

New file
Iraq 1996

Basic Rationale

Saddam Hussein has exploited internal conflict among the Kurds of northern Iraq by aligning himself with one faction to attack another with ties to Iran. There have been significant casualties, including many civilians. His forces now threaten to take further actions in northern Iraq.

The United States has worked hard for years to help the two major Kurdish parties overcome their differences. It is tragic that the Kurdish leaders refused to do so.

But there is a broader significance to the Iraqi army's seizure of Irbil.

Saturday, Saddam Hussein's victims were the Kurds. At other times, they have been other Iraqi minority groups. Twice, they have been Iraq's neighbors.

In short, Saddam Saturday repeated a pattern we have seen before. He is ready at any time to use force to achieve his ends. He is a threat to his own people, to his neighbors and to the peace of the region.

If there is not a firm response, he will have established that he can act with impunity, fueling his recklessness and regional ambitions.

Saddam's actions threaten our interest in the peace and stability of the region. Our response must take into account not just Saddam's latest resort to force, but this overall threat he represents to U.S. interests.

- First, our response demonstrates to Saddam Hussein that he will pay a price for resorting to force;
- Second, this new example of his recklessness requires further actions to reduce the threat he poses to his neighbors.

Congressional Talking Points

- In response to Saddam Hussein's attack on the Kurds of northern Iraq, last night the U.S. has carried out air strikes against Iraqi air defenses and related military systems south of Bagdad. We also are acting to expand the southern Iraqi No Fly Zone.
- The purpose of these actions is twofold. First, Saddam must pay a price for his attack on the Kurds. If there are no consequences for his latest recklessness, his recklessness will only increase. Second, by extending the No Fly Zone and eliminating air defense assets south of Bagdad, we will reduce the threat he poses to his neighbors. This serves our strategic interests over the longer term.
- The U.S. has worked hard for years to help the two major Kurdish parties overcome their differences. It is tragic that the Kurdish leaders refused to do so, allowing Saddam to align himself with one Kurdish faction to attack another. There is no evidence to support Iraqi claims that it is withdrawing.
- But there is a broader significance to the Iraqi army's seizure of Irbil.
- Today, Saddam Hussein's victims are the Kurds. At other times, they have been other Iraqi minority groups. Twice, they have been Iraq's neighbors.
- In short, Saddam is repeating the pattern we have seen before. He is ready at any time to use force to achieve his ends, threatening his own people, his neighbors and the peace of the region. If we don't respond firmly he will know that he can act with impunity.
- We seek your support for these steps.
- The President will make an announcement in about an hour and the Department of Defense will be providing a detailed military briefing. We are prepared to provide detailed briefings to you or your staff as well.