions established by the United Nations Security Council.

"No-fly zones," enforced primarily by U.S. aircraft operating from bases in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Turkey, were established over the northern and southern sections of the country. Since 1991, the southern no-fly zone has been expanded, and U.S. pilots continue to fly routine patrols over Iraq as part of a "contingency operation" that has become a semi-permanent and costly feature of U.S. military operations in the post-Cold War world.

The Disarmament Regime and Iraqi Noncompliance

UN Security Council Resolution 687, adopted on April 3, 1991, required Iraq to

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Background Brief

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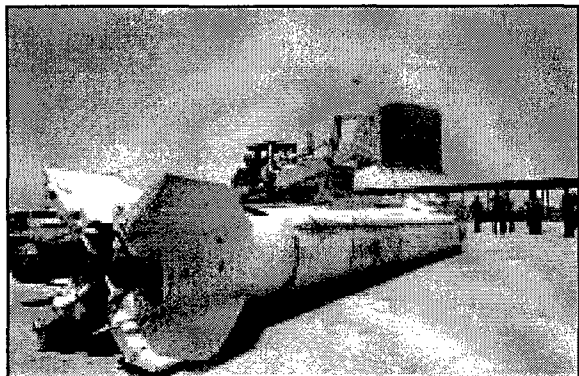
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provide a full, final and complete disclosure of all aspects of its weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programs, and to “unconditionally accept the destruction, removal, or rendering harmless, under international supervision, of: (a) all chemical and biological weapons and all stocks of agents and all related subsystems and components and all research, development, support and manufacturing facilities; [and] (b) all ballistic missiles with a range greater than 150 kilometers and related major parts, and repair and production facilities.” In addition, Iraq was forced to “unconditionally agree not to acquire or develop nuclear weapons or nuclear-weapons-usable material or any subsystems or components... or manufacturing facilities.”

The nuclear disarmament task was entrusted to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). To carry out Iraq’s disarmament in the chemical, biological, and ballistic missile area, the UN Security Council established a Special Commission on Iraq, referred to as UNSCOM. This new organization was tasked with the responsibility of conducting on-site and challenge inspections of declared and suspected Iraqi sites containing information, equipment, or technology related to Iraq’s chemical, biological, or ballistic missile programs. Moreover, the UN Security Council directed Iraq to “allow the Special Commission, the IAEA and their inspection teams immediate, unconditional and unrestricted access to any and all areas, facilities, equipment, records and means of transportation which they wish to inspect.”



An Iraqi Al-Hussein ballistic missile being dismantled.

Since 1991, UNSCOM inspectors have been repeatedly denied the “immediate, unconditional and unrestricted access” Iraq promised to provide, prompting the UN Security Council to declare Iraq in “material breach” of its cease-fire obligations seven times between 1991 and 1993. In 1996, the Security Council called Iraq’s refusal to allow UNSCOM access to certain sites “a clear violation” of its obligations. In addition, the information provided by Iraq on its weapons programs has repeatedly proven erroneous and the Iraqis have revised their official “full, final and complete disclosure” statements on numerous occasions.

Each Iraqi challenge has been viewed as more serious than the previous one. Thus, some observers have concluded that through his tactics, Saddam Hussein has been able to exacerbate political fissures in the once solid United Nations coalition and has been successful at chipping away at political support for a continuation of the inspection regime and economic sanctions.

Iraq’s decision to cease all cooperation with UN weapons inspectors continued the challenge to the UN weapons inspection regime that began on October 29, 1997, when Iraq blocked U.S. weapons inspectors from participating in UNSCOM inspections, effectively suspending the inspection process. On November 13, 1997, Iraq expelled U.S. weapons experts from the country. The expulsion occurred as inspection teams were closing in on what was thought to be a major discovery involving Iraq’s biological weapons program.

In October 1997, the United States responded to the Iraqi expulsion by deploying additional military forces to the

Persian Gulf, including a second aircraft carrier. Russian intervention with Saddam Hussein resulted in an agreement by Iraq to allow U.S. inspectors to return and for UNSCOM’s work to continue, in exchange for Russia’s agreement to work toward a lifting of the economic sanctions. However, Iraq refused to allow UNSCOM access to

what it declared to be “sensitive” presidential sites, and declared more than 60 such sites off-limits to inspectors. This prompted Secretary of Defense Cohen to threaten military strikes, stating that any U.S. strike “will not be a pin-prick.” The threat of U.S. force was opposed by Russia and other UN Security Council members.

On January 12, 1998, Iraq again threatened to expel U.S. arms inspectors and blocked an inspection team headed by William “Scott” Ritter from conducting an inspection. In response, the UN Security Council condemned Iraq’s action, UNSCOM Executive Chairman Richard Butler withdrew Ritter’s UNSCOM team from Iraq, and the future of the inspection regime was again placed in doubt.

The Military Option Takes Shape

On February 4, 1998, as diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis foundered, the United States deployed more than 30,000 troops, 30 ships, and over 200 strike aircraft to the Persian Gulf region, redeploying aircraft carriers from Europe and the Pacific. President Clinton declared that “something is going to have to give here.” Secretary of State Madeleine Albright stated that “we have all but exhausted the diplomatic option” and threatened “substantial strikes” if Iraq failed to comply fully with UN resolutions. Press reports indicated that the strike plan, code-named “Operation Desert Thunder,” involved launching approximately 300 combat sorties a day and firing hundreds of cruise missiles. From November 1997 to March 1998, the cost of deploying additional U.S. forces to the Gulf was estimated at approximately \$600 million.

The Gulf buildup impacted U.S. forces deployed elsewhere in the world. Press reports indicated that General John Tillie, the commander of U.S. forces in Korea, expressed concerns that the diversion of military resources from the Pacific region to the Gulf weakened his ability to defend South Korea. U.S. military officials in Europe reportedly echoed similar concerns about their ability to maintain readiness.

U.S. policy regarding military action against Iraq was described in various ways on numerous occasions by Administration spokespersons. By February 1998, the of-

ficially-articulated objectives of any potential U.S. military strike had been downgraded. Administration spokespersons conceded that a strike would not eliminate Iraq's weapons of mass destruction capability, but would significantly retard it.

The crisis over UNSCOM inspections highlighted the danger of allowing Saddam Hussein to possess weapons of mass destruction and the ballistic missiles that could deliver them. Continuing reports of clandestine Iraqi work on biological weapons, including anthrax, raised concerns over Iraq's ability to quickly reconstitute a dangerous offensive biological weapons capability in the absence of effective inspections. Secretary of Defense Cohen highlighted the threat on national television by holding up a 5-pound bag of sugar and emphasizing that a similar quantity of anthrax "would destroy at least half the population" of a city the size of Washington, D.C.

A Crisis Averted?: The Annan Agreement

In an effort to preclude military action by the United States, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan traveled to Baghdad on February 20, 1998 to negotiate a diplomatic outcome to the inspection standoff. Some analysts considered the attempt to negotiate a diplomatic solution to the crisis likely to result in a further step toward the unraveling of the inspection regime and a loosening of the sanctions imposed on Iraq. This concern was heightened by an interview Annan gave to the BBC, aired on February 10, 1998, in which he stated that full Iraqi compliance with UN resolutions "is the position today. It does not mean that, depending on what can be worked out, that would be the position tomorrow." While some in the Administration referred to Saddam Hussein as being "in a box," other private analysts questioned whether it was the United States that was "in a box."

An agreement was reached in Baghdad that allowed for the inspection of eight "sensitive" sites, sometimes referred to as "presidential compounds," under a modified inspection procedure that established a "special group" of diplomats and experts. In exchange, Iraq again committed to abide by all relevant UN resolutions. The agreement also called



Destroyed warheads from Iraqi missiles capable of carrying chemical and biological weapons.

upon member states of the UN to "respect legitimate concerns of Iraq relating to national security, sovereignty and dignity." "Saddam can be trusted.... I think I can do business with him," Annan declared.

Supporters of the agreement argued that it accomplished the goal of allowing critical weapons inspections to resume and was preferable to a military confrontation. Opponents charged that it undermined the work of UNSCOM and represented a retreat from the principle of unfettered access to any suspected site. Former UNSCOM weapons inspector David Kay called the agreement "fundamentally flawed," stating that it "could set back even the modest progress UNSCOM has made."

On March 2, 1998, the Security Council warned Iraq that it would face "the severest consequences" if it reneged on the deal brokered by Secretary General Annan. President Clinton stated that "no one seriously believes that there can be a breach of this agreement by Iraq without serious consequences." He also stated that U.S. forces would remain in the Gulf region "until we are satisfied that Iraq is complying with its commitments." Assistant Secretary of State James Rubin stated that "military force will ensue if Iraq violates this agreement." UN inspection teams returned to Iraq and resumed the search for prohibited

weapons under the modified inspection regime.

The 1998 U.S. Policy Review

Despite the resumption of inspections after almost a two-month hiatus, on April 16, 1998, UNSCOM Executive Chairman Butler reported "virtually no progress" in verifying Iraq's declarations of compliance with UN directives that would allow economic sanctions to be lifted. Concerns were also raised that Iraq had used the suspension of inspections to purge sensitive sites of any incriminating evidence related to the Iraqi weapons of mass destruction program. Nevertheless, on April 30, 1998, President Clinton declared that he was "encouraged by [Iraq's] level of compliance so far with the UN inspections...."

On May 24, 1998, Secretary Cohen announced that the United States would reduce its military presence in the Gulf back to November 1997 pre-crisis levels. Recent press reports have indicated that this drawdown was the result of a policy review, begun last spring. That review reportedly concluded the United States could not afford to sustain the high level of operational deployments in the region without serious impact on defense readiness elsewhere, and that the cost of building up and building down in response to the waxing and waning of Iraqi-generated crises would be prohibitive.

The use of U.S. military force against Iraq — under what conditions and against what targets — continues to be a topic of debate, especially in light of the recently-aborted U.S. airstrikes. There is little political support among the countries of the original anti-Iraq coalition for unilateral U.S. military action. With the exception of Great Britain, no U.S. allies have demonstrated a willingness to commit combat forces to any military strike. Most of Iraq's neighbors are highly cognizant of Saddam Hussein's political resiliency and capacity to again threaten them. They are also sensitive to the prevalent view on the "Arab street" that the Iraqi people have suffered enough. Therefore, most Iraqi neighbors are reluctant to support any military option.

In the United States, opinions vary regarding the effectiveness of diplomacy and

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is “boxed in.” I am also concerned with the fact that we have drawn down our force levels in the region in recent months — not in reaction to Saddam’s improved behavior, but because of the serious strain that constant deployments is having on an already overextended U.S. military. A reduced military presence and allies who have begun to hedge their bets — these are neither encouraging signs, nor signs of strength. It would appear that Saddam, with a lot of patience and persistence, may be gaining the upper hand in this seven year standoff, and in so doing, demonstrating the shortcomings of the Administration’s Iraq policy.

whether U.S. military power, if eventually brought to bear, should be limited to and directed against Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction facilities or against the infrastructure that keeps Saddam Hussein in power. In addition, indigenous Iraqi opposition is fractured, leading some to argue that removing Saddam Hussein from power would require more than just limited air strikes, but the deployment of thousands of U.S. ground troops as well.

The spring policy review also reportedly concluded that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to continue to preserve the inspection regime in the face of Iraqi obstructionism and dissension among coalition partners and allies over the long-term benefits. Instead, U.S. policy reportedly shifted to placing priority on preserving the sanctions regime. On September 9, 1998, the UN Security Council voted to suspend all further periodic reviews of the sanctions regime, essentially continuing the sanctions indefinitely.

The Inspection Regime Under Siege

As the U.S. force drawdown continued into August, Saddam Hussein announced a freeze on all cooperation with UN weapons inspectors, a move that President Clinton described as “unacceptable.” On August 3, 1998, the House voted 407-6 to declare Iraq in “material breach” of its arms dismantlement obligations. UNSCOM for-

mally suspended inspections on August 9, 1998. No new inspections of Iraqi sites have occurred in the past three months.

On August 10, 1998, the *London Times* reported that the Clinton Administration had intervened with UNSCOM Executive Chairman Butler on several occasions to block inspections of sensitive Iraqi sites due to concerns that the inspections would be too provocative to Iraq. Secretary of State Albright reportedly called Butler directly to urge a delay in several inspections. Subsequent press reports indicated that Butler acceded to the requests. Secretary Albright admitted that she had “consulted” with Butler over the timing of planned inspections, but denied that she had compelled Butler to cancel any planned inspections. At a broader policy level, Secretary Albright challenged the notion that the U.S. policy of containment had failed. “Saddam may be rattling his cage again,” she noted, “but he has no way to break out of it.”

On August 26, 1998, Scott Ritter resigned as an UNSCOM weapons inspector, accusing the United States and the UN of undermining the work of UNSCOM, which he stated had been “hobbled” by “unfettered Iraqi obstruction and nonexistent Security Council enforcement of its own resolutions.” Secretary Albright countered that Ritter did not “have a clue” about U.S. policy toward Iraq and that the United States has been the strongest supporter of UNSCOM. UNSCOM Executive Chairman Butler claimed that Ritter’s version of events “is not accurate.” In testimony before a joint session of the Senate Armed Services and Foreign Relations Committee on September 3, 1998, Ritter accused the “highest levels of the Administration’s national security team,” including Secretary Albright, of “interference and manipulation.” “I do have a clue,” he stated. “Our government has expressed its policy one way and then acted [in] another.” In testimony before the House National Security Committee on September 16, 1998, Ritter called the implementation of U.S. policy “inconsistent and ineffective.” “Iraq still poses a real and meaningful threat to its neighbors,” he noted, “and nothing the Security Council or the United States is doing currently will change this fact.”

On October 31, 1998, Iraq announced that it would halt all cooperation with UN arms inspectors and would not allow long-term *monitoring* operations to continue. This was the first time the viability of the long-term weapons *monitoring* regime had been explicitly threatened. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan responded that Iraq was “in total breach of Security Council resolutions,” and the Security Council declared Iraq to be in “flagrant violation” of its obligations. President Clinton called Iraq’s action “completely unacceptable,” while a National Security Council spokesman declared that Iraq’s action “cannot be tolerated” and hinted at the possible use of military force.

As the United States once again increased its deployments in the Gulf region and a military strike appeared imminent, Saddam Hussein reversed course. In a November 14, 1998 letter to UN Secretary General Annan, Iraq agreed to allow UNSCOM and the IAEA “to perform their normal duties...” President Clinton, who had reportedly already given the launch order for air strikes, aborted the military action and announced on November 15, 1998 that Iraq had “backed down.” However, few observers believe Saddam Hussein will now abide by the agreements he has repeatedly flouted over the past eight years. Instead, many predict the cycle of Iraqi obstructionism will continue.

Conclusion

U.S. policy toward Iraq has undergone a significant transformation since the allied coalition victory in the Gulf War almost eight years ago. As a result, Saddam Hussein may be closer to achieving his ultimate objectives: destroying the political cohesion of the allied coalition, undermining support for U.S. military action, increasing his political standing within the Arab world, maintaining his grip on power, preserving his capacity to develop weapons of mass destruction and the ballistic missiles capable of launching them, eliminating the UN-imposed weapons inspection and monitoring regime, and, eventually, overcoming economic sanctions. If he is successful, the military victory won by the United States and its partners in 1991 will have turned out to be hollow.