

Can the United States Influence the WMD Policies of Iraq and Iran?

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Articles & Testimony

Iraq and Iran are likely to pose some of the most difficult long-term proliferation challenges for the United States in the coming years. Both countries remain actively committed to developing weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in spite of obstacles created by export controls and sanctions, and even though they are signatories to various arms control treaties proscribing the possession and/or use of such weapons.

The WMD ambitions and capabilities of Iraq and Iran are of concern to the United States because of the key role these two states play in the politics of the Persian Gulf—a conflict-prone region of strategic importance, where two-thirds of the world's proven oil reserves are located. Iraq and Iran fought a bloody eight-year war in the 1980s, and many of the factors that gave rise to this conflict remain unresolved. Moreover, both have tense or hostile relations with several of their neighbors. Iraq still covets Kuwait. It harbors deep resentment against the Arab Gulf states for their role in the 1991 Gulf War and is likely to try to avenge its defeat someday. The leaders of Iraq and Iran also remain opposed to the existence of Israel—the sole nuclear power in the region. The acquisition of nuclear weapons by either would thus increase the potential for a nuclear confrontation in the Middle East. For all of these reasons, preventing Iraq and Iran from enhancing their current WMD capabilities, and deterring the use of these weapons, are high policy priorities of the United States. . . .

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Farzin Nadimi

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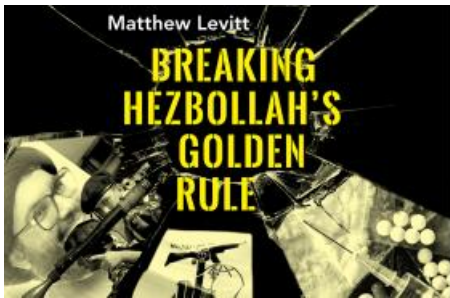
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