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NUCLEAR ARMED IRAQ SPECTER OF DEATH IN MIDDLE EAST

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The thought of Iraq as a nuclear power ought to chill the heart of everyone in the Middle East, everyone in the world.

According to a federal indictment opened Thursday, five people and two British companies accused of illegally exporting electronic devices to trigger nuclear warheads were acting as agents of Iraq. Some analysts believe Baghdad's effort to get its hands on nuclear triggers is a sign that it is close to reaching a nuclear weapon capability.

That's all the outlaw regime of **Saddam** Hussein needs. This is the man who already has demonstrated a willingness -- indeed, a zeal -- for using the most hideous weapons at his disposal. In his recent war with Iran, he did not hesitate to employ poison gas against the throngs of teen-agers sent his way by the Ayatollah Khomeini.

He used the same weapon against the Kurdish minority under his own brutal dominion. Men, women and children fell by the thousands under his genocidal tactics.

Hussein is one of the world's foremost sponsors of terrorism. Numbered among his clients are a varied assortment of highjackers, bombers and kidnapers around the world.

And it was Hussein who earlier this month summarily hanged a reporter from the The London Observer. His crime? Hussein suspected the reporter was about to write something about which Hussein disapproved.

Plainly, this man has no concept of civilized behavior or human decency. Just as plainly, he would use a nuclear weapon at the first opportunity. If no opportunity arose, he would concoct one.

For all the energy and effort the United States has spent on Libya's Moammar Gadhafi, he's a Boy Scout next to **Saddam** Hussein. We're worried that Libya may have a plant capable of producing chemical arms. Iraq is not only producing them, but using them with relish and impunity.

Yet the Bush administration -- and the Reagan administration before it -- seem strangely reluctant to do anything about Hussein. There are no F-15s buzzing Baghdad. When journalist Farzad Bazoft was hanged, there was nothing more than a perfunctory whimper from Washington. Bush has refused Congress' call to identify Iraq as a **terrorist** nation. Iraq still receives U.S. loan guarantees on grain purchases.

Perhaps this latest episode, the attempted theft of nuclear triggers, will prompt the White House to stop treating Iraq with kid gloves. The criminal regime of **Saddam** Hussein, the Butcher of Baghdad, deserves only our contempt.

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