

The Future of Iraq Policy

Oct 8, 2002



Brief Analysis

On October 5, 2002, Zalmay Khalilzad, special assistant to the president for Near East, Southwest Asian, and North African affairs, addressed The Washington Institute's 2002 Weinberg Founders Conference. The following are excerpts from his remarks, edited for readability. [Read an edited transcript \(templateC07.php?CID=113\)](#) of his full remarks, including the question-and-answer session that followed his speech.

I want to give you the administration's perspective on where we are and what our vision is for Iraq. As far as the current situation is concerned, we are of the view that Saddam Husayn's regime is determined to retain, expand, and again use weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and that the regime is ready to employ such weapons not only at home, but also abroad. The administration is now determined to disarm Iraq one way or another. No decision for use of force has been made, and we have no desire for war with Iraq. War is not inevitable, but action is.

We are working with Congress to secure an effective resolution that allows the president to consider all possible options for dealing with the threat that Saddam Husayn poses. Similarly, we are working with the UN to secure an effective resolution that will end Saddam's defiance of Security Council resolutions and disarm the regime. We believe that Saddam is in material breach of his commitments to the UN. We believe that he threatens regional and global stability by supporting terrorism as well as by holding his country hostage and using its resources to build WMD and the missiles to deliver them. In order to avoid the use of force, Saddam must take the necessary actions -- not words, but actions -- to comply with all Security Council resolutions. Our position is that this threat will be dealt with one way or another, and in short order.

Liberation

Should force be required, U.S. and coalition forces will liberate the Iraqi people from the tyranny of Saddam Husayn. We will not enter Iraq as conquerors, nor will we treat the Iraqi people as a defeated nation. As President George W. Bush has said, liberty for the Iraqi people is a great moral cause and a great strategic goal. Our mission in Iraq will be to serve the interests and the hopes of the Iraqi people. We regard them as a gifted and great people with an ancient culture, and they, like people everywhere, deserve freedom. Our long-term objective for Iraq would be to establish a broad-based representative and democratic government, one that will renounce terror and WMD, respect international laws and norms, give all religious and ethnic groups a voice, adhere to the rule of law, and become an example of peace and tolerance for the region as a whole.

In the short term, we will reunify Iraq -- because it is not unified even today -- and maintain its territorial integrity. We will meet the humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people. We will immediately implement a major reconstruction program and put Iraq on the path to economic prosperity. It is our desire and objective to have plans in place for each of these goals before the use of force becomes necessary. We understand, however, that the challenge of building such an Iraq is a major one. The costs will be significant. Yet, we believe that a significant portion of the international community is prepared to help. Moreover, the Iraqi people will play a significant role in shaping reconstruction plans. We are optimistic about the contribution that the Iraqi people can make. Iraq has an educated and industrious population. It is endowed with great natural wealth and a history of law, scholarship, and culture.

Challenges

With regard to the future, we believe that three sets of challenges lie ahead. First will be the political reconstruction of Iraq. This will involve thoroughly reforming the government, ending the Ba'ath dominance of the country, and removing those elements used by Saddam to enforce his tyranny on the Iraqi people. Officials found guilty of crimes against humanity will be prosecuted. The larger issue of transitional justice will be settled by the Iraqi people.

Second will be economic reconstruction. The economy will need to be reformed in order to put Iraq on the path to prosperity. The United States is committed to ensuring that Iraq's oil patrimony is used to meet the economic and reconstruction needs of the Iraqi people.

Third will be security reconstruction. Iraq's international borders will be protected and respected. Security inside Iraq will be critical as well. The violence inflicted by Saddam on the Iraqi people has left serious scars. These problems need to be resolved by a reformed Iraqi judicial system. Iraq after Saddam will follow the rule of law, not the rule of the gun.

Iraqis themselves are already working on these complex challenges. The U.S. government's Future of Iraq project has been working on these issues for some time. Sixteen mixed groups that represent the rich variety of the Iraqi people are participating in these efforts. Yet, many Iraqis have been held back from participating in such activities by Saddam's regime, a regime that has chosen to waste Iraq's resources on miscalculated military adventures, palaces, and payments to the families of suicide bombers.

Again, transforming Iraq will not be easy. It will take time and it will involve costs for all parties, including the United States. Yet, the president believes that this cost is worth paying. If we succeed, as we are determined to, we will achieve a great deal. We will eliminate the WMD threat from Iraq. We will decrease the threat that Iraq poses to regional peace and stability, and, in transforming Iraq, we will take a significant step in the direction of the longer-term need to transform the region as a whole.

Responses to Questions

We are very skeptical that Saddam would comply with all UN Security Council resolutions in word as well as deed. But should the miraculous, the unexpected, the unlikely happen, we would still pursue regime change and liberation, but these objectives would not necessitate the near-term use of force. The message that the president wants to give is that the United States is committed to liberation, that our intent is not conquest or occupation of Iraq. We will do what needs to be done to achieve disarmament and to ready Iraq for a democratic transition.

Should military action become necessary to maintain security in Iraq, I cannot at the moment announce any specific figures regarding the size of the force that would be employed. But we can be assured that the necessary resources would be committed and that we would have the will to stay for as long as necessary to get the job done. This will be a major strategic commitment.

The formation of a provisional government is a possibility, but I would say that we are not yet ready for that step. My own judgment is that it would be better to establish such a government later, once liberation has taken place and we have established the security environment and other conditions appropriate for given Iraqi groups to take over the country. In any case, I think that several Iraqi groups will play an important role. The question is when and in what sort of a structure, and I am not in a position to say that we have established a formula defining their involvement in detail, either for the preliberation phase or in the immediate aftermath of liberation. I think it is best to engage such groups once liberation has occurred.

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