

Disarming Iraq without force

8618A
By LOUIS KRIESBERG
Knight Ridder News Service

President Bush and his advisers have given many reasons why they believe the United States is being compelled by Saddam Hussein to go to war against Iraq now. These reasons are numerous and shift in primacy, which weakens their persuasiveness.

Two of the oft-given reasons are: To ensure that Iraq will not have chemical, bacteriological or nuclear weapons; and second, to replace the ruling Iraqi regime with a democratic one, presumably one friendly to the United States.

The links between these two U.S. goals and American interests are not necessarily sound. And recourse to war now is not clearly the most effective method to attain the goals.

Conflict resolution work suggests many tactics and strategies to avoid destructive conflicts and others to use in waging conflicts constructively.

Among them: determine what the primary interests are to be advanced and consider what they might be for the opponents, in their circumstances.

And second, avoid making irrevocable commitments to particular positions and methods.

Appearing inflexible may seem useful in mobilizing constituency support and in coercing the other side to yield, but inflexibility gets in the way of following better solutions and courses of ac-

From the perspective of Hussein, having weapons of mass destruction now may be a defense against being overthrown. He and his circle have little incentive for permanent disarmament, which makes them vulnerable to attack.

tion that can become available.

There is a fundamental problem with the idea of initiating war against Iraq in order to ultimately save American lives. War would result in battle deaths.

And if Iraq really has weapons of mass destruction and employs them, the number of deaths could be quite great, in addition to those caused by terrorist attacks that are likely to increase after the war begins.

From the perspective of Hussein, having weapons of mass destruction now may be a defense against being overthrown. He and his circle have little incentive for permanent disarmament, which makes them vulnerable to attack.

The connection between forgoing weapons of mass destruction and assurances of non-aggression has been made evident by the North Korean government.

The underlying interest for the second goal may be to spread democracy and improve the lives of Iraqis and others in the region, but a democratic transformation of Iraq is not likely to result from a war that is generally

seen as an illegitimate intervention by the United States assisted by a few other governments.

Even decades of nation-building conducted by the United States are not likely to succeed.

The transformation is more likely to succeed if it is brought about by local and regional forces acting in concert with broad-based civilian efforts, fostering business, mass media and religious changes.

Attending to the many non-governmental persons who are engaged in their countries' foreign relations suggests additional policies.

For example, if Iraq is not to have weapons of mass destruction, business leaders might work together with government officials and weapons specialists in an international campaign to ensure that the materials needed for the production of such weapons are not exported to Iraq.

If Iraq is to be transformed into a more democratic society, a wide variety of contacts between Iraqis and citizens of democratic societies is crucial. This can be undertaken by formal

and informal interactions between Iraqis and Americans engaged in various professional, religious and business organizations.

To follow a relatively constructive course, it is useful to consider a wide array of possible solutions that would satisfy one's interests.

The constructive conflict resolution approach gives attention to the actions of people at all levels within each party to a struggle and also to parties that may intervene.

These people include political opposition groups, as well as leaders at every level within religious, business, professional, entertainment and intellectual institutions. They influence not only their own country's authorities, but also their counterparts in the opposing camp, as well as possible intermediaries.

There are of course many other American interests in the conflict that have equal or more priority.

Among them are achieving a good standard of living for all Americans, protecting the country's resources for the future, maintaining good relations with allies, securing oil supplies and sustaining the rule of law.

These and other interests should not be ignored.

But it is important to explore various alternative ways to move toward a desired solution.

Those ways should not be limited to violence or coercion; various means incorporating persuasion and promising benefits should be

considered in conjunction with threats.

Means should be chosen in terms of their likely effectiveness and relative costs, not simply because they satisfy domestic feelings.

For example, a continuing U.N. inspections regime in Iraq, as an alternative to war, would inhibit the development of weapons of mass destruction capabilities, particularly when combined with strengthened regional and international controls.

And that can contribute to the transformation of Iraq.

The methods and goals in large-scale conflicts are always numerous, in part because each side always consists of many different groups with varying interests and vulnerabilities.

Furthermore, they differ in attractiveness to domestic constituencies, allies, possible allies and supporters of the adversary.

Positions and methods that garner wide outside support and isolate the opposing side have great value. Significantly, too, no conflict is wholly isolated; rather each is interlocked with many others.

Therefore, escalating one conflict can have unwanted effects on many others.

Louis Kriesberg, professor emeritus of social conflict studies at the Maxwell School of Syracuse University, is author of "Constructive Conflicts: From Escalation to Resolution." Reach him at lkriesbe@maxwell.syr.edu.