

Letter to Gingrich and Lott on Iraq

May 29, 1998

The Honorable Newt Gingrich
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232 Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20515-6501

The Honorable Trent Lott
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
S-208 Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20510-7010

Dear Mr. Speaker and Senator Lott:

On January 26, we sent a letter to President Clinton expressing our concern that the U.S. policy of "containment" of Saddam Hussein was failing. The result, we argued, would be that the vital interests of the United States and its allies in the Middle East would soon be facing a threat as severe as any we had known since the end of the Cold War. We recommended a substantial change in the direction of U.S. policy: Instead of further, futile efforts to "contain" Saddam, we argued that the only way to protect the United States and its allies from the threat of weapons of mass destruction was to put in place policies that would lead to the removal of Saddam and his regime from power. The administration has not only rejected this advice but, as we warned, has begun to abandon its own policy of containment.

In February, the Clinton Administration embraced the agreement reached between the UN Secretary Kofi Annan and the Iraqi government on February 23. At the time of the agreement, the administration declared that Saddam had "reversed" himself and agreed to permit the UN inspectors full, unfettered, and unlimited access to all sites in Iraq. The administration also declared that the new organizational arrangements worked out by Mr. Annan and the Iraqis would not hamper in any way the free operation of UNSCOM. Finally, the administration stated that, should Iraq return to a posture of defiance, the international community would be united in support of a swift and punishing military action.

According to the UN weapons inspectors, Iraq has yet to provide a complete account of its programs for developing weapons of mass destruction and has continued to obstruct investigations. Sites opened to the inspectors after the agreement had "undergone extensive evacuation," according to the most recent UNSCOM report. UN weapons inspector Charles Duelfer has also pointed to significant problems in the new reporting arrangements worked out by Annan and the Iraqis, warning that these may have "important implications for the authority of UNSCOM and its chief inspectors." And, in the wake of these "Potemkin Village" inspections, the Iraqi government is now insisting that the inspections process be brought to an end and sanctions lifted - going so far as to threaten the U.S. and its allies should its demands not be met.

In the face of this new challenge from Saddam, however, the President's public response has been only to say that he is "encouraged" by Iraq's compliance with the UN inspections and to begin reducing U.S. military forces in the Gulf region. Unwilling either to adopt policies that would remove Saddam or sustain the credibility of its own policy of containment, the administration has placed us on a path that will inevitably free Saddam Hussein from all effective constraints. Even if the administration is able to block Security Council efforts to lift sanctions on Iraq this year, the massive expansion of the so-called "oil for food" program will have the effect of overturning the sanctions regime. It is now safe to predict that, in a year's time, absent a sharp change in U.S. policy, Saddam will be effectively liberated from constraints that have bound him since the end of the Gulf War seven years ago.

The American people need to be made aware of the consequences of this capitulation to Saddam:

-- We will have suffered an incalculable blow to American leadership and credibility; -- We will have sustained a significant defeat in our worldwide efforts to limit the spread of weapons of mass destruction. Other nations seeking to arm themselves with such weapons will have learned that the U.S. lacks the resolve to resist their efforts;

-- The administration will have unnecessarily put at risk U.S. troops in the Persian Gulf, who will be vulnerable to attack by biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons under Saddam Hussein's control; -- Our friends and allies in the Middle East and Europe will soon be subject to forms of intimidation by an Iraqi government bent on dominating the Middle East and its oil reserves; and

-- As a consequence of the administration's failure, those nations living under the threat of Saddam's weapons of mass destruction can be expected to adopt policies of accommodation toward Saddam. This could well make Saddam the driving force of Middle East politics, including on such important matters as the Middle East peace process.

Mr. Speaker and Mr. Lott, during the most recent phase of this crisis, you both took strong stands, stating that the goal of U.S. policy should be to bring down Saddam and his regime. And, at the time of the Annan deal, Senator Lott, you pointed out its debilitating weakness and correctly reminded both your colleagues and the nation that "We cannot afford peace at any price."

Now that the administration has failed to provide sound leadership, we believe it is imperative that Congress take what steps it can to correct U.S. policy toward Iraq. That responsibility is especially pressing when presidential leadership is lacking or when the administration is pursuing a policy fundamentally at odds with vital American security interests. This is now the case. To Congress's credit, it has passed legislation providing money to help Iraq's democratic opposition and to establish a "Radio Free Iraq." But more needs to be done, and Congress should do whatever is constitutionally appropriate to establish a sound policy toward Iraq.

U.S. policy should have as its explicit goal removing Saddam Hussein's regime from power and establishing a peaceful and democratic Iraq in its place. We recognize that this goal will not be achieved easily. But the alternative is to leave the initiative to Saddam, who will continue to strengthen his position at home and in the region. Only the U.S. can lead the way in demonstrating that his rule is not legitimate and that time is not on the side of his regime. To accomplish Saddam's removal, the following political and military measures should be undertaken:

-- We should take whatever steps are necessary to challenge Saddam Hussein's claim to be Iraq's legitimate ruler, including indicting him as a war criminal;

-- We should help establish and support (with economic, political, and military means) a provisional, representative, and free government of Iraq in areas of Iraq not under Saddam's control;

-- We should use U.S. and allied military power to provide protection for liberated areas in northern and southern Iraq; and -- We should establish and maintain a strong U.S. military presence in the region, and be prepared to use that force to protect our vital interests in the Gulf - and, if necessary, to help remove Saddam from power

Although the Clinton Administration's handling of the crisis with Iraq has left Saddam Hussein in a stronger position than when the crisis began, the reality is that his regime remains vulnerable to the exercise of American political and military power. There is reason to believe, moreover, that the citizens of Iraq are eager for an alternative to Saddam, and that his grip on power is not firm. This will be much more the case once it is made clear that the U.S. is determined to help remove Saddam from power, and that an acceptable alternative to his rule exists. In short, Saddam's continued rule in Iraq is neither inevitable

nor likely if we pursue the policy outlined above in a serious and sustained fashion. If we continue along the present course, however, Saddam will be stronger at home, he will become even more powerful in the region, and we will face the prospect of having to confront him at some later point when the costs to us, our armed forces, and our allies will be even higher. Mr. Speaker and Senator Lott, Congress should adopt the measures necessary to avoid this impending defeat of vital U.S. interests.

Sincerely,

[Elliot Abrams](#) [William J. Bennett](#) [Jeffrey Bergner](#)

[John R. Bolton](#) [Paula Dobriansky](#) [Francis Fukuyama](#) [Robert Kagan](#)

[Zalmay Khalilzad](#) [William Kristol](#) [Richard Perle](#) [Peter Rodman](#)

[Donald Rumsfeld](#) [William Schneider, Jr.](#) [Vin Weber](#) [Paul Wolfowitz](#)

[R. James Woolsey](#) [Robert B. Zoellick](#)