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Richard Perle, fellow, American  
Enterprise Institute, before the House  
Armed Services Committee

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Statement of Richard Perle  
Fellow, American Enterprise Institute  
Before the  
House Committee on Armed Services

September 26, 2002

Mr. Chairman,

I wish to thank you for including me in today's hearing. As we confront issues of war and peace, our country is strongest when the Congress and the executive branch act in concert. In all the talk of the need for a coalition to confront Saddam Hussein, the coalition that matters most is to be found here in Washington, at opposite ends of Pennsylvania Avenue.

The President, Secretary Powell, Secretary Rumsfeld and British Prime Minister Blair have all spoken in recent days about the urgency of dealing with the threat posed to the American people, and others, by Saddam Hussein. In what may well be the most important speech of his presidency, President Bush has argued eloquently and persuasively to the United Nations in New York that Saddam's open defiance of the United Nations, and his scornful refusal to heed its many injunctions, is a challenge to the credibility of the U.N itself. And he has rightly asked the United Nations to approve a Security Council Resolution that would force Saddam to choose between full compliance with the many resolutions he has scorned and violated and action to remove his regime from power.

Saddam's, response—calculating, deceitful and disingenuous—moves only slightly in the direction of U.N. inspections of Iraqi territory—and not at all toward the disarmament that is what really matters. The statement issued in his name that he will accept inspections unconditionally is anything but unconditional: it is hedged as to the allowable types of inspection and the rules under which inspections would be conducted. As I understand it, Saddam is demanding an inspection regime in which advance notification is required and in which certain places are off limits to the inspectors, who would be limited in number, mobility and armament.

Even from a government whose cooperation we could count on, these conditions would be unacceptable. But from Saddam Hussein, who has

gone to enormous lengths to conceal his weapons program from previous international inspectors and continues to lie about them now, the sort of inspection regime that Kofi Annan has negotiated with Saddam would be a farce.

What would a robust inspection regime look like? It would, at a minimum, include tens of thousand inspectors with Americans in key leadership and decision-making roles distributed throughout Iraq, possessing an independent capability to move anywhere from dispersed bases to any site in the country without prior notification or approval, the right to interview any Iraqi or Iraqi resident together with his family at safe locations outside Iraq, appropriate self-defense capabilities for the inspectors so they could overcome efforts to impede them, and the like.

But Iraq is a very large country. My own view is that even with a large and intrusive force it is simply not possible to devise an inspection regime on territory controlled by Saddam Hussein that could be effective in locating, much less eliminating, his weapons of mass-destruction. In any case, the inspection regime known as Unmovic doesn't even come close: Its size, organization, management and resources are all hopelessly inadequate for the daunting task of inspecting a country the size of France against Saddam's determined program of concealment, deception and lying. The simple truth is that the inspectors will never find anything the location of which has not been discovered through intelligence operations. Unless we can obtain information, from defectors or by technical means, that points the inspectors to specific sites, we are most unlikely to find what we are looking for.

We know, Mr. Chairman, that Saddam lies about his program to acquire nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. We know that he has used the years during which no inspectors were in Iraq to move everything of interest, with the result that the database we once possessed, inadequate though it was, has been destroyed. We know all of this yet I sometimes think there are those at the United Nations who treat the issue not as a matter of life and death, but rather more like a game of pin the tail on the donkey or an Easter egg hunt on a sunny Sunday.

The bottom line is this: Saddam is better at hiding than we are at finding. And this is not a game. If he eludes us and continues to refine, perfect and expand his arsenal of chemical and biological weapons, the danger to us, already great, will only grow. If he achieves his holy grail and acquires one or more nuclear weapons there is no way of knowing what predatory policies he will pursue.

Let us suppose that in the end a robust inspection arrangement is put in place and after a year or two it has found nothing. Could we conclude from the failure to unearth illegal activity that none existed? Of course not. All we would know is that we had failed to find what we were looking for, not that it was not there to be found. And where would that leave us? Would we be safer—or even more gravely imperiled? There would be a predictable clamor to end the inspection regime and, if they were still in place, to lift the sanctions. Saddam would claim not only that he was in compliance with the U.N. resolutions concerning inspections, but that he had been truthful all along. There are those who would believe him.

Given what we now know about Saddam's weaponry, his lies, his concealment, we would be fools to accept inspections, even an inspection regime far more ambitious than anything the U.N. contemplates, as a substitute for disarmament.

That is why, Mr. Chairman, the President is right to demand that the United Nations promptly resolve that Saddam comply with the full range of United Nations resolutions concerning Iraq or face an American led enforcement action.

I have returned last night from Europe where the issues before you are being widely discussed. Perhaps the most frequently asked question put to me by various Europeans is, "why now?" What is it about the current situation that has made action to deal with Saddam urgent? My answer is that we are already perilously late. We should have acted long ago—and we should certainly have acted when Saddam expelled the inspectors in 1998. Our myopic forbearance has given him four years to expand his arsenal without interference, four years to hide things and make them mobile, four years to render the international community feckless and its principal institution, the United Nations, irrelevant.

We can, of course, choose to defer action, to wait—and hope for the best. That is what Tony Blair's predecessors did in the 1930's. That is what we did with respect to Osama Bin Laden. We waited. We watched. We knew about the training camps, the fanatical incitement, and the history of acts of terror. We knew about the Cole and the embassies in Africa. We waited too long and 3,000 innocent civilians were murdered. If we wait, if we play hide-and-seek with Saddam Hussein, there is every reason to expect that he will expand his arsenal further, that he will cross the nuclear divide and become a nuclear power.

I urge this committee, Mr. Chairman, to support the President's determination to act before it is too late.