

U.S. Policy in the Gulf: Five Years of Dual Containment

May 8, 1998



Brief Analysis

On May 6, 1998, Bruce Riedel, special assistant to the president and senior director of Near East and South Asian Affairs at the National Security Council, addressed The Washington Institute's Soref Symposium. The following are excerpts from his speech. [Read a full transcript. \(templateC07.php?CID=75\)](#)

When President Clinton was elected in 1992 his first administration recognized immediately the strategic importance of the region and recognized that there were two central threats posed to the stability and security of the area -- Iraq and Iran. We also recognized from the beginning that these threats could not be dealt with in isolation. Rather the United States needed to understand that dealing with the threat posed by one could not be done at the cost of neglecting the other. Consequently, we needed a policy designed to handle the unique threat each posed but which did so in a coordinated manner. This was and remains the underlying premise of the policy known as Dual Containment. That policy understands the unique threats posed by these two states and seeks to deal with them both, not identically but in a coherent manner. Early on we rejected the option of trying to play one off against the other. That policy had been tried earlier and had resulted in the dangerous imbalance of power in the region that helped to precipitate the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990.

We are now five years later and much has changed in the world. But much remains unchanged. Let's start with Iraq. We continue to face a very serious challenge to the stability of the Gulf from Saddam's Iraq... It is imperative that vigilance and strength remain the hallmarks of our efforts to contain this regime until the time comes when Iraq fully complies with its obligations and is at peace with its neighbors...

So the challenge ahead will be to keep this very dangerous regime contained and to prevent it from building an arsenal of dangerous weapons. How do we intend to do so? First, by limiting the regime's ability to threaten its neighbors. The two "no-fly" zones and the maritime interdiction force are part of this approach... We will also continue support for UNSCOM and sanctions. We are proud to fly UNSCOM's U-2 missions, and sanctions have already lost Saddam \$110B -- imagine what kind of threat Iraq would be today if it had \$110B. We will work with our partners in the region and around the world to strengthen these instruments. We will insist on full Iraqi compliance with Security Council Resolutions including a full accounting for all of Kuwait's missing-in-action.

Second, by trying to help the Iraqi people through the oil for food arrangement expanded by the UN earlier this year... We should not let him exploit what we care about, the people of Iraq, to protect what he cares about, WMD. We should not be fooled by Saddam's propaganda -- an Iraq that has grown by over 3 million people since 1991 is not starving to death.

Third, we will continue to be in contact with various elements of the Iraqi opposition to help them work more effectively. Those Iraqis who oppose Saddam do so at great personal risk -- they deserve our support. We should have no illusions here that an end to the Saddam dictatorship is close at hand or easy to accomplish. But we should also do what we can to help efforts like the INDICT program to highlight and dramatize Saddam's crimes.

Fourth, we will remain ready to work with a new government in Baghdad when it comes to power. Saddam will not last forever, and we should be ready to work with the Iraqis who succeed him. We do not seek a permanent sanctions regime or a Versailles like peace for Iraq. Nor do we want to see Iraq fragmented and turned into another Afghanistan or Somalia. We do want to see a strong and healthy Iraq return to the community of nations and see it play its appropriate role in international and regional affairs. America and Iraq have been close partners in the past and they can be partners and friends again in the future...

So let me turn to the second threat in the Gulf region that President Clinton inherited in 1993 -- Iran. How has containment fared vis--vis Iran? Our most important accomplishment here has been to put an international focus on Iran's actions and behaviors. And we have had some success. Four years ago Japan suspended its aid program for Iran, citing its support for terrorism, costing the Iranian regime over a billion dollars. Europe last spring announced an arms embargo. Russia has agreed to cap its arms dealings and take steps to control technology transfers with Iran. The Ukraine, Poland and other states have listened positively to our concerns about dangerous arms and technology transfers. China has moved away from cooperation with Iran's nuclear program and the sale of destabilizing conventional weapons.

Second, our effort to highlight Iran's dangerous policies and increase the economic cost of such actions has forced Tehran to make difficult decisions about where to put its resources... Hard pressed for foreign hard currency Iran has had to steadily cut back on its purchases of foreign weapons in this decade. Foreign exchange expenditures on arms have dropped from a high of \$2.5 billion in 1991 to less than one billion dollars last year...

Now we have begun to see some signs of change within Iran's political process. The election of President Khatami last spring obviously marked a milestone in the history of the Islamic Republic... Since President Khatami's inauguration we have followed his words and actions. We watched closely his unprecedented CNN interview and noted its many positive statements. We followed his handling of the Islamic Summit in Tehran last December and its generally moderate tone. And we have noted with interest his efforts to strengthen the rule of law inside Iran. We hope this will lead to protection for all Iranians, including religious minorities like the Bahai. We hope it will also lead to an end to efforts to encourage Salman Rushdie's murder. Most of all we welcome President Khatami's decision to increase the level of interaction at the people-to-people level between our two countries... And we support the efforts of think tanks on both sides to increase greater contacts between experts...

We are prepared to move further toward engagement. People to people dialogue is useful but the issues that divide Iran and America must ultimately be addressed by their governments. The United States has been open to a government-to-government dialogue with Iran since the Bush administration. We remain interested in sitting down face to face with the Iranian leadership to discuss all issues of concern to both states. We have no preconditions. We only insist that the dialogue be authoritative.

Unfortunately, there are serious issues about Iran's actions that still need to be addressed and need to be changed. First are Iran's efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction and long range ballistic missiles. Despite its signature on the NPT and CWC, our information is crystal clear: Iran is seeking to develop an arsenal of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and the missiles to deliver them. As DCI Tenet has reported to the Congress, this effort is an aggressive one in which Iran has put considerable resources...

Second, there remains Iran's dangerous connections with terrorist organizations around the world and particularly in the Muslim world. Despite promises that Iran opposes terrorism, we continue to see significant connections between Iran and numerous organizations that engage in terror including Islamic Jihad, Hizballah and Hamas. Iran still provides such groups with arms, money, training and safe haven. In Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon and many other states, Iran gives aid and assistance to groups engaged in acts of brutal violence against civilians. That is why so many of Iran's neighbors remain so leery of Iranian intentions despite the changes brought by President Khatami.

Third, we remain particularly concerned by Iran's support for violent opposition to the Middle East peace process. We have noted Iran's more moderate declaratory policy toward the Palestinian Authority and the more flexible approach it took in the Islamic Summit. But we remain deeply concerned about its continued connections and support for the most violent enemies of peace. Its words must now be matched by deeds.

So in any future dialogue with Iran we will want to discuss these issues. And we will continue to discourage other countries from engaging with Iran as a normal partner until we all see changes in Iran's policies in these areas. In this regard we will enforce the laws passed by Congress intended to encourage other states to control technology transfers to Iran and to exercise great care and discipline in what they trade with Iran.

In principle the United States and Iran potentially have many areas where shared interests and common concerns could emerge: seeing the Gulf open to unrestricted flow of its energy resources; seeing the Saddam regime in Iraq contained and disarmed by the UN inspectors; seeing an Afghanistan at peace with itself and its neighbors... It is even possible to envision the development of a common interest in seeing stability in the region so that its peoples can focus their attention on human development, not weapons development. The United States stands ready to engage with Iran on all of these issues and others whenever Tehran is ready.

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