

December 19, 2001 Statement in Opposition to House Resolution on Iraq

Mr. Speaker, I strongly oppose House Joint Resolution 75 because it solves none of our problems and only creates new ones. Though the legislation before us today does wisely excise the most objectionable part of the original text of H.J. Res. 75 B the resolution clause stating that by not obeying a UN resolution Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein has been committing an "act of aggression" against the United States B what remains in the legislation only serves to divert our attention from what should be our number one priority at this time: finding and bringing to justice those who attacked the United States on September 11, 2001.

Saddam Hussein is a ruthless dictator. The Iraqi people would no doubt be better off without him and his despotic rule. But the call in some quarters for the United States to intervene to change Iraq's government is a voice that offers little in the way of a real solution to our problems in the Middle East B many of which were caused by our interventionism in the first place. Secretary of State Colin Powell underscored recently this lack of planning on Iraq, saying, "I never saw a plan that was going to take [Saddam] out. It was just some ideas coming from various quarters about, 'let's go bomb.'"

Mr. Speaker, House Joint Resolution 64, passed on September 14 just after the terrorist attack, states that, "The president is authorized to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on Sept. 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons." From all that we know at present, Iraq appears to have had no such role. Indeed, we have seen "evidence" of Iraqi involvement in the attacks on the United States proven false over the past couple of weeks. Just this week, for example, the "smoking gun" of Iraqi involvement in the attack seems to have been debunked: The New York Times reported that "the Prague meeting (allegedly between al-Qaeda terrorist Mohammed Atta and an Iraqi intelligence agent) has emerged as an object lesson in the limits of intelligence reports rather than the cornerstone of the case against Iraq." The Times goes on to suggest that the "Mohammed Atta" who was in the Czech Republic this summer seems to have been Pakistani national who happened to have the same name. It appears that this meeting never took place, or at least not in the way it has been reported. This conclusion has also been drawn by the Czech media and is reviewed in a report on Radio Free Europe's Newswire. Even those asserting Iraqi involvement in the anthrax scare in the United States B a theory forwarded most aggressively by Iraqi defector Khidir Hamza and former CIA director James Woolsey B have, with the revelation that the anthrax is domestic, had their arguments silenced by the facts.

Absent Iraqi involvement in the attack on the United States, I can only wonder why so many in Congress seek to divert resources away from our efforts to bring those who did attack us to justice. That hardly seems a prudent move. Many will argue that it doesn't matter whether Iraq had a role in the attack on us, Iraq is a threat to the United States and therefore must be dealt with. Some on this committee have made this very argument. Mr. Speaker, most of us here have never been to Iraq, however those who have, like former UN Chief Arms Inspector Scott Ritter -- who led some thirty inspection missions to Iraq -- come to different conclusions on the country. Asked in November on Fox News Channel by John Kasich sitting in for Bill O'Reilly about how much of a threat Saddam Hussein poses to the United States, former Chief Inspector Ritter said, "In terms of military threat, absolutely nothing. Diplomatically, politically, Saddam's a little bit of a threat. In terms of real national security threat to the United States, no, none." Mr. Speaker, shouldn't we even stop for a moment to consider what some of these experts are saying before we move further down the road toward military confrontation?

The rationale for this legislation is suspect, not the least because it employs a revisionist view of recent Middle East history. This legislation brings up, as part of its indictment against Iraq, that Iraq attacked Iran some twenty years ago. What the legislation fails to mention is that at that time Iraq was an ally of the United States, and counted on technical and military support from the United States in its war on Iran. Similarly, the legislation mentions Iraq's invasion of Kuwait more than ten years ago. But at that time U.S. foreign policy was sending Saddam Hussein mixed messages, as Iraq's dispute with Kuwait simmered. At the time, U.S. Ambassador April Glaspie was reported in the New York Times as giving very ambiguous signals to Saddam Hussein regarding Kuwait, allegedly telling Hussein that the United States had no interest in Arab-Arab disputes.

We must also consider the damage a military invasion of Iraq will do to our alliance in this fight against terrorism. An attack on Iraq could destroy that international coalition against terrorism. Most of our European allies are critical in maintaining this coalition and have explicitly stated their opposition to any attack on Iraq. German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer warned recently that Europe was "completely united" in opposition to any attack on Iraq. Russian President Vladimir Putin cautioned recently against American military action in Iraq. Mr. Putin urged the next step to be centered around cutting off the financial resources of terrorists worldwide. As for Iraq, the Russian president said, "So far I have no confirmation, no evidence that Iraq is financing the terrorists that we are fighting against." Relations with our European allies would suffer should we continue down this path toward military conflict with Iraq.

Likewise, U.S. relations with the Gulf states like Saudi Arabia could collapse should the United States initiate an attack on Iraq. Not only would our Saudi allies deny us the use of their territory to launch the attack, but a certain backlash from all Gulf and Arab states could well produce even an oil embargo against the United States. Egypt, a key ally in our fight against terrorism,

has also warned against any attack on Iraq. Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Maher said recently of the coalition that, "If we want to keep consensus we should not resort, after Afghanistan, to military means."

Mr. Speaker, I do not understand this push to seek out another country to bomb next. Media and various politicians and pundits seem to delight in predicting from week to week which country should be next on our bombing list. Is military action now the foreign policy of first resort for the United States? When it comes to other countries and warring disputes, the United States counsels dialogue without exception. We urge the Catholics and Protestants to talk to each other; we urge the Israelis and Palestinians to talk to each other. Even at the height of the Cold War, when the Soviet Union had missiles pointed at us from 90 miles away in Cuba, we solved the dispute through dialogue and diplomacy. Why is it, in this post Cold War era, that the United States seems to turn first to the military to solve its foreign policy problems? Is diplomacy dead?

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, this legislation, even in its watered-down form, moves us closer to conflict with Iraq. This is not in our interest at this time. It also, ironically enough, could serve to further Osama bin Laden's twisted plans for a clash of civilizations between Islam and the West. Invading Iraq, with the massive loss of life on both sides, would only forward bin Laden's hateful plan. I think we need to look at our priorities here. We are still seeking those most responsible for the attacks on the United States. Now hardly seems the time to go out in search of new battles.