

Policy Statement on War and Weapons of Mass Destruction

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By: ACR Board of Directors

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Link: <http://www.acresolution.org/research.nsf/key/wmdpolicystatement>

The Association for Conflict Resolution (ACR) is a membership association committed to educational activities that promote peaceful, effective conflict resolution, both nationally and internationally. Within the context of our mission, the Board of ACR believes that we need to engage in an educational dialogue about the issues raised by the escalating tensions and violence in our world.

ACR is committed to constructive approaches to the resolution of conflict, whether interpersonal, communal, organizational, national or international. We believe that constructive approaches to conflict resolution do not require ignoring or sacrificing key interests or concerns of participants.

ACR believes that it is important to promote a dialogue about how to deal with the potential threat of the development and deployment of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Iraq, the United States, and elsewhere. We think this dialogue should take into account what we have learned about dealing with serious conflict. For example, as we consider the impending crisis concerning Iraq and the U.S., the following key lessons are relevant and are offered as discussion points:

- **Sensitivity to Alternative Views.** Conflict surrounding the development of WMD has to be understood from the viewpoints of the many different stakeholders involved. A thorough analysis of the interests of all parties to this conflict is needed. To consider these interests is not a sign of weakness, but of strength and confidence that good solutions to difficult problems can be found.
- **Polarization.** Presenting an issue in polarized terms does not promote constructive approaches to the resolution of conflict: there are alternatives other than doing nothing or taking violent action. When we limit the options under consideration in this way, we make it harder to achieve effective, long-term solutions to the problem.
- **Long-term Implications.** In serious conflicts, good decisions are seldom made when people act precipitously and without adequate attention to long-term implications. Slowing a process down is often the most effective way of ensuring that a broader and wiser approach can be taken. For example, in the case of Iraq, providing enough time to allow inspections to have a significant impact and building a broad coalition to address concerns about WMD and the relationship among the parties would probably produce a less volatile long-term outcome.
- **Use of Positive Incentives.** Positive inducements are often effective in reducing the rapid escalation of conflict. Threats of dire consequences typically force conflictants to "feel backed into a corner." Many such positive inducements can be offered in such a way that they are neither a bribe nor a reward for bad behavior, but a genuine effort to address problems that are keeping a party isolated and dangerous.
- **Third Party Involvement.** Third parties can often help to bridge gaps where impossible chasms seem to exist. This would require the identification of third parties who can help broker solutions to this crisis that might address concerns about WMD without resorting to war.
- **Consequences.** Escalating a conflict usually entails unforeseen and dangerous consequences. For example, we believe an escalation of conflict with Iraq to the level of a violent preemptive intervention could lead to an escalation of terrorism. The potential to build a strong international coalition to look at the underlying causes of terrorism and to decrease the incentives for its use could be set back significantly by a war.

In long-term and entrenched disputes, understanding the history and context of the conflict is essential. At this time, ACR believes it is important to understand the history of violence in Iraq and the relationship between Iraq and the United States. We do not advocate naïve acceptance of dubious promises or guarantees. We do believe that the uncontrolled and poorly monitored development of WMD is a problem that extends far beyond the current crisis. We believe the U.S. and its allies need to expand the options that are being considered to take into account the approaches we have discussed. Based on the lessons that conflict resolution professionals have learned in dealing with serious conflict over many years, ACR urges de-escalation. This would allow for the pursuit of alternative approaches and the assessment of long-term interests of all involved. Efforts to deal with the problem of WMD should be made through the emerging but still fragile coalition of the world community.

We urge ACR members to engage in a dialogue around these issues. Also, we urge ACR members to extend that dialogue within their communities with the goal of educating more people about options that increase the possibility of peaceful settlements to apparently intractable conflicts. We believe the principles we have learned from our years of work as conflict resolvers can be productively applied to the most serious conflicts of our day, whether these involve weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, the conflict in the Middle East or in other regions where issues of mass violence are present.

We invite your responses to this statement.

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