

U.S. Policy on Iraq: "We Will Not Shrink From War"

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Op-Ed

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President Bush warned in his State of the Union address that "the gravest danger facing America and the world is outlaw regimes that seek and possess nuclear, chemical and biological weapons." Exhibit A is Saddam Hussein's Iraq. As the president said, we need only look at how Saddam has terrorized, oppressed, and murdered his own people to understand his methods. And, perhaps most critically, the President confirmed that Iraq has open channels and ties to terrorist organizations, including al Qaeda.

Last November, the UN Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 1441, giving Iraq one last chance to disarm peacefully or "face serious consequences." However, instead of disarming, Iraq has responded to Resolution 1441 with empty claims, empty declarations, and empty gestures. Just a week ago, UN chief weapons inspector Hans Blix told the Security Council that "Iraq appears not to have come to a genuine acceptance, not even today, of the disarmament that was demanded of it." Indeed, the Iraqi regime is going to great lengths to conceal its weapons of mass destruction. It has removed material from sites it knew were likely to be inspected. The regime also has an active program of coaching scientists before they talk to inspectors and only permits interviews when minders are present. On top of that, thousands of pages of sensitive weapons-related documents have been found in private homes.

Resolution 1441 established two key tests: a full and accurate disclosure of Iraq's weaponry and a requirement to cooperate immediately, unconditionally, and actively with the inspectors. Iraq has failed both tests. Iraq's declaration of its weapons holdings is incomplete and inaccurate and provides no substantive information on the disposition of its weapons of mass destruction. Not surprisingly, the UN inspectors have found it woefully deficient. In his report to the Security Council, Mr. Blix noted that Iraq has failed to account for its production of the deadly nerve agent VX, some 6,500 chemical bombs, and about 1,000 metric tons of chemical agent. Iraq also previously acquired the materials to make much more anthrax than it declared.

In their inspections, Mr. Blix's team discovered a number of chemical warheads not previously acknowledged by Iraq. Iraq also continues to acquire banned equipment, with proscribed imports arriving as recently as last month. The inspectors also reported that Iraqi activity is severely hampering their work. For example, Iraq has refused the inspectors' request to use a U-2 reconnaissance aircraft, a critical tool for inspections. Inspectors are accompanied everywhere by Iraqi minders, are slandered by Iraqi officials as spies, and face harassment and disturbing protests that would be unlikely to occur without the encouragement of the authorities.

On Wednesday, I will present to the Security Council U.S. intelligence showing further evidence of Iraq's pattern of deception. Our evidence will reinforce what the inspectors told the Security Council last week -- that they are not getting the cooperation they need, that their requests are being blocked, and that their questions are going unanswered. While there will be no "smoking gun," we will provide evidence concerning the weapons programs that Iraq is working so hard to hide. We will, in sum, offer a straightforward, sober and compelling demonstration that Saddam is concealing the evidence of his weapons of mass destruction, while preserving the weapons themselves. The world must now recognize that Iraq has not complied with the will of the international community as expressed in Resolution 1441. Iraq has failed the resolution's two tests -- to disclose and to cooperate -- in a manner that constitutes a further material breach of the resolution.

In response, the U.S. will begin a new round of full and open consultation with our allies about next steps. Much has been made of the friction between the U.S. and some of its traditional partners over how to proceed with Iraq. We will work to bridge our differences, building on the bedrock of our shared values and long history of acting together to meet common challenges. The fruits of our partnership are evident all around the globe, from Western Europe to Japan, Korea, Bosnia, and Afghanistan.

Together we must face the facts brought to us by the UN inspectors and reputable intelligence sources. Iraq continues to conceal deadly weapons and their components, and to use denial, deception and subterfuge in order to retain them. Iraq has ties to and has supported terrorist groups. Iraq has had no compunction about using weapons of mass destruction against its own people and against its neighbors.

President Bush's message has been clear from the beginning. The President eloquently and persuasively set forth the U.S. position at the UN on Sept. 12: A peaceful outcome to this situation is possible if Iraq cooperates with the UN and disarms. Unfortunately, Saddam seems to be leading his nation down another path. The U.S. seeks Iraq's peaceful disarmament. But we will not shrink from war if that is the only way to rid Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction.