From the Chairman...

Coming on the heels of the collapse of the Soviet empire, the coalition victory over Iraq in the 1991 Gulf War seemed to hold the promise of a new era. Our crushing defeat of the Iraqi army seemed to codify America's standing as the world's "sole superpower".

Eight years later, the promise of those heady days has not been fulfilled, and our troubles with Saddam Hussein seem to reflect our troubles elsewhere in the world. In fact, Saddam has been increasingly able to claw his way out of his diplomatic, economic, military and strategic isolation. Today, Saddam Hussein is as close to slipping out of his "box" as he has been since the Gulf War ended in 1991. According to Scott Ritter, a former United Nations weapons inspector, Saddam may be only six months away from developing the chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction that we have sought to keep out of his hands. And the viability of the United Nations inspection regime is very much in doubt. Despite the devastation it suffered during Desert Storm, the Iraqi military still maintains significant capabilities. And if Saddam finally succeeds in developing and fielding an arsenal of chemical or biological weapons he will pose an even larger threat to the region and to American interests.

In recent weeks, the Administration has tried to make the case that Saddam remains boxed in and isolated. Yet, the Saudis and our other allies in the region have distanced themselves from us over the years. It may be that the U.S. is increasingly the one that has the credibility of the United States and the effectiveness of efforts to prevent Iraq from reconstituting its ability to develop or use weapons of mass destruction.

Nearly eight years after the Gulf War dislodged Iraqi troops from Kuwait, Saddam Hussein is still in power. U.S. policy toward Iraq continues to be one of containing Iraqi aggression while attempting to dismantle the Iraqi programs for weapons of mass destruction. However, this policy has been increasingly buffeted by strong political cross-currents that have called into question the long-term resolve and ability of the United States to bring about the desired changes in Iraq. Saddam Hussein's repeated challenges to the authority of the international community have left the coalition of states that defeated him frustrated, fatigued, and divided over the proper balance between "carrots" and "sticks." Iraq's most recent act of defiance has sought to exploit these divisions. Moreover, debate continues over whether the crux of the problem in Iraq is Saddam Hussein's continuing drive to acquire and maintain weapons of mass destruction or, more broadly, his seemingly unshakable grip on power.

As a result of its invasion of Kuwait, economic sanctions were imposed on Iraq, and these sanctions remain in place today. In addition, as a consequence of its Gulf War defeat, Iraq was forced to accept stringent disarmament conditions established by the United Nations Security Council.

Background Brief

Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's most recent and most serious challenge to the international community — halting all cooperation with United Nations weapons inspectors — has brought the United States the closest to war with Iraq since 1991. However, the United States has again refrained from military action in exchange for a last-minute promise from Saddam Hussein that he will allow UN weapons inspectors to resume their work unconditionally. This continuing pattern of Iraqi behavior — placing obstacles in the path of weapons inspectors and then removing them in the face of a threatened military response — has raised new questions regarding the credibility of the United States and the effectiveness of efforts to prevent Iraq from reconstituting its ability to develop or use weapons of mass destruction.

Nearly eight years after the Gulf War dislodged Iraqi troops from Kuwait, Saddam Hussein is still in power. U.S. policy toward Iraq continues to be one of containing Iraqi aggression while attempting to dismantle the Iraqi programs for weapons of mass destruction. However, this policy has been increasingly buffeted by strong political cross-currents that have called into question the long-term resolve and ability of the United States to bring about the desired changes in Iraq. Saddam Hussein's repeated challenges to the authority of the international community have left the coalition of states that defeated him frustrated, fatigued, and divided over the proper balance between "carrots" and "sticks." Iraq's most recent act of defiance has sought to exploit these divisions. Moreover, debate continues over whether the crux of the problem in Iraq is Saddam Hussein's continuing drive to acquire and maintain weapons of mass destruction or, more broadly, his seemingly unshakable grip on power.

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The Disarmament Regime and Iraqi Noncompliance

UN Security Council Resolution 687, adopted on April 3, 1991, required Iraq to...
provide a full, final and complete disclosure of all aspects of its weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programs, and to “unconditionally accept the destruction, removal, or rendering harmless, under international supervision, of: (a) all chemical and biological weapons and all stocks of agents and all related subsystems and components and all research, development, support and manufacturing facilities; [and] (b) all ballistic missiles with a range greater than 150 kilometers and related major parts, and repair and production facilities.” In addition, Iraq was forced to “unconditionally agree not to acquire or develop nuclear weapons or nuclear-weapons-usable material or any subsystems or components… or manufacturing facilities.”

The nuclear disarmament task was entrusted to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). To carry out Iraq’s disarmament in the chemical, biological, and ballistic missile area, the UN Security Council established a Special Commission on Iraq, referred to as UNSCOM. This new organization was tasked with the responsibility of conducting on-site and challenge inspections of declared and suspected Iraqi sites containing information, equipment, or technology related to Iraq’s chemical, biological, or ballistic missile programs. Moreover, the UN Security Council directed Iraq to “allow the Special Commission, the IAEA and their inspection teams immediate, unconditional and unrestricted access to any and all areas, facilities, equipment, records and means of transportation which they wish to inspect.”

Since 1991, UNSCOM inspectors have been repeatedly denied the “immediate, unconditional and unrestricted access” Iraq promised to provide, prompting the UN Security Council to declare Iraq in “material breach” of its cease-fire obligations seven times between 1991 and 1993. In 1996, the Security Council called Iraq’s refusal to allow UNSCOM access to certain sites “a clear violation” of its obligations. In addition, the information provided by Iraq on its weapons programs has reportedly proven erroneous and the Iraqis have revised their official “full, final and complete disclosure” statements on numerous occasions.

Each Iraqi challenge has been viewed as more serious than the previous one. Thus, some observers have concluded that through his tactics, Saddam Hussein has been able to exacerbate political fissures in the once solid United Nations coalition and has been successful at chipping away at political support for a continuation of the inspection regime and economic sanctions.

Iraq’s decision to cease all cooperation with UN weapons inspectors continued the challenge to the UN weapons inspection regime that began on October 29, 1997, when Iraq blocked U.S. weapons inspectors from participating in UNSCOM inspections, effectively suspending the inspection process. On November 13, 1997, Iraq expelled U.S. weapons experts from the country. The expulsion occurred as inspection teams were closing in on what was thought to be a major discovery involving Iraq’s biological weapons program.

In October 1997, the United States responded to the Iraqi expulsion by deploying additional military forces to the Persian Gulf, including a second aircraft carrier. Russian intervention with Saddam Hussein resulted in an agreement by Iraq to allow U.S. inspectors to return and for UNSCOM’s work to continue, in exchange for Russia’s agreement to work toward a lifting of the economic sanctions. However, Iraq refused to allow UNSCOM access to what it declared to be “sensitive” presidential sites, and declared more than 60 such sites off-limits to inspectors. This prompted Secretary of Defense Cohen to threaten military strikes, stating that any U.S. strike “will not be a pin-prick.” The threat of U.S. force was opposed by Russia and other UN Security Council members.

On January 12, 1998, Iraq again threatened to expel U.S. arms inspectors and blocked an inspection team headed by William “Scott” Ritter from conducting an inspection. In response, the UN Security Council condemned Iraq’s action, UNSCOM Executive Chairman Richard Butler withdrew Ritter’s UNSCOM team from Iraq, and the future of the inspection regime was again placed in doubt.

The Military Option Takes Shape

On February 4, 1998, as diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis foundered, the United States deployed more than 30,000 troops, 30 ships, and over 200 strike aircraft to the Persian Gulf region, redeploying aircraft carriers from Europe and the Pacific. President Clinton declared that “something is going to have to give here.” Secretary of State Madeleine Albright stated that “we have all but exhausted the diplomatic option” and threatened “substantial strikes” if Iraq failed to comply fully with UN resolutions. Press reports indicated that the strike plan, code-named “Operation Desert Thunder,” involved launching approximately 300 combat sorties a day and firing hundreds of cruise missiles. From November 1997 to March 1998, the cost of deploying additional U.S. forces to the Gulf was estimated at approximately $600 million.

The Gulf buildup impacted U.S. forces deployed elsewhere in the world. Press reports indicated that General John Tillelli, the commander of U.S. forces in Korea, expressed concerns that the diversion of military resources from the Pacific region to the Gulf weakened his ability to defend South Korea. U.S. military officials in Europe reportedly echoed similar concerns about their ability to maintain readiness.

U.S. policy regarding military action against Iraq was described in various ways on numerous occasions by Administration spokespersons. By February 1998, the of-

An Iraqi Al-Hussein ballistic missile being dismantled.
ficially-articulated objectives of any potential U.S. military action by the United States, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan traveled to Baghdad on February 20, 1998 to negotiate a diplomatic outcome to the inspection standoff. Some analysts considered the attempt to negotiate a diplomatic solution to the crisis likely to result in a further step toward the unraveling of the inspection regime and a loosening of the sanctions imposed on Iraq. This concern was heightened by an interview Annan gave to the BBC, aired on February 10, 1998, in which he stated that full Iraqi compliance with UN resolutions “is the position today. It does not mean that, depending on what can be worked out, that would be the position tomorrow.”

An agreement was reached in Baghdad that allowed for the inspection of eight “sensitive” sites, sometimes referred to as “presidential compounds,” under a modified inspection procedure that established a “special group” of diplomats and experts. In exchange, Iraq again committed to abide by all relevant UN resolutions. The agreement also called for the resumption of inspections and the return of UN inspection teams to Iraq.

A Crisis Averted?: The Annan Agreement

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The crisis over UNSCOM inspections highlighted the danger of allowing Saddam Hussein to possess weapons of mass destruction and the ballistic missiles that could deliver them. Continuing reports of clandestine Iraqi work on biological weapons, including anthrax, raised concerns over Iraq’s ability to quickly reconstitute a dangerous offensive biological weapons capability in the absence of effective inspections. Secretary of Defense Cohen highlighted the threat on national television by holding up a 5-pound bag of sugar and emphasizing that a similar quantity of anthrax “would destroy at least half the population” of a city the size of Washington, D.C.

THE 1998 U.S. POLICY REVIEW

The 1998 U.S. Policy Review

Despite the resumption of inspections after almost a two-month hiatus, on April 16, 1998, UNSCOM Executive Chairman Butler reported “virtually no progress” in verifying Iraq’s declarations of compliance with UN directives that would allow economic sanctions to be lifted. Concerns were also raised that Iraq had used the suspension of inspections to purge sensitive sites of any incriminating evidence related to the Iraqi weapons of mass destruction program. Nevertheless, on April 30, 1998, President Clinton declared that he was “encouraged by Iraq’s level of compliance so far with the UN inspections....”

On May 24, 1998, Secretary Cohen announced that the United States would reduce its military presence in the Gulf back to November 1997 pre-crisis levels. Recent press reports have indicated that this drawdown was the result of a policy review, begun last spring. That review reportedly concluded the United States could not afford to sustain the high level of operational deployments in the region without serious impact on defense readiness elsewhere, and that the cost of building up and building down in response to the waxing and waning of Iraqi-generated crises would be prohibitive.

The use of U.S. military force against Iraq — under what conditions and against what targets — continues to be a topic of debate, especially in light of the recently-aborted U.S. airstrikes. There is little political support among the countries of the original anti-Iraq coalition for unilateral U.S. military action. With the exception of Great Britain, no U.S. allies have demonstrated a willingness to commit combat forces to any military strike. Most of Iraq’s neighbors are highly cognizant of Saddam Hussein’s political resiliency and capacity to again threaten them. They are also sensitive to the prevalent view on the “Arab street” that the Iraqi people have suffered enough. Therefore, most Iraqi neighbors are reluctant to support any military option.

In the United States, opinions vary regarding the effectiveness of diplomacy and
information may be obtained from Tom Donnelly (x65372), David Trachtenberg (x60532), or Michelle Spencer (x53036) on the committee staff.


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sulted" with Butler over the timing of planned inspections, but denied that she had compelled Butler to cancel any planned inspections. At a broader policy level, Secretary Albright challenged the notion that the U.S. policy of containment had failed. "Saddam may be rattling his cage again," she noted, "but he has no way to break out of it."

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The Inspection Regime Under Siege

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whether U.S. military power, if eventually brought to bear, should be limited to and directed against Iraq's weapons of mass destruction facilities or against the infrastructure that keeps Saddam Hussein in power. In addition, indigenous Iraqi opposition is fractured, leading some to argue that removing Saddam Hussein from power would require more than just limited air strikes, but the deployment of thousands of U.S. ground troops as well.

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