



THE WHITE HOUSE

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My challenge today is to resist the tyranny of the news cycle and put the current crisis with Iraq in context. I want to make clear the danger Saddam Hussein poses to his people, his neighbors, America and the world. I want to explain what we're doing about it -- in terms of the current crisis over Iraq's weapons of mass destruction program. And I want to lay out our long term strategy for dealing with the chronic problem that is Saddam Hussein.

Throughout his time in power, Saddam has demonstrated again and again utter contempt for his people, the peace of his region and the security of the world. He pursued a horrific, decade-long war of attrition against Iran, costing at least half a million lives. He repeatedly unleashed chemical weapons against Iran's soldiers and fired SCUDs into its cities. In 1988, he gassed Kurdish civilians in Northern Iraq. In 1990, his troops invaded Kuwait, executing those who resisted, looting the country, setting fire to 600 oil wells, spilling tens of millions of gallons of oil into the Gulf, firing SCUD missiles at Tel Aviv, Riyadh and Manama [mah-NAH-mah]. At war's end, he brutally put down in his own country the Kurds and Shia Arabs who rose up in revolt against him. He ordered an attempt on the life of former President Bush. Once again in 1994, he massed his army along the Kuwaiti border. He forcefully occupied Irbil in Northern Iraq in 1996. And throughout the last two decades, Saddam has worked to develop, maintain and conceal the most terrible weapons known to humanity -- nuclear, chemical and biological -- and the missiles to deliver them.

The United States has actively and consistently opposed Saddam because he has demonstrated the intent to threaten the stability of a region vital to our interests. A stable Middle East means we can better protect the free flow of oil, fight terrorism and build support for a comprehensive Middle East peace. 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 Hussein, 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. And I have no doubt he will use them again if his capacity to rebuild his arsenal is left unchecked.

For the better part of this decade, the international community has worked to discover and dismantle Iraq's WMD program. At the end of the Gulf War, Iraq was given 15 days to inventory and prepare for the destruction of its nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and the missiles to deliver them. The U.N. set up a special commission of international experts, called UNSCOM, to make sure that the job got done -- and to monitor the situation so that Iraq did not reconstitute its program.

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Ever since, Iraq's WMD compliance record had been a litany of lies, deceit and run-arounds. The full disclosure document on missiles Baghdad was required to produce in fifteen days, it delivered -- in five years. When UNSCOM and the International Atomic Energy Agency uncovered facts that proved Iraq's biological, chemical and nuclear weapons reports to be grossly inaccurate, Baghdad simply amended the reports. When Hussein Kamel [ka-MEL] -- Saddam's son-in-law and the architect of Iraq's WMD program -- defected to Jordan in 1995, Baghdad was forced to reveal additional weapons stockpiles and production capacity it had insisted it did not have. Throughout, Baghdad has engaged the UNSCOM inspectors in a high stakes game of cat-and-mouse -- lying to them, harassing them, delaying their access to sites, flagrantly destroying evidence in plain view of the inspectors.

Yet despite Iraq's best efforts, the inspectors have done a remarkable job. They have found and destroyed more of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction capacity than was destroyed during the Gulf War itself. This includes nearly 40,000 chemical weapons, more than 100,000 gallons of chemical weapons agents, 48 operational missiles, 30 warheads specially fitted for chemical and biological weapons, and a massive biological weapons factory at Al-Hakim equipped to produce deadly anthrax and botulinum.

But UNSCOM's job is not yet done. Stockpiles of chemical and biological munitions and a small force of Scud-type missiles remain unaccounted for. And most importantly, Iraq still has the capacity to rebuild its production program for biological and chemical weapons and the missiles to deliver them. As UNSCOM has come closer and closer to ferreting out Iraq's remaining weapons capacity, Saddam has become increasingly determined in his efforts to block the inspectors and end the inspection regime.

Which brings us to the current crisis. Over the last three months, Saddam has sought to end UNSCOM by any and every ruse. First he demanded that American inspectors be removed from the inspection teams. Then he tried to dictate a change in the teams' composition. Now he is denying UNSCOM the free and full access it must have to all sites by designating some of them [Presidential] sites or otherwise restricting the inspectors' access. But as the charts behind me show, some of his presidential compounds are literally city-sized -- one almost as large as the district of Columbia -- with dozens of separate buildings.

At the same time, Saddam is seeking to end the economic sanctions imposed by the United Nations after the Gulf War -- and which should not be lifted until Iraq complies with all U.N. resolutions, including those on WMD. His gambit is clear and presents a stark danger to our national interests. Compromise UNSCOM's integrity by imposing debilitating conditions on the inspectors and Saddam keeps his remaining weapons of mass destruction and the capacity to produce many more of them. Lift the sanctions and Saddam gets the money he needs to rebuild his military.

It is a situation we cannot tolerate. If Saddam defies international controls here with impunity, he will roll on, as he has before, energized by the conclusion that the international community lost its will. Only our will has stopped him before. The will of President Bush to lead the Gulf War coalition that ejected Iraq from Kuwait and imposed tough conditions for the cease-fire. The will of President Clinton to strike hard at Iraqi intelligence headquarters in 1993 after its agents plotted to assassinate former President Bush. The will immediately to deploy our troops, ships and planes to the region, as President Clinton did in 1994 when Saddam threatened to repeat his walkover of Kuwait. The will to take out Iraqi air defenses and extend the No Fly Zone when Saddam forcefully occupied Irbil in northern Iraq.

Now, once again, we must summon the will to respond firmly to Saddam's challenge to UNSCOM and establish a safe haven for programs to develop weapons of mass destruction. That is exactly what we are doing. From Europe to the Persian Gulf, there is widespread consensus that Iraq must meet all its obligations to the United Nations, that UNSCOM must be allowed to do its job effectively, and that, if diplomacy fails, Saddam Hussein will bear responsibility for the consequences.

Many of our friends and allies would prefer a diplomatic solution. So would we. The UNSCOM

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system works -- that's why Saddam is so desperate to end it. We will spare no diplomatic effort to gain unfettered access for UNSCOM and to assure it can do its job effectively. We will not accept any proposal that would weaken UNSCOM's effectiveness.

In pursuit of these objectives, President Clinton has been in contact with his counterparts nearly every day over the past few weeks. He dispatched Secretary Albright and Secretary Cohen to Europe and the Middle East -- and Ambassador Richardson literally around the world. If there is a peaceful way to convince Saddam to let UNSCOM complete its mission, we will pursue it until the end.

But if Iraq continues to tie UNSCOM's hands, as Chairman Butler has said, it doesn't much matter if the inspectors are holed up in a hotel in Baghdad, or in Bahrain, or in Boston. If they are not allowed to do their job unhindered, we must be prepared to deal directly with the threat posed by Iraq's weapons of mass destruction -- with force if necessary. Either Saddam Hussein acts -- or we must be prepared to do so.

For the past several weeks, the United States has built up its forces in the Gulf. As I speak, two American carrier battle groups and over 300 aircraft are in the region. They are joined by the British aircraft carrier *Invincible*. And we continue to receive support for action, should it prove necessary. Our force posture in the region would not be possible without the support of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, the GCC states, and Turkey. And many friends and allies -- including the United Kingdom, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Denmark, Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Australia, New Zealand and Canada -- are prepared to provide forces, bases or logistical support. That list is growing every day.

Should such a mission prove necessary, its purpose is clear: to deliver a serious blow that will significantly diminish Saddam's weapons of mass destruction threat, and reduce his ability to threaten his neighbors. That is the objective we can and must meet to protect our vital national interests.

The most difficult decision any President has to make is to put our troops in harm's way. No military mission is without risk and cost. Even the best prepared, best equipped forces will suffer losses. But should force become necessary, the safety of our men and women in uniform will be President Clinton's top priority. And let me say, too, that, if military action becomes necessary, we will do what we can to avoid civilian casualties.

If, in the aftermath of force, Iraq allows UNSCOM back in, so much the better. Unless it does so, there is no prospect for ending economic sanctions. But if it does not, here's how the world will look to Saddam in the weeks and months after force is used.

Second, Saddam will know, by our actions and our warning, that we will be prepared to act again if we have evidence he is trying to rebuild his weapons of mass destruction capabilities. We will closely monitor Iraq's activities with our own intelligence methods. I have full confidence in our ability to detect significant cheating. The demonstrated certainty that he will pay a heavy price for his conduct will need to become part of Saddam's calculus in the future. The United States will not go away.

Third, sanctions cannot be lifted so long as UNSCOM is unable to complete its mission. Sanctions hurt the Iraqi regime. The proof can be found in Saddam's desperate attempts to lift them. They severely restrict the amount of oil Iraq can sell and give the United Nations control over Iraq's primary source of revenue. To date, sanctions have cost Iraq \$110 billion in oil sales. Imagine the armed force Saddam would have today had he invested even a fraction of this money in rehabilitating his military.

Sanctions are aimed at the Iraqi regime, not the Iraqi people. From the start, we exempted food and medicine. To help Iraq generate revenue to pay for such food and medicine, the United States in 1991

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proposed U.N. Security Council Resolutions 706, 712 and later 986. They would have allowed Iraq to sell limited amounts of oil and use the proceeds for humanitarian supplies -- subject to U.N. monitoring. Saddam rejected that offer for five years, in effect taking the needs of his own people hostage -- while spending what resources he had on Italian marble for 48 new palaces and expensive automobiles for his cronies.

In 1996 Saddam finally and grudgingly accepted U.N. Security Council Resolution 986. Since then, more than 3 million tons of food have been delivered to the Iraqi people. But to this day, Saddam hinders the program's operation and deploys his people as human shields around suspected weapons sites -- while appealing to international public opinion to lift the sanctions with images of starving Iraqi children and patients suffering from a lack of vital medicines. This is the mother of cruel deceptions.

Despite Saddam's cynical efforts to manipulate the plight of his people for political ends, we are determined to do all we can to make oil-for-food work better. We welcome the U.N. Secretary General's recommendation to increase the program. The more Iraqi oil goes to feeding the Iraqi people, the less Saddam can spend on arms.

Fourth, in the weeks and months ahead Saddam will know that we will strictly enforce the No Fly Zones in southern and northern Iraq. Already, our air force controls the skies from the southern suburbs of Baghdad to the Kuwaiti border and over northern Iraq -- severely reducing the threat Iraq poses to the Gulf countries and Turkey. We have flown more sorties to enforce these [No Fly Zones] than in all of Desert Storm. And our forces in the Gulf are ready to respond to Iraqi aggression quickly and decisively -- countering any threat in a matter of days instead of the months it took in 1990.

There are alternatives to our approach. I do not think they best serve America's national interests.

Some suggest we should meet Saddam half way by agreeing to close our eyes to [Presidential] or [sensitive] sites or to render UNSCOM ineffective. Such a stunning reversal of the U.N. Resolution imposed on and accepted by Iraq after the Gulf War would be unacceptable -- and pose a serious threat to our security.

Others suggest that the only effective solution is for U.S. ground forces to remove Saddam from power. But the costs and risks associated with such a venture are high and not essential to achieving our strategic interests -- containing the threat Iraq poses to the region. It would require a major land campaign and risk large losses of our soldiers.

There is no question that Iraq and the world would be better off if Saddam were out of power. As Secretary Albright said in March, we would gladly work with a successor regime ready to live at peace with its neighbors and resume its rightful place in the community of nations. The Iraqi people deserve no less. In the meantime, we have worked with Iraqi opposition groups -- and we will continue to do so.

But as long as Saddam Hussein is in power, we must be prepared to respond firmly to his reckless actions. When the international community weakens in the face of his threats, Saddam simply is emboldened. When we stand as one, Saddam is thwarted. That is the timeless lesson to apply to dangerous tyrants. Sustaining our policy will require constant vigilance. It will from time to time cause tension with our friends and allies. And it will require that we sustain the will to act each time Saddam seriously challenges the international community. We are on the right course. Staying with it offers the best prospects for protecting our interests and preserving stability in a vital part of the world.

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