
PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF DANGEROUS WEAPONS TO IRAQ AND IRAN

By Bruce O. Riedel



Allowing weapons of mass destruction to spread to Iraq and Iran “undermines security and stability” throughout the Middle East, says Riedel. “Working in close cooperation with our friends and allies, and adopting a long-term, patient approach, the United States will achieve its goal of curbing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, changing the behaviors of dangerous states, and thus securing our vital interests in one of the most strategically important regions of the world.” Riedel is Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Near East and South Asian Affairs of the National Security Council.

When President Clinton was elected in 1992, his administration immediately recognized the strategic importance of the Persian Gulf region and identified two central threats to stability and security there — Iran and Iraq. In the past two decades, both countries have aggressively sought to build their arsenals of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, and this drive has created greater instability and uncertainty in a volatile region of the world. One of the most important objectives of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East has been to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) to Iraq and Iran.

IRAQ

Under President Saddam Hussein, Iraq remains one of the most dangerous countries in the world. In the past two decades, it started two wars that took hundreds of thousands of lives in an effort to dominate the Persian Gulf. In both of these wars, it launched ballistic missiles against five of its neighbors, and over the past two decades, it has repeatedly used chemical weapons against its own people and neighbors. Saddam Hussein’s Iraq has proven time and time again that it is incapable of being a responsible member of the international community.

At the end of the Persian Gulf war in 1991, the international community gave Iraq a chance to change its behavior. UN Security Council Resolution 687 laid out a series of requirements that would end the sanctions imposed in 1990 when Iraq invaded Kuwait. One of the most important requirements was that Iraq abandon its programs for developing weapons of mass

destruction and long-range missiles. To disarm and monitor this uniquely dangerous regime, the international community established the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) in 1991.

Iraq refused to cooperate with the UNSCOM inspectors sent to destroy its WMD arsenal and instead created an elaborate concealment mechanism to hide its weapons. In spite of this deception campaign, UNSCOM forced Iraq to declare and destroy, among other things, almost 40,000 chemical weapons, almost 700 tons of chemical weapons agents, 48 operational missiles, 30 warheads fitted for chemical and biological weapons, a nuclear centrifuge program, and a massive plant designed to produce anthrax. UNSCOM destroyed more weapons than Desert Storm did.

Despite this success, the question of Iraq’s WMD capability remains an issue of great concern. The United States continues to support professional, expert weapons inspections as the only agreed means to establish Iraqi compliance with UN resolutions. But after two years of repeated crises and broken Iraqi promises in 1997 and 1998, in December 1998 it became clear that Iraq would not allow the inspectors to do their job the way it needs to be done. Inspectors without access, without required documents, without a cooperating partner, cannot do their job.

The United States will not support a spurious arms control regime, and until legitimate weapons inspections can be established, the United States will continue to maintain a powerful force posture in the region, which it is prepared to use should Iraq try to

reconstitute its weapons of mass destruction. In the meantime, we are working with our UN Security Council partners to craft a new weapons inspection and monitoring organization which, when Iraq is ready to cooperate, will be able to verify once and for all that Iraq has actually disarmed.

For the past nine years, the United States has led an international effort to press Iraq to comply fully with all UN Security Council resolutions, using a combination of sanctions, diplomacy, and force to keep this dangerous regime contained and to limit its ability to threaten the peace and stability of the region. As a result, Saddam Hussein is isolated, his regime is weaker, and the region is safer. But the job is not finished. The task ahead for the international community will be to keep this very dangerous regime contained and to prevent it from building an arsenal of dangerous weapons until Iraq has a government worthy of its people.

Indeed, because Saddam Hussein has made clear that he will not give up his proscribed weapons of mass destruction and that he will use them — against his neighbors and his own people — the United States is working to help those Iraqis who seek to change the regime in Baghdad. For nine years, Saddam Hussein's regime has cheated, lied, and dissembled to try to hold on to its WMD arsenal. During this time, Iraq has given up roughly \$120 billion in oil revenues because it refuses to surrender its proscribed weapons programs. Clearly, as long as Saddam Hussein rules in Baghdad, the vital Gulf region will never be free from the threat of weapons of mass destruction.

The goal of the United States is to see a strong and healthy Iraq return to the community of nations and see it play its appropriate role in international and regional affairs. America and Iraq have been close partners in the past, and they can be partners and friends again in the future. The United States will remain ready to work with a new government in Baghdad when it comes to power. If Saddam Hussein is replaced by a government ready to comply with the UN resolutions, disarm, and live in peace with its neighbors and its own people, the United States will seek sanctions relief. It will encourage American investment and work to find ways to relieve Saddam Hussein's \$100 billion war debts.

But until then, the United States will continue to lead efforts to prevent Saddam Hussein from threatening the stability and security of the Gulf region by building Iraq's arsenals of weapons of mass destruction.

IRAN

Like Iraq, Iran has also threatened stability and security in the region by attempting to build its arsenals of weapons of mass destruction. Despite its signature on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and Chemical Weapons Convention, Iran has worked to develop an arsenal of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and the missiles to deliver them. The United States recognizes that Iran like all states has an interest in its security, but that does not provide a justification for developing weapons of mass destruction. Iran's drive to build these weapons has done nothing but lead to greater instability and an increased likelihood for a regional arms race.

Iran has made significant progress in its efforts. In 1998, Iran tested the Shahab III, a ballistic missile capable of delivering warheads 1,280 kilometers. There are reports that it is developing a missile with an even greater range. These developments pose significant potential threats to U.S. forces and to U.S. allies in the Middle East and could trigger even more dangerous arms races across the region. Iran's move to build its weapons of mass destruction and develop long-range ballistic missiles presents a significant challenge to the U.S. goal of creating a Middle East free of such weapons.

In addition to Iran's attempts to project its regional influence through the development of these weapons, the United States remains seriously concerned about Iran's continued support for terrorism and its sponsorship of violent opposition to the Middle East peace process. Despite assurances that Iran opposes terrorism, we continue to see evidence that Iran still provides arms, money, training, and safe haven to terrorist organizations such as Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah, and Hamas. That is why so many of Iran's neighbors remain wary of Iranian intentions despite the changes brought about by President Mohammad Khatami. The United States will continue its economic sanctions policy until Iran begins to change its policies that

violate international norms, threaten our interests, and undermine security and stability in the Gulf region and the Middle East. The intent of sanctions is to deprive Iran of resources to develop weapons of mass destruction and support terrorism. The sanctions also demonstrate to Iran's leaders that there is a serious price to be paid for pursuing such policies.

The United States also will enforce the laws passed by Congress intended to encourage other states to control technology transfers to Iran and to exercise greater care and discipline in what they trade with Iran. One of the highest priorities of the Clinton administration has been to block Iran's ability to acquire the technology and materials necessary to develop weapons of mass destruction and missile systems. We have made progress with China and Ukraine in restricting nuclear cooperation. The Russian government has taken some steps to shut down the cooperation Iran has received from Russian companies for its Shahab long-range missile program. But more needs to be done.

Developing weapons of mass destruction will not increase Iran's own security and it will not enhance

stability in the Persian Gulf — it will do the exact opposite. For this reason, the United States remains steadfast in its approach to prevent the spread of WMD to Iran.

CONCLUSION

Allowing weapons of mass destruction to spread to Iraq and Iran undermines security and stability throughout the region. Over the course of years of sustained diplomacy, the United States has developed a level of trust and confidence with key states in the Middle East. Working in close cooperation with our friends and allies, and adopting a long-term, patient approach, the United States will achieve its goal of curbing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, changing the behaviors of dangerous states, and thus securing its vital interests in one of the most strategically important regions of the world. ©