

## U.S. missing the target in unfocused Iraq policy

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If U.S. policy toward the USSR had been as misguided as it has been toward Iraq, the Cold War would have been lost.

The flawed U.S.-Iraq policy has been consistent for two decades.

It started during the Iran-Iraq war, when Henry Kissinger helped Iraq but did so in a way that did not ensure its success. The U.S. gave it satellite intelligence on Iranian disposition of forces and encouraged gulf states to financially support the war. Worse, the U.S. turned a blind eye to Iraq's use of chemical weapons against the Iranians.

The sale of grain and other commodities to Iraq with convenient financing was actively supported by several influential senators, including former Senate Majority Leader Robert Dole and former Sen. Alan Simpson. They even went to Baghdad as part of a Senate delegation to assuage the feelings of Saddam Hussein and his regime about increasing U.S. media criticism.

The Iraqi regime was not only encouraged but also emboldened by the belief that the U.S. would turn a blind eye to an invasion of Kuwait.

After Iraq's defeat in Kuwait by the U.S.-led coalition, the mistakes continued. U.S. forces allowed the Republican Guard to escape destruction and to return home with their military equipment, including tanks and artillery that should have been destroyed in the field.

Then, the senior President George Bush urged the Kurds in the north and the Shiite in the south to rebel. Many signals were sent indicating that if such a rebellion took place, the U.S. would support it. But when rebellions took place, Iraqi forces destroyed them while the U.S. watched passively.

The people there felt betrayed.

Realizing it had to do something, the administration imposed a "no-fly zone" to protect the Kurds in the north. But by then the Kurds in Turkey rallied to support their brethren in Iraq, and both were met by Turkish forces that attacked them repeatedly using U.S. military equipment, particularly U.S. planes. Thus, the U.S. was complicit in the Turkish anti-Kurd operation, which included several large-scale military penetrations into Iraqi territory against the Iraqi Kurdish population.

During the Iraqi repression of the Kurds, chemical weapons were once again used with little reaction from the U.S.

### **Missed opportunity**

During the Clinton administration, the U.S. could have gotten the UN Security Council to establish an international commission to investigate crimes against humanity and war crimes committed by the Iraqi regime, but it did not want to spend political capital.

This would have been the best way to discredit the Iraqi regime; instead, President Clinton pursued occasional bombing of Iraqi targets, which only brought Baghdad sympathy from many quarters, including European allies. With disastrous sanctions, which brought about the deaths of an estimated half a million children because of a shortage of medication and food, the advantage shifted to Hussein.

Iraq became the victim, and the Iraqi regime became the beneficiary of a groundswell of sympathy from all over the world, making the United States seem like a ruthless and insensitive bully that took its fights to innocent children.

The latest initiative led by Vice President Dick Cheney was ill-timed and ill-conceived.

### **Mission without a plan**

He traveled to Arab countries to gauge their mood about a new military initiative but had no specific plan to propose to those Arab governments whose support he sought. The vague idea of a Kurdish rebellion in the north plus the expectation of internal rebellion by

some military commanders against the Iraqi regime was unconvincing.

But the visit happened as Israel was increasing its crushing blows against the Palestinians. Supporting Israel's repression of the Palestinians while seeking Arab support against Iraq was not likely to succeed.

Recent published accounts by former intelligence officers revealed similar plans under the Clinton administration that were botched because of the unreliability of U.S. intentions. So, in addition to being bullying and insensitive, the U.S. is also viewed as inconsistent and unreliable.

President Bush's announcement that Iraq, Iran and North Korea constitute an "axis of evil" was ill-received almost everywhere in the world. It was a slogan devoid of substance. If this was intended to galvanize governments and world public opinion against Iraq, it has failed.

This, too, is the result of a lack of Arab and Islamic expertise in the White House, whose policy and public-relations efforts concerning these parts of the world have been disastrous.

The strongest case the U.S. has against the Iraqi regime is the moral case: its ruthlessness against its own people, its violations of international human-rights law, including the use of chemical weapons and refusal to return POWs to Iran and to Kuwait, and the aggression against Kuwait.

Very little was done to establish the facts about the Iraqi regime's crimes and human-rights abuses and disseminate them worldwide, even though the U.S. has the evidence. If world public opinion had facts, assessed by an international commission of experts on a fair and impartial basis, its reactions might be different.

The U.S. could have appeared as a champion of human rights.

It is time to reconsider a new comprehensive approach from the Security Council to deal with the Iraqi regime.

This would include:

- New sanctions that would be more targeted and more specific, eliminating the hardships befalling the civilian population;
- The development of a new system to inspect for weapons of mass destruction;
- The establishment of a commission of experts to investigate violations of international law and serious violations of human rights.

Such a plan could overturn current perceptions and pave the way for future, more forceful action. But that would largely depend on whether the U.S. is willing to take a more balanced and fair position toward the Palestinians considering the devastating attack by the Israeli government.

### **No double standards**

To uphold legality and morality, the United States cannot apply double standards.

The push for military action against Iraq at this time comes from the extreme right of the pro-Israel lobby, which strangely finds itself in partnership with the conservative religious right.

For them, it is a great opportunity to further radicalize the Arab and Islamic worlds against the U.S., and thus compel a stronger alliance between the U.S. and Israel.

This is why the administration has to resist this push, particularly at this time.