

Advice from Friends:

Possibilities and Pitfalls in Dealing with the Middle East

Apr 26, 2001



In-Depth Reports

Robert Satloff, The Washington Institute: As we have begun to do in the last few years for some of the programs in the Soref Symposium, we are dispensing with formal presentations so as to have enough time for informal remarks and give-and-take exchanges. So let me just open up with a general question to you, Richard. We are almost 100 days into the Bush administration. How would you rate the administration's policies in general, and especially in terms of the Middle East?

Richard Perle: The administration is doing extraordinarily well. They do not yet have a policy toward the Middle East, which is actually a highly desirable situation to be in; given the dependence of this administration on holdovers from the previous administration, if they had a Middle East policy, I would not like it very much. So they are working to formulate one. Change is greatly needed in this area, Iraq being one example. The previous administration had a policy of doing nothing, or essentially nothing, in Iraq. It also had a policy of encouraging an approach to negotiation in the region which at times was reckless, and which certainly has not improved the situation; if anything, the situation is worse. So a great deal needs to be done to come to grips with the legacy of the outgoing administration, and if this sounds too partisan, my Republican friend may want to say something in defense of that administration. (Laughter.)

Lawrence Eagleburger: Let me say first of all that I particularly enjoy being here with Richard Perle. He is the only man I know who can always make me look like a raving liberal. (Laughter.) Now, with regard to the question of 100 days, we cannot expect any administration to be brilliantly successful from the outset. What we see in the first hundred days is not necessarily what we are going to see after the first thousand days. This administration suffers from another peculiarity, which is that the dispute in Florida really delayed its ability to get its act together before coming into office. Having on several occasions been involved in transitions into and out of office -- more out than in, I may add -- I know how important time is in terms of trying to get the right people in the right positions. Richard is absolutely correct: this administration is operating in many regards with people from the previous administration. These people cannot be expected to do a 180-degree turn on, for example, environmental issues like the Kyoto Protocol: issues on which the new administration has succeeded in upsetting almost every environmentalist. I think that this latter fact is a good thing, but that is another matter.

Having said all of that, I think the new administration has had a test of sorts -- the spy-plane incident in China -- and it performed pretty well. Although this incident was not the crisis that the press constantly tried to make it into, it could have become a messy situation if the Chinese had held the plane's crew; but the administration did a pretty good job of getting them released. I was a little worried about our excessive apology, but I would have been even more worried if these people had been turned into hostages. Given my particularly strenuous view of our relations with China, though, I would have to say that the administration is making some mistakes with its arms sales to Taiwan. To come back to the original question, though: in its first 100 days, the Bush administration has done pretty well. Yet even if they had done badly in the first 100 days, this fact would not tell us much about what they will be like

500 days from now.

Satloff: Fair enough. Let's take another term that has been much bandied about, regarding the desire to define a "regional strategy" for the Middle East, in contrast to the sort of strategy that the Clinton administration allegedly had: namely, its laser-like focus on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process as opposed to an emphasis on Iraq and the Gulf in general. The Bush administration sees integral links between the two. Yet what does this term mean when it comes to making policy? What is a regional strategy, and what should it look like in practice?

Perle: I don't know what a regional strategy is. It sounds to me like one of those terms that we use when we are trying to comprehend a variety of policies with a common geographic core.

Eagleburger: Or when you are trying to describe yourself as different from the president who preceded you.

Perle: That, too. The last administration had no regional strategy at all; the concentration on the peace process -- which I would not call a strategic "peace process," but rather a series of negotiations -- was the whole of their policy. "Laser-like" is the way you put it; although I would not use that adjective, these negotiations were certainly the near-exclusive focus of that administration's policy, to the detriment of other parts of the region where, for a very long time, neglect was accompanied by deterioration in America's standing. For example, at the end of that administration, we had no inspectors in Iraq; they had been thrown out by Saddam Husayn, in violation of United Nations regulations. We had used force to try to get them back in, failed, and then redefined the objective. Thus, Saddam is emerging from this last decade in a much stronger position than he was in at the beginning of the decade, and I believe this fact to be extremely dangerous.

I had occasion recently to spend some time with an Iraqi physicist who had been trained in the United States and later summoned back to Iraq to work as Saddam's nuclear-weapons head. He has written a book called *Saddam's Bombmaker*, which I strongly recommend. The book contains a bit of sensationalism, but when you sit down with this fellow, he describes in a very calm and deliberate way the nuclearweapons program that he put together in Iraq after Israel's 1981 destruction of the French reactor at Osirak. That program entailed the building of several hundred very small uranium-enrichment facilities, most of them smaller than a conference room. These facilities are all over Iraq; some of them look like farmhouses, others like warehouses. We do not know where they are, and every day, a little trickle of weapons-grade material comes out of them. German intelligence estimates that Saddam will have nuclear weapons by 2003, before the White House changes hands again. The prospect of nuclear weapons in the hands of Saddam Husayn, who has used weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in the past, is truly daunting, so we have to take some sort of action before he acquires that capability. The current policy, which is to tolerate him and to pretend that tougher sanctions will inhibit him, is profoundly shortsighted.

Satloff: So "regional strategy" does not mean very much; we need to focus on Saddam as our top priority?

Perle: If we applied a laser-like focus on Saddam, and it meant something rather more than it meant in the peace process, then we would be doing the right thing. If we could accomplish one thing in the region, getting rid of Saddam would be the one thing to do.

Satloff: Larry?

Eagleburger: Like Richard, I do not fully know what "regional strategy" means. I also agree with him on the importance of Iraq, though not necessarily on the solution. Everything he has described in terms of the threat is correct, and I would add that this whole question of WMD in the hands of the wrong people is not just an issue between the United States and Iraq; it is one of the fundamental questions that we have to look at on a global basis. History does not bode well for us; in looking at other countries that may also develop these weapons, we have to wonder whether there will be far fewer inhibitions against using them than was the case with those who possessed them in the past. All of this is off the point, but if a regional strategy means recognizing that we have to differentiate

countries and issues in that region, then I suppose this would be a regional strategy.

I will also say that the United States cannot put the Arab-Israeli issue off in a corner for very long. I do not mean to imply that something has to be done in a hurry, but our leaders do need to think very hard about how they return some sense of, if not momentum, at least involvement in an issue where a lack of intention and involvement almost always leads to popular uprisings. They need to think about how they get themselves back into the game, if you will, though by no means in the way that the previous administration was involved. My own belief -- which I am prepared to change if I see evidence to the contrary -- is that we have to recognize that the grand solution which we have been pursuing for a long time now is not something that Chairman Yasir Arafat ever intended to accept; if he had intended to accept it, he probably could not have anyway. For the immediate future, then, this will not be the way to proceed with regard to the peace process. We have to recognize that there are specific, discrete issues that we can perhaps discuss with the appropriate people on both sides, which may encourage some progress.

Not that we have to beat on the heads of the Israelis to take action every time the Palestinians slow things down, as we have in the past. The United States does this too often, and not just with regard to Israel. When we are mediating between two negotiating parties and either side is moving more slowly than we think is appropriate, our tendency is to turn to our ally and say, "Oh my God, you've got to do something, put something else on the table!" Over time, this practice inevitably leads to a deterioration in our negotiating position. Thus, on the Middle East in general, and on the Arab-Israeli conflict in particular, we must hold back for a while. The pressures of the last year, particularly the last six months, have left everybody giddy. Once we are ready to get involved again, though, I believe that we should encourage negotiations on specific issues, like water and so forth, though certainly not on Jerusalem. (Applause.) Thanks -- I was just checking to see who was still awake. (Laughter.)

Let me just say more on Iraq, because it is a real conundrum. I cannot debate for one minute what Richard has said about the problems there, nor can I deny my own frustration with the last administration's failure to do something serious when Saddam began to challenge both the UN and our own oversight. We should have responded appropriately, even if it meant renewing a mini-war there, however unrealistic that prospect sounds. This would have been an important step, although I also understand why neither the administration nor, probably, the American people had the stomach for it at the time.

Nevertheless, I take issue with the increasingly popular notion that the real solution now is for the United States to find a group of people who will overthrow Saddam and put a different government in place. We need to keep in mind how massively inept we are at that sort of thing, however nice it may sound. We do not want a repeat of what happened in Chile, where we supplanted the communist president, Allende, with someone along the lines of Pinochet. Similarly, when the previous administration felt that it was not enough to feed people in Somalia and get out, and decided instead to get rid of the generalissimos there and start a new government, we all saw the horrific results. I can see us becoming deeply entangled with some new group of people in Iraq and later wishing that we had never heard of them. So while I acknowledge that we have a terribly serious problem in Iraq, I am not at all sure what we should do about it. If we are going to do something about it, we need to educate the American people far more than we have on how important this issue is, because the public is not prepared at this stage for any terribly serious action. Whatever the case, sparking a coup of Saddam's regime is not really the answer at this point.

Satloff: Richard, you disagree.

Perle: A large-scale coup is certainly one feasible answer. More specifically, we should align ourselves with a group of people who are well known to us and who are eager to liberate their country from the monstrous rule of Saddam Husayn. The leader of the preeminent organization among the Iraqi opposition holds a Ph.D. in mathematics from the University of Chicago. Normally, that would disqualify one from serious political work, but he is also from a distinguished Iraqi political family going back many generations. He has long been dedicated, I think quite selflessly

-- he is independently wealthy and thus not in it for the money -- to mobilizing other opponents of the regime in a broad coalition known as the Iraqi National Congress. This group is widely disparaged by people who --

Eagleburger: Like me.

Perle: -- who are, frankly, defeatists on the prospect of replacing Saddam and who often miss the fundamental point, which is that no opposition operating without support, without much hope, without much substance, without a basis from which to operate, without political legitimacy conferred by allies -- that no such opposition can hope to succeed. Yet with the backing of the United States -- including a modest investment and a serious commitment to the liberation of Iraq -- I believe that these people can be successful. Broadly speaking, they share our values, but in any case, they have committed themselves to eschewing WMD, to introducing democratic institutions, and to doing other things of which we would very much approve. So the issue becomes a practical one of how to get them from exile -- where they are now -- into power.

The only method by which we could hope to do that involves helping them to reestablish a political presence on Iraqi territory. Until 1996, the Iraqi National Congress operated from Iraqi territory, from the third of the country which was not under Saddam's control. Eventually, though, the presence on his territory of a group of democratically oriented oppositionists forced Saddam to take action, and, sadly, we stood by as he did so: as people were lined up and executed for having aligned themselves with us and our values. We do not have to let this happen again, though. We can commit ourselves to being there the next time we are called on to take decisive action.

I have discussed this issue at length with various military figures, with old colleagues in the Defense Department, with people as highly credentialed as the former head of the U.S. Army Special Forces. A great many such people believe that there are feasible strategies which would entail little more than the use of American air power, if necessary, to protect the territory from which the opposition might operate. Obviously, this is not the occasion for a detailed operational plan, but if we examine seriously the prospect for liberating Iraq, as we succeeded in liberating El Salvador and Nicaragua --

Eagleburger: And Cuba. (Laughter.)

Perle: Larry, the difference between what we have done in Cuba and what I am proposing we do in Iraq is that we have been relying now for thirty-five years on sanctions in Cuba, and this has also become the preferred method for dealing with Iraq, where it will be as fruitless as it has been in Cuba.

Eagleburger: I was thinking more of the Bay of Pigs.

Perle: I know what you were thinking of, and the two cases are not at all the same.

Eagleburger: I concede that this is not the time to debate it, and I give you all credit for the idea; I just disagree with it. Again, I do not have a particular solution. Yet, if there has to be a solution, and if we are going to go with a solution simply because somebody has come up with one, then we are going to get ourselves deeply enmeshed in Iraq in a way that I am not sure we should.

Satloff: Larry, what would you say if the new administration asked you what act of provocation by Iraq would merit the use of massive American force? Not the sort of force currently on display in the no-fly zones, but the kind that we experienced during the Gulf War.

Eagleburger: In a way, you are forcing me to make a suggestion which is different from Richard's proposal, yet which would not receive support. Certainly an invasion of Kuwait or a neighboring state would merit such force, except for the fact that the U.S. military is in nowhere near the shape to do it now that it was ten years ago. The United States should also be prepared to take substantial military action if and when we see a state such as Iraq in the process of building nuclear weapons. Now, this stance could get us into all sorts of trouble, because I think that we have been

much too lenient on this issue in North Korea as well. Yet, any clear development of a nuclear-weapons program -- not just some jerry-built contraption, but a serious capability -- should require from us, at minimum, a serious examination of whether we would use substantial military force. We should also present this possibility to the particular governments with which we are contending.

I realize that such forceful action is not going to happen, because it is not the sort of thing that the American people are prepared to accept. Yet, I will say -- and this is where Richard and I really do agree -- that the vision of nuclear weapons or any kind of WMD in the hands of people like Saddam Husayn is such a serious, longterm threat to global stability that we have to be much more prepared to deal with it in a forceful way than we are now. This whole question of WMD is going to be one of the principal foreign-policy issues for current and future administrations throughout the rest of the early part of this century. We have hidden our heads in the sand up until now, so we have to develop a willingness to use substantial military force in dealing with this problem. Frankly, Richard, I would prefer these more extreme measures to your strategy for implanting a new government in a country such as Iraq. I would rather go all the way to direct use of military force, but again, I do not think that this approach would be accepted by the American people. While we are on the issue of military force, let me say that although I used to think of myself as a hawk, I never conceived of placing American troops into every nook and cranny around the world, as has been done over the last eight years. This makes me sound very much like a Republican, but it is a real problem: troops here, there, and everywhere, without any clear rationale as to why they are there. Take Haiti, for example -- it is no different today from what it was before we sent in our troops. As a general rule, we need to be much more reluctant to commit our forces than we have been in the last eight years. Yet, if we are going to commit them, then we need to commit them for real, and for a cause that is clearly, directly related to the security and interests of the United States.

Satloff: Richard, if indeed Iraq will have a nuclear weapon by 2003, then shouldn't you be advocating the sort of suggestion that Larry just described? That is, rather than trying to work with the opposition on something that may or may not succeed, shouldn't we be going into Iraq ourselves and taking care of the problem now?

Perle: Clearly, we were not prepared to take that conclusive action when Saddam's army had been decimated and he was in full retreat, not even against the Republican Guard right outside Baghdad, when it would have changed the situation substantially. So it is hard to imagine that we would now amass the force necessary to go into Iraq. I share Larry's view that we are not terribly competent at creating new governments, and that was one of the concerns of the first Bush administration when it refrained from attempting to change the government in Baghdad by force of American or coalition arms. So I am rather doubtful about whether we could mobilize support for this strategy now, and if we did, whether we could achieve the objective, short of occupying and administering Iraq. Instead, the role of American military power should be to support Iraqis who want to liberate their country. If I thought that the only way to accomplish this was through an American-managed operation, I would throw up my hands in despair. The United States should not manage such efforts; we should simply provide a little bit of support to those Iraqis who can manage it on their own.

Satloff: Is it your policy prescription that the liberation of Iraq can be achieved without a single American soldier on the ground?

Perle: We will not know that until we help the opposition create a political presence there. In 1996, before we abandoned the Iraqi opposition in the field, there were massive defections to the liberated areas by Iraqis who were not loyal to Saddam. Most of the army is still not loyal to Saddam. People who rule the way he rules eventually acquire a very large number of lethal enemies.

Eagleburger: Enemies who find themselves dead on the ground shortly thereafter.

Perle: If they attempt a small-scale coup, certainly. Yet there were thousands of defections at the time, by people who were prepared to switch sides and fight, and I think we can recreate that situation.

Satloff: Let's move on to topics in the Arab-Israeli arena. One month ago, President Bush gave a press conference in which, after he had exhausted his briefing notes, he got a bit hot under the collar and responded to one question by saying, "The way to get things going is [to] just stop the violence, Yasir Arafat, and I'm going to have Colin Powell get on the telephone this afternoon to tell him so." Yet, last week, the secretary of state issued a statement calling Israeli actions in Gaza "disproportionate and excessive." Why this apparent contradiction?

Perle: The phone wasn't working.

Eagleburger: Between whom?

Satloff: Powell and Arafat.

Eagleburger: Powell and the president, it sounded like.

Perle: That's what I meant.

Satloff: Which do you think it is, Larry?

Eagleburger: Both, really; these two incidents are a perfect microcosm of our general lack of a coherent Middle East policy. Unquestionably, Mr. Arafat and the Palestine Liberation Organization need to understand that massive changes have to be made in the way that they look at and deal with this issue of violence; otherwise, they are going to have terrible problems with the United States. I also think that the last months of 2000 demonstrated that Arafat simply cannot bring himself to accept any agreement, certainly not what he was offered last year. Yet, I don't see how he could avoid accepting it, unless in the back of his mind he believes that he can get more if he perseveres. In any case, there is no question about where we stand with the Palestinians and what kind of behavior we expect from them.

On the other hand, there may be times -- and I am not sure that last week was the proper time -- when the U.S. government thinks that Israel ought to do things differently. We do have a right to express our views -- at least in private -- to the Israeli government if we think that they are using excessive force. By and large, the Israelis are going to know better than we will what force is necessary to deal with a problem. Yet, we do not have to give carte blanche to everything the Israelis do. We do have some involvement in this matter, and thus we have a right to let them know what we think, perhaps even publicly at times. Both sides in this dispute are going to do things on occasion that we may not like. Then again, there may be times when neither side cares what we think.

I happen to be a veteran of the infamous loan dispute that took place during the early 1990s, wherein we conditioned our loan offer to the Israelis on their implementing a settlement freeze. I was working with former President Bush at the time, and we took a beating for our handling of the problem. Fundamentally, though, the government was right in how it dealt with this question. I do not necessarily contend that the current president should try something similar, but on the issue of settlements at that time, the U.S. government was correct. The United States is the only entity that can bring Israel's enemies to the table and, by and large, make them do certain things. We do not want to lose that ability, so we have to continue to be engaged. Yet we also have to make it clear to both sides that we are not participating in these negotiations for the purpose of adding our weight only to one side, despite the fact -- and everybody needs to understand this as well -- that 99 times out of 100, we are going to back the Israelis.

Perle: The miscommunication between Bush and Powell was troublesome for other reasons as well. For one thing, the force that Powell was criticizing was not in fact excessive. Second, we knew that the Israeli operation in question was coming to an end, and it strikes me as a serious breach of confidence that we made a public statement which did not reflect the fact that we had this information. Third, I found it deeply troubling that Powell's statement appeared

to confuse terrorist violence with action taken against terrorism. We have made this mistake too often. Let me also say that though I hope for a resumption of serious negotiations, "resumption" may not be quite the right word, because it has been a long time since we had serious negotiations. Larry came close to saying what I believe, which is that Arafat does not have any interest in concluding a peace with Israel -- that there was no set of concessions Barak could have offered which would have led to peace. Until there is a new Palestinian leadership, there will not be a peace agreement with Israel.

Eagleburger: Did you believe that last year as well?

Perle: I believed it last year as well. The evidence is not simply in the diplomatic behavior at the bargaining table. The evidence lies in what Palestinian children are taught in kindergarten, where they learn violence and hatred. The evidence is seen in the representation of geography on Palestinian television, where Israel does not exist on a map of the region. The evidence is in the speeches that Arafat has been giving consistently, in which he calls for a holy war and shares the platform with the families of suicide bombers who have committed acts of terror. This is not a partner with whom you can negotiate or expect to achieve a peace. It astonishes me that so many people -- including many in the Jewish community - were caught up in the illusion that there was a peace process under way that could lead to a satisfactory result.

Eagleburger: Do you put any merit in my thought that there are specific issues which might be negotiated?

Perle: Well, I think there are things that can be done to keep idle hands busy. (Laughter.)

Eagleburger: Beyond that, though -- if instead of trying to reach a comprehensive settlement, we tried to find individual issues that would be improved if there were some agreement?

Perle: Clearly, if we can ameliorate a difficult situation, we should find ways to do so, but without illusions about what can be achieved under the current leadership. I would put the emphasis on the current leadership, because people who truly wish to make peace are not clamoring for a chance to replace Arafat at the negotiating table. Until we see that, the prospects for peace are very dim indeed. We would be wise to encourage more modest agreements, but we must not do so with the illusions that characterized the last several years, because among other things, those illusions led to an inflation of expectations which has made the violence of disillusionment all the worse. The situation is significantly worse today than it was before some people were led to believe that they could achieve a result that was never achievable.

Satloff: Let me just pursue two issues: the objective and the means. Both of you have just said that we should have extremely modest objectives for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, given what we know from the last six months or what we should have known over the last seven years: that there is business which can be done, but that it is modest and incremental. If I characterize your views correctly, let me ask you about the best way to pursue them. Several American presidents from both parties have had the Middle East, Arab-Israeli "bug" over the years, creating special envoys to the region and so forth. We seem to have started this new administration with a desire to let the in-house professionals in the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, among others, manage this process. Consequently, some people feel that we need to do something more, perhaps appoint another special envoy to address Arab-Israeli issues. How would you advise the president to go about handling these issues?

Eagleburger: When the American people made the unwise choice to remove George Bush and replace him with Mr. Clinton, and I was dealing with the transition out of office, former Secretary of State Warren Christopher and I had lunch together one day and discussed some of these issues. As he was walking out the door, he turned to me and said, "I want you to know one thing. We will never put as much time into the Middle East as you and Jim Baker have." (Laughter.) No matter what this administration says now about how much time it is going to spend on the Middle East, it will inevitably be drawn in at some point. Henry Kissinger spent four years avoiding the Middle East, and we

saw what happened to him during the second Nixon administration, aside from Watergate. (Laughter.) The peace process is too important to avoid.

The question really becomes how much we want to try to do and how deeply we want to become involved. Frankly, the last administration went much too far in the end. I had no trouble with its actions until we got to a point, fairly near election time, where we clearly were not going to succeed, and were embarrassing our own president and everybody else by continuing to try. We have to continue the process, though, and the only way that we can potentially do so is on smaller issues. I agree with Richard that Arafat cannot make a deal. I am not saying that this is some devious game on Arafat's part; psychologically, he cannot make an agreement. The last round of negotiations should have demonstrated that. So we are going to have to become involved in a different fashion. Despite this administration's present reluctance, I will wager that two years from now, we will not be able to find Colin Powell on any given day because he will be off somewhere in the Middle East.

Satloff: Richard?

Perle: What you have asked us to do is comment on a dispute between Israel and the Palestinians in the context of this negotiating process, which seems to me -- at the moment -- the least promising way to deal with the problem. The negotiating process, at the end of the day, will reflect the context in which it takes place and the realities that surround it. It will reflect the strength of the parties, it will reflect the disposition of the people who ultimately make decisions in that process, and it will reflect the position of the United States and others. We can do a great deal to assist in the ultimate resolution of that conflict, though none of it has to do with the peace process, per se. For one thing, we can remind ourselves first, and then others, that trying to reach a settlement by means of terrorism is unacceptable. We have not made this point clear; in fact, terrorism has frequently been rewarded in the region, most recently by statements coming from our State Department. If a group is trying to decide whether to engage in acts of terror in the area and they can reasonably assume that any armed response to their actions will be criticized, then they have an additional incentive to engage in terror in the first place. We are not going to make significant progress until violence is set aside, and it is not going to be set aside until we clearly show that it will not be rewarded, but rather, punished.

Satloff: I will open the floor now for a few questions before we close out this discussion.

Joseph Sisco, Sisco & Associates: I have two very brief questions, but first I would like to comment on what the administration faces in the very short term. Basically, their position is that they want to see this violence end and that negotiations really cannot develop unless this occurs. Despite the fact that they condemn Arafat on one occasion and describe the Israeli reaction as disproportionate on another, their fundamental goal is for the violence to end, whatever they have to say tactically in terms of the entire region.

My two questions, then. First, Secretary Powell has outlined what is presumably a new approach to the whole question of sanctions on Iraq, the emphasis being on easing the economic restrictions while trying to tighten security vis-à-vis the possibility of WMD materiel going into Iraq. Powell is doing this, as we all know, largely because the coalition has fallen apart. I would like a reaction from each of you. Second, we have an imminent decision in Congress concerning the renewal of the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA), which comes up this summer. Should the administration support this renewal?

Perle: Let me start with Iraq. As you said, the reason for changing the sanctions policy is that this policy is getting less and less support. The effort to persuade people that the sanctions are serving a useful purpose has largely failed. The civilian population of Iraq is widely seen around the world as a victim of the sanctions, even though we know that Saddam manipulates the flow of those things that the Iraqi people need. So we are abandoning the sanctions as a practical matter in the face of failure to persuade people that they are justified. The decision to use the term "smart

sanctions" and to suggest that they are going to be more effective is a public-relations maneuver which is transparent in the Arab world, and I doubt that anyone in the United States seriously believes it either. In effect, then, we are removing most of the sanctions.

Furthermore, it is naïve to think that we can prevent the small quantities of materials needed to build weapons of mass destruction from flowing across Iraq's borders. If you go to the Turkish-Iraqi border or the Jordanian-Iraqi border, you will find a line of heavy trucks twenty miles long at any given time. If you calculate how long it takes to inspect a single truck -- and these are inspected, if at all, by a listless bunch of international civil servants -- you will realize that we are not going to stop anything from crossing those borders. Even if we could stop the flow at the borders, there are plenty of flights into Iraq from Paris and Moscow and Kiev and elsewhere. So in my view, the sanctions are not going to get us anywhere.

As for the renewal of ILSA -- the dilemma with sanctions in general is that they are frequently adopted because we are not prepared to take more difficult action. During the argument about how to respond to Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, the proponents of sanctions did not want to fight, so they called for sanctions instead. We are now imposing sanctions against Libya and Iran, and they are not terribly effective, in part because they are being massively violated by others. Yet, if we remove those sanctions, it will appear to be an enormous victory for Mu'ammār Qadhafi. Less clear is who the victor would be on the Iranian side, but if we are going to encourage additional reform in Iran, it is too soon to lift the sanctions. So even though there are many problems with the sanctions, even though they are widely violated by others -- including allies of the United States -- lifting them is an admission of political defeat, which carries its own heavy price. Thus, we need to swallow hard and renew ILSA.

Satloff: Larry?

Eagleburger: I agree with Richard, for the most part. If I've learned nothing else during my time in the U.S. government, I have learned that, by and large, unilaterally applied sanctions are almost worthless. In fact, looking around the world, I cannot see any sanctions in recent years -- other than perhaps those on South Africa, which were fairly universally applied -- that had much success. As Richard said, we tend to apply sanctions because it makes us feel better, as if we have done something real. Yet, they are only a way of avoiding more substantive actions. Having said that, I think that even as bad as the sanctions have become in Iraq, they have exacted some price on Saddam, although over time our Western European allies have called for relieving them, perhaps out of simple greed. Thus, we have to maintain the sanctions on Iraq, if for no other reason than we cannot, from a political standpoint, admit defeat.

The same is probably true with regard to Iran and Libya. I am inclined to think that Mr. Qadhafi may be changing in ways that are more favorable for the United States. Despite what I read in the newspapers, though, I am still fundamentally doubtful about Iran. Clearly, there are forces for reform there. Yet, the mullahs still sit in the driver's seat at will, so again, I would not relieve the sanctions on Iran. This, despite the fact that everybody -- particularly the European oil companies and some of our own -- is lining up, just waiting for change there. Nevertheless, in all three cases, we should have known when we imposed the sanctions that they would at best have a marginal effect.

Satloff: Very interesting to have two Republican foreign-policy strategists, even if by default, who support the renewal of ILSA.

Eagleburger: Not necessarily because it is the smarter thing to do. New administrations are often stuck with the actions of the previous administration. President Bush cannot simply turn U.S. foreign policy around on a dime, nor should he be able to do so. If new presidents could do this, then nobody would be able to count on the United States for consistency.

Barbara Slavin, USA Today: This question is to Mr. Perle. I do not know whether you have traveled recently in the

Arab world or have any sense of how unpopular your views on Iraq are in many Arab countries. Are you suggesting that we support regime change in Iraq without actively trying to broker an Arab-Israeli settlement, and if so, what do you think the ramifications of that strategy might be for Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia?

Perle: Your question reflects an official position adopted by a number of Arab governments. Unofficially, though, the small states neighboring Iraq are in a very uncomfortable situation. When Arabs are talking to visiting Americans, it is much easier for them to say what you have just said than to admit that they feel weak and vulnerable in relation to Iraq, and that we are not giving them any reason to believe that we will protect them or look out for their interests. Many Arabs do not believe that the United States is serious about dealing with Saddam. Indeed, many of them think that we want Saddam to remain in power; they have a high regard for the military might of the United States, so they believe that if we really wanted to remove Saddam, he would be removed.

A lot of nonsense has been spoken about the objections to American policies on Iraq. In their heart of hearts, I think everyone in the region would cheer if they thought we were really going to remove Saddam from power. Yet, after years of fecklessness, symbolic acts, and halfhearted gestures -- of striking buildings in the middle of the night because we want to be sure that we don't hurt anyone, even though one such building was the headquarters of the Iraqi secret police -- we have lost all credibility in the region. What we are seeing now is a reflection of that collapse of credibility. We cannot reestablish credibility by focusing entirely on some other agenda, particularly when the implication is that this other agenda should involve pressuring the Israelis to make concessions to the Palestinians. Instead, we should get serious about the Iraq agenda and do something about Saddam.

Eagleburger: This question leads to something else that I am particularly concerned about. Granted, if we had been much more forceful against Saddam when he first challenged the sanctions, we would be in far better shape than we are now. The minute that we allowed him get away with such things, we committed a serious mistake, in part because of what Richard described as a loss of confidence in us. Yet, this brings up another potential problem in U.S. foreign policy for the twenty-first century. What worries me at least as much as this question of when we should apply sanctions is a trend in this country that I would have to describe as superpower hubris.

One of the consequences of the Kosovo war was our demonstration to ourselves and to the rest of the world that we can now fight wars by pushing buttons. Using advanced technology to kill our enemies does not cost us even an extra breath, particularly since we can keep all of our pilots above 15,000 feet, where they cannot be touched. In the years ahead, then, there is a real danger that Americans will begin to conceive of war as a kind of clean thing. The other side of this coin is that when some of our own soldiers are in fact killed, there will be an overreaction, if you will, to these losses. Many of us are already in this never-never-land of thinking that we can accomplish most military objectives through our high technology. Thus, we are horrified when we find that we are still paying the price -- to some degree -- that war implies, which is dead people. Witness our reaction to the killing of U.S. Marines in Somalia; it led to our hasty withdrawal a week or two later, which simply confirmed to the other side that killing Americans is one way to get them out of your country.

Our hubris is also evident in the fact that we are becoming increasingly prepared to exercise our muscle because we think that we can do it without much cost, and because we really do believe that we know better than most of the rest of the world how to manage their international relationships, their domestic politics, and so forth. This belief is particularly problematic for us in the human-rights area. I am not saying that we can ignore violations of human rights. Yet, we need to understand that, in some cases, other countries do not look at these questions in quite the same way we do, and that there may be some issues on which other countries have at least as legitimate a view as we do. So I am terribly worried that the United States is going to be dragged between these two extremes more and more in this coming century; on the one hand, reacting militarily because we have come to see it as costless, and on the other hand, adopting a kind of semi-isolationism when in fact we do have to pay a price.

We also have to come to grips with the fact that as the world's only superpower, we are going to be mightily disliked in many parts of the world. Because we have this power, and because we may tend to exercise it more than we should, many countries are going to become increasingly unhappy with us. We need to keep this factor in mind when we are making foreign-policy decisions. I am not saying that we have to shy away from this role. Yet the reality is that at no point in our history, or perhaps even in human history, has any one country been as predominant as we now are. Whether we like this fact or not, whether we are prepared to live with this responsibility or not, it is there. Inevitably, our actions are going to have far more impact on world events now than they did when we were only one superpower involved in a struggle with another one, the Soviet Union.

In a way, determining American foreign policy today is far more difficult than it ever was during the worst days of the Cold War. Because we knew who our enemy was then, we always had an anchor windward, in the sense that if we had to make a decision, one of the elements in it was always going to be, "How does it affect our relationship with the Soviet Union?" That kind of question is almost irrelevant now. As we develop our foreign policy in the coming decade or two, we will not have the road map that we had during the Cold War. We will have a much more difficult time trying to make sensible decisions, and at the same time, it will be much more important that we act sensibly. Because we are the superpower that we are, we will have to improve our ability to manage as sophisticated a foreign policy as possible while analyzing more precisely some of the pressing questions that lie before us.

So if there is one American foreign-policy issue that I think is most critical, it is this fundamental question of who we are and how we are going to proceed through the rest of this century. We need to keep this larger question in our heads as we try to answer the kinds of specific questions that have been asked tonight. ❖

RECOMMENDED



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

[The Ukraine Crisis Isn't Over: Russia Has Lied About Troop Withdrawals Before](#)

Feb 16, 2022

◆
Anna Borshchevskaya

[\(/policy-analysis/ukraine-crisis-isnt-over-russia-has-lied-about-troop-withdrawals\)](#)



As China Thrives in the Post-9/11 Middle East, the US Must Counter

Feb 16, 2022



Jay Solomon

(/policy-analysis/china-thrives-post-911-middle-east-us-must-counter)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

Unpacking the UAE F-35 Negotiations

Feb 15, 2022



Grant Rumley

(/policy-analysis/unpacking-uae-f-35-negotiations)

TOPICS

U.S. Policy (/policy-analysis/us-policy)