

# U.S. Should Intensify Pressure on Hussein

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Articles & Testimony

**S**anctions on Iraq are now 11 years old, and U.S. policy is going nowhere fast. The State Department has proposed to revise sanctions to try to undermine Saddam Hussein's propaganda, but the approach is little more than appeasement. At least that's how Iraqis described it during my recent nine-month visit there. They pointed out that Mr. Hussein interprets negotiation and compromise as weakness, not a tool to resolve differences. Regardless, nothing in the proposed revised sanctions forces Mr. Hussein to feed his people, and so the Iraqi ruler will simply continue to cynically starve them and blame the United States. Anti-sanctions activists will continue their pressure to lift sanctions and rehabilitate Mr. Hussein, claiming the sanctions to be responsible for the deaths of a million.

They often cite the 1 million number as a solid United Nations statistic, though they often fail to mention that Mr. Hussein's Health Ministry was the report's co-author and that the Iraqi government provided most of the statistics. Even United Nations officials admit the report is extremely flawed.

Rather than loosen controls on Mr. Hussein, the Bush administration should ratchet up the pressure. When left alone, Mr. Hussein started two bloody wars and, in an orgy of violence against his own population in 1988, he killed 182,000 Iraqi civilians, many with chemical weapons.

While Secretary of State Colin Powell may want to tread softly, leaving Mr. Hussein to his devices would be to make the same mistake three times. Iraqis, free to speak openly in the northern safe-haven, are terrified that the United States has lost its resolve.

Only since the implementation in 1996 of the oil-for-food program have the northern Iraqis received income proportional to their population. The northerners associate Mr. Hussein with interrogation cells, rape, chemical weapons attacks, destroyed villages and war.

According to doctors in Halabja, site of one of Mr. Hussein's more gruesome chemical attacks, cancers and birth defects have increased by more than 300 percent. If sanctions are lifted and Mr. Hussein reasserts authoritarian control over the democratic north, locals say the result will be clear: 3 million refugees.

Since Mr. Hussein is the primary threat to the Iraqi people, the Bush administration should do everything in its power to avert a humanitarian crisis and prevent Mr. Hussein from again threatening Iraqis or their neighbors. Augmenting the no-fly zones with "no-drive zones" would be a start, giving maximum protection to the region's civilians with minimum risk to American forces.

Simply put, the United States should declare that Mr. Hussein's armor and artillery -- so cavalierly paraded for 13 hours in Baghdad Dec. 31 -- will not be allowed to terrorize the safe-haven or any other area of Iraq where the people rise up and demand their democratic and human rights.

A no-drive zone requires air power -- effectively used to counter Slobodan Milosevic's ethnic cleansing in Yugoslavia -- but not ground troops. Mr. Hussein can hide his tanks, but hidden tanks cannot be used to level schools, hospitals,

mosques or homes, as his armor did.

In December, Mr. Hussein briefly moved his troops into the northern safe-haven and surrounded a town called Baadre. American jets flew low over the Iraqi soldiers; 138 troops threw down their weapons and surrendered. Iraqis living both in the safe-haven and under Mr. Hussein's control consistently reported Iraq's military morale to be low. Iraqis simply do not want to die for Mr. Hussein.

Some might argue that the security of a no-drive zone might become a base for an uprising, but why should the United States and Europe applaud the Serbian people for rising up against their dictator but discourage Iraqis who have suffered both longer and more brutally? The choice should be made by Iraqis only.

If the Bush administration is serious about helping stabilize Iraq and protect innocent people, the time is now for a no-drive zone. Muddling through Iraq policy, or loosening controls on Mr. Hussein, will only encourage the Iraqi leader to again use his military against civilians and minorities and destabilize his neighbors. ❖

Baltimore Sun

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