

Beyond 'Containment' of Iraq:

An Action Plan for U.S. Policy

Mar 24, 1997



Brief Analysis

On March 26, 1997, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is scheduled to deliver her first major speech on Middle East policy—her focus, Iraq. Strengthening U.S. policy toward Iraq was a key theme of The Washington Institute's recently released Presidential Study Group report, *Building for Security and Peace in the Middle East*. That report was endorsed by a bipartisan commission of 39 statesmen, legislators, veteran diplomats, Middle East experts and former government officials (see bottom of page for a full listing). Following is the "Iraq policy" section of the report:

To improve upon the administration's current "containment" strategy, the Study Group believes that the administration's top priority should be to take steps that hasten the demise of Saddam Hussein's regime while preserving Iraq's national unity and territorial integrity.

Operationally, a policy that seeks to hasten the demise of Saddam's regime should include the following measures:

- The United States should clarify its declared policy on Iraq, stating categorically that it opposes the lifting of UN sanctions or any potential reconciliation with Iraq without a change in the regime in Baghdad. This would rectify a misguided perception held by too many leaders and people in the Arab world and in Europe that the United States has become reconciled to Saddam's hold on power. That perception is a critical factor that permits Saddam to continue to hold sway over a considerable Sunni Arab constituency within Iraq; that makes Arab, Turkish and European partners hesitate to support what they perceive as half-hearted U.S. responses to Iraqi military provocations; and that helps propel Arab, Turkish and European businessmen to beat a path to Saddam's door.

This suggested change in declaratory policy would improve upon current policy—which focuses more narrowly on the need for full Iraqi compliance with all UN resolutions—by restoring a theme that has fallen into disuse: the concept of Saddam's "irredeemability." This used to be U.S. policy; if it still is, the United States should be crystal clear about it.

- The United States should take all necessary measures to ensure the continued deployment of land- and naval-based U.S. forces in the Gulf, commensurate with the need to deter Iraqi and Iranian aggression and respond with overwhelming force to Iraqi or Iranian military and other provocations, as outlined below. This includes maintenance of existing air operations in northern and southern Iraq. At the same time, the United States should take every effort to limit the exposure of U.S. forces stationed in the Gulf so as to reduce points of friction with the local population.

- The United States should issue a Presidential statement offering a clearly defined set of incentives that would accrue to Iraq's benefit in the event of the ouster of Saddam's regime, to complement the set of UN sanctions that will remain in force as long as Saddam and his closest associates remain in power. These incentives should include:

----a general amnesty for all but the highest ranking members of Saddam's regime, whose continued hold on power (even in a post-Saddam regime) the United States would find unacceptable;-expedited removal of UN sanctions on Iraqi exports of oil and the import of non-lethal and non-dual use items;

----amendment of the ceasefire terms to reduce the monetary damages to be deducted from Iraqi oil revenues (though not reducing the amount that would go toward funding the operation of UNSCOM); and

----reaffirmation of the U.S. commitment to Iraq's unity and territorial integrity. In this regard, the United States should reaffirm its opposition to Kurdish independence and commit itself to recognizing the legitimate political and cultural rights of the Kurds only within the context of a sovereign and independent Iraq.

- At the same time, the United States should make clear its view that the UN inspection and monitoring program of its WMD and missile delivery efforts will remain in place indefinitely. Here, it is important to clarify to Iraqis and the world what sort of post-Saddam regime the United States should welcome-i.e., one that respects Iraq's commitment to regional stability; that recognizes the sovereignty, territorial integrity and the inviolability of borders of all regional states; that repudiates any acquisition, deployment, use or threat of weapons of mass destruction and accepts the indefinite extension of UNSCOM's mandate to ensure Iraqi compliance with WMD restrictions; that eschews terrorism in any form for any reason and commits to prevent acts of terrorism and punish perpetrators; and that respects the legitimate rights of its Kurdish, Shi'i, Turcoman and other ethnic populations and permits their expression through political, cultural and other forms of autonomy in the framework of a unified state of Iraq. A post-Saddam regime that adopts that platform and that excludes those members of the current regime with direct responsibility for the acts of genocide, aggression and terrorism perpetrated under Saddam deserves U.S. recognition.

- The United States should adopt a more aggressive approach toward military responses to Iraqi provocations, commensurate with the objective of hastening the demise of Saddam's regime. Increasingly, the U.S. response to provocative actions-e.g., major troop movements, violations of no-fly and no-drive zones, obstruction of UN weapons inspectors, proven complicity in terrorist acts-has been reactive in nature, limited in scope, and progressively more timid, often signalling a "more in sorrow than in anger" attitude toward Saddam. Instead, these provocations should be viewed as opportunities to inflict as much damage as practically and logistically possible on core regime assets and personnel. Among these are the headquarters and barracks of the Republican Guard, the Special Republican Guard and the various intelligence services as well as Saddam's own military headquarters in Baghdad, Tikrit or elsewhere.

- The United States should neither bless any particular Iraqi opposition leader nor anoint any putative successor to Saddam. As the recent debacle in northern Iraq indicates, Washington lacks the skill, will and/or resources for clandestine efforts to engineer a coup against Saddam through cooperation with the Iraqi opposition; this is in large part a result of the lack of confidence engendered by the opposition's internecine squabbling and its lack of significant Sunni Arab (as opposed to Kurdish) support. While the United States should lend political support to Saddam's opponents and insist upon the full implementation of UNSC Resolution 688, which calls upon Iraq to end its repression of the Iraqi people, we should not again permit clandestine initiatives to substitute for clarity in U.S. policy. Instead, Washington should work politically, diplomatically and militarily to create the conditions that would make regime change in Iraq more likely.

- The United States should warn Iran against any meddling in Iraq and with Iraqi groups (such as the PUK, the KDP,

or the SAIRI). Here, it is important to underscore the U.S. commitment to Iraq's territorial integrity and to preventing any outside power from threatening it. U.S. policy should be to oppose through appropriate means any Iranian incursion into Iraq that could threaten Iraq's territorial integrity, just as the United States should oppose any entry into Iran of Iraqi-backed groups that threatens Iran's territorial integrity. Similarly, the United States should take care to ensure that its focus on Iraq does not come at the expense of a firm U.S. posture against aggressive Iranian initiatives elsewhere in the Gulf. Geography dictates that southern Gulf states, like the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, view Iran as their preeminent strategic threat, which has the effect of complicating U.S. efforts against Iraq. While Washington should take a firm stand against any incremental rehabilitation of Saddam Hussein, this must be backed up by vigorous and sustained efforts to support southern Gulf states in deterring Iranian military aggression and preventing Iranian political subversion.

- The United States should undertake urgent, private consultations with European and Middle Eastern allies about the U.S. perception of the Iraqi situation, the need to adopt a more assertive approach toward Saddam's regime as a way to save the Iraqi people from further misery and the region from further bloodshed, and the U.S. commitment to persevere with this policy until its goals are attained. Washington should work assiduously with our allies to gain their participation, support or at least acquiescence to the policy outlined above.

The Study Group recognizes the gravity of its recommendation to adopt policies-both private and public-designed to hasten the demise of Saddam's regime and does not propose it lightly. Specifically, there are strong arguments against a public declaration rejecting any possibility of reconciliation with Saddam's regime and opposing any future repeal of UN sanctions on Iraq without regime change in Baghdad. Such a policy could worsen already tense relations with our allies vis-a-vis Iraq. It also runs the risk of reducing Saddam's incentive for cooperating with UNSCOM and complying with Security Council mandates, with the potential of provoking Saddam into lashing out against U.S. interests and U.S. regional allies, perhaps using missiles and weapons of mass destruction. Even if Saddam does not react militarily, this policy could redound to his political benefit by raising his stature as America's "public enemy number one." Moreover, some might suggest that at a time of relative peace, after the first full presidential term since World War II when the Middle East witnessed neither regional war nor full-scale revolution, it would be foolhardy to precipitate a confrontation with Saddam without a guarantee that the steps outlined above will bring about their desired outcome.

We believe, however, that it would be even more foolhardy to let time work against us, as our deterrent posture in the Gulf suffers from the threat of terrorism and from growing popular resentment within countries that host U.S. forces, as the international coalition against Iraq gradually erodes, and as European and Arab states progressively reconcile with Saddam. In this environment, we are convinced that the benefits of injecting clarity into U.S. policy, backed up with a greater willingness to respond forcefully to Iraqi provocations, outweigh the potential costs. Believing, as we do, in the near inevitability of future clashes with Saddam, it is far better for the United States to clarify its objectives and take the initiative now, while its regional assets remain strong, rather than permit Saddam to determine the pace and direction of events.

The Presidential Study Group was convened by Institute Executive Director Robert Satloff and Institute Counselor Ambassador Samuel Lewis. Signatories include: Senator Congressmen Benjamin Gilman and Howard Berman, former Secretary of State Alexander Haig, Ambassadors Jeane Kirkpatrick and Max Kampelman, former Director of Central Intelligence R. James Woolsey; former Undersecretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, former Undersecretary of State Robert Zoellick; U.S. News publisher Mortimer Zuckerman; former National Security Council officials Robert McFarlane, Peter Rodman, Geoffrey Kemp, Richard Haass, Paula Dobriansky, Douglas Feith, and Kenneth Pollack; renowned scholars Michael Mandelbaum, Daniel Pipes, and Steven Spiegel; Progressive Policy Institute president

Will Marshall; former Democratic congressmen Stephen Solarz and Mel Levine; two former U.S. ambassadors in the Arab world, Alfred L. Atherton (Egypt) and Roscoe Suddarth (Jordan); former State Department officials John Bolton, Bruce Jentleson, Harvey Sicherman, and Alan Makovsky; former ACDA officials Kenneth Adelman and Alan Platt; former congressional staff director Graeme Bannerman and House International Relations Committee aide Deborah Bodlander; and military experts Anthony Cordesman, Zalmay Khalilzad, James Roche, and Michael Eisenstadt. (Though not every member endorses every recommendation in the report, Building for Security and Peace reflects the broad, bipartisan consensus of the Study Group.). ❖

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