

Evolution of U.S. Policy on Iraq, the Iraqi Opposition, and Northern Iraq:

Between Humanitarian and Strategic Interests

Sep 19, 1996



Brief Analysis

In recent days, the Clinton Administration has articulated a clear distinction between U.S. strategic interests in southern Iraq and solely humanitarian concerns in northern Iraq. Following are statements since the end of the Gulf War chronicling the evolution of this policy.

- "[O]ur interest in the Kurds in [northern Iraq] is not a vital national security interest. It's a humanitarian interest. That's why we are concerned about Kurds. And we maintain that humanitarian interest, and we continue to pursue it. . . . But our vital interests are in the south, in the south where they have the danger of coercing or attacking neighbors in the south, as they did in Kuwait. We do not believe for a moment that Saddam Hussein has given up his ambitions in that direction, and we also have a vital interest in [Iraq's] development of chemical and biological and nuclear weapons. Only the military force we have here, only the maintenance of the no-fly zone, Operation Southern Watch, gives us a way of controlling that." --Secretary of Defense William Perry, on News Hour with Jim Lehrer, September 17, 1996.
- "America's position on Iraq sanctions has been consistent, principled, and grounded in a realistic and hard-won understanding of the nature of the Iraqi regime. U.S. policy will not change until and unless Iraq does everything the UN Security Council says it must." --Madeleine K. Albright, U.S. permanent representative to the United Nations, statement before the Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, DC, August 3, 1995.
- "The United States shares with the other ministers and the countries of this region the concerns that exist here over the suffering of the Iraqi people. We are also in complete agreement that it is the responsibility of the Iraqi government to end that suffering and their responsibility alone." --Secretary of State Warren Christopher, remarks at a press conference following a meeting with the GCC foreign ministers, March 12, 1995.
- "We strongly support the continued territorial integrity and unity of Iraq. We also support the Iraqi National Congress in its efforts to unify and strengthen the Iraqi opposition, and to bring a democratic, pluralistic government to Iraq, one which can live in peace with its neighbors and its own people. In sum, we are determined that the will of the international community, as expressed in UN Security Council resolutions, be enforced to ensure that an Iraqi tyrant does not again threaten his neighbors or pose a threat to broader peace." --Robert H. Pelletreau, assistant secretary for Near Eastern Affairs, statement before the Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, October 4, 1994.
- "As a signal of our interest in a democratic Iraq, the Clinton Administration also supports the objectives of the

Iraqi National Congress, the exile organization that represents a broad spectrum of religious, secular and ethnic communities." --Anthony Lake, assistant to the president for National Security Affairs, in "Confronting Backlash States," Foreign Affairs, March/April 1994.

- "We support the formation of a democratic government in Baghdad representative of all Iraqis and able to live in peace with its own people and its neighbors. We support the Iraqi National Congress as a unifying force in the opposition and as an important element in movement toward a democratic future. . . We do not believe Saddam Hussein can comply with Resolution 688 dealing with an end to repression and remain in power. . . . With regard to northern Iraq, we did not work for the return of over one million displaced persons to that area only to abandon them to the repression and murder that characterize Saddam Hussein's previous actions." --Ronald Neumann, then-director, Office of Northern Gulf Affairs, address at the Meridian International Center, Washington, DC, January 27, 1994.
- "I hope that by now the Clinton Administration policy toward Iraq is clearly understood. Simply stated, we seek Iraq's full compliance with all UN resolutions. The regime of Saddam Hussein must never again pose a threat to Iraq's neighborhood. And we are also committed to ensuring Iraq's compliance with UN Resolution 688, which calls upon the regime to end its repression of the Iraqi people.

"Some have tried to portray our policy as a softening of previous policy. But by now it should be clear that we seek full compliance for all Iraqi regimes. We will not be satisfied with Saddam's overthrow before we agree to lift sanctions. Rather we will want to be satisfied that any successor government complies fully with all UN resolutions.

"Nor do we seek or expect a reconciliation with Saddam Hussein's regime. The Clinton Administration's decision to release the judge advocate general's report, which details the regime's war crimes and crimes against humanity in Kuwait, was but a first step. Now, we have decided to seek the establishment of a UN Commission to investigate the charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Iraq itself and to assemble the voluminous evidence to back up these charges. Our purpose is deliberate: it is to establish clearly and unequivocally that the current regime in Iraq is a criminal regime, beyond the pale of international society and, in our judgment, irredeemable.

"We are also providing stronger backing for the Iraqi National Congress as a democratic alternative to the Saddam Hussein regime. The INC has succeeded in broadening its base to encompass representatives of all three major communities in Iraq, Sunni, Shiite, and Kurd. It is committed, as are we, to maintaining the territorial integrity of Iraq and to adhering to Iraq's international responsibilities. We are now urging others in the region to accord the INC the recognition and support it deserves.

"It should be clear that our quarrel is not with the Iraqi people. Their plight is the responsibility solely of the dictatorship in Baghdad. We are engaged in a UN effort to provide them with humanitarian assistance and to prevent them, as best we can, from falling victim again to Saddam Hussein's brutal repression. That is the purpose of Provide Comfort and the no-fly zones in northern and southern Iraq. That is also the purpose of UN resolutions 706 and 712 which provide for much greater humanitarian assistance but which the Iraqi regime refuses to accept. We are now looking, on an urgent basis, at other ways we can assist the Iraqi people. For example, we support proposals to send UN monitors to Iraq to observe human rights violations." -- Martin Indyk, then-senior director, Near East/South Asia Affairs, National Security Council, address to The Washington

Institute's Soref Symposium, May 18, 1993.

- "President Clinton is determined to ensure Iraq's full compliance with all relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions, including UN resolution 688. . . . We remain very concerned about the human rights practices of the Iraqi regime. That is why we have now decided to see a UN commission to investigate the war crimes and crimes against humanity of the Iraqi regime." --Vice President Al Gore, remarks on his meeting with representatives of the Iraqi National Congress, Washington, DC, April 29, 1993.
- "The secretary emphasized the importance of Iraq complying fully with all United Nations Security Council resolutions, including those on ceasing repression of the Iraqi people. . . . The secretary concluded by noting that only through democracy, respect for human rights, equal treatment of Iraq's people, and adhering to basic norms of international behavior, could Iraq be brought back into the community of civilized nations. The Iraqi National Congress will have the support of the United States in achieving these goals." --Richard Boucher, then-spokesman, U.S. Department of State, April 27, 1993.
- "Our policy is as it was before. We intend to try to require Saddam Hussein to obey all the UN resolutions. . . . [O]ne of those, 688, requires him to cease oppression of the Shiites in the south and the Kurds in the north. . . . Our policy is to try to ensure that the UN resolutions are lived up to." --Secretary of State Warren Christopher, CBS Face the Nation, March 28, 1993.
- "Under my Administration, the United States will continue to lead international efforts aimed at ensuring that the Iraqi regime does not threaten international peace and security and at ending the Iraqi government's brutal repression of its people." --President Clinton, letter on Iraq's non-compliance with UN resolutions, Washington, DC, March 22, 1993.
- "President Clinton reaffirmed the continuity of our policy toward Iraq. He noted that the Iraqi regime's continued refusal to accept the UN resolution has perpetuated the suffering of the Iraqi people. The President stressed that Iraq must fully comply with the UN resolutions, which mandate an end to repression of the Iraqi people as well as measures designed to achieve the security of Iraq's neighbors, before lifting of economic sanctions can be considered. . . .

"We also support the work of the opposition Iraqi National Congress. . . . A future Iraqi government which is representative of all the people of Iraq, which is committed to the territorial integrity and unity of Iraq, and which does not threaten its neighbors or its own people remains a key U.S. foreign policy goal." --Edward P. Djerejian, then-assistant secretary for Near East Affairs, statement before the Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Washington, DC, March 9, 1993 in U.S. Department of State Dispatch, March 15, 1993.
- "The United States has long encouraged the development of a broad-based Iraqi opposition leadership, reflective of all the elements of Iraqi society. The secretary and the delegation discussed our mutual interests in working toward a democratic, pluralistic government in Iraq which lives in peace with its neighbors and cares for its people. We stressed to the delegation the U.S. commitment to see full implementation of all UN Security Council resolutions, including Resolution 688, which forbids repression of Iraq's citizens. . . . Secretary Baker assured the delegation that the United States will continue to stand firmly in support of the brave Iraqis who oppose Saddam's tyranny." -- Margaret Tutwiler, then-State Department spokesman, statement following Secretary of

State Baker's meeting with the Iraqi National Congress, Washington, DC, July 29, 1992.

- "[M]any Kurds have good reason to fear for their safety if they return to Iraq. And let me reassure them that adequate security will be provided at these temporary sites by U.S., British, and French air and ground forces, again consistent with UN Security Council Resolution 688. . . . Our long-term objective remains the same--for Iraqi Kurds and, indeed, for all Iraqi refugees, wherever they are to return home and to live in peace, free from repression, free to live their lives." --President Bush, opening statement at a White House news conference, Washington, DC, April 16, 1991.



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