

THE U.N. REWARDS SADDAM

by John R. Bolton

YOU MIGHT THINK THE UNITED NATIONS would want to punish Saddam Hussein for disrupting and nearly killing the U.N.'s own efforts to eliminate Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. Instead, the U.N. Security Council last week effectively rewarded him. Not only did the council extend the misnamed "oil-for-food" program at current levels—a loophole in the sanctions that lets Iraq export roughly \$2 billion worth of oil every six months. It also offered him the prospect of increasing those sales and loosening the U.N.'s controls over the proceeds of those sales.

Thus, just six weeks after he barred Americans from participating in U.N. arms inspections, Saddam Hussein now has the best of both worlds: The U.N. ban on weapons of mass destruction is materially impaired, and the economic sanctions are in danger of collapse.

Saddam has won on both fronts thanks to an inattentive and erratic U.S. policy. Three weeks without U.N. inspections undoubtedly allowed the Iraqis to roll back months if not years of weapons-monitoring work by the U.N. Special Commission. That was ample time to disperse and conceal facilities for research, production, and storage of mass-terror weapons. Even worse, however, is the likelihood that the Clinton administration will, in the near future, accept a weakening of economic sanctions—regardless of whether Iraq is subverting the work of the weapons inspectors.

President Clinton has found it rhetorically easy to concentrate on the clash over weapons inspections. Iraq's conflict with the U.N. inspection team was straightforward, easy to explain and understand, and highly visible. The mandate of the U.N. Special Commission is limited to the indisputable threat posed by weapons of mass destruction; its operations have little impact on Iraqi society at large; the global arms-control "community" understands and supports the

U.N.'s efforts; and the inspectors have been highly successful since the end of the Gulf War in 1991.

By contrast, the economic sanctions are broad in their impact, diffuse in their implementation, and—bluntly stated—hard to get excited about. Nonetheless, and although far from perfect, the sanctions regime has materially impeded Iraq's ability both to rebuild its conventional military and to acquire weapons of mass destruction. The sanctions reinforce

and support the work of the U.N. inspection teams by highlighting Iraq's continuing pariah status and its enormous uncertainty and risk as a commercial partner. With sanctions substantially lifted, Saddam's maneuvering room and options for purchasing weapons materials in world markets would be dramatically enhanced. The difficulty of preventing his acquisition of weapons of mass



destruction would be magnified accordingly.

Saddam clearly understands the mutually supporting roles of the U.N. Special Commission and the sanctions; the Clinton administration, for its part, has been utterly unable even to articulate this point, let alone deal with it. Saddam also understands that sanctions have real enemies in the West. While many analysts deride sanctions generally as ineffective, Saddam has somehow succeeded in convincing much of international opinion that sanctions are causing terrible suffering to innocent Iraqis.

Thus, Mary Robinson, former president of Ireland and now U.N. high commissioner for human rights, recently opined: "I want to bring to the public's concern the incredible suffering of the children and old people" caused by Security Council sanctions against Iraq. U.N. secretary general Kofi Annan essentially bought this line last week when he supported an increase in the permissible amount of Iraqi oil sales. Prominent conservative and liberal commentators in this country have agreed.

But this is nonsense. From the adoption of Resolution 661 on August 6, 1991, the U.N. sanctions have

always expressly allowed Iraq to import medicines and food for humanitarian purposes. After the Gulf War, the sanctions were substantially eased, and they have been eased further (too far, in my view) by the various “oil-for-food” resolutions. There are not, and have never been, any international impediments to Iraq’s attending to the humanitarian needs of its citizens, if it really wanted to do so.

The suffering of the Iraqi people since 1990 has not been the result of sanctions. It stems directly from the policy choices of Saddam Hussein. This is a man who has used poison gas against his fellow citizens. He has condemned them to starve, sicken, and die in order to free up resources to purchase military and other supplies in international markets. And we can be sure that the extra money Saddam would make from an easing of sanctions would be similarly spent on his needs, not the Iraqi people’s. His goal has been to ensure the survival of his government, not the survival of his citizens. All that an easing of sanctions will accomplish is to hand a clear victory to Saddam’s propaganda campaign, to acquiesce in the big lie that we, and not Saddam, are the cause of Iraqi suffering.

That Saddam Hussein has successfully befuddled so many Western analysts is a sign of just how desperately in trouble the sanctions now are. Holding the sanctions regime in place against Iraq will require the Clinton administration to demonstrate a strong will, focused attention, and persistence in military and diplomatic efforts.

Every indication is that the administration is about to cave. We can be certain that other rogue governments will be watching closely.

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