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Israel, and Qatar. He massacred thousands of his own people in an uprising in 1991.

As a condition for the Gulf war cease-fire, Iraq agreed to disclose and to destroy its weapons of mass destruction and to demonstrate its willingness to live at peace with its neighbors. Iraq could have ended economic sanctions and isolation long ago by meeting these simple obligations. Instead, it has spent nearly 8 years defying them. Saddam has failed to disclose information about his weapons arsenal. He has threatened his neighbors and refused to account for hundreds of Kuwaitis still missing from 1991.

Each time Saddam has provoked a crisis, we've tried hard to find a peaceful solution, consulting our friends in the Arab world and working through the United Nations. A month ago we joined the other 14 members of the U.N. Security Council in demanding that Saddam come into compliance immediately. We supported what Iraq said it wanted: a comprehensive review of its compliance after it resumed full cooperation with the U.N. weapons inspectors. And we were gratified when eight Arab nations, Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, and Oman, warned that Iraq would bear the blame—Iraq alone would bear the blame for the consequences of defying the U.N.

Now, I canceled a military strike when, at the last moment, Saddam promised to cooperate unconditionally with the inspectors. But this month he broke his promises again, and again defied the U.N. So, we had to act. Saddam simply must not be allowed to threaten his neighbors or the world with nuclear arms, poison gas, or biological weapons.

America understands that Saddam's first victims are his own people. That is why we exempted food and medicine when sanctions were imposed on Iraq. That is why, since 1991, we have offered to allow Iraq to sell its oil and use the proceeds to pay for humanitarian supplies. For 5 years, Saddam rejected that offer while building lavish palaces for himself and diverting resources to his military.

Finally, in 1996, Saddam allowed the oil-for-food program to take effect. Since then, the U.N. has delivered nearly $3 billion worth of food and medicine to the Iraqi people every year. Without the watchful eye of the U.N., we would soon see the oil-for-food program become oil-for-tanks, leading to less food for the Iraqi people and more danger for Iraq's neighbors.

No decision to use force is easy, especially at a time when I'm working so hard to build peace in the Middle East and to strengthen our own relations with the Arab world. My visit to Gaza last week reflected my deep commitment to the peace process. I will never forget the warm welcome I received from the Palestinian people, eager to shape their own future at last.

Let me also state my deep respect for the holy month of Ramadan. In the days ahead, I hope all Muslims will consider America's sincere desire to work with all people in the Middle East to build peace. We have the most profound admiration for Islam. Our dispute is with a leader who threatens Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

As the crescent moon rises, and the ninth month begins, Muslim-Americans—and all Americans—wish you the blessings of faith and friendship. May our prayers for a better world soon be answered.

Ramadan Kareem.

NOTE: This address was videotaped at approximately 12:20 p.m. in the Cabinet Room on December 18 for later broadcast on the U.S. Information Agency Worldnet. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 18 but was embargoed for release until 7 a.m. on December 19. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this address.

The President's Radio Address

December 19, 1998

Good morning. As I speak to you, America's men and women in uniform and our British allies are fighting for security, peace, and freedom in the Persian Gulf. They're doing an outstanding job, showing bravery and skill, making our country proud. Our thoughts and prayers are with them.

Putting our troops in harm's way is the hardest decision any President faces. I believe our action in Iraq clearly is in America's interest. Never again can we allow Saddam Hussein to develop nuclear weapons, poison

gas, biological weapons, or missiles to deliver them. He has used such terrible weapons before against soldiers, against his neighbors, against civilians. And if left unchecked, he'll use them again.

For 7½ years, United Nations weapons inspectors did a truly remarkable job in forcing Saddam to disclose and destroy weapons he insisted he did not have. But over the past year, Saddam repeatedly has blocked their efforts. Each time with intensive diplomacy backed by the threat of force, we compelled him to back down.

Last month, when he agreed to fully cooperate, I canceled an American military action. But I, along with Prime Minister Tony Blair of Great Britain, made it absolutely clear that if he did not fully cooperate, we would have no choice but to act without further negotiation or warning.

For three weeks, the U.N. inspectors tested Saddam's commitment. He failed the test, hindering and preventing inspections, withholding and destroying documents. As their chairman concluded, the inspectors can no longer do their vital job. Under these circumstances, had we failed to respond, it would have given Saddam a green light to rebuild his arsenal and threaten his neighbors.

I acted quickly because, as my military advisors stressed, the longer we waited, the more time Saddam would have to disperse his forces and protect his arsenal. Our mission is clear: to degrade Saddam's capacity to develop and deliver weapons of mass destruction and threaten the region. Based on reports from the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and the CIA Director, I believe the mission is going well.

Now, where do we go from here? Our long-term strategy is clear: First, we stand ready to use force again if Saddam takes threatening action such as seeking to reconstitute his weapons of mass destruction, menacing his neighbors or his own Kurdish citizens, or challenging allied aircraft.

Second, so long as Iraq fails to live up to its obligations, we'll work with the international community to keep the sanctions in place. They have cost Saddam more than $120 billion, resources he would have devoted to rebuilding his weaponry. At the same time, we will continue to support the ongoing program to provide humanitarian supplies to the people of Iraq, so that Saddam uses his oil to buy food and medicine, not tanks and missiles.

Finally, we'll strengthen our engagement with Iraqis who want a new government, one that will respect its citizens and live in peace with its neighbors. We must not harbor illusions, however, that change will come easily or quickly. But we should go forward, and we will, with determination, working with opposition groups, strengthening the global consensus for bringing Iraq a government worthy of its people.

As our forces carry out their missions, I want to express my heartfelt thanks to all our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines in the Gulf and all around the world, who work every day to defend our freedom, promote stability and democracy, and bring hope. To those forces now engaged in the battle against Saddam Hussein, you have our appreciation for your courage, and our Nation's hopes for your safe and successful return.

To all those in our Armed Forces who will spend this holiday season away from home, away from your loved ones, we thank you for your service. You are helping to ensure a just and peaceful world.

As we enter the season of peace, we remain ever hopeful that one day all nations and all communities will actually live in peace, with tolerance, respect, and civility. There can be no greater gift for our children.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:06 a.m. from 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.

Remarks Following the House of Representatives Vote on Impeachment

December 19, 1998

Thank you very much. Thank you.

Good afternoon. Let me begin by expressing my profound and heartfelt thanks to Congressman Gephardt and the leadership and all the members of the Democratic caucus