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aircraft over Iraq, or moving against his own Kurdish citizens. The credible threat to use force and, when necessary, the actual use of force, is the surest way to contain Saddam's weapons of mass destruction program, curtail his aggression, and prevent another Gulf war.

Second, so long as Iraq remains out of compliance, we will work with the international community to maintain and enforce economic sanctions. Sanctions have cost Saddam more than $120 billion, resources that would have been used to rebuild his military. The sanctions system allows Iraq to sell oil for food, for medicine, for other humanitarian supplies for the Iraqi people. We have no quarrel with them. But without the sanctions, we would see the oil-for-food program become oil-for-tanks, resulting in a greater threat to Iraq's neighbors and less food for its people.

The hard fact is that so long as Saddam remains in power, he threatens the well-being of his people, the peace of his region, the security of the world. The best way to end that threat once and for all is with a new Iraqi Government, a Government ready to live in peace with its neighbors, a Government that respects the rights of its people.

Bringing change in Baghdad will take time and effort. We will strengthen our engagement with the full range of Iraqi opposition forces and work with them effectively and prudently.

The decision to use force is never cost-free. Whenever American forces are placed in harm's way, we risk the loss of life. And while our strikes are focused on Iraq's military capabilities, there will be unintended Iraqi casualties. Indeed, in the past, Saddam has intentionally placed Iraqi civilians in harm's way in a cynical bid to sway international opinion. We must be prepared for these realities. At the same time, Saddam should have absolutely no doubt: If he lashes out at his neighbors, we will respond forcefully.

Heavy as they are, the costs of action must be weighed against the price of inaction. If Saddam defies the world and we fail to respond, we will face a far greater threat in the future. Saddam will strike again at his neighbors. He will make war on his own people. And mark my words, he will develop weapons of mass destruction. He will deploy them, and he will use them. Because we are acting today, it is less likely that we will face these dangers in the future.

Let me close by addressing one other issue. Saddam Hussein and the other enemies of peace may have thought that the serious debate currently before the House of Representatives would distract Americans or weaken our resolve to face him down. But once more, the United States has proven that, although we are never eager to use force, when we must act in America's vital interests, we will do so.

In the century we're leaving, America has often made the difference between chaos and community, fear and hope. Now, in a new century, we'll have a remarkable opportunity to shape a future more peaceful than the past but only if we stand strong against the enemies of peace. Tonight, the United States is doing just that.

May God bless and protect the brave men and women who are carrying out this vital mission, and their families. And may God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6 p.m. from the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; and United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Foreign Policy Team and an Exchange With Reporters

December 17, 1998

Military Strikes on Iraq

The President. My national security team is about to update me and the Vice President on the status of our operation in Iraq. I'd like to begin by speaking for every American in expressing my gratitude to our men and women in uniform and also to our British allies, who are participating in this operation with us.

I am convinced the decision I made to order this military action, though difficult, was absolutely the right thing to do. It is in our interest and in the interest of people all around the world. Saddam Hussein has used weapons of mass destruction and ballistic

missiles before; I have no doubt he would use them again if permitted to develop them.

When I halted military action against Saddam last November, after he had terminated the UNSCOM operations, I made it very clear that we were giving him a last chance to cooperate. Once again he promised in very explicit terms that he would fully cooperate. On Tuesday the inspectors concluded that they were no longer able to do their jobs and that, in fact, he had raised even new barriers to their doing their jobs.

Then yesterday morning I gave the order because I believe that we cannot allow Saddam Hussein to dismantle UNSCOM and resume the production of weapons of mass destruction with impunity. I also believe that to have done so would have, in effect, given him a green light for whatever he might want to do in his neighborhood. I think it would be a terrible, terrible mistake.

We acted yesterday because Secretary Cohen and General Shelton strongly urged that we act at the point where we could have maximum impact with minimum risk to our own people because of the surprise factor. We also wanted to avoid initiating any military action during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which is slated to begin in just a couple of days.

Our mission is clear: to degrade his capacity to develop and to use weapons of mass destruction or to threaten his neighbors. I believe we will achieve that mission, and I'm looking forward to getting this briefing.

Impeachment and Military Strikes on Iraq

Q. Mr. President, how are you going to stem the Republican drive to drive you out of office?

The President. Well, the Constitution has a procedure for that, and we will follow it.

Q. Mr. President, as you know, Senator Trent Lott and Dick Armey, the House majority leader, and other Republicans are questioning the timing, suggesting that this was simply a diversionary tactic to avoid an impeachment vote on the House floor. What do you say to those critics?

The President. That it's not true, that what I did was the right thing for the country. I don't think any serious person would believe that any President would do such a thing. And I don't believe any reasonably astute person in Washington would believe that Secretary Cohen and General Shelton and the whole rest of the National Security team would participate in such an action. This was the right thing for the country.

We have given Saddam Hussein chance after chance to cooperate with UNSCOM. We said in November that this was the last chance. We got the report from Mr. Butler saying that he was not cooperating and, in fact, raised new barriers to cooperation. And we acted just as we promised we would. We acted swiftly because we were ready, thanks to the very fine work of the Defense Department in leaving our assets properly deployed. We had the strong support of the British.

And I might add, I'm very gratified by the strong support we've gotten from people among both Democratic and Republican ranks in the Congress who are interested in national security, people like Senator Helms, Senator McCain, Senator Warner, Senator Hagel, Senator Lugar, all have expressed support for this mission. So I feel good about where we are on that.

Q. Mr. President, will you confirm reports on ground troops in Kuwait?

Q. [*Inaudible*]—on the first day of the operation and would it undercut your authority if the House opened the impeachment debate during this operation?

The President. What was the first question, Terry [Terence Hunt, Associated Press]?

Q. Bomb damage assessment.

The President. I'm about to get it.

Q. You didn't get any from Mr. Berger?

The President. Obviously, I've kept up with it as best I could, but I have not gotten a full report.

Q. But you think it is a success?

The President. I'm about to get a—it's an ongoing mission. I want to wait——

Q. Because Joe Lockhart told us it was a success.

Q. And he undercut your authority, sir?

The President. No. First of all, I'm going to complete this mission—we're going to complete this mission. And the Republican leaders will have to decide how to do their job. That's not for me to comment on.

Kuwait

Q. Can you confirm reports of Saddam Hussein possibly advancing and invading Kuwait and the possible use of ground troops, sir?

The President. No, I have no comment on that. I think that surely he knows what a disastrous mistake that would be.

Civilian Casualties in Iraq

Q. Mr. President, the Iraqis are saying there's been heavy civilian casualties in this. Do you have any information so far that that's true?

The President. I do not. I can tell you what I said last night: We did everything we could to carefully target military and national security targets and to minimize civilian casualties. There is always a prospect that the missiles will miss, that they will be interrupted because of the missiles being fired at them, trying to deflect them from their intended targets. I am quite sure there will be, as I said last evening, unintended casualties, and I regret that very much.

That's one of the reasons that I have bent over backwards, not just in November but also on previous occasions to avoid using force in this case. I did not want to do it; I think all of you know it. But in November, we literally had planes in the air, and I said that it would be the last chance. I think it is very important that we not allow Saddam Hussein to destroy the UNSCOM system without any penalty whatever, to eventually get all these sanctions lifted and to go right on just as if he never made any commitments that were unfulfilled on this score. I think it would have been a disaster for us to do this.

And so, regrettably, I made this decision. There is, I believe, no way to avoid some unintended civilian casualties, and I regret it very much. But I believe far, far more people would have died eventually from this man's regime had we not taken this action.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:45 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; and Richard Butler, executive chairman, United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM). A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Proclamation 7160—Wright Brothers Day, 1998

December 17, 1998

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

On a December morning 95 years ago, over the windswept sands of Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, Orville and Wilbur Wright turned humanity's age-old dream of powered flight into reality. The two brothers, bicycle mechanics by trade and visionaries by nature, had worked painstakingly for years to construct the first power-driven craft that was heavier than air and capable of controlled, sustained flight. After persevering through many trials and discouraging setbacks, they made their fourth trip to Kitty Hawk in 1903 and, on December 17, with Orville at the controls and Wilbur running alongside, their airplane took flight and took us into a new era. The achievement of the Wright brothers was not only a great personal success and a vindication of years of creative effort and methodical experimentation—it was also a feat of historic significance for the future of humankind.

Almost a century later, the same passion and power of imagination that spurred the Wright brothers are fueling the dreams of a new generation of Americans. From John Glenn's second historic space flight to the construction of the International Space Station, we continue to open new frontiers and expand our horizons. Just as the Wright brothers' inventions and achievements created a new industry and revolutionized transportation, commerce, and communication, today's missions into space hold great promise for the development of new technologies and industries to benefit all humanity and strengthen our hopes for lasting peace and prosperity for nations across the globe.