



# PRESS RELEASE

## House National Security Committee

### Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

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### **OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN FLOYD D. SPENCE** **HEARING ON U.S. IRAQ POLICY**

*September 16, 1998*

Today the committee begins to turn its attention from the defense authorization bill to broader issues of national security policy. While we have a limited period of time left before Congress adjourns next month, I hope we can spend as much of it as possible reviewing the extraordinary range of challenges America faces around the world.

Consider just some of the events of the past few months:

- Two of our embassies in Africa were destroyed last month by terrorist bombs, with a number of Americans and hundreds of innocent civilians killed.
- Beyond retaliation, the administration has told us that the subsequent cruise missile strikes on terrorist camps in Afghanistan and chemical factories in Sudan were the beginning of a “war on terrorism.” None of us knows exactly what that means, but any such war promises to be long, difficult, and bloody.
- India and Pakistan have exploded nuclear devices, raising the specter of an arms race in politically volatile South Asia, and calling into doubt the entire premise of contemporary arms control.
- Japan, our foremost ally in East Asia, is paralyzed by its worst economic recession since World War II.
- North Korea, again defying U.S. intelligence estimates, has launched at least a two-stage ballistic missile over the Japanese mainland, and apparently continues to develop nuclear weapons despite the 1994 “Agreed Framework.”
- Likewise, Iran seems to have surprised the U.S. intelligence community several months ago by testing a new advanced medium-range ballistic missile, a year to 18 months sooner than predicted.

- In Russia, a weakened Boris Yeltsin has been forced by a unique coalition of ultra-nationalists, communists, and even reformers, to form a new government under former Foreign Minister Primakov, a man best known for his ardent nationalism and warm relations with America's adversaries in the Middle East. Russia's economic collapse raises the specter of increased chaos or dictatorship – and in a country that still possesses thousands of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles.

- And in Iraq, Saddam Hussein is as close to slipping out of his box as he has been since the Gulf War ended in 1991. Saddam may be only months away from developing the chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction that we have sought to keep out of his hands. And, as we will hear shortly, the viability of the United Nations inspection regime is very much in doubt.

These events ought to be disconcerting to all Americans. For years I have argued that while we no longer face the world-wide threat posed by the former Soviet Union, the post-Cold War world was proving to be a complex, chaotic and violent place. When you further consider the force reductions and budget cuts that the Department of Defense has had to absorb over the past decade, our ability to protect our global national security interests is increasingly open to question.

In light of these recent events, it is certainly appropriate to begin the committee's end-of-session review by discussing our strategy and policy toward Iraq. Coming on the heels of the collapse of the Soviet empire, the coalition victory over Iraq in the 1991 Gulf War seemed to hold the promise of a new era. Our crushing defeat of the Iraqi army seemed to codify America's standing as the world's "sole superpower."

Eight years later, the promise of those heady days has not been fulfilled, and our troubles with Saddam Hussein seem to reflect our troubles elsewhere in the world. The past eight years have seen Saddam increasingly able to claw his way out of his diplomatic, economic, military and strategic isolation. Despite the devastation it suffered during Desert Storm, the Iraqi military still maintains significant capabilities. And if Saddam finally succeeds in creating and fielding an arsenal of chemical or biological weapons – in perhaps as little as six months — he will pose an even larger threat to the region and to American interests.

In recent weeks, the Administration has tried to make the case that Saddam remains boxed in and isolated. Beyond such rhetoric, I find myself more interested in (and certainly more concerned with) the fact that the Saudis and our other allies in the region have distanced themselves from us over the years. I am also concerned with the fact that we have drawn down our force levels in recent months – not in reaction to Saddam's improved behavior, but because of the serious strain that constant deployments is having on an already overextended U.S. military. A reduced military presence and allies who have begun to hedge their bets – these are neither encouraging signs, nor signs of strength. It would appear that Saddam with a lot of patience and persistence, may be slowly but surely gaining the upper hand in this seven year standoff.

What has happened? How has our position of strength eroded? Where are we now? And most importantly, where are we headed in the future?

The committee begins its search for answers to these questions with former UN weapons inspector Scott Ritter. By now, I am sure most members are familiar with Mr. Ritter's unique situation. While I regret and find reprehensible the attempts by some in this town to defame Mr. Ritter, I would urge my colleagues to look past these "Inside-the-Beltway" politics and to consider the clarity and strength of his message. Scott

Ritter may ride in a Jeep rather than in a diplomat's limousine, and his paygrade is certainly below the Foggy Bottom standard, but that does not mean that he is wrong. Scott Ritter's message is deeply disturbing on many levels, and his message is one that we all must consider as we struggle to understand why our containment strategy towards Iraq is in tatters.