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FIRM PRESSURE IS STILL NEEDED AGAINST SADDAM HUSSEIN

The Clinton Administration is sending mixed signals about America's policy toward Iraq that are undercutting international efforts to isolate and weaken Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. The State Department announced on March 29 that the United States would no longer demand Saddam's removal as a condition for lifting the United Nations embargo on trade with Iraq. This reversed President George Bush's insistence that trade sanctions would be maintained as long as Saddam remained in power.

Clinton Administration officials maintain that their aim is to "depersonalize" tensions with Iraq. This is consistent with President-elect Bill Clinton's January 14 interview in *The New York Times* in which he said he was not "obsessed" with Saddam. Noting that he was a Baptist who believed in "deathbed conversions," Clinton indicated he was ready for a fresh start with the Iraqi dictator.

This eagerness to let bygones be bygones is a dangerous mistake. Saddam is an aggressive, ruthless survivor with a strong sense of vengeance. Bill Clinton should remember what happened to Jimmy Carter, the last Baptist President who confronted a Middle Eastern dictator. Carter's well-meaning attempts to engineer a rapprochement with Iran after the February 1979 Iranian revolution helped to prompt Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's radical followers to seize American hostages at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran.

The Clinton Administration's decision to depersonalize relations with Iraq wrongly implies that President Bush was fixated on Saddam. This ignores Saddam's role in personalizing the confrontation for his own self-aggrandizement. Far from being obsessed with Saddam, Bush failed to react to a number of Iraqi provocations following the Gulf war, including the harassment of U.N. weapons inspectors and terror bombings of U.N. relief personnel. Bush's Iraq policy was flawed because it was not tough enough, not because it was too tough.

The Clinton Administration denies that abandoning the demand for Saddam's ouster as a condition of lifting the embargo represents a softening of U.S. policy on Iraq. State Department officials stress that Washington continues to insist on full Iraqi compliance with U.N. Security Council resolutions. They maintain that Saddam cannot stay in power if he abides by the resolutions. They gloss over the fact that dropping the U.S. demand for Saddam's ouster deflates the concerted international pressure that Bush brought to bear on Iraq. It will bolster the growing impression in Iraq and the Middle East that Saddam is here to stay and that the U.S. has acquiesced to his continued rule. This in turn will undermine efforts to contain Saddam on three important fronts:

1) It weakens the regional alliance against Saddam. Clinton's policy reversal has generated anxiety among U.S. allies in the region who are worried that America cannot be relied on to stay the course against Saddam. The Iraqis already have tried to heighten concern on this score through a disinformation campaign alleging that secret Iraqi-American talks were under way. Key allies in the effort to isolate Saddam, such as

Saudi Arabia and Turkey, therefore will be increasingly tempted to reach accommodations with Saddam. This not only will weaken the economic sanctions against Iraq, but could undermine the U.S. ability to launch air strikes against Iraq, if another crisis requires them.

2) It undermines the Iraqi opposition. By suggesting that Washington can accept a modus vivendi with Saddam, the Administration inadvertently has dealt a psychological blow to the Iraqi opposition. Ultimately it may demoralize Saddam's internal enemies and enable him to reconsolidate his control over Iraq.

3) It reduces incentives for a military coup against Saddam. One of the biggest threats to Saddam's power is the threat of a military coup. Saddam has survived several coup attempts, the most recent in July 1992. By suggesting that Washington has concluded that Saddam is here to stay, the new U.S. policy reduces the likelihood that Iraqi nationalists in the Army or security services will take the risk of trying to oust Saddam to preserve Iraq's national interests.

The Administration should end its short-sighted attempt to depersonalize relations with Iraq. It must work assiduously to convince regional friends and Saddam himself that Washington's resolve in confronting Baghdad is not slackening. To maintain relentless pressure on Saddam, prevent the unraveling of the anti-Saddam coalition, and erode Saddam's power to threaten his own people and neighboring states, the U.S. should:

- ✓ **Be prepared to use force.** The U.S. must retain its military option to enforce the no-fly zones, compel Saddam to abide by the cease-fire terms, and prevent him from attacking Iraq's Kurdish and Shiite rebels. When provoked, the U.S. should avoid incremental tit-for-tat reprisals that allow Saddam to claim a political victory. Instead it should launch air strikes at the assets that Saddam values most: his security forces, the Republican Guard, and his military industries. Washington also needs the cooperation of regional allies such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other Arab states in the Persian Gulf to retain access to naval and air bases ringing Iraq. The U.S. therefore must convince these states that it has the staying power to win the protracted test of wills with Saddam.
- ✓ **Tighten the embargo against Iraq.** The U.S. should seek to enforce the embargo by pressing the U.N. to impose sanctions on countries that violate the embargo. Iran, for example, recently has imported Iraqi oil in violation of the sanctions. An exception should be made, however, for cross-border trade with the beleaguered Kurds.
- ✓ **Step up support for the Iraqi opposition.** The Iraqi National Congress (INC), founded in June 1992, has emerged as an increasingly viable coalition which unites Saddam's Kurdish, Shiite, and Sunni opponents. It deserves U.S. political, financial, and military support. The U.S. also should assist the INC in setting up a Radio Free Iraq to broadcast from Kurdish-controlled territory.
- ✓ **Seize Iraq's frozen assets.** Roughly \$4 billion in Iraqi financial assets were frozen by foreign governments worldwide following Iraq's August 2, 1990, invasion of Kuwait. The U.S. should work through the U.N. Security Council to seize these assets to pay the U.N.'s costs of monitoring Iraq's weapons programs, provide reparations to Kuwait and other victims of Iraqi aggression, finance U.N. relief operations inside Iraq, and defray the costs of maintaining the no-fly zones over northern and southern Iraq.

Saddam Hussein will remain a threat to the stability of the Persian Gulf as long as he remains in power. The U.S. should relentlessly seek Saddam's overthrow, and not merely focus on enforcing U.N. resolutions concerning Iraq. A narrow legalistic effort to compel compliance with U.N. resolutions would be doomed to failure as long as the Iraqi dictator survives. Such a policy would treat the symptoms of the problem, while doing little to remove the cause of the problem — Saddam Hussein. It would be a strategic mistake and an enormous setback for the U.S. if Saddam were allowed to outlast Bill Clinton, as he did George Bush.

James Phillips
Deputy Director of Foreign Policy
and Defense Studies