

U.S. Policy toward Iraq

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Jun 23, 1999

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Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs

MR. CLAWSON: Thank you. It's an honor to be here with you today. I've submitted a statement for the record. And if you'll permit me, I would like just to summarize that briefly.

SEN. BROWNBACK: That would be just fine. And we will put your entire statement in the record, and you're free to summarize as you see fit.

MR. CLAWSON: Thank you very much. After Congress passed the Iraq Liberation Act in 1998, the Clinton administration decided a regime change was a necessary goal rather than just a desirable aim. By publicly identifying regime change as a policy objective, the United States has put its prestige on the line. From now on, the world will use a simple test to judge the success or failure of U.S. policy towards Iraq. Namely, is Saddam still in power?

Therefore, the policy of promoting regime change is not one that should be done halfway. Success in this policy will depend upon the vigor with which the policy is pursued. Regime change is a realistic change if and only if Washington puts itself behind this effort. It is not realistic if Washington sits back to await others making it happen.

The U.S. government should therefore devote vigorous efforts to regime change rather than presenting regime change as a long-term aim, with the implication that in the short term, little will be done to promote it. It is in this context that we should consider the role for the Iraqi opposition. Replacing Saddam requires harnessing the potential inherent in all the policy levers that the United States holds. That means that we must coordinate military action, covert operation, reducing Saddam's unsupervised oil income, as well as support for the opposition. No one of these policies by itself is sufficient to achieve the objective of regime change. But taken together, the synergy among them creates the best conditions for the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, as well as the reinforcement and containment of Iraq.

U.S. military action can facilitate regime change, especially when it targets the regime's internal security apparatus, because that apparatus is the main obstacle to overthrowing Saddam. Covert action can diminish Saddam's image in the eyes of his supporters, exacerbate strained relations between Saddam's inner circle in the military, and it can stir

up popular discontent against the regime. Reducing Iraq's unsupervised oil income, which amounts to several hundred million a year, cuts into Saddam's ability to buy loyalty.

But it is support for the opposition which is the clearest expression of America's commitment to regime change. Such support, especially when it is given publicly and endorsed by top officials, fosters the impression that the tide is running against Saddam Hussein. Only when Washington demonstrates its high-level support for the opposition can it effectively lobby regional governments to do the same. The more the United States supports the opposition, the more regional governments will be confident that Saddam will, in fact, go, and therefore, that they can assist the opposition without facing eventual Iraqi retaliation.

Some who would strictly limit U.S. support for the opposition belittle its chances of accomplishing much. To be sure, the opposition is unlikely to defeat Saddam's forces in the field. But that is largely irrelevant. The issue is what must be done to crack the aura of invincibility around Saddam and his repressive apparatus. If Saddam's security organizations are spending their time worrying about the opposition, they will have fewer resources to repress outbreaks of the (seething?) popular discontent. And that will make more likely opposition success, either through a coup or through uprising. If I may, let me address some specific measures which might be taken to increase support for the opposition. First, over the last six months, the United States has stepped up its support for the opposition, but the support remains low-key and a secondary aspect of our Iraq policy. A good indicator of where the opposition fits into overall U.S.-Iraq policy is to see how the opposition leaders are treated.

During their recent visit to Washington, in comparison to their reception six years ago -- in April 1993, six years ago, the opposition leaders saw the vice president in the White House. This time, when the opposition had been broadened to include monarchists and prominent Iraqi Sunnis like former Foreign Minister Adnan Pachachi (ph), the opposition leaders saw the secretary of State, even though the administration had for months been telling the opposition that the more broadly they united, the higher the U.S. officials who would see them. This distinction between seeing the secretary of State and seeing the vice president matters to Saddam, to Middle Eastern countries and to the Arab public. It will be interesting to see whether President Clinton sends greetings to the upcoming meeting of the Iraqi National Assembly, and if so, how warm and how specific those greetings will be.

Second, on the operational front, the opposition has been unsuccessfully asking the United States to publicly commit itself to strict enforcement of the existing U.N. Security Council resolutions, especially U.N. Security Council Resolution 949, which authorizes use of force of Iraq, quote, "takes any action to enhance its military capability in southern Iraq," end quote. This is the so-called no-drive-zone resolution. In fact, the United States has rarely used the authority granted by this resolution to hit at the tanks and other equipment that Saddam has added to his forces in the south for the purpose of hitting at the opposition.

Third, the Clinton administration has announced that it will begin using the draw-down authority contained in the Iraq Liberation Act. Throughout the Middle East, not least of all in Iraq, close attention will be paid to what kind of assistance is provided under the draw-down program. Assistant Secretary Indyk has said, quote, "To arm the Iraqi opposition is premature," end quote.

Let us define a road map to maturity. The administration should approach the opposition to develop a plan that includes specific steps that each side will take to permit U.S. military aid so that the opposition can expand the scope of its ongoing military operations. Next, there is the issue of what kind of lethal equipment to give the opposition; specifically, whether the United States will provide what in essence are relief supplies, or whether the United States will provide equipment designed to make the opposition more dangerous to Saddam. A good barometer here is how much communication equipment and training is included.

Better communication equipment will let the opposition report in real time on what is happening in Iraq, and that

could allow the opposition to identify when Saddam is moving reinforcements into the no-drive zone, to the Kurdish areas, facilitating U.S. retaliation. Furthermore, the ability to communicate and coordinate between different regions and different cities could allow the news of unrest in one city to spread elsewhere, increasing the prospect that the (seething?) discontent will erupt in riots.

In conclusion, President Clinton, in his December speech to the nation, said that the United States would support the opposition, quote, "prudently and effectively," end quote. Well, what is prudent and effective is to put the full weight of the United States government behind that policy to which we have committed our prestige; namely, regime change.

Integrating vigorous support for the opposition with well-planned military action, covert operations and reduction in oil income will increase the prospects for ending Saddam Hussein's rule soon, plus it will bolster the containment of Iraq. The support for the opposition should steadily increase as the opposition matures, with the United States always pushing the process forward rather than lagging behind.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SEN. : Thank you, Dr. Clawson. That was an excellent statement, and I think, unfortunately, an accurate analysis. From my perspective, it seems to me that we need to be far more aggressive and far more specific. And we know how to do that; witness the recent actions in Kosovo. We know how to be aggressive and specific. And I hope that we can move the administration towards that position here.

I agree with you as well that our prestige is on the line. And you've got a regime that's very troubling to a number of neighbors in this area. They don't want to see this regime, and it's threatening to those neighbors, far in excess of what we see in some other regions of the world. So this is an important policy issue for the United States. And on a broad basis, it's an important policy issue. So thanks for your testimony.

Patrick Clawson is director for research at The Washington Institute. ❖

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