

America, Iraq, and UNSCOM:

On the Record

Aug 13, 1998



Brief Analysis

Saddam Husayn's refusal to cooperate with United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) has re-opened a confrontation with the U.N. and the United States that was temporarily resolved through Kofi Annan's diplomatic efforts in February 1998. Over the course of that earlier crisis, U.S. officials made strong statements about the threat posed by Iraq and about U.S. willingness to use force, if necessary, to ensure full Iraqi compliance. The following is a collection of quotations concerning Iraq from principal U.S. foreign policy officials during the November-February 1998 crisis. They are instructive in considering the U.S. response to the emerging crisis with Iraq.

What Is At Stake:

"This is a crisis of Saddam's making. It can be unmade only when he can no longer threaten the international community with weapons of mass destruction." -- President Clinton, November 14, 1997.

"Let me remind all of you what this whole crisis is about: that is, to make sure that Saddam Husayn is not in a position to threaten the international community with weapons of mass destruction." -- Secretary of State Madeleine Albright at a press conference, November 20, 1997.

"Now, let's imagine the future. What if he [Saddam] fails to comply and we fail to act, or we take some ambiguous third route which gives him yet more opportunities to develop this program of weapons of mass destruction and continue to press for the release of the sanctions and continue to ignore the solemn commitments that he made? Well, he will conclude that the international community has lost its will. He will then conclude that he can go right on and do more to rebuild an arsenal of devastating destruction. And some day, some way, I guarantee you, he'll use the arsenal . . . If we fail to respond today, Saddam and all those who would follow in his footsteps will be emboldened tomorrow by the knowledge that they can act with impunity -- even in the face of a clear message from the United Nations Security Council and clear evidence of a weapons of mass destruction program." -- President Clinton in remarks to Pentagon personnel, February 17, 1998.

"He [Saddam] has started two wars. He has invaded a country next door. He is a repeat offender, and he is the kind of a rogue state leader that is a threat not only to his neighborhood, but because he has possessed and would like to possess more weapons of mass destruction, he is a threat to our national security . . . And given the stakes, especially with weapons of mass destruction, the world cannot afford to let Saddam try again. That's why what we are doing is so important." -- Secretary of State Albright speaking at the University of South Carolina, February 19, 1998.

"There is no greater challenge to the region's stability and to America's security in that region than Saddam's reckless pursuit of weapons of mass destruction. As President Clinton has said, the spread of these weapons to outlaw states, and from them to terrorists and international criminals, is one of the most dangerous security threats our people will face over the next generation. Other countries have weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles. With Saddam Husayn, there is one big difference: he has used them. Not once, but repeatedly. Not only

against combatants, but against civilians. Not only against a foreign adversary, but against his own people. I have no doubt he will use them again if his capacity to rebuild his arsenal is left unchecked." -- National Security Advisor Samuel Berger at the National Press Club, February 13, 1998.

"UNSCOM must be allowed to continue to investigate all of Iraq's programs until it can verify with absolute certainty that all the equipment has been destroyed and that all the capabilities have been eliminated. Otherwise, Iraq eventually will be free to develop the capacity to strike at any city in the Middle East, delivering biological, chemical and possibly even nuclear weapons." -- President Clinton, in a letter to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate, February 4, 1998.

Resolving the Crisis:

"If we can find a diplomatic way to do what has to be done . . . that is by far our preference. But to be a genuine solution, and not simply one that glosses over the remaining problem, a diplomatic solution must include or meet a clear, immutable, reasonable, simple standard: Iraq must agree, and soon, to free, full, unfettered access to these sites, anywhere in the country. There can be no delusion or diminishment of the integrity of the inspection system that UNSCOM has put in place ... "Saddam Husayn's Iraq reminds us of what we learned in the 20th century and warns us of what we must know about the 21st. In this century we learned through harsh experience that the only answer to aggression and illegal behavior is firmness, determination, and, when necessary, action." -- President Clinton in remarks to Pentagon personnel, February 17, 1998.

"Nobody wants to use force. But if Saddam refuses to keep his commitments to the international community, we must be prepared to deal directly with the threat these weapons pose to the Iraqi people, to Iraq's neighbors, and to the rest of the world. Either Saddam acts -- or we will have to . . . But make no mistake: Saddam Husayn must bear full responsibility for every casualty that results." -- President Clinton, February 20, 1998.

"The United States remains resolved and ready to secure by whatever means necessary Iraq's full compliance with its commitment to destroy its weapons of mass destruction . . . I believe that if it [Iraq] does not keep its word this time, everyone would understand that then the United States and hopefully all of our allies would have the unilateral right to respond at a time, place and manner of our own choosing." -- President Clinton, February 23, 1998.

"We would welcome any action by the Security Council that makes clear Iraq's responsibilities. There would be utility in sending a clear message to the government of Iraq that it had better not violate the agreement to which it has just signed. But our position remains clear: We believe we have the authority under existing Security Council resolutions to take action if that action is necessary . . . "While we welcome a principled diplomatic solution, and we have been prepared to go the last extra mile for a diplomatic solution, it is a solution that has to work in terms of deeds and not just words." -- Bruce Riedel, Special Assistant to the President and senior Director for Near East and South Asian Affairs, the National Security Council during a briefing, February 26, 1998.

Compiled by Adam Frey.

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