



Landpower Essay

No. 02-2
June 2002



An Institute of Land Warfare Publication

The Challenge of Iraq

by

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Since the terrible events of 11 September 2001, the United States has come to sense a degree of terrorist threat unequalled in its history. The rise of these threats has brought into focus an array of other types of challenges to national security which have lain dormant for a number of years, but which some analysts believe may be related to the immediate problems stemming from the “9/11” episode. Federal law-enforcement officials have long denied that they could locate clear evidence of such connection in the case of Iraq,¹ but the President’s elevated concern for the overall security of the country necessitates a thorough and wide-reaching examination of the dimensions of all such threats. This analysis seeks to fulfill that objective.

Why Iraq?

In the case of Iraq, the greatest threat to U.S. interests is the apparent desire on the part of the leader, Saddam Hussein, to acquire weapons of mass destruction (WMD), including chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, and his obvious hostility to the United States and to Israel (a U.S. client). This penchant, coupled with a record of aggression against neighboring countries, brutal treatment of suspect countrymen, and the use of chemical weapons in conflicts, has led the U.S. government to conclude that Saddam should be removed from power. As the White House press secretary explained on 1 May 2002, “I think there’s no question that the people of Iraq and the region will be safer and freer and more at peace without Saddam Hussein at the helm.”² An important factor driving the American concern is a belief that at the close of the Gulf War in 1991, Iraq had a capability for assembling one or two crude nuclear explosive devices within a six- to twelve-month period, using uranium supplied for a French- and Soviet-built reactor.³

As part of the settlement of the Gulf War, Iraq agreed to destroy all of its WMD capabilities. To verify that it was following through on this condition, Iraq was required to open its nuclear, chemical and biological facilities to international monitors. This monitoring program succeeded initially in reducing Saddam’s WMD capabilities. However, in 1998 Iraq expelled the inspectors and has refused to allow UN monitors into the country, and U.S. officials believe that Saddam Hussein is attempting to rebuild his unconventional weapons capabilities. In the words of Charles Dueltel, the former head of the UN Special Commission on Iraq (UNSCOM), “Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction program has only accelerated since UNSCOM was expelled from the country in 1998.”⁴ Specific Iraqi efforts include

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the mobilization of biological weapons production units and the development of missile delivery systems with ranges of 600–700 miles.⁵

However, U.S. motives for deposing Saddam Hussein are not limited to his desire to obtain, and propensity to employ, WMD, or the possibility that he may provide these weapons to terrorist groups. There appears to be a desire among some key U.S. officials to set an example of America’s resolve to counter regimes posing significant threats to U.S. interests. The elimination of Saddam could serve to deter other nations, within the Middle East and elsewhere, from attacking the United States, either directly or through acts of terror at any point on earth.

Iraq’s Military Posture

Iraq’s military capabilities have been significantly degraded since 1990, both as a result of the Gulf War and by subsequent international controls over the country’s imports. Figures 1 and 2 below show current estimated troop strengths and equipment holdings.⁶ Fifty percent of all ground equipment lacks spare parts.

<p>Figure 1</p> <p>Iraqi Armed Forces Troop Strength</p> <table> <tr> <td>Total Active Forces</td> <td style="text-align: right;">424,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td> Regular Army</td> <td style="text-align: right;">275,000 *</td> </tr> <tr> <td> Reserves on Active Duty</td> <td style="text-align: right;">100,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td> Air Force</td> <td style="text-align: right;">30,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td> Air Defense</td> <td style="text-align: right;">17,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td> Navy</td> <td style="text-align: right;">2,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td> Reserves</td> <td style="text-align: right;">600,000</td> </tr> </table> <p>(*Including 100,000 Republican Guard considered 100 percent effective. Other ground forces 50 percent effective.)</p>	Total Active Forces	424,000	Regular Army	275,000 *	Reserves on Active Duty	100,000	Air Force	30,000	Air Defense	17,000	Navy	2,000	Reserves	600,000	<p>Figure 2</p> <p>Iraqi Major Items of Equipment</p> <table> <tr> <td>Main Battle Tanks</td> <td style="text-align: right;">4,400</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Armored Fighting Vehicles</td> <td style="text-align: right;">3,700</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Artillery</td> <td style="text-align: right;">2,050</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Multiple Rocket Launchers</td> <td style="text-align: right;">200</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Combat Aircraft</td> <td style="text-align: right;">>300</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Helicopters</td> <td style="text-align: right;"><400</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Air Defense Missile Launchers</td> <td style="text-align: right;">1,500</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Air Defense Guns</td> <td style="text-align: right;">6,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Missile Boats</td> <td style="text-align: right;">1</td> </tr> </table>	Main Battle Tanks	4,400	Armored Fighting Vehicles	3,700	Artillery	2,050	Multiple Rocket Launchers	200	Combat Aircraft	>300	Helicopters	<400	Air Defense Missile Launchers	1,500	Air Defense Guns	6,000	Missile Boats	1
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Numbers and equipment aside, many argue that, based upon the U.S. experience in Operation Desert Storm, Iraqi military forces pose little threat to a modern invading force and may, in fact, turn against Saddam’s government in the face of a serious effort, external or internal, to topple it. Others, however, are more cautious, pointing out that even if the regular Iraqi army were broken, or turned tail, the well-trained Republican and Special Republican Guard, organized into six divisions and 11 separate brigades, might remain loyal, providing a substantial obstacle to any force intent upon ousting the current regime.

Nonmilitary U.S. Options

Few U.S. friends and allies are enthusiastic about an invasion of Iraq, particularly those situated closest to the potential action. But there has been substantial support for the redefinition of forbidden items under the UN sanctions program. Most agree that the new, more tightly drawn list of controlled items will be more manageable and less onerous for all parties.⁷ As William Donaher and Ross DeBlois have commented, “[The previous] sanctions have had the perverse effect of increasing Saddam’s hold on power.”⁸ The new “smart sanctions” approach identifies goods the UN Security Council must approve for export to Iraq. All other constraints will be lifted. The move should eliminate one of Saddam’s most

cogent arguments against the West.⁹ All funds from oil sales are to be deposited in a UN-controlled escrow account to prevent diversion of the money to WMD development.¹⁰

Nevertheless, there are real deficiencies in the UN action which may reemerge in the future. Smuggling is endemic in the region, and the Iraqi leadership is adept at concealing its activities. Further, a number of nations, less concerned with the undesirable inclinations of the Iraqi government than is the United States, but anxious to market “dual-use” goods or to expedite trade through their shipping facilities, may turn a blind eye to such operations and assist in subversion of the new UN accord. Turkey, Syria and Jordan have all refused to commit themselves to the monitoring of their borders with Iraq, so there is no clause in the UN resolution requiring them to do so.¹¹

Some argue that sanctions are not, in any event, a permanent solution to the problems of Iraq. Even a renewed, well-supported, targeted sanction program would, like the previous one, degrade over time. Moreover, the sanctions against Iraq have a defined end state—the dismantling of Saddam’s WMD capabilities. This condition can be met only when UN inspectors have declared Iraq WMD-free. Currently, the likelihood of this is very small. Saddam has not allowed UN inspectors into his country since 1998. Should he allow inspectors back into Iraq, he not only forestalls the possibility of invasion, he also creates the possibility that inspectors will give him a clean bill of health and thus remove the very reason for the sanctions. With a clean bill of health, due to either lax inspections or Saddam’s deception, or even because Saddam has in fact dismantled the bulk of his capabilities, the sanctions would likely be lifted and Saddam or his successors would be free to reconstitute Iraq’s WMD capabilities.

In any case, in order to get international support, the United States must attempt to get inspectors into Iraq. Should Baghdad refuse new inspections, the United States might then be justified in the use of force. More important, Saddam’s rejection of inspectors would give cover to potential allies and coalition partners, particularly those who may publicly speak out against regime change in Iraq, but might privately be happy to see Saddam’s ouster. Then, and only then, would the United States have a clear road for the use of force to eliminate Saddam’s regime.

Of course, Saddam’s readmitting the UN inspectors would pose a dilemma to a Bush administration coiled and ready to attack. Past inspections were not worthless. As Donaher and DeBlois point out, “What progress there has been in degrading Iraq’s unconventional weapon capabilities has come through UNSCOM and not the sanctions.”¹² Moreover, fresh inspections are unlikely to be



structured in such a way that they provide Saddam another opportunity to delay.¹³ First, inspections would proceed with no limitations on where and when the inspection teams can go, nor indeed on the makeup of the inspection teams themselves. Second, inspections would be completed within a timeline established by the UN, not by Iraq. In the past, the Iraqi government was given, and took advantage of, too much “wobble room.”

Any inspection regime must have a zero-tolerance policy. If inspectors are denied access at any point, or if, due to Iraqi foot-dragging, the inspections drag on beyond their initial schedule, the UN should pull the plug on the inspections, and the United States would be free to proceed with military operations if it desired. Any lesser steps, such as reimposing or tightening sanctions, are unlikely to be more effective than in the past. To facilitate such an eventuality, or to deter Saddam from undertaking any action which could lead to it, the United States and any willing allies should consider building up their forces in the region. Should force be required to oust Saddam, such preparations would greatly facilitate the effort.

Military Options

Assuming that Saddam either refuses to allow weapons inspectors into his country or, once having done so, fails to allow them to complete their mission, a military option is likely to come into play. Exactly how military force might be applied is another subject for debate. Before the events of 9/11, a variety of military strategies for ousting Saddam were proposed.¹⁴ One called for a prolonged air campaign targeting Saddam’s key supporters—the Republican Guard, the Ba’ath Party, the internal security services—in the hope of sparking a coup.¹⁵ Another option called for the United States to help local opposition groups such as the Iraqi National Congress (INC) seize and establish “safe zones,” from which they would work to undermine the Iraqi government. A third proposed that the United States help opposition groups “mount an insurgency on the model of the Afghan mujahideen.”¹⁶ Regardless of the merits or drawbacks of the various plans, the military option was not seriously considered by the U.S. government.

As noted earlier, the environment in which discussions over Iraq take place has changed dramatically since 9/11. Many of the options previously discussed have fallen by the wayside. Instead, the debate has crystallized largely around two distinct military strategies. The first, the “Afghanistan approach,” modeled on the successful campaign that ousted the Taliban regime late last year, combines airpower with U.S. support of local opposition forces, and only a small number of U.S. Special Forces deployed on the ground. The second, which was not even on the table before 9/11, essentially calls for a U.S. military campaign including as many as 200,000 U.S. ground troops and substantial heavy equipment. Given the decline of Iraqi forces after more than a decade of war and sanctions, this option—“Desert Storm Lite”—might require only one-third to one-half of the forces used in Desert Storm.¹⁷

The Afghanistan Approach

A number of officials and analysts advocate the replication in Iraq of the strategy employed in Afghanistan to oust the Taliban government. In this plan, domestic opposition ground forces, in concert with small numbers of U.S. Special Forces troops directing U.S. air strikes, would be used to overthrow Saddam’s regime. While initially quite popular, this plan has encountered considerable skepticism both within and outside the Bush administration, as it leaves unanswered a number of important questions. Which indigenous factions can we trust? Which factions have the necessary capabilities? What is the cost of supporting one faction or the other? What are the expectations of these factions in a post-Saddam Iraq?

The benefits of employing the Afghan approach to oust Saddam are obvious. Relying almost completely on domestic opposition to provide the ground forces spares the United States from having to place its

own soldiers in harm's way. In addition, the already overextended U.S. military would be relieved of the potential burdens of increased deployment. And further, there is the issue of time. Without large numbers of ground troops, logistical issues would pose fewer problems than a full invasion option. The time required to deploy in theater the necessary forces would be greatly reduced, and the need for basing rights in countries of sensitive or questionable alliance significantly diminished.

The drawbacks of such a strategy, however, are substantial. The first is finding a viable Iraqi partner on the ground with the proper political connections, popular support and military capabilities needed both to oust Saddam and subsequently to govern in a post-Saddam Iraq. Once a partner is found—if, indeed, there is an appropriate one—there is the problem of compliance on the ground. Given past experiences with Afghan fighters, particularly during the battle for Tora Bora, steps must be taken to ensure compliance with U.S. desires. This means during the war and during the ensuing peace as well. Any group inheriting power in Iraq with the assistance of the United States must be closely monitored to ensure that revenge and retribution on old scores are minimized. Finally, while the indirect method of supporting local opposition forces may be initiated fairly quickly, it may drag on far longer than the full-invasion option. Some analysts believe that Saddam's regime would crumble at the first sign of real opposition, but to count on its doing so is shortsighted and dangerous. A long, drawn-out campaign by U.S.-supported opposition forces could serve to strengthen Saddam's position, both domestically and abroad.

The first of these issues—the identification of a viable partner—has already presented significant obstacles. There currently exists in Iraq no broad organization with political appeal and military skills comparable to those of the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan. Perhaps the nearest thing to such a group is the INC. An opposition group composed of many different anti-Saddam factions, the INC has already received \$12 million from the United States in support of its activities.¹⁸ In addition to the INC, there are three other significant opposition organizations: two Kurdish organizations in northern Iraq, and one Shi'ite Muslim guerrilla group in the south.¹⁹ These groups are better armed than the INC and have significant forces on the ground. However, they have not coordinated their efforts, nor do they have significant contact with the INC. These splits pose problems both for the campaign against Saddam and for the governing of Iraq after his departure.

Further, there is a corresponding split within the U.S. government itself.²⁰ Many in the State Department, responsible for distributing support, believe that the INC has little popular support within Iraq, lacks adequate forces on the ground, and has few connections with current military and political officials needed to foment a coup or to create a post-Saddam government. Moreover, the State Department claims that the INC has misused funds already disbursed. Many within the Pentagon and Congress, on the other hand, see the INC as the best option for coordinating the various anti-Saddam factions. Until the U.S. government itself decides which, if any, factions to back, this option appears to be infeasible.

Finally, there is a problem of lack of enthusiasm, especially among the Kurds. The Kurds have the experience of fighting Saddam Hussein once before, in 1991, supposedly with U.S. backing, only to find that backing had slipped away. At present, the Kurds enjoy a measure of independence and a booming economy. They are not supportive of Saddam, but neither do they wish to disturb him. Their currency is a hundred times stronger than the Iraqi dinar, and they feel that they would have much to lose in another fight with Baghdad.²¹

Desert Storm Lite

A second, and increasingly popular option, is the concept of a U.S.-led military campaign. In this approach, U.S. military forces, alone or with coalition partners and/or domestic opposition forces, would launch a full-scale military campaign from a neighboring country. Underlying the idea is a belief that the Iraqi armed forces are a shadow of what they were before Desert Storm and would quickly collapse under pressure from a determined American-led force.

The benefits of this option are many. First, it would put the full weight of the U.S. military behind the regime-change effort, giving it the greatest chance for success. With U.S. soldiers on the ground, opportunities for human rights abuses by vengeance-filled domestic opposition forces or greed-fueled collaboration with elements of Saddam's regime would be greatly diminished. The psychological effect of a U.S.-led military option might also have beneficial repercussions both in Iraq, by effecting a swift capitulation by the Iraqi armed forces, and abroad, by demonstrating U.S. commitment to ousting a regime that threatened the United States. Finally, once initiated, the full-invasion option would offer a good chance for a swift victory, providing an opportunity for stability of the region and the world. From a military standpoint, it would minimize Iraq's opportunities to use WMD on invading forces. Politically, it could oblige even those who initially opposed armed intervention to reassess their policies. Economically, it would reduce the time allowed for Saddam to carry out debilitating economic policies such as embargoing oil exports or destroying oil fields, as he did upon retreating from Kuwait.

The drawbacks to the U.S.-led military option are likewise many. For one, the costs would likely be much larger than for the Afghanistan approach. The military option is estimated by some within the Pentagon to require as many as 200,000 troops.²² Monetarily, deploying and supplying this number of troops would be extremely expensive. More important is the likely human expense of sending a U.S. force half a world away to combat a military force estimated to be twice its size.²³ Even assuming the regular Iraqi army would collapse after minimal engagement, there is the possibility that the better trained, better equipped, more loyal Republican and Special Republican Guard would stand and fight, perhaps in Baghdad itself. This possibility in 1991 may have been a deciding factor, leading the former President Bush to refrain from attempting to oust Saddam's regime in the final stages of the Gulf War. Uprooting elite forces from Baghdad could be quite deadly, with heavy civilian casualties.

And the risks are not limited to Iraq. U.S. forces are already stretched thin, with deployments ranging from Kosovo to Afghanistan to the Philippines.²⁴ Deploying 200,000 soldiers to oust Saddam would require pulling soldiers from many current missions. Most important of these are homeland defense and the overseas war on terrorism. It is terrorism, not specifically WMD, that poses the greatest, most immediate threat to the United States. Diverting forces from the current war on terrorism to the preemptive war on Iraq could have dangerous repercussions. In addition, drawing these forces would necessarily leave the United States weak in other areas, creating the possibility that other unfriendly regimes could take advantage of the U.S. shift in focus.

Finally, the logistical burden of a full-fledged military effort would create problems as well. For one, the United States would likely need to use bases in the countries in the region, especially Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Oman—and if not bases, at least have overflight rights. In the current climate of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, getting permission from these countries to use their land and airspace to launch attacks on a fellow Muslim regime—no matter how unpopular—could prove difficult, if not impossible. Even if permission were granted, the buildup of the necessary forces in region would be quite lengthy, giving Saddam adequate time to further improve his defenses. Even given the buildup of forces in the region in connection with Operation Enduring Freedom, the time required could be extensive.

When?

There is substantial debate within the U.S. government about when to embark on the effort to oust Saddam. Some analysts and advisors argue that the sooner the United States attacks Iraq, the better. They believe that a quick victory would not only prevent Saddam from fully preparing his defenses, it would also have significant positive repercussions on other conflicts around the world.

To others, this view is unrealistic, if not dangerous. As Mark Strauss points out, “Absent a smoking gun linking Iraq to the 11 September attacks, the United States might find itself acting unilaterally.”²⁵ This may seem unimportant, but the cooperation of other countries, particularly Arab and other Muslim

states, is needed for the more pressing war on terrorism. For the United States to attack Iraq while the Israeli–Palestinian conflict continues to boil would hardly be conducive to the realization of such support. On a different note, the U.S. military’s stores of precision munitions have been seriously depleted in the actions against the Taliban and al Qaeda in Afghanistan.²⁶ The refreshment of these stocks may require some time. Considering the greater power of the Iraqi forces, a successful campaign in Iraq could require a much more intensive air effort than that launched against the Taliban, with a much higher percentage of precision-guided munitions. Some analysts anticipate up to 1,000 sorties per day by ground- and sea-based aircraft. Further, the mix of precision-guided to “dumb” bombs would likely approach 9:1.²⁷

The basing issue is critical. Absent the well-developed facilities in Saudi Arabia, the effort would likely have to be launched from marginal facilities in secondary areas or delayed until comparable facilities could be found or built. Substantial investment is now being undertaken in Qatar and Oman, but it may be a year or more before they are up to standard for a full-fledged air war.²⁸

The Israel–Palestine Dilemma

U.S. government efforts to press the Iraq issue to the forefront have been limited by the ongoing Israeli–Palestinian conflict. After allowing the conflict to progress without U.S. involvement for an extended period, the U.S. government recently stepped in with a plan to bring peace. But a price has been paid in the limited support Arab governments are able to offer to a prospective campaign against Iraq. While some Arab leaders would be happy to see Saddam ousted, the Israel–Palestine issue takes precedence on Arab agenda given its importance to the “Arab “street.”²⁹

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict, in which the entire Arab world has provided political and, in many cases, financial support to the Palestinian side, could have other repercussions as well. During the Gulf War, Israel was a frequent target of Saddam’s Scud missile attacks which, while not especially damaging, were certainly provocative. Nevertheless, Israel, understanding the fragility of the anti-Saddam coalition, exercised self-restraint and refrained from retaliation. If Israel were again subjected to attack from Iraqi soil, it is uncertain that, in today’s climate, the Israeli leadership would again refrain from retaliation. Lack of such restraint would greatly complicate the efforts of the United States to build or maintain an anti-Saddam coalition with Arab partners.

In an effort to take advantage of renewed Arab unity in connection with the renewed intifada against Israel, Saddam has been on a charm offensive in the Middle East. At the recent Arab League summit in Beirut, Iraqi Foreign Minister Najji Sabri announced that Iraq would recognize the sovereignty of Kuwait, long claimed by Iraq as the “19th province,” and called for reestablishment of normal relations.³⁰ At the same summit, Saudi Arabia’s de facto leader, Prince Abdullah, embraced Saddam’s second-in-command, Ezzat Ibrahim.³¹ Saddam’s policy of providing \$25,000 each to the Palestinian families of suicide bombers has also proven to be very popular within Arab countries.

Cold Feet in Europe and Other Issues

Arab allies are not the only concern for the United States. The leaders of many countries in Western Europe and elsewhere have expressed concern about U.S. plans to widen the war on terrorism to include the “axis of evil” countries of Iraq, Iran and North Korea.³² French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine dismissed the policy as “simplistic,” while European Union (EU) Foreign Affairs Commissioner Chris Patten accused the United States of going into “unilateralist overdrive.”³³ The political distance between the United States and much of Western Europe has expanded as a result of America’s support of Israel in its battle with the Palestinians. In much of Europe the United States is perceived as doing too little to rein in the Israeli government led by Ariel Sharon.

The U.S. government, of course, has stated its willingness to pursue Saddam unilaterally if no allies are to be found. But doing so could have profound consequences, not just in relation to Iraq policy, but

also on relations between Europe and the United States across a wide spectrum of issues. Whether or not the disagreement could “destroy NATO,” as some commentators have argued, Washington may wish to reassess the costs and benefits of pursuing Saddam without the support of its long-time allies.³⁴

It should be recognized that international law poses potential obstacles to an attack on Saddam’s regime. Georgetown Law professor Anthony Clark Arend points out that the United Nations Charter permits military force in only two circumstances: in cases of individual or collective self-defense, and when authorized by a UN Security Council resolution.³⁵ It is difficult to argue that Iraq is waging armed aggression against the United States, even indirectly by supporting terrorists, rendering the self-defense argument ineffective. Without credible evidence of Iraq’s complicity in the 11 September attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon or overtly aggressive actions toward its neighbors, the UN Security Council is unlikely to issue a resolution endorsing armed force against Baghdad. Arend suggests that the U.S. government could argue for an attack on Iraq either as preemptive self-defense—to curtail Saddam’s efforts to manufacture WMD before he can use them—or as a continuation of the use of force authorized by previous UN resolutions. However, Arend concedes that both strategies are risky, complicating the creation of a coalition against Iraq.

Aftermath

In the debate over whether or, more recently, how to oust Saddam, there has been little commentary about what may come after Saddam Hussein. This is problematic, not just because the U.S. government needs to ensure that the benefits of eliminating Saddam outweigh the costs, but because, to a large degree, ends are very interdependent on means. That is, the selected military strategy for ousting Saddam could constrain the choices the U.S. government might have in shaping a post-Saddam Iraq.

The more “hands-off” military options, such as fomenting a coup or the Afghanistan model, seem the least sure in fulfilling U.S. objectives. There is no guarantee that the regime that replaces Saddam will be significantly more benign or less eager to acquire WMD. First, any coup would have to eliminate not just Saddam but, at the very least, his two sons, whom he is currently grooming to replace him.³⁶ Even if a coup were to succeed in eliminating all three, and others in line of succession, power in Iraq could fall into the hands of one of the three institutions that have propped up Saddam’s regime for decades: the army, the security services or the Ba’ath Party. Even should the institution taking power desire to open up the country to weapons inspections and adopt liberal democratic reforms, there is no assurance the other two institutions would allow it to happen. The ensuing conflict could easily create an Iraq of warring factions and institutions, with control of Saddam’s WMD up for grabs. In the words of Canadian strategic analyst James W. Moore, “The country could become an Iraqistan.”³⁷

Under the Afghanistan model, power would likely fall to the Shi’ites from the south, the Kurds from the north, and/or a group like the INC, alone or in some ad hoc coalition. Once in power, these elements might take revenge on their former oppressors, diminishing the prospects of a stable replacement government and damaging the reputation of the United States. The various groups could end up fighting among themselves, à la Angola in 1975. One may envision a crippling civil war, with the two Kurdish armies, the major Shi’ite organization and any surviving elements of the Iraqi army or Ba’ath Party (of which there are likely to be several) all seeking power, with Saddam’s weapons of mass destruction perhaps lost in the shuffle. Considering Turkey’s interest in the Kurds and Iran’s ties to the Shi’a, this could have serious consequences not just for Iraq but for the region as well. This may be a “worst-case” scenario, but it is not an impossible one.

There is a better chance that the United States could meet its post-Saddam objectives with the Desert Storm Lite option. With “thousands of boots on the ground,” the U.S. military could essentially occupy the country in a post-World War II model while U.S., UN and other officials pursued the dismantling

of Iraq's WMD capabilities. With U.S. and international supervision and assistance, the various Iraqi factions could create and install new government structures and begin addressing 25 years of economic mismanagement, all without fear of violent reprisals or internecine struggle. By providing assistance and supervision, the United States could ensure that the new institutions and markets would be acceptable not only to both the various segments of Iraqi society but to the international community as well.

Of course, such a program has drawbacks. First, it would be enormously expensive. Kenneth M. Pollack, Deputy Director for National Security Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, estimates the cost of rebuilding Iraq's economy could range from \$50 billion to \$150 billion, not including war damage.³⁸ Having started the fight, the United States would be expected to shoulder the greatest share of the economic burden, although it might be able to get assistance from other countries. Second, the postwar situation would probably require the long-term commitment of large numbers of troops. Extrapolating from Bosnia's example, Michael E. O'Hanlon and Philip H. Gordon (both Senior Fellows at Foreign Policy Studies) estimate that an occupation force would require at least 250,000 troops initially, and more than 100,000 after five years.³⁹ National institutions are not created or rebuilt overnight, and if Iraq were allowed to fall back into the hands of surviving Sadamic organizations, such as the Ba'ath Party, there would be little chance for a peaceful, stable Iraq. Third, the entire undertaking would likely be dangerous and costly in terms of human life. Rounding up, demobilizing and disarming Iraq's vast security apparatus could turn out to be a long and dirty, but necessary, task. Fourth, there is no guarantee that a government so overtly indebted to the United States could ever achieve full legitimacy in the eyes of the populace of Iraq or other Muslim states. As Daniel L. Byman, Research Director of RAND's Center for Middle East Public Policy, has pointed out, "No country likes outsiders to impose a government on it," and any ensuing rapprochement with the West could be highly suspect.⁴⁰ Finally, U.S. occupation of an Islamic country is likely to have significant political consequences, regardless of how hated the regime or how soft the U.S. footprint. If the U.S. government botches the job, its actions may be interpreted as simply the latest persecution of Islamic states in a long history of such acts. If the U.S. government is successful, it may create a liberal, democratic state not at all welcome to its more illiberal neighbors. U.S. forces, officials and installations could, for the entire period of conflict and occupation, present easy targets for disgruntled Islamic terrorists and guerrillas.

Unfortunately, these drawbacks are the price of success. Invasion and regime change without the necessary follow-up have essentially the same unfortunate results as other options: The successor regime collapses, civil war ensues, neighboring states get drawn in, and the region is destabilized. Unfortunately, this choice appears to be the least worst option. Others, while cheaper on most counts, have less chance of increasing the security of either the region or the United States. As Senator Joseph Biden (D-Delaware), Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, recently stated, "The easy part is going to be, in a bizarre sense, taking Saddam out. The hard part is what do you do after that."⁴¹

Conclusion

In the mid- to long term, Saddam poses a significant threat to the United States and U.S. interests. He has demonstrated a commitment to obtaining weapons of mass destruction in the face of inspections and an ongoing sanction regime. Moreover, he has, in the past, used chemical weapons against both Iranian targets (during the Iran-Iraq war) and the Kurdish minority. Left to his own devices, Saddam would likely achieve at least a minimal level of nuclear capability which, given his past bellicosity and risk-taking, could be disastrous for international security. His successor, in all probability one of his two sons, would probably continue his efforts.

To eliminate this threat, the United States should be prepared to undertake a military campaign against Saddam. It should do so, however, only after a few criteria have been met:

- First, all other options must be exhausted. Before any military action is taken, the U.S. government must insist that Saddam reopen his country to UN weapons inspectors with no time limitation. Failure on the part of Saddam to allow inspectors full, unfettered access over an unlimited period would provide the United States and allies with the clearest justification for the military option.
- Second, the United States should select the Desert Storm Lite strategy to oust Saddam. Current conditions in Iraq simply do not lend themselves as well to the Afghanistan model or other lighter plans. They could, in the words of General Anthony Zinni, former Commander in Chief, U.S. Central Command, lead to a “Bay of Goats.”⁴²
- Third, the United States should delay action on Iraq, not just because of the logistical problems of moving 200,000–300,000 troops into the region, but because the United States is already engaged in the war on terrorism on multiple fronts. Moreover, launching a campaign against Saddam without first addressing the renewed Israeli–Palestinian conflict could damage the U.S. position in the Middle East for years to come.
- Fourth, the United States must have allies in the coming war against Iraq. Allies provide military bases; they may also provide political cover for actions that might otherwise be interpreted as aggressive. In addition, the allies most necessary for the war on terrorism—Muslim countries ranging from Sudan to Uzbekistan to Malaysia—are those most sensitive to a new offensive against a fellow Muslim state. Hopefully they will eventually acquiesce, but only if the ground is well prepared beforehand.
- Finally, the U.S. government should determine beforehand what kind of Iraq it hopes to create after Saddam, taking into consideration the sensitivities of all parties within the country and those of neighboring states, such as Turkey, Kuwait and even Iran. Moreover, the U.S. government should be prepared to devote the necessary time and resources to the rebuilding of Iraq. Decades of oppression and misrule cannot be corrected overnight.

Of these criteria, the last may be the most important, both for the safety of the region and for the credibility of the United States. If, having removed Saddam, the United States were to fail in replacing him with something better, or to fail to provide a new regime with adequate resources and assistance, the entire effort could have been wasted, and at great political and economic cost. In Afghanistan, the U.S. government demonstrated an outstanding ability to topple regimes. The administration’s subsequent actions—a failure to provide adequate funds in a timely manner and refusal to participate in peacekeeping—have cast a shadow on its ability to rebuild a country. The national leadership would be well advised to examine the country’s willingness to undertake the full task of reconstructing Iraq before undertaking military action.

Endnotes

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7. Peter Slevin, "Revised Sanctions on Iraq Backed: U.N. Security Council Could Vote Thursday," *The Washington Post*, 8 May 2002, p. A-1.
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21. Nicholas Birch, "Iraq's Kurds Aren't Looking For a Fight," *Washington Post*, 5 May 2002, p. B3.
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27. Rowan Scarborough, "Size of Force on Ground Key in Plan for Iraq War," *Washington Times*, 26 April 2002, p. 1.
28. Michael Sirak and Neil Barnett, "USA Looks to Expand Based in Oman and Qatar," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 17 April 2002, p. 15.
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