



U.S. Policy Toward the Middle East in Clinton's Second Term

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While U.S. President Bill Clinton achieved a number of successes in his Middle East policy during his first term in office -- most noticeably the Oslo peace agreement between Israel and the PLO that was signed on the White House lawn in September 1993 -- during his second term U.S. Middle East policy has proved much more problematic.(1) Not only has the Oslo peace process run into serious difficulty, but the U.S. "dual containment" policy toward Iran and Iraq which he inherited from the Bush Administration and then intensified during his first term, had also come close to collapse. The U.S. has also encountered problems in peripheral areas of the region, such as Cyprus, while also becoming beset by the problem of terrorism.

Compounding the President's difficulties was a Republican-dominated Congress that became increasingly assertive as President Clinton became bogged down in the Lewinsky affair, which after January 1998, began to seriously threaten his presidency. This essay will examine U.S. policy toward the Middle East in the first two years of Clinton's second term, looking first at what American goals were at the time President Clinton was reelected in November 1996, and then assessing the administration's success or failure in meeting these goals by January 1999. In particular, this essay will concentrate on the U.S. role in the Arab-Israeli peace process and U.S. policy toward Iraq and Iran.

THE ARAB-ISRAELI PEACE PROCESS

U.S. goals for the Middle East in the period just before the 1996 U.S. Presidential election were clearly and concisely spelled out by then U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, Robert H. Pelletrau in a speech before the Fifth Annual Southwest Asia symposium of the U.S. Central Command (CENTO):

"Securing a just, lasting and comprehensive peace between Israel and its neighbors remains a cornerstone of our overall foreign policy. A successful peace process will enhance regional stability, remove a rallying point for fanaticism, and enhance prospects for political and economic development. The United States is engaged in several fronts to advance peace negotiations, an engagement which in turn helps achieve our other objectives in the Middle East. These include preserving Israel's security and well-being; maintaining security arrangements to preserve stability in the Persian Gulf and commercial access to its resources; combating terrorism and weapons proliferation; assisting U.S. businesses, and promoting political and economic reform."(2)

Pelletrau's emphasis on the peace process as the key to overall U.S. policy in the Middle East reflected a realization that had become concretized in U.S. policy over the past two decades: that it was very difficult for the U.S. to simultaneously maintain good relations with Israel and with friendly Arab states -- especially the oil producers of the Persian Gulf -- unless the U.S. was working both assiduously and

successfully to bring about a peace agreement between Israel and its Arab neighbors. While much of the Arab world, seeing a direct threat from Iraq, did rally around U.S. efforts to repel Iraqi aggression against Kuwait in the August 1990-March 1991 period (during a time when the Arab-Israeli peace process was making little progress); during Clinton's second term the U.S. was to have a great deal of difficulty rallying Arab support against Iraqi violations of U.N. Security Council Resolutions in November 1997 and January/February 1998, at least in part because of the near collapse of the Arab-Israeli peace process. Conversely, once the U.S. got the peace process back on track with the Wye Agreement in October 1998, Clinton got far more support from the Arab states during the mid-November 1998 confrontation with Iraq, although as Wye faltered in December 1998, this was to negatively affect popular opinion in parts of the Arab world when the U.S. finally decided to bomb Iraq.

A year before the U.S. Presidential election of 1996, the Arab-Israeli peace process had suffered its first blow when an Israeli religious fanatic, Yigal Amir, assassinated the Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin who had pioneered the effort to reach peace with the Palestinians. In 1993 Rabin and PLO leader Yasser Arafat had signed the Oslo I "Declaration of Principles" on the White House lawn, a ceremony which underlined the U.S. backing of the peace agreement which, however, had been forged by direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. A year later, with President Clinton also present, Rabin and King Hussein ibn Talal of Jordan signed a peace treaty, which transformed the unofficial peaceful relationship between Israel and Jordan into a public one. In September 1995, despite a series of Hamas and Islamic Jihad terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians, Rabin and Arafat signed the Oslo II

agreement that turned over the major Palestinian cities of the West Bank (except for Hebron) to Palestinian rule, a process that was completed by January 1996 and accompanied by elections for a Palestinian Parliament and Palestinian Executive, the latter won, to no one's surprise, by Arafat.

As the peace process developed between 1993 and 1995, the U.S. took the lead in fostering multilateral working groups bringing representatives from Israel and 13 Arab countries, along with 30 countries from outside the Arab world to deal with problems that cut across the region as a whole, such as water, the environment, the refugee issue, and arms control and security.⁽³⁾ The highlight of these multilateral meetings were the economic summits that took place in Arab capitals such as Amman, Cairo and Casablanca and brought together Arab and Israeli businessmen to discuss possible business deals.

Following the assassination of Rabin, however, the peace process began to deteriorate -- in spite of the best efforts of his successor, Shimon Peres to hold it together. In February and March 1996, Hamas terrorist bombings in the heart of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv helped create an atmosphere that led to the election of the anti-Oslo Israeli politician, Benjamin Netanyahu as Israeli Prime Minister, in May 1996, despite the attempts of the United States to rally support for Peres by organizing an anti-terrorism summit at the Egyptian town of Sharm el-Sheikh in March 1996.

Following the election of Netanyahu, one of the first things the Israeli leader did, once he had put together his governing coalition, was to journey to Washington. Besides meeting President Clinton, he also addressed the American Congress, and in his speech made assertions that were clearly aimed at winning over the Republican-dominated body, such as announcing his

plans to privatize state-owned Israeli companies, deregulate the Israeli economy and eliminate U.S. foreign aid to Israel. The alliances Netanyahu was to reinforce with key Republican leaders (he had been a frequent visitor to Congress when he was the Likud opposition leader from 1993-1996) were to greatly aid him when he came into conflict with Clinton over the peace process, something he was soon to do. Indeed, while in his inaugural speech in the Israeli Knesset, Netanyahu offered peace to both the Palestinians (in return for "maximum security for Israel in the face of terror and war")(4) and to Israel's Arab neighbors, Netanyahu's policy of expanding Jewish settlements on the West Bank angered the Arabs, and Israeli-Palestinian relations hit a crisis in late September 1996 when, after unilaterally ordering the opening of the Hasmonean tunnel near the Temple Mount which was holy both to Moslems and Jews, fighting erupted between Israelis and Palestinians causing the deaths of 70 people. President Clinton in an effort to defuse the crisis, which took place little more than a month before the Presidential election, invited Netanyahu, Arafat, King Hussein and Hosni Mubarak to Washington (Mubarak refused to go, a sign of the chilling of U.S.-Egyptian relations) and while the emergency summit achieved little in substance, the crisis was eased. Nonetheless the degree of trust between Arafat and Netanyahu, never very high to start with, all but evaporated, and it was to be the United States that was forced to get intensively involved in the peace process (unlike the situation in the Oslo I and Oslo II negotiations), in order to broker an agreement for the partial (80 percent) Israeli withdrawal from the city of Hebron in January 1997. The agreement also stipulated that Israel would undertake three additional troop redeployments over the next 18 months.

Just a month later, however, Israeli-Palestinian relations received a major blow. Prime Minister Netanyahu, possibly reacting to pressure from the right wing of his governing coalition, which had been strongly opposed to the Hebron agreement, announced on February 26 that Israel would build a new Jewish neighborhood, which he called Har Homa, of 6,500 housing units in traditionally Arab East Jerusalem. When he announced days later that the next Israeli troop redeployment would turn over only 2.7 percent of Israeli-controlled West Bank territory to the Palestinian Authority, the peace process came to a halt. Arafat then not only broke off talks with Netanyahu, he also sharply diminished the security cooperation between the Palestinian police and the Israeli army, stipulated by the Oslo II agreement, leading Israelis to charge that he was encouraging terrorism. Terrorism in fact did resume, with a bomb in a Tel Aviv cafe in March, set off by Hamas, killing 3 Israelis and additional bombs in Jerusalem on July 30 and September 4, killing a total of 21 Israelis and wounding hundreds more. Netanyahu reacted to the bombings by imposing a border closure that prevented Palestinians on the West Bank and Gaza from working in Israel (a tactic also periodically used by Rabin), by withholding tax payments previously collected from Palestinians working in Israel and owed to the Palestinian Authority, and by threatening to send Israeli forces into Palestinian areas to root out the terrorists.

In September 1997, after appearing to withdraw from the Middle East peace effort, the U.S. again intervened, this time with the peace process on the verge of total collapse after the two Hamas bombings. The new U.S. Secretary of State Madeline Albright, who had been sworn in on January 23, 1997 but had not yet made an official visit to the Middle East, came to Israel in an effort to jump-start the stalled peace process. She appealed to Arafat to take unilateral

action to root out the terrorist infrastructure, and called on Netanyahu for a "time-out" in settlement construction in the occupied territories, a plea Netanyahu rejected. The peace process continued to stagnate until November when the Israeli cabinet voted in principle in favor of another troop withdrawal but specified neither its extent nor its timing. Meanwhile, Clinton had grown exasperated with what his administration perceived as stalling by Netanyahu and publicly snubbed the Israeli Prime Minister during Netanyahu's November 1997 visit to the U.S. to talk to Jewish organizations. Netanyahu's ties to the Republicans in Congress, and to their allies on the religious right of the American political spectrum (such as Jerry Falwell whose Liberty University students regularly make pilgrimages to Israel)(5) helped insulate the Israeli leader from U.S. pressure, a process that would continue into 1998 as a weakened Clinton got bogged down in the Lewinsky scandal.

Despite his growing weakness, Clinton, acting through his Secretary of State Madeline Albright, again sought in May 1998 to salvage the peace process whose apparent demise was badly damaging the U.S. position in the Middle East as Arab friends of the United States, as well as its Arab enemies, increased their complaints about a U.S. "double standard" in the region of pressuring Iraq (see below) while not pressuring Israel. Albright, in an effort to reverse this situation, following meetings with Netanyahu and Arafat in London, issued an ultimatum for Israel to accept a 13 percent withdrawal. This, however, failed due to the support Netanyahu received from Republicans in the U.S. Congress, the pro-Israeli lobby in the U.S. led by the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), and the Christian Religious Right.(6) Interestingly enough, however, American Jewry was badly split over Netanyahu's policy, with Reform and

Conservative Jews, already angry at Netanyahu for his favoritism to Israel's orthodox Jews, calling for Netanyahu to more energetically engage in the peace process while Orthodox Jews [a clear minority in the American Jewish community] tended to support the Israeli Prime Minister.

Albright continued her efforts during the summer, however, reportedly calling Netanyahu seven times between the 5th and 8th of July.(7) On July 10, after Albright's meeting with two senior Palestinian negotiators -- Saeb Uraquat and Nabil Sha'th -- , the U.S. White House spokesman Mike McCurry stated that there was "a limit to the degree in which we participate in a process that doesn't have utility,"(8) and on July 13 State Department spokesman James Rubin pointedly noted "the ball is not in the Palestinian court; the ball is in the court of the Israelis to try to work with the Palestinians and work with us to come to a second 'yes'. We have a 'yes' from the Palestinians and we are looking to get ourselves in a position where the Israelis can say 'yes' as well."(9)

During the summer of 1998 the U.S. effort took on a new focus -- seeking to get Israeli approval by linking the Israeli withdrawal, in stages, to Palestinian action to combat terrorism and assure Israeli security. Meanwhile a new element had been added to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Yasser Arafat's threat to unilaterally declare a Palestinian state upon the expiration of the Oslo I agreement on May 4, 1999. While Netanyahu issued a counter-threat of a unilateral Israeli response, which many interpreted as annexation of large parts of the West Bank if Arafat went ahead to declare a state, the Palestinian leader's threat may have been enough to get Netanyahu to agree to meet Arafat in late September 1998 in Washington when both leaders would be in the United States to address the United Nations. At his first

meeting with Arafat in a year, Netanyahu finally agreed in the presence of Clinton to the 13 percent withdrawal figure stipulated by the United States, but only on condition that 3 percent of the area would be a "nature reserve" on which the Palestinians would be prohibited from building, a condition to which Arafat agreed.⁽¹⁰⁾ The 13 percent figure was a considerable concession for Arafat who had initially demanded a 30 percent withdrawal, and the Palestinian leader also toned down his speech at the U.N. where he refrained from threatening to declare a state on May 4, 1999. But other issues continued to raise questions about the ultimate success of the negotiations even as Netanyahu and Arafat agreed to return to Washington in mid-October. First and foremost were the security agreements which Israel demanded in return for its phased 13 percent withdrawal. These included the specifics of Palestinian action to dismantle terrorist cells, extradite prisoners, confiscate excess guns, and stop what the Israelis called "incitement" of citizens through anti-Israeli speeches, sermons and propaganda.⁽¹¹⁾ Other issues included the opening of an airport in Gaza, safe passage for Palestinian officials traveling between the West Bank and Gaza and a clear repudiation by the PLO of its charter calling for the destruction of Israel. Then, of course, there were "final status" issues such as Jerusalem, borders, water, refugees and the future of Israeli settlements that were supposed to be negotiated by May 4, 1999. Clinton met with Arafat separately the next day to urge him to work effectively to combat terrorism, although the ultimate success of the U.S. President's efforts remained to be seen. Nonetheless, the CIA, an organization with the confidence of both Israelis and the Palestinian Authority, was proposed as a compromise institution to monitor Palestinian efforts to curb terrorism. Indeed, as far back as March 1998, the Hamas spokesman Ibrahim Ghawsah, had

noted the effectiveness of the CIA when he complained that "military operations" against Israel had "become difficult" because of security cooperation between Arafat's Palestinian Authority and Israel "especially after the CIA joined in this coordination."⁽¹²⁾

However, beside the security questions involved in a Palestinian-Israeli agreement, there were real concerns whether Clinton was strong enough to broker an agreement, given the Lewinsky affair. Natan Sharansky, Minister of Industry and Trade in Netanyahu's government and a close confidant of the Israeli Prime Minister, openly wondered "America is weak, so Arafat must wonder whether they can deliver and that affects their role here."⁽¹³⁾ On the Palestinian side, Ziad Amr Amr, a Palestinian lawmaker stated "Before the scandal, at least, [Clinton] had some credibility. He could send an envoy or secretary of state and people would take it seriously. I don't think he can be taken seriously. He has no ability to do anything about the peace process. Its not even a realistic option."⁽¹⁴⁾ If this situation were not bad enough, the U.S. faced another dilemma, the illness of King Hussein whose country, Jordan, was now not only Israel's closest Arab friend [at least on the elite level] but also, after some disruptions during the Gulf War when the King supported Saddam Hussein, was again a major U.S. ally in the Arab world. Should Hussein die, not only could Israeli-Palestinian relations be further strained, but the entire Middle East peace process could be jeopardized.

Despite the skepticism of both Israeli and Palestinian parliamentarians, and the illness of King Hussein, Clinton was able to move the peace process several steps forward in mid-October as Netanyahu, Arafat, and King Hussein (who left the Mayo Clinic to play an important mediating role) gathered with U.S. officials at the Conference Center of the Wye Plantation on

Maryland's Eastern Shore. After eight days of intense bargaining which involved the threat of a walkout by Netanyahu, and Clinton's postponement of a trip to California to aid the reelection campaign of the embattled Senator Barbara Boxer, a modest agreement was achieved between Netanyahu and Arafat. The agreement involved Israel withdrawing in three stages from 13.1 percent of West Bank land (3 percent of which would become a nature preserve), transferring an additional 14.2 percent of land jointly controlled to sole Palestinian control, releasing 750 prisoners, and agreeing to the opening of a Palestinian airport in Gaza, of two corridors of safe passage between Gaza and the West Bank, and of an industrial zone between Israel and Gaza. In return Arafat agreed to changing the Palestine National Charter to clearly eliminate the 26 articles calling for Israel's destruction, although the manner in which the change was to take place was a bit vague (reference was made to an assembly of Palestinian notables). Clinton's promise to be present during the Palestinian action, however, would serve to dramatize the event. Arafat also agreed to issue a decree prohibiting all forms of incitement to violence, to cut the number of Palestinian police to 30,000 (from 40,000), to arrest and confine 30 terrorism suspects wanted by Israel, to collect illegal weapons, and suppress terrorism, with the CIA attesting to the fact that the Palestinian Authority was making every effort to crack down on terrorism.⁽¹⁵⁾ The two sides also agreed to resume negotiations on final status issues.⁽¹⁶⁾

Given the issues still to be resolved between Israel and the Palestinians, the achievements at Wye were quite modest, and the modicum of trust between Arafat and Netanyahu that had been achieved at Wye seemed to evaporate following their return home as each issued bellicose statements while terrorist acts, orchestrated

by Hamas, threatened the process of the planned three stage Israeli withdrawal.⁽¹⁷⁾ Nonetheless, Clinton had achieved several important things as a result of the Wye Agreement. First, by demonstrating that he was still a leader with international influence, he helped dispel the weakened image of the American presidency caused by the Monica Lewinsky affair. Second, by getting the peace process back on track, he demonstrated to the Arabs that the U.S. was not following a double standard vis-a-vis Iraq and Israel. Indeed, in the subsequent confrontation with Iraq in mid-November 1998, this development was to help the U.S. isolate Iraq in much of the Arab world. Third, Clinton's political position vis-a-vis Netanyahu was strengthened. The Israeli Prime Minister's unwise raising of the Jonathan Pollard affair in the latter stage of the negotiations alienated some of Netanyahu's Republican supporters. Netanyahu suffered a second political blow as a result of Republican losses in the House of Representatives in the U.S. mid-term elections that took place less than two weeks after the Wye summit, and which were widely seen as a repudiation of Republican efforts to impeach Clinton. The speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Newt Gingrich, perhaps Netanyahu's closest ally in the Republican-dominated Congress, was forced to resign as a result of the Republican defeat (Gingrich had predicted gains of 35-40 Republican seats), to be replaced (albeit only temporarily due to his own sex scandal) by Robert Livingston, who was considerably more cool to Israel.⁽¹⁸⁾ While the House of Representatives in a highly partisan impeachment process, went on to vote two articles of impeachment against Clinton, the President's standing in American public opinion polls soared, and the impeachment vote did not serve to weaken him politically. Whether Clinton could use his restored political position to bring added pressure on Netanyahu to move the peace process

forward soon became a moot point, however, as the Israeli Prime Minister, beset by defections from his government, moved to call new elections. In the process, implementation of the Wye agreement, which had been suspended by Netanyahu in early December 1998, was frozen.

Initially, the Wye agreement appeared to restore a modicum of confidence between Arafat and Netanyahu. Israeli troops, in the first stage of the agreement, withdrew from 2 percent of the occupied West Bank; Israel released 250 Palestinian prisoners, and allowed the opening of the Palestinian airport in Gaza. However, the momentum for peace was quickly reversed. Palestinians, complaining that the prisoners who were released were only "car thieves," not the political detainees they wanted, carried on violent protest activities.⁽¹⁹⁾ These protests, together with a series of Palestinian terrorist attacks against Israelis, including the attempt by a Hamas suicide bomber to ram a bus filled with Israeli school children in Gaza, an attempt to set off a bomb in the Mahane Yehudah market in Jerusalem, and an attack on an Israeli soldier in Ramallah [actions which Arafat proved unwilling or unable to prevent], led Netanyahu, under heavy pressure from right-wing elements in his governing coalition, to freeze additional troop withdrawals on December 2nd. The Israeli Prime Minister conditioned the resumption of the withdrawals to Arafat halting what he called a campaign of incitement against Israel, foregoing his intention to declare a Palestinian state on May 4, 1999, and acceding to Israel's selection of the prisoners who were to be released.⁽²⁰⁾

For its part, the Clinton Administration, despite the ongoing impeachment process, was making major efforts to keep the peace process going. On November 29th, speaking at a Palestinian donor conference he had convened in

Washington, President Clinton pledged \$400 million in additional aid to the Palestinians, on top of the \$500 million he had pledged in 1993. All told, some \$3 billion in aid was pledged to the Palestinians, an amount that would greatly help the beleaguered Palestinian economy, although questions were raised at the conference about corrupt Palestinian officials siphoning off previous aid for their own personal use.⁽²¹⁾ The U.S. also sought to downplay the conditions Netanyahu had placed on further Israeli troop withdrawals under the Wye agreement, with State Department spokesman James P. Rubin stating on December 2, 1998 "The agreement should be implemented as signed. We do not believe it is appropriate to add new conditions to implementation of the agreement."⁽²²⁾ The most important effort to restore momentum to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process was taken by Clinton himself when he journeyed to Gaza in mid-December to witness the Palestinians formally abrogate the clauses in the Palestine National Charter calling for Israel's destruction, an action which the Netanyahu government had long demanded. While Clinton was on hand to witness the vote that he too had urged on Arafat, the end result of his visit was a warming of relations between the U.S. and the Palestinian Authority which received increased international legitimacy as a result of the U.S. President's visit -- an outcome which Israeli critics of Netanyahu blamed on Netanyahu. As Bar-Ilan University professor Shmuel Sandler noted "Netanyahu boxed himself in, wanting to survive politically and believing he can have his cake and eat it [too]. He will have to pay a price as Washington opens up to the Palestinians."⁽²³⁾

While U.S.-Palestinian relations, at least on the level of the Palestinian "street", were to suffer a serious blow when the U.S. bombed Iraq two days after Clinton's visit to the Palestinian Authority,⁽²⁴⁾ Clinton's

personal relationship with Arafat was to remain strong as Arafat was to meet Clinton and Albright in Washington in early February. In any case, Clinton's summit with Arafat and Netanyahu following the visit to Gaza proved unsuccessful despite the U.S. President's claims of reviving the stalled Middle East peace talks, as Netanyahu held fast to his position that no further withdrawals would take place until the Palestinians met his conditions.(25) This position, however, proved the death knell for his coalition government as members from within Netanyahu's ruling Likud party, led by Defense Minister, Yitzhak Mordechai, threatened to pull out of the government because of Netanyahu's obdurate position on the peace process. Suffering a major political blow when his Finance Minister Ya'acov Ne'eman resigned, Netanyahu moved to call new elections before his government would fall on a non-confidence vote.(26) With elections scheduled for May 17, 1999, the peace process was in effect frozen, leaving the United States somewhat nervously on the diplomatic sidelines, hoping that Arafat would not prematurely declare a Palestinian state, and thus strengthen the chances for Netanyahu's reelection.

At the same time, American leaders had to be concerned about the sudden succession process in Jordan. King Hussein, who was suffering a relapse of his cancer, left the U.S. where he was undergoing cancer treatment to fly back to Jordan. There the King replaced his brother, Hassan, as Crown Prince, with Hussein's eldest son Abdullah. Given the fact that Hassan, who had been Crown Prince for more than 30 years, was a strong supporter of the peace process and that Abdullah, a general in the Jordanian army, was politically inexperienced, U.S. officials had to be concerned. While Secretary of State Albright quickly visited the Crown Prince to offer U.S. support, and President Clinton

offered \$300 million in additional aid, the death of King Hussein, which came soon after his selection of Abdullah as Crown Prince, added a new challenge to the U.S. leadership because it removed a moderating influence from the often volatile Palestinian-Israeli relationship, and King Hussein, who had been so valuable at Wye, would be sorely missed.(27)

THE RISE AND FALL OF DUAL CONTAINMENT: U.S. POLICY TOWARD IRAQ AND IRAN

If President Clinton was encountering difficulty in fostering peace between Israel and the Palestinians, his efforts at containing both Iraq and Iran, a policy he actively pursued during his first term in office, had all but collapsed in the two years following his reelection in November 1996. For dual containment to be effective the U.S. had to be willing not only to support large U.S. military forces in the Persian Gulf, and to have the will to use them if either Iran or Iraq got out of line, rather than use one to check the other as the U.S. had done in the 1970's and 1980's, but the two states also had to be kept isolated from countries in their immediate region and be prevented from receiving support from outside countries as well.(28) Iran, with which the European Union countries followed a policy of "constructive engagement" never really faced such isolation, while Iraq, a pariah in most of the Arab world because of its invasion of Kuwait in 1990, by 1997 began to acquire increased support from Arab countries, such as Egypt and Syria, while having received support from Russia as far back as 1993. In addition U.S. policy toward Iran had clearly shifted by June 1998 from containment to an effort at a rapprochement, in large part because of the election of a reform-minded Iranian cleric, Mohammed Khatami, as President of Iran.

U.S. Policy toward Iraq

During his first term, Clinton had been challenged by Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein on a number of occasions. In June 1993, following an abortive Iraqi attempt to assassinate former U.S. President George Bush, who was visiting Kuwait, the U.S. bombed an intelligence center in Baghdad. In October 1994, Saddam Hussein moved his army toward Kuwait and the U.S. responded by airlifting military forces to Kuwait and warning Iraq not to invade, a threat that achieved its purpose. The U.S. was less successful in late August 1996, however, when Iraqi troops, in cooperation with the KDP (the Masud Barzani faction of the Kurdish opposition), attacked the rival PUK faction of Jallal Talabani which had been aided by Iran, and drove it from Irbil, thus severely damaging U.S. efforts of forging a united opposition to the Iraqi regime. The U.S. responded by expanding its "no-fly" zone in the south of Iraq to the 33rd parallel, and by bombarding Iraqi air defense installations, although France, which had hitherto cooperated with the U.S. in maintaining the "no-fly" zone, did not cooperate in the newly extended part of the zone.(29) The Arab opposition may have also been caused by their view of limited U.S. cruise missile attacks as worse than useless stirring up Arab popular anger, while not threatening the bases of Saddam Hussein's power.

The major Iraqi challenges to the U.S. were to come in the fall of 1997 and the winter of 1998 and were to result in a weakening of the U.S. containment effort, something that was to be the result both of a sharp erosion in President Clinton's domestic political stature, and in support for his anti-Iraqi policies in the Arab world. Making matters more difficult for the U.S. was the active diplomacy of Russia which was seeking to rebuild its position in the Middle East. There were three main reasons

for Russian leader Boris Yeltsin's support of Iraq. First, to demonstrate to the world and to an often hostile Duma (Parliament) that Russia remained an important factor in the world, both willing and able to oppose the United States. Second, to obtain repayment for the \$7 billion owed Russia's predecessor, the Soviet Union -- something that will not happen until after the lifting of sanctions on Iraq. Third, Russian arms manufacturers and oil and gas companies seek contracts in Iraq, even though they cannot actually begin operations until sanctions are lifted. With these interests in mind, it is easy to explain Russian behavior in both the October-November 1997 and January-February 1998 crises, although Russian policy was far more coherent in the October-November crisis.(30) In the fall of 1997, U.S. weapons inspectors, who were in Iraq as part of the U.N. inspection team (UNSCOM) checking on Iraq's development of weapons of mass destruction, were prohibited by Iraq from carrying out their mission and left the country, followed by the other U.N. inspectors. The U.S. threatened military action against Iraq and began to mobilize its forces. At the peak of the crisis, Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov called Secretary of State Madeline Albright back from a visit to India and met with her and other members of the U.N. Security Council at 2 a.m. in Geneva on November 20, 1997. With the help of France, which was also pursuing lucrative arms and business deals in Iraq, Primakov put together an agreement under which the weapons inspectors would be let back into Iraq in return for a vague promise about lifting the sanctions. The agreement proved short-lived, however, and in January Saddam Hussein, claiming that the U.S. sanctions were starving the Iraqi people, began backtracking on the agreement by prohibiting inspections of his "Presidential palaces" which were suspected as weapons depositories. This led to the U.S. and Britain massing their forces in the

Persian Gulf, and it appeared as if a conflict was imminent. Several factors, however, prevented the outbreak of war. First, Clinton was now beset by the Monica Lewinsky affair, which became public in late January, and which eroded his political position. Second, domestic support for an attack on Iraq proved not as strong as the Clinton Administration had hoped, as on February 18, 1998, Secretary of State Albright and some of her administration colleagues encountered a hostile reception during a Town Hall meeting at Ohio State University on U.S. policy toward Iraq that was broadcast worldwide by CNN.(31) A third factor was a clear lack of support from America's Arab allies who appeared to be moved by Saddam's portrayal of his suffering people. In November 1997, at the height of the first crisis with Iraq, many of America's major Arab allies, including Saudi Arabia, Morocco and Egypt, boycotted the U.S.-sponsored regional Arab-Israeli economic conference held in Doha, Qatar. As the Egyptian newspaper *_Al-Ahram_*, which usually reflects government opinion noted -- despite the U.S. support for the "oil for food" agreement that allowed Iraq to import substantial amounts of food and medicine -- "The American position toward Iraq cannot be described as anything but coercive, aggressive, unwise and uncaring about the lives of Iraqis, who are unnecessarily subject to sanctions and humiliations."(32) The Arab leaders also made clear their dissatisfaction with the U.S. for not pressing the Netanyahu government to move ahead with the peace process, complaining that the U.S. had a double standard in the Middle East, pressuring Iraq but not Israel. Arab criticism of the U.S. continued into the February crisis when Saudi Arabia would not permit the U.S. to use bases on its soil to attack Iraq, reportedly because of the U.S. "inability to push forward the quest for a broader peace between the Arabs and Israelis."(33) The

Arab opposition may also have been caused by their view that limited U.S. cruise missile strikes would be worse than useless, stirring up the anger of the "Arab street," while not threatening the bases of Saddam Hussein's power. In the face of these constraints as well as opposition from Russia and France to a U.S. military attack, President Clinton chose a diplomatic way out of the impasse, this time with the help of U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan who extracted the promise from Saddam Hussein that the Iraqi leader would not interfere with UNSCOM inspections. The agreement, however, was strongly criticized by Republican leaders in Congress, such as Trent Lott, Jesse Helms and John McCain who, as Clinton weakened politically, became increasingly assertive spokesmen on U.S. foreign policy.(34) Their clamor became louder in late August when the chief U.S. inspector on the UNSCOM team, Scott Ritter, resigned in protest at what he said were deliberate U.S. efforts led by Secretary of State Madeline Albright to derail inspections in order to avoid another military confrontation with Iraq.(35) The resignation occurred on August 26th, three weeks after Saddam Hussein, on August 5th, barred surprise inspections and said he would only allow remote monitoring and repeat visits to known sites. Since the Iraqi leader had long had a policy of trying to hide evidence of Iraq's efforts to construct weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and UNSCOM with Ritter often in the lead, had been successful in ferreting out the WMD information primarily by surprise inspections (although the information released by Iraq after the defection in 1995 of Saddam's son-in-law, Hussein Kamil, was also helpful), Saddam's barring of surprise inspections meant the effective end of U.N. monitoring of Iraq's weapons programs; and the U.S. failure to react to the Iraqi move, which Ritter (and many others) saw as in direct contravention of UNSC Resolution 687, precipitated his resignation. While the

U.S. was subsequently to get a unanimous U.N. Security Council condemnation of the Iraqi leader's action (following Saddam's decision to interfere with routine UNSCOM monitoring)(36) along with a deferment of any Security Council decision on lifting sanctions,(37) it appeared that Iraq was now relatively free to engage in a crash program to build weapons of mass destruction, although the continuation of the sanctions on his regime appeared to limit Saddam's ability to do so.

Following Ritter's resignation, Congressional Republicans held hearings on what they called a reversal of U.S. policy toward Iraq, with House Speaker Newt Gingrich saying that what was involved suggested a "secret shift from confrontation to appeasement" that was in direct conflict with the government's public rhetoric. Gingrich(38) further attacked Clinton by stating that if Ritter's accusations were true, "Your administration's tough rhetoric on Iraq has been a deception masking a real policy of weakness and concession."(39) In response Secretary of State Albright, citing the unanimous U.N. Security Council vote against Iraq, asserted that the administration's policy would be more effective in curbing Saddam Hussein than that of Scott Ritter,(40) although few Republicans appeared convinced. The administration did score a success in its Iraq policy, albeit perhaps only a small one, in mid-September when it persuaded the Kurdish factions of Masud Barzani and Jallal Talabani, whose internecine conflict had facilitated the capture of Irbil by Saddam Hussein's forces two years earlier, to work together and share power in Northern Iraq.(41) Whether the agreement would hold, however, remained to be seen. Meanwhile, Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott and House International Relations Committee Chairman Benjamin Gillman, introduced a bill at the end of September 1998 that authorized the Clinton

Administration to select one or more Iraqi opposition groups that would be able to receive up to \$97 million in U.S. Defense Department equipment and military training "to seek to remove the regime headed by Saddam Hussein in Iraq and promote the emergence of a democratic government."(42) While the Clinton Administration initially opposed the bill (although Clinton was later to sign it) because it limited its flexibility of action over Iraq, it appeared that the Congressional Republicans, unhappy with Clinton's handling of Iraq, were thrusting forward an alternative policy.

Fortunately for Clinton, Saddam Hussein again overreached himself and allowed the American President to seize the initiative against the Iraqi leader. On October 31, 1998 Saddam Hussein ended all Iraqi cooperation with UNSCOM, precipitating yet another unanimous Security Council vote condemning Iraq and demanding that the ban on cooperation with UNSCOM be ended.(43) When Iraq refused to change its policy, the UNSCOM inspectors left Iraq and Clinton again began to mobilize U.S. forces for a possible strike against the Iraqi leader. But the political situation in November 1998 was far different from what it had been during the November 1997 and February 1998 crises. In the first place Clinton was greatly strengthened by the U.S. midterm elections which were seen, as noted above, as a public repudiation of Republican attempts to impeach him. Second, after Clinton concluded the Wye Agreement, which involved a further Israeli withdrawal from occupied territory, the Arab world was far less hostile to U.S. pressure against Iraq. Indeed, the Arab Gulf coalition, that fought against Iraq -- Egypt, Syria and the Gulf Cooperation Council -- issued a strongly worded warning to Iraq on November 12, stating:

Iraq must heed U.N. Security Council resolutions and abide by them to avoid military confrontation...The Iraqi government will be solely responsible for all repercussions resulting from its decision to block UNSCOM from carrying out its inspections..."(44)

A third problem which had hampered U.S. action against Iraq in the previous two crises, Russian opposition, had all but dissipated by November 1998. Beset by a monumental economic crisis, having defaulted on its foreign loans, and now having to virtually beg the U.S. and Europe for food to get through the winter, Russia was in no position to try to block a U.S. military strike on Iraq.(45)

In this strengthened political position, Clinton decided to launch a major military attack against Iraq only to call it back at the very last minute after receiving information that Iraq, under the imminent threat of attack, had agreed to allow the UNSCOM inspectors to resume their work.(46) While Clinton claimed the Iraqis had "backed down," and threatened to initiate attacks if Iraq failed to fully cooperate with UNSCOM,(47) many commentators thought Clinton had lost a golden opportunity, now that he had both the Arab world and a united Security Council behind him, to destroy the bases of Saddam's power including the Republican Guard, the suspected sites of weapons of mass destruction, and Iraq's remaining military capability. While in his November 15 news conference Clinton asserted that "the return of the inspectors, if they can operate in an unfettered way, is the best outcome, because they have been and remain the most effective tool to uncover, destroy and prevent Iraq from rebuilding its weapons of mass destruction,"(48) Clinton's critics asserted that it was only a matter of time before Saddam Hussein again interfered with the UNSCOM inspectors and at that time Clinton might not have the

favorable domestic and diplomatic situations to enable him to launch a major military attack against Iraq. Indeed, this was to be the case one month later when a politically weakened Clinton decided, in cooperation with the British, to finally launch a military attack against Iraq.

By mid-December 1998 Clinton's position had weakened on two fronts. In the Middle East, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, as noted above, had suspended Israeli participation in the Wye River agreement and Clinton had not been able to reverse the decision. At home in the United States, the Republican-dominated House Judiciary Committee, in what was generally seen as a highly partisan action, had pushed through, on a party-line vote, a four-count impeachment indictment against Clinton, and the resolution was awaiting action by the full House of Representatives. It was precisely at this point that Clinton, citing UNSCOM Chairman Richard Butler's report that the Iraqis had again seriously interfered with the activities of the inspectors, and concerned that with the Islamic holy month of Ramadan coming in a few days the U.S. would have had to postpone the attack for more than a month, giving Saddam time to hide his WMD equipment, launched the attack. In the words of President Clinton:

The conclusions [of UNSCOM chairman, Richard Butler's report] are stark, sobering, and profoundly disturbing...In short, the inspectors are saying that even if they could stay in Iraq, their work would be a sham. Saddam's deception has defeated their effectiveness. Instead of the inspectors disarming Saddam, Saddam has disarmed the inspectors.

This situation presents a clear and present danger to the stability of the Persian Gulf and the safety of people everywhere. The international community gave Saddam one last chance to resume co-operation with the weapons inspectors. Saddam has failed to seize the chance.

And so we had to act and to act now. Let me explain why: First, without a strong inspection system, Iraq would be free to retain and begin to rebuild its chemical, biological and nuclear weapons programs in months, not years. Second, if Saddam can cripple the weapons inspection system and get away with it, he would conclude that the international community, led by the United States, had simply lost its will. He will surmise that he has free rein to rebuild his arsenal of destruction. And some day, make no mistake, he will use it again as he has in the past. Third, in halting our air strikes in November, I gave Saddam a chance, not a licence. If we turn our backs on his defiance, the credibility of U.S. power as a check against Saddam will be destroyed.

That is why on the unanimous recommendation of my national security team, including the vice president, the secretary of defense, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the secretary of state and the national security adviser, I have ordered a strong sustained series of air strikes against Iraq. They are designed to degrade Saddam's capacity to develop and deliver weapons of mass destruction and to degrade his ability to threaten his neighbors.(49)

The attack on Iraq, coming on the eve of the impeachment vote, gave rise to strong criticism both in the U.S. and abroad. While many Republicans such as outgoing House Majority Leader Newt Gingrich and Senator John McCain of Arizona supported the attack, Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, who heretofore had urged Clinton to take a tougher stand on Iraq, stated "I cannot support this military action in the Persian Gulf at this time. Both the timing and the policy are subject to question."(50) While Lott later backed away from the statement, the political damage had been done, and was reinforced by Republican Representative Gerald Solomon, the Chairman of the House

Rules Committee, who asserted "Never underestimate a desperate President."(51)

Even before the U.S. launched the attack, National Security Adviser Samuel Berger in a speech at Stanford University, on December 8th, had articulated in a more detailed way than ever before, the Administration's strategy toward Iraq. He noted that the U.S. would be working "step-by-step, in a practical and effective way" to undermine and eventually oust Saddam Hussein and he linked that goal with a pledge "to use effective force if necessary." Berger's statement was coupled with incentives for people in the center of power in Baghdad to overthrow Saddam, as the U.S. official promised "to ease economic sanctions" against a new Iraqi regime and also "work to relieve Iraq's massive economic debts."(52)

In this light an analysis of the military attack itself, which lasted 70 hours, reveals that it was not only aimed at weakening Saddam's capacity to make weapons of mass destruction and threaten Iraq's neighbors, but also to weaken the very basis of his regime. The Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Harry Shelton, estimated that between 600 and 1,600 members of the Iraqi Republican Guard, a main prop of the Iraqi government, had been killed in the U.S. attacks, which also targeted the headquarters of Iraqi military intelligence, the special Republican Guard, and the special security organization while leaving regular army units alone.(53) The U.S. strategy in doing so seemed aimed at encouraging a future coup, on the assumption that regular army officers were less likely to support Saddam than the Republican Guard, the special Republican Guard or the special security organization. The U.S. also claimed success in degrading Saddam's WMD capability even though "dual use" facilities such as pharmaceutical plants were not targeted to avoid civilian casualties. The U.S. commander in the

Persian Gulf, General Anthony Zinni, stated that as a result of the attacks Iraq's missile development might have been set back two years.(54) The U.S. also hit an oil refinery near Basra that Saddam was using to refine oil to be smuggled out through the Persian Gulf in violation of U.N. sanctions. Zinni asserted that the 300 ship-launched cruise missiles were particularly effective, hitting more than 85 percent of their targets, while overall, 75 percent of the strikes were rated "fully successful."(55)

Following the end of the bombing campaign, Sandy Berger again articulated U.S. policy toward Iraq, this time in a speech to the National Press Club. Berger noted that there were only two possible outcomes to U.S. policy toward Iraq -- total Iraqi compliance with U.N. Security Council demands which he stated was "unlikely," or the downfall of Saddam Hussein which he said was "inevitable." He noted that the U.S. opposed a return to the pre-attack situation in which Saddam could instigate crises whenever he wanted by promising to give UNSCOM unfettered access and then obstructing the inspectors' work. Berger also stated that the U.S. now had an open-ended commitment to use military force to block the rebuilding of the WMD and communications equipment destroyed by the U.S. and British attacks. In addition, Berger asserted that the U.S. was prepared to devote resources to "practical and effective" efforts to build an opposition to Saddam.(56) However, Berger also stated that the U.S. was not willing to ensure Saddam's immediate departure through the commitment of the hundreds of thousands of U.S. troops which would be needed for the task.(57)

While the U.S. was evaluating the impact of the missile and air strikes, and working to undermine Saddam's position within Iraq, it was coming under strong criticism for its actions from Russia, France and China. The Russians, who had long

sought to lift the embargo against Iraq, seized on the U.S.-British attack not only to severely criticize the U.S., but also to push for the lifting of the embargo. A sick Yeltsin, under attack from communists in his Parliament who sought to impeach him, used the U.S. attack to try to demonstrate Russia's continuing importance in the world despite its serious economic problems. He denounced the attack and withdrew, albeit only for a short time, the Russian ambassadors from the U.S. and Britain. Russia's ambassador to NATO, Sergei Kiseljack went so far as to accuse the U.S. of launching the strikes just to test its newest weapons.(58) In addition Moscow sought the ouster of UNSCOM Chairman Richard Butler, whom Russia's deputy UNSC representative, Yuri Fedotov, said "We just don't trust."(59) and also sought to increase the role of U.S. Secretary General Kofi Annan in dealing with the post-attack political situation in which Saddam Hussein refused to readmit the UNSCOM inspectors.

France, which also denounced the attack and also wished to secure economic benefits in Iraq, sought to capture the diplomatic initiative by tying the lifting of the oil and petroleum embargo against Iraq to the establishment of a new "independent and professional control commission under the authority of the Security Council," while continuing the ban on forbidden weapons into Iraq.(60)

While Russia supported the French plan, the U.S. opposed it, demanding that UNSCOM remain the U.N. inspection arm although in an effort to demonstrate it was not opposed to the welfare of the Iraqi people, the U.S. offered to allow Iraq both to sell more oil and import spare parts for its oil industry.(61) Meanwhile, someone in the office of the U.N. Security Council leaked the information that UNSCOM investigators had collected eavesdropping intelligence, and given it to the U.S. to help it undermine the Saddam Hussein regime.(62) Both the

U.S. and Butler denied the charge and Kofi Annan himself stated, through a spokesman, that he had "no evidence of any kind that UNSCOM had assisted U.S. intelligence." (63) The leaking of the story, however, timed as it was, appeared to be an effort to undermine the credibility of UNSCOM in general and Butler in particular and was utilized not only by Iraq, but by Russia and France as well to demand the end to UNSCOM.

While the inconclusive discussions at the U.N. were proceeding, Saddam Hussein was seeking to recapture the initiative in the Gulf, although once again his heavy-handed actions appeared to backfire. Thus, after offering virtually no resistance to the joint U.S.-British attacks, at the end of December Saddam declared the U.S. no-fly zones "null and void" and began to launch attacks against U.S. and British planes patrolling the zones. The end result of the process was the further weakening of Iraq's defense capability as, by the end of January, the U.S. claimed to have destroyed an estimated 20 percent of Iraqi air defense installations while suffering no losses of its own. (64) Meanwhile, on the Arab diplomatic front, Saddam was also suffering losses. Frustrated because of a lack of Arab support during the U.S. and British attacks, Saddam called for an Arab summit, only to pull out his delegation when the Arab delegations present demanded that Iraq renounce "provocations" against its neighbors and that it comply with all United National resolutions before economic sanctions could be lifted. (65) Before the meeting, Saddam had called for the Arab masses to overthrow their leaders, and had directed particular criticism against the Egyptian regime of Hosni Mubarak. Speaking on Iraqi T.V., Saddam urged the Arabs to "revolt and unseat those stooges, collaborators, throne dwarfs and cowards! Revolt against injustice. Surely we will remain forever as revolutionaries against them." (66) Such

statements were not calculated to win the support of Arab leaders, and by the end of January Iraq was even more isolated in the Arab world than it had been before the U.S.-British attacks.

As Iraq remained isolated in the Arab world and weakened militarily by its ongoing military conflict with the U.S., there was yet another attempt to forge a UN Security Council consensus on action toward Iraq. At the end of January the Security Council agreed to a Canadian proposal for a three-part review of the Iraqi situation under which there would be a review of (1) Iraq's disarmament situation; (2) the condition of the Iraqi population living under sanctions; and (3) an accounting of missing Kuwaitis and others during Iraq's occupation of Kuwait from August 2, 1990 to March 1, 1991. (67) While Iraq turned down the U.S. proposal, demanding that the UN Security Council condemn the U.S. and British air strikes and immediately lift the embargo, at a minimum the Security Council was again cooperating on Iraq, albeit on at a rather minimal level.

As the U.N. was again grappling with the Iraqi situation, the U.S. was stepping up its efforts to overthrow Saddam Hussein's regime. On January 21, U.S. Secretary of State Albright appointed Frank Ricciardone to the post of special representative to the opposition groups working to overthrow Saddam. Earlier she had announced the Iraqi opposition groups eligible for the \$97 million in U.S. aid under the Iraq Liberation Act [the Iraqi National Congress, the Iraqi National Accord, the Islamic Movement of Iraqi Kurdistan, the Movement for the Constitutional Monarchy, the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan] (68) Given the differences among the six groups (a seventh group, the Iranian-backed Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq, rejected U.S. help) the U.S. faced a formidable task in coordinating an effort to overthrow Saddam.

This point was made abundantly clear -- albeit in a rather non-diplomatic way -- by General Zinni who, in testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee, stated that none of the Iraqi opposition groups "had the viability to overthrow Saddam at this point" and he warned that if the opposition did prove successful, the end result could be " a disintegrated, fragmented Iraq...and the last thing we need is another rogue state."(69) While the Administration sought to put the best face on General Zinni's remarks, with State Department spokesman James Foley noting that he agreed with Zinni's conclusion that "this is not going to be an easy or short term effort,"(70) there was some question whether U.S. policy on Iraq was fully coordinated. In any case, while Saddam had been effectively isolated in the Arab world -- mostly through his own mistaken diplomacy -- and his military power had been considerably weakened, the U.S. still appeared to have a long way to go before the Clinton Administration's new policy toward Iraq, the overthrow of the Saddam Hussein regime, was realized.

U.S. Policy toward Iran

While even during Clinton's first term there were voices in Washington calling for an improvement in relations with Iran, the memories of the hostage crisis of 1979-80, and of the ill-fated Iran-Contra Affair of the 1980's, coupled with Iran's death sentence on the writer Salman Rushdie, its conduct of terrorism abroad, its efforts to obtain weapons of mass destruction, and its opposition to the Arab-Israeli peace process which took the form of military aid to such anti-Israeli terrorist groups as Islamic Jihad, helped prevent any policy change, as did the Republican sweep of Congress in the 1994 elections. Indeed, Iranian-American relations actually deteriorated further during Clinton's first term(71) as the U.S. refused to permit the U.S. airplane manufacturer Boeing to sell

passenger aircraft to Iran. Similarly, the U.S. pressured Azerbaizhan to drop Iran from an international consortium developing one of Azerbaizhan's off-shore oil fields, and in 1995 President Clinton signed a Presidential order banning U.S. companies from investing in Iran's oil industry, thereby forcing the U.S. oil firm Conoco to cancel a \$1 billion agreement to develop two Iranian off-shore oil fields. In 1996, Clinton went further and signed the Republican-inspired Iran-Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA) which imposed a number of sanctions against foreign firms investing more than \$40 million in Iran's oil and gas industry. Yet another blow to U.S.-Iranian relations in 1996 was the terrorist attack against the Khobar Towers residence of U.S. airmen in Saudi Arabia, which killed 19 U.S. airmen. At the time, the terrorist attack was widely attributed to Iran which made no secret of its opposition to U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf although more recently suspicion has shifted to Osama Bin Laden.

While the U.S. was endeavoring to isolate Iran, it did not receive much help from its NATO allies. The French firm, Total, signed the off-shore oil deal that Conoco had been forced to cancel and Turkey, which faced a rapidly growing demand for natural gas, signed a 20 year \$20 billion dollar agreement to import gas from Iran. Energy-related issues also divided the U.S. from its allies on the question of the preferred export route for Caspian Sea oil and natural gas, with many Europeans who are more dependent on energy imports than the U.S., preferring the shorter, less expensive and more secure route from the Caspian through Iran to the Persian Gulf, over the more expensive, longer and much more insecure route the U.S. backed from Azerbaizhan through Georgia and Turkey to the Mediterranean (the Baku-Ceyhan route). The U.S. also clashed repeatedly with Russia over Iran because Russia was Iran's major supplier of sophisticated military

equipment, such as aircraft and submarines and was also selling nuclear reactors and missile technology to Iran.

The hostility between the U.S. and Iran, so evident during Clinton's first term, began to diminish during the early part of his second term. The precipitating factor was the unexpected -- and overwhelming (70 percent of the vote) election of Mohammed Khatami as Iran's President in May 1997. The moderate Iranian leader, although challenged by hardliners in the Iranian regime including Iran's religious leader, Ayatollah Khomeini who controlled important levers of power such as the army, police and Pasdaran, sought to increase cultural and personal freedom in Iran, while also improving relations with Iran's Gulf neighbors, Europe and, to a lesser degree, with the United States.

Khatami's efforts to improve Iran's regional position began with the dispatch of the new Iranian Foreign Minister, Kamal Kharazmi on a tour of Arab capitals with a message that Iran wanted peaceful and cooperative relations with the Arab world.⁽⁷²⁾ Next came the OIC (Organization of Islamic Countries) Summit, held in Teheran in December 1997, where Khatami was unanimously elected as chairman of the OIC for the next three years. At the summit, Khatami moderated Iran's position on the Arab-Israeli peace process, stating Iran would accept any solution which the Palestinians accepted, and Iran got the support of the other Islamic countries in opposing U.S. sanctions.⁽⁷³⁾ The rapprochement between Iran and its neighbors continued in March 1998 with the visit of former Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani, himself a moderate, to Saudi Arabia, where the two sides discussed, inter alia, the drop in oil prices to below \$13 a barrel, a development that hurt both countries. Saudi Arabia and Iran were subsequently to agree to an oil production cutback.⁽⁷⁴⁾ Iran also sent out feelers to

Iraq, and the hard-pressed regime of Saddam Hussein, looking to escape its own isolated position, responded positively although the two countries remained at odds over unsettled issues from their 1980-1988 war. By mid 1998, the only issue of consequence remaining in Iranian-Gulf Arab relations was the dispute over the three islands in the Persian Gulf (Big Tunb, Little Tunb and Abu Musa) which are claimed both by Iran and the United Arab Emirates but are currently occupied by Iran -- an occupation that dates back to the time of the Shah. In the new mood of GCC-Iran cooperation, however, the islands issue now appears to be far less of an area of contention that it was in the past.

As Iran was improving its ties with the Gulf Arabs, it was stepping up its relations with Russia and France, two of its leading trade partners. Russia, which was Iran's leading supplier of military equipment as well as nuclear reactors, saw Iran as a useful ally in a number of Caucasian and Central Asian trouble spots from Chechnya to the Tajik civil war to Afghanistan as well as a major market for Russian military and civilian exports.⁽⁷⁵⁾ For its part France also rejected U.S. efforts to isolate Iran economically and in 1997 the French company Total joined with Russian and Malaysian energy companies in an agreement to develop Iran's South Pars natural gas field -- a direct challenge to U.S. efforts to limit Iranian energy development, at a time when Iran was facing serious economic problems.

The challenge, however, was not to be met by the U.S. because Iran's efforts at improving its ties with foreign countries by 1998 now also included the United States. The U.S. was to reply in kind. What could be called a limited rapprochement began in December 1997 when in a news conference President Khatami stated "I first of all pay my respects to the great people and nation of America."⁽⁷⁶⁾ Three weeks later, in a CNN

interview, he proposed to the U.S. the idea of an exchange of "professors, writers, scholars, artists, journalists and tourists." President Clinton responded in kind at the end of January when he broke the U.S. public stereotype of Iran as a hostage-holding terrorist nation by calling Iran "an important country with a rich and ancient cultural heritage of which Iranians are justifiably proud" and asserted that the current differences between Iran and the U.S. were not "insurmountable." (77)

The first tangible results of the new atmosphere between the two countries came in February 1998 when a group of American wrestlers were triumphantly received by Iranian wrestling fans during the Takhiti Cup tournament in Teheran. (78) During the spring the U.S. took two further actions to build up momentum for a rapprochement. In May, Clinton waived sanctions against the French, Russian and Malaysian companies planning to develop Iran's South Pars gas field, (79) and in June Secretary of State Madeline Albright, in a speech to the Asia Society in New York, after noting that the U.S. had implemented a more streamlined procedure for issuing visas to Iranians, offered to "develop, with the Islamic Republic, when it is ready, a road map leading to normal relations." (80)

During the summer and early fall, however, the road to normal relations developed a few potholes. Under pressure from the Republicans in the U.S. Congress, the U.S. extended the mandate of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty to broadcast into Iran to "promote democracy." (81) In addition, Iran's testing of a medium range missile, the Shahab 3, in July raised concerns in the U.S. that Iran was making unexpectedly rapid progress on its way to developing weapons of mass destruction, a concern shared by Israel and its lobby in the U.S. Despite these events, there was a great deal of expectation of a further thaw in U.S.-Iranian relations when Khatami and his

Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazmi journeyed to New York for the opening of the fall session of the United Nations. In his U.N. speech, Khatami continued his theme of dialogue, calling on the U.N. to declare the year 2001 the "year of dialogue among civilizations." However, he took a sharply anti-Israeli tone stating that peace and security would come to the Middle East only when all Palestinians had the right to "exercise sovereignty over their ancestral homeland," and that "Palestine is the homeland of Moslems, Christians and Jews, not the laboratory for the violent whims of Zionists." The Iranian leader, nine of whose diplomats had been killed by the Taliban in Afghanistan and whose army now maneuvered menacingly on the border of that country, also called for a broad-based government in Afghanistan representing all ethnic groups and communities. (82) The next day, Khatami also took a critical stance toward the U.S. in a news conference in which he rejected the idea of government-to-government talks between the U.S. and Iran although he did welcome what he termed a "change in speech" by the U.S. He complained, however, about a number of American actions including the U.S. economic embargo against Iran and U.S. opposition to pipelines carrying Caspian Sea oil through Iran. He also protested the failure of the U.S. to return the Iranian assets it had frozen and for allocating money to Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty for Persian-language broadcasts that would "hurt the government of Iran." In an effort to diffuse criticism of Iran's human rights position, however, Khatami seemed to lift the Iranian death threat against the author Salman Rushdie by stating "We should consider the Salman Rushdie issue as completely finished. The Iranian government has officially announced that in practice it has made no decision to act on this matter" -- an assertion which while welcome in the West (Britain immediately

upgraded diplomatic relations with Iran) provoked a firestorm of criticism among Khatami's hard line opponents in Iran.(83) The Iranian President also met with a group of Iranians living in the U.S. and Canada and asked them to invest in Iran as he set out to develop a dialogue with the Iranian exile community.(84)

The official response to Secretary of State Albright's appeal for a road map to improve relations came in Foreign Minister Kharazzi's speech to the Asia Society on September 28th, and it was filled with criticism of the U.S., emphasizing a number of the points already stated by Khatami in his news conference several days earlier. These included attacking the U.S. because of its imposition of sanctions against Iran, U.S. efforts to "sabotage" Iran's efforts to play a role in promoting regional stability, the U.S. propaganda war against Iran because of its Persian-language broadcasts on Radio Free Europe and America's "retarding economic prosperity of Iran and the region" by its obstruction of the building of a pipeline through Iran to ship oil and gas from Central Asia and the Caucasus.(85) Iran also chose not to exploit the opportunity for person-to-person diplomacy on the Afghan issue, an area of common interest with the U.S. The Clinton Administration also opposed the Taliban and had just bombed Osama Bin-Laden's terrorist bases located in Afghanistan. Nonetheless Kharazzi decided, reportedly on the orders of Khomeini, not to participate in a U.N.-sponsored meeting on Afghanistan at which Secretary of State Madeline Albright was present.(86)

In analyzing the hard-line positions of both Khatami and Kharazzi, it appears that the central factor affecting their behavior was the strong conservative counterattack against Khatami in Iran during the summer. The mayor of Teheran, Gholanhossen Karabaschi, an ally of Khatami was sentenced to five years in prison on alleged corruption charges in July.

The former Interior Minister Abdollah Nouri lost his post in June and in early September was physically attacked, along with Ayatollah Mahajerani, another Khatami ally who was the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, by thugs apparently sent by hard-line conservative forces.(87) Making matters worse, Iran's supreme religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini launched an attack against the Iranian media which had been acting with considerably more freedom following Khatami's election. Khomeini charged that sections of the media had abused their freedom and that action would be taken against their "creeping excesses."(88) Soon afterwards, the popular Iranian newspaper *Tous* was closed and its managing director and two of its staff members were jailed. Then the weekly magazine *New Way* was also closed, two senior editors at the state-owned Islamic Republic news agency were jailed, and two-thirds of the Iranian parliament (180 of 270) called for journalists who wrote against "Islamic principles" to be tried for threatening national security.(89) The situation got so bad that an Iranian judge was quoted as saying that the jailed journalists could face the death penalty for "fighting God."(90)

It appeared that the Iranian conservatives were using the war scare with Afghanistan to fight back against Khatami's policies of domestic and foreign moderation and, by mid October, it was an open question as to which side would emerge victorious. In any case, following the Khatami visit to the U.S., it appeared that U.S.-Iranian relations had come to a crossroads. In both countries there was opposition to moving ahead with the rapprochement. In the U.S., it was primarily the Republicans in Congress, linked to anti-Iranian elements in the Israel lobby.(91) They remain suspicious of Iran, arguing that Khatami can't really control the radicals in Iran, even if he wanted to, and they openly

wonder whether Khatami's "charm offensive" is nothing more than a tactic to put Iran's enemies off guard, while Iran was acquiring weapons of mass destruction. Khomeini's strong criticism of the Wye Agreement served to reinforce their opposition. On the Iranian side, Khatami's conservative opponents, still smarting over his election victory, have opposed not only his domestic reforms but also his moderate foreign policy approach to the U.S. With President Khatami now under onslaught from Iranian conservatives, it is not at all clear as to whether the rapprochement can continue unless the U.S. is forthcoming with a major concession such as the release of frozen Iranian assets, permission for U.S. companies to invest in Iran's oil and gas infrastructure, or removal of U.S. opposition to foreign investment in Iranian oil pipelines. Whether Clinton, despite his high public opinion ratings during the impeachment process, is strong enough to take such steps is very much in doubt.

CONCLUSIONS

In assessing U.S. policy toward the Middle East in the first two years of the second term of President Clinton, several conclusions can be drawn. First the clear-cut policy direction, evident in his first term of office, has now fallen into disarray. Second, while Clinton secured a number of Middle East policy successes during his first term, his second term has been marked by some significant failures. In the Arab-Israeli conflict, Clinton's effort to promote the peace process has run into serious problems as negotiations between Israel and the PLO virtually ended between February 1997 and September 1998, and the limited progress he achieved in the fall of 1998 in the Wye Agreement, which quickly ran into trouble, pales into insignificance when compared to the issues that still need to be negotiated between Israelis and Palestinians. While in

Clinton's first term, Israelis and both Palestinians and Jordanians did most of the negotiating themselves, with the U.S. essentially standing on the sidelines as a cheerleader, during the American leader's second term the lack of trust between Arafat and Netanyahu necessitated a much more active role for the U.S. Yet the American effort, at least at the top level (President and Secretary of State) seemed disjointed. The newly appointed Secretary of State, Madeline Albright, did not even make a visit to the Middle East until eight months into her term and then only after a series of terrorist bombings. For his part, President Clinton, apparently exasperated by Netanyahu's policies, publicly snubbed the Israeli leader during his November 1997 visit to the United States and then -- through Albright -- gave an ultimatum to Netanyahu six months later only to prove unable to enforce it. Given the history of high level U.S. activity in the Arab-Israeli conflict, something regional leaders have come to expect, Clinton's policy of apparent benign neglect followed by frenetic activity raised serious questions about U.S. policy, and the freezing of the implementation of the Wye agreement by Netanyahu in December 1998, despite Clinton's protestations, could only raise further doubts about U.S. policy capability.

If Clinton's policies toward the Arab-Israeli conflict have had, at best, limited success during the first two years of his second term, U.S. policy toward Iraq has been even more problematic, and the degree of success the U.S. achieved in its zero-sum game conflict with Iraq was, in large part, due to Saddam Hussein's mistakes. During this period U.S. strategy evolved from supporting UNSCOM, despite numerous infractions of U.N. resolutions by Saddam Hussein who sought in every way possible to impede the UNSCOM inspectors, to a policy of working with Iraqi opposition groups under the Iraq Liberation Act to

overthrow Saddam, a policy that was stepped up following Clinton's decision in December 1998 to belatedly bomb Iraq. This action, while it was aimed both at weakening Iraq's WMD capability and striking at the major supports of Saddam's regime like the Republican Guard, also led the Iraqis to prohibit the return of UNSCOM inspectors. In an effort to demonstrate to the Arab world that the U.S. was only opposed to the regime of Saddam Hussein, not to the Iraqi people, the U.S. also pioneered the "food for oil" agreement, although the impact on the "Arab street" of this measure did not seem significant. Meanwhile, beginning in the summer of 1998 the Republican-led Congress began to urge Clinton to take ever stronger measures against Iraq, although several of these Republican hawks, like Senator Lott, did not choose to support Clinton when he finally attacked Iraq in December 1998 -- on the eve of the House impeachment vote. Fortunately for Clinton however, Saddam's heavy-handed attempts to overthrow opposing Arab regimes led to his isolation in the Arab world, while his efforts to belatedly challenge the U.S. and British planes in the no-fly zones of Northern and Southern Iraq led to the further degradation of his military capacity. Finally, his main ally on the UN Security Council, Russia, was far too weak economically and politically, let alone militarily, to take action to protect him.

In the case of Iran, U.S. policy has had more of a mixed result. The old policy of dual containment pursued so strongly during Clinton's first term seems now to have been jettisoned with the U.S. now seeking to improve relations with Iran while keeping Iraq isolated. The U.S. embarked on a policy of rapprochement with Iran following the election of Mohamed Khatami as Iran's President in May 1997. Yet the policy of limited rapprochement, replete with positive oratory and symbolic actions by both sides, seems to have run its course

and it remains to be seen if the U.S. and Iranian leaders, each of whom is beset by domestic opposition to the limited rapprochement, can push the process much farther.

In looking to the reasons for the U.S. policy disarray and Clinton's relative lack of success in his Middle East policies during his second term, several factors appear paramount. First is the Republican Congress which provided support for hard-line Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu in his efforts to slow the peace process and rebuff Clinton's pressure, and which challenged Clinton's policies on Iraq and Iran as well. While Clinton cannot personally be held responsible for the election of Netanyahu which, along with the Hamas terrorism that Arafat proved unwilling or unable to suppress, proved to be a major obstacle to U.S. efforts to forge a Middle East peace, Clinton can certainly be held responsible for the Monica Lewinsky affair which breathed new life into the Ken Starr special counsel investigation of his presidency and led to the beginning of an impeachment process. This process strengthened the role of Congress in U.S. foreign policy and helped foreign leaders like Netanyahu and Saddam Hussein to resist U.S. pressure. The Lewinsky crisis undermined Clinton's efforts to build a coalition against Saddam Hussein in February 1998 as much of the world's perception (whether true or not is besides the point) was that the crisis stemmed not from Saddam's defiance of the U.N. inspectors, but from Clinton's efforts to divert attention from the Monica Lewinsky affair. Similar criticism was leveled against Clinton when he finally decided to launch a major attack on Iraq in mid-December 1998, just as the House of Representatives was preparing to vote articles of impeachment against him. Indeed, one of the weaknesses of U.S. policy toward Iraq has been Clinton's unwillingness to use force when the political situation favored it, and poor

timing when he belatedly chose to use significant force. There are times in international crises when force must be used and it is not clear that Clinton fully understand this.

Finally, the weakness of his Presidency appears to limit how far Clinton can go in building on the opportunity provided by the election of a moderate to the presidency of Iran. With the administration's dual containment strategy now a matter of history, the chance to build a new relationship with Iran is the first genuine opportunity for the U.S. to change direction on Iran in two decades and to improve the American position in the Persian Gulf as a result. Yet the weakness of the Clinton Administration seems to preclude the steps needed to move the U.S.-Iranian rapprochement on to the next stage, although the domestic opposition faced by Khatami is certainly a major factor as well.

In sum, despite some small and perhaps transitory successes like the Wye agreement, American policy toward the Middle East during the first two years of President Clinton's second term has been a highly problematic one. Whether the U.S. can be more successful in pursuing its policy goals in the region during the remainder of Clinton's term is a very open question.

NOTES

1. For an overview of U.S. policy toward the Middle East in Clinton's first term, see Don Peretz, "U.S. Middle East Policy in the 1990's," in *The Middle East and the Peace Process* (ed. Robert O. Freedman) (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), pp. 347-364.

2. Robert H. Pelletreau, *American Objectives in the Middle East*, Occasional Paper Series No. 7, US-GCC Corporate Cooperation Committee, (Washington, DC, 1996), pp. 2-3.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

4. The text of Netanyahu's speech can be found in *Collier's International Yearbook* (New York: Collier-Newfeld, 1997), p. 116.

5. David Coven, "Liberty U. to send 3,000 students on a study tour of Israel," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 25, 1995, p. 51.

6. For an analysis critical of U.S. strategy at this time, see Robert Satloff, "Shifting Sands: The U.S.'s Disturbing New Israel Policy," *New Republic*, June 1, 1998.

7. Cited in Donald Neff, "American Impatience Grows," *Middle East International* No. 579 (July 17, 1998), pp. 10-11.

8. Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 11.

9. *Ibid.*

10. Martin Sief, "Arafat Accepts Israeli Land Deal for West Bank," *Washington Times*, September 30, 1998.

11. Steven Erlanger, "U.S., Israel and Arafat Inch Toward Pact," *New York Times*, September 29, 1998.

12. Cited in Vernon Loeb, "CIA Emerges to Resolve Middle East Disputes," *Washington Post*, September 30, 1998.

13. Cited in Deborah Sontag, "Patch of Desert Key to Mid East Talks Next Step," *New York Times*, September 9, 1998.

14. Cited in report by Lee Hockstader, *Washington Post*, September 18, 1998.

15. See Eric Schmitt, "The CIA: New Role as Umpire May Bring More Risk," *New York Times*, October 24, 1998. For an article strongly criticizing this new role for the CIA, see Edward G. Shirley, "CIA Needs Reform, Not New Missions," *Wall Street Journal*, November 19, 1998.

16. For a description of the Wye Agreement, see Barton Gellman, "Netanyahu, Arafat Sign Accord," *Washington Post*, October 24, 1998.

17. Nonetheless, despite strong opposition from the right wing of the Israeli political spectrum, the Israeli cabinet approved the Wye accord by a vote of 8 to 4 with 5 abstentions. The cabinet's conditions for so

agreeing, however, which included a required Palestinian vote to repeal the 26 offending articles of the Palestine National Charter (an issue fudged at Wye) may presage future problems. See Lee Hockstader, "Israel Puts Pact in Doubt: Cabinet Votes Approval but Adds Conditions," *Washington Post*, November 12, 1998. The Wye Agreement supported by Labor, Meretz and the Arab parties, was passed overwhelmingly in the Israeli Knesset by a vote of 75 to 19 with 9 abstentions (see Nina Gilbert and Danna Harman, "Knesset approves Wye," *Jerusalem Post*, November 18, 1998).

18. See William A. Orme, Jr., "Paying for Mideast Plan, U.S. Walks Tightrope," *New York Times*, November 19, 1998 and Seth Gitell, "Fall of Gingrich leaves Netanyahu bereft of key ally in Congress," *Forward*, November 13, 1998.

19. Lee Hockstader, "Attacks kill Arab; injure 3 Israelis," *Washington Post*, December 3, 1998.

20. Ann LeLardo, "Israel issues ultimatum, halts West Bank pull-out," *Baltimore Sun*, December 3, 1998.

21. Philip Shenon, "U.S. and other nations plan more aid for Palestinians," *New York Times*, December 1, 1998, and Martin Sieff, "Palestinians get more U.S. aid," *Washington Times*, December 1, 1998.

22. Cited in Hockstader, "Attacks kill Arab, injure 3 Israelis," loc.cit.

23. Cited in Judy Dempsey, "Palestinians turn the tables on Israelis: Arafat poses as Clinton's friend as Netanyahu sulks," *Financial Times*, December 16, 1998.

24. Toni Marshall, "Clinton goes from cheers to jeers in two days," *Washington Times*, December 18, 1998.

25. Stephen Fidler and Judy Dempsey, "U.S. claims it has put peace process back on track," *Financial Times*, December 16, 1998.

26. Judy Dempsey, "Deep freeze in Jerusalem," *Financial Times*, December 23, 1998.

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28. For a background on the dual containment policy, see Peretz, loc.cit., pp. 353-355. For a recent debate on the continued utility of the policy, see *The Middle East Institute Newsletter*, vol. 49 no. 5 (September 1998), pp. 1;6. For a highly negative view of dual containment, see Hisham Melham, "Dual Containment: The Demise of a Fallacy," (Washington, DC: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, 1997).

29. For an analysis of these events, see Phebe Marr, "Iraq After the Gulf War: the Fallen Idol," *The Middle East and the Peace Process*, op.cit., p.232.

30. Russia's motivations and policy are discussed in Robert O. Freedman, "Russia's Middle East Ambitions," *Middle East Quarterly* (September 1998), pp. 31-40.

31. The ill-fated Town Hall meeting is described by Sam Hussein, "Short Circuiting the Media/Policy Machine," *Middle East Research and Information Project*, no.208 (Fall 1998), p.33.

32. R.K. Ramazani, "The Emerging Arab-Iranian Rapprochement: Towards an Integrated U.S. Policy in the Middle East," *Middle East Policy*, vol. 6 no. 1 (June 1998), p. 51.

33. Cited in *Ibid*, p. 52.

34. See Stephen Zunes, "Confrontation with Iraq: A Bankrupt U.S. Policy," *Middle East Policy*, vol. 6 no. 1 (June 1998), p. 100.

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39. Cited in Judith Miller, "Gingrich Questions U.S. Policy on Iraqi Arms Inspections," *New York Times*, August 29, 1998.

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41. Philip Shenon, "Two Kurd groups unite against Baghdad in pact brokered by U.S.," *New York Times*, September 18, 1998.

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44. Cited in Thomas Lippman and Bradley Graham, "Support for U.S. Stance on Iraq Grows," *Washington Post*, November 13, 1998, and Howard Schneider, "Baghdad stiffens as U.S. air armada assembles nearby," *Washington Post*, November 13, 1998.

45. Michael R. Gordon, "Food crisis forces Russia to swallow its pride," *New York Times*, November 7, 1998.

46. For an analysis of this decision, see Bradley Graham, "White House advisers split on halting attack," *Washington Post*, November 16, 1998.

47. In his news conference Clinton laid out five conditions for Iraq to meet: First, Iraq must resolve all outstanding issues raised by UNSCOM and the IAEA; second, it must give inspectors unfettered access to inspect and monitor all sites they choose, with no restrictions or qualifications, consistent with

the memorandum of understanding Iraq itself signed with (U.N.) Secretary General Annan in February; third, it must turn over all relevant documents; fourth, it must accept all weapons of mass destruction related resolutions; fifth, it must not interfere with the independence or the professional expertise of the weapons inspectors. *Washington Post*, November 16, 1998.

48. *Ibid.*

49. Cited in *Washington Post*, December 17, 1998.

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61. AP, "Clinton eases curbs on sale of spare parts for Iraq's oil industry," Wall Street Journal, January 18, 1998.

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