

# War and the Iraq Dilemma: Facing Harsh Realities

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“The children of darkness are evil because they know no law beyond the self. They are wise, though evil, because they understand the power of self-interest. The children of light are virtuous because they have some conception of a higher law than their own will. They are usually foolish because they do not know the power of self-will. They underestimate the peril of anarchy in both the national and international community.”

“Clearly it has become necessary for the children of light to borrow some of the wisdom of the children of darkness; and yet be careful not to borrow too much.”

— Reinhold Niebuhr  
*The Children of Light and The  
Children of Darkness, 1944*

The tragic events of 11 September 2001 have given Americans a painful reminder of the evil that men are capable of inflicting on others, as Reinhold Niebuhr warned long ago, witnessing the destruction wrought by Nazi Germany. The World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks dealt heavy blows to the American liberalism that sees humankind as perfectible and on a steady historical march toward democracy and international peace. That dark day jarred American innocence and alerted us to the hatred of the United States that seethes in the Middle East and the lengths to which adversaries will go to harm our citizens and interests. The day should serve as a loud wake-up call that adversaries want to inflict massive devastation on the United States and would be able to accomplish this task more readily if armed with chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear weapons. Al Qaeda was working feverishly along these lines, judging from documents and plans captured in the Afghanistan campaign. Other sub-state actors may follow al Qaeda's lead. The substantial infrastructure needed to support

weapons of mass destruction programs—particularly for nuclear weapons—and their delivery systems such as aircraft and ballistic missiles, however, will likely remain more within the reach of nation-states than sub-state actors.

The Bush Administration casts the American military campaign as a “war against terrorism.” That characterization might be useful as oratory but is amorphous and causes considerable confusion. After all, terrorism is a method or tactic of warfare, not an entity. A “war against terrorism” is akin to a “war on war,” which comes perilously close to the crusading liberalism of Woodrow Wilson and his “war to end all wars.” A “war against terrorism” is an open-ended pledge that causes potential international partners to step back from cooperation in areas where they share interests with the United States out of fear that the next American steps could be sharply at odds with their interests.

The Bush Administration would have been wiser to call the American military campaign what it is—a war to destroy the al Qaeda network, and the regimes and entities that support it, and to deter others from lending any support to the network responsible for slaughtering thousands of innocent American civilians in our homeland. Such directness would have lent a strategic clarity needed to link ends and means in statecraft, reinforced the war’s objectives, and reduced a fair amount of second-guessing and downright back-stabbing at home and abroad.

When President Bush surveyed the global geopolitical landscape through his post-9/11 lenses in his State of the Union address, he rightly viewed major threats to American security as coming from Iraq, Iran, and North Korea—his “axis of evil.” Bush’s characterization was a rhetorical means to succinctly capture three nation-state threats, although it mistakenly suggested that there is an active concert of planning or conspiring between Baghdad, Tehran, and Pyongyang. What these countries do share is robust weapons of mass destruction capabilities and delivery systems coupled with political intentions to work against US interests. Bush no doubt singled them out, in part, to serve notice that the United States will be watching closely for any attempts to support surrogates such as al Qaeda in attacks against the United States, thereby bolstering an American deterrent against such a course. As was the case with the “war on terrorism” conceptualization, however, the “axis of evil” reference has increased anxiety and uncertainty in the minds of potential international partners, an effect that outweighs the benefits of its rhetorical appeal.

In the aftermath of the seemingly successful US military campaign to destroy the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and to disrupt the al Qaeda terrorist

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network there, attention is now turning to Iraq, another potential source of strategic surprise and grave danger to American national interests. Many voices in the renewed debate argue for the continued use of international sanctions and UN arms inspections to contain Iraq and deny imports that would be used to rebuild and modernize Saddam Hussein's military. Yet there is building political sentiment in the Arab world and beyond that the sanctions only hurt Iraqi civilians. Some voices are calling for the United States to redouble support to Iraqi opposition movements and consider assertive military options to aid opposition forces in operations to topple Saddam's regime. Fewer observers are calling for an outright American military invasion to rid the region of Saddam and to buttress the Gulf balance of power.

The latter option appears to curry favor from key policy players, but the Bush Administration would be taking another misstep if it were to cast a war against Iraq as a continuation of the "war against terrorism." That characterization would only increase the unease with regional partners who might be more willing to cooperate in a US campaign to destroy Saddam's regime if they were less concerned that lending support would be a de facto invitation to even more ambitious American actions in the Middle East. Furthermore, little evidence has emerged publicly to link Iraq to al Qaeda in the run-up to the 11 September events. The lack of direct linkage between al Qaeda and Iraq would be the "soft underbelly" into which opponents of aggressive American moves against Iraq—namely the French, Russians, and Chinese, and most states in the Middle East—would stick their knives to undermine international political, economic, and military support for the campaign.

A war against Iraq—as separate from the war against al Qaeda—would more effectively be waged on its own merits. Saddam has failed to comply with United Nations resolutions for the past decade, especially in his tenacious protection of Iraq's programs for producing weapons of mass destruction. A war to rid Iraq of Saddam and his weapons of mass destruction as a declaratory policy would be more durable in the court of international public and elite opinion than casting a war against Iraq as a continuation of the war on al Qaeda.

A war against Iraq would be the continuation of business unfinished by the Gulf War. Americans view the Gulf War with a great sense of closure; we won with the liberation of Kuwait. In contrast, Saddam views the Gulf War as a tactical defeat or battle lost. From Saddam's point of view, he strategically won the Gulf War because he managed to outlast George Bush the elder's time in power, endure international sanctions, protect his weapons of mass destruction programs, and live to fight another day. Iraqi forces were withdrawn from Kuwait, but Saddam's claims on the country and aspirations for dominating the region were not. Saddam perceives the war with the United States as ongoing and is garnering his power—principally in the form of ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction—in preparation for the next battle. Americans, for the most part, fail to perceive that the struggle with Iraq never ended, much as we failed

to grasp before 11 September that al Qaeda had declared—and was waging—a war against us.

A war that de-fangs Iraq of Saddam and his weapons of mass destruction (WMD) might help reverse trends in regional WMD proliferation. An Iraq without Saddam and WMD would pose less of a threat to Iran and might reduce Tehran's incentive to pursue WMD. Iran, of course, is pursuing WMD because doing so is comparatively easier than modernizing conventional forces and because Iran wants to counterbalance the United States. A robust American military campaign against Iraq, however, might change Iran's strategic calculus. Tehran might then recalculate that building robust WMD capabilities increases the risk of conflict with the United States rather than deters American power in the region.

To be sure, President Bush need not take on his shoulders this arduous task fraught with enormous risk. But no course here is risk-free; the continuation of the status quo and the fiction of international sanctions against Iraq also entail risk. Sometime in the not-too-distant future, the world could gasp in horror at a nuclear detonation in Iraq's Western Desert. The specter of Saddam and his heirs—sons Uday and Qusay—in possession of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles capable of delivering warheads throughout the region is a grave risk of inaction. His conventional forces, though obsolescent and suffering from shortages, are still sufficiently massive to threaten neighbors. Should Iraqi conventional forces one day be backed by nuclear weapons, they indeed would pose a formidable threat. Dislodging Iraqi conventional forces again from Kuwait would be an inherently more risky proposition if Baghdad were armed with nuclear weaponry.<sup>1</sup> If Saddam were to acquire nuclear weapons a few years hence, those same critics who are alarmed by US contemplation of military action against Iraq—the Europeans, Arabs, and many in the American domestic scene—would be vocally asking why President Bush had neglected his responsibilities and chosen the easy road of perpetuating the status quo vis-à-vis Iraq.

### ***Failure of Sanctions and Frailty of Opposition***

The harsh reality is that international sanctions and intrusive UN weapons inspections have failed to undermine the Iraqi regime or force Saddam to abandon his WMD programs. On the contrary, the sanctions may have worked to bolster Saddam's reign rather than weaken it. The sanctions are evaded through all of Iraq's neighbors, including American partners in Jordan and Turkey, as well as through Saddam's foes in Iran and Syria.<sup>2</sup> The sanctions have created an enormous black market controlled by Saddam and his family. Saddam uses the black market earnings to shore up the loyalty of his intelligence, security, and elite military forces to safeguard his regime.

Saddam's banning of UN weapons inspection teams in 1998 signaled the end to intrusive international efforts to fathom the depths of Iraq's WMD programs. The end of effective monitoring probably had reached the point of diminishing returns long before. In the early years of UN inspections, the Iraqis were

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caught off-guard by inspectors who periodically uncovered Iraqi inconsistencies in declarations, documents, and materials that revealed Iraqi duplicity. These episodes gave the outside world glimpses of the scope and sophistication of Iraqi WMD programs. But as time wore on, Iraq’s intelligence services grew increasingly proficient at keeping their UN weapons inspection guests as contained as fireflies in a bottle.

While the Iraqis could do little to hide major weapons-related infrastructure, they could easily disperse and hide documents and personnel—the critical building blocks for reconstituting WMD programs—throughout the country with little chance of detection by weapons inspectors. As former lead United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) inspector David Kay recounts, Iraq’s WMD program was funded by \$20 billion and staffed by 40,000 people. He assesses that Iraq retains the technical expertise needed to rebuild weapon production capabilities and to have weapon programs widely dispersed throughout Iraq’s industrial and scientific infrastructure, which could survive even the “most draconian of sanctions.”<sup>3</sup>

Today the scope of Iraq’s chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons programs, as well as its ballistic missile program, remains shrouded in secrecy. As former UNSCOM head Richard Butler prudently warns, “It would be foolish in the extreme not to assume that he [Saddam] is developing long-range missile capability, at work again on building nuclear weapons, and adding to the chemical and biological warfare weapons he concealed during the UNSCOM inspection period.”<sup>4</sup> The Iraqi nuclear weapons program had progressed to the point where Saddam in the run-up to the Gulf War was able to order a crash project to produce enough fissionable material for at least one nuclear device to use against American forces if faced with his own demise.<sup>5</sup> Although the Iraqi effort fortunately failed, it illustrates how close the Iraqis were to acquiring a nuclear weapon more than ten years ago. The assessments of experienced UN weapons inspectors such as Kay and Butler leave little doubt that inspections and sanctions in the years since the Gulf War have failed to stop the Iraqi nuclear weapons program.

To insist today that Saddam again accept UN weapons inspection teams is futile. The Iraqis would likely compel the UN to work under such severe con-

straints as the price for readmission that inspections would be unlikely to uncover any sensitive Iraqi materials or make any major revelations about Iraq's WMD programs. As Daniel Byman anticipates, "Inspectors would probably discover only what Saddam wanted them to, or at best marginally improve the West's knowledge of Iraq's WMD programs, leaving Iraq's existing WMD capabilities untouched."<sup>6</sup> A greater danger is that Saddam could re-invite UN weapons inspection teams as a tactic to diffuse the accumulation of political support for more aggressive US actions against Iraq.

Notwithstanding the shortcomings evident with historical 20/20 hindsight, international sanctions and weapons inspections were worth the try. In the immediate aftermath of the Gulf War, both policy tools seemed to be prudent and appropriate avenues along which to proceed. The UN sanctions were seen as a means that would eventually lead to Saddam's ouster under the stress of economic deterioration, while the intrusiveness of UN inspection teams would allow the accurate assessment of Saddam's weapons programs and prevent their reestablishment. That was the theory, but in practice, neither end came to fruition. After more than a decade of testing, it is time to conclude that sanctions and weapons inspections have outlived their usefulness as tools for dealing with Saddam Hussein.

Again with the advantage of hindsight, George Bush the elder's decision in 1991 not to march on to Baghdad after liberating Kuwait is easy to criticize. Although the decision to end ground operations after 100 hours of fighting was premature and allowed many Iraqi Republican Guard forces—which correctly had been the highest priority for attack in the ground campaign—to escape the Kuwaiti theater of operations, the political and military objective of liberating Kuwait was achieved. In his masterful orchestration of a diverse coalition, George H. W. Bush knew that his Arab partners were adamantly opposed to US forces occupying Iraq. Had President Bush ordered his forces northward to Baghdad, support from his Arab counterparts would have been left by the roadside north of Basra. If Bush the elder paid too much deference to Arab leaders then, Bush the younger might be well advised to listen less to them today in fashioning Iraq policy options.

Recognition of the failure of international sanctions and UN weapons inspections over the years has caused the United States to pursue the idea of bolstering Iraqi opposition to undermine Saddam's regime. Support for Iraqi opposition, working under the umbrella organization of the Iraqi National Congress (INC), has proceeded in fits and starts. The policy has been a political football between Capitol Hill, where support for the INC runs higher—perhaps in no small measure due to effective lobbying—and the executive branch, where the well-founded conventional wisdom holds that the INC is too weak on the ground to seriously challenge Saddam's forces. The INC appears to be expert at the extravagant spending of US taxpayer money on its office spaces and operations outside of Iraq, but there is little evidence that it has a substantial infrastructure in the region or inside Iraq that are prerequisites for battle with Saddam's regime.<sup>7</sup>

Even with the benefit of increased support to the INC, to include American military training and equipment, it is hard to imagine the INC building up to anything more than a façade. The INC would have to enjoy sanctuary in states neighboring Iraq, such as Jordan, Kuwait, and Turkey, for a prolonged period to develop a substantial military organization from the ground up. The time required, perhaps years, for these forces to reach maturity would likely exceed the political resolve needed to host them in neighboring states. Any undertaking as large as the one required to build robust opposition military capabilities would be unlikely to remain secret for very long, as was the case with the pseudo-covert American support to the Mujahideen during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Nor would the Iraqi opposition likely have the warrior spirit and brutality that the Afghans have nurtured in the crucible of tribal warfare for years. As Kenneth Pollack points out, “In 1991 and again in 1996, Saddam’s Republican Guard easily defeated even the strongest of the local Iraqi opposition forces, the two Kurdish militias.”<sup>8</sup> Iraqi opposition bases, moreover, would be a long way from the heart of Saddam’s security apparatus in Baghdad, and their forces would have to fight their way in against larger and more heavily armed Iraqi security forces. Years of indecisive Iraqi opposition hit-and-run attacks would cause outcries from the Arab world, the Europeans, and even within the United States to stop the operations and their negative repercussions on Iraqi civilians caught in the cross-fires.

### *War to Destroy Saddam’s Regime*

If the Iraq dilemma is to be resolved, President Bush will have to assert his leadership from the bully pulpit to forge a consensus in the American public and Congress that Saddam’s ouster will come only at the hands of a massive American military campaign. As Michael Eisenstadt assesses of plans for backing Iraqi insurgents, “By nibbling away at its periphery, rather than by landing crushing blows to the nerve centers of the regime, the enclaves approach eschews the type of devastating and decisive American military action that is probably required to unseat Saddam and his regime, without disastrous consequences for innocent Iraqis and the peoples of the region.”<sup>9</sup>

The lesson of the Gulf War taken by many observers is that Saddam was deterred from using chemical and biological weapons by the fear of massive American retaliation, including the potential use of nuclear weapons. At Geneva in January 1991 before the start of the war, Secretary of State James Baker tried to give his Iraqi counterpart, Tariq Aziz, a sealed letter from President Bush to Saddam, but the Iraqi foreign minister refused to accept it and Baker had to orally deliver parts of it.<sup>10</sup> Bush wrote in the letter, “The United States will not tolerate the use of chemical or biological weapons. . . . The American people would demand the strongest possible response. You and your country will pay a terrible price if you order unconscionable acts of this sort.”<sup>11</sup> An alternative, but compelling, argument is that Saddam held his weapons of mass destruction in reserve to use them as a last resort to fend off an American threat to his hold on

power. Had Bush the elder ordered American forces to take Baghdad, the route northward from Kuwait might have been littered with chemical and biological weapon denotations.

In a future military campaign to destroy Saddam's regime, the danger of Iraqi use of chemical and biological weapons will likely be greater than it was during the Gulf War because Saddam will recognize that the United States is playing for all or nothing. Saddam was quick during the Gulf War to fire ballistic missiles at Israel in attempts to draw Israeli forces into the fray and undermine Arab support for the American war effort. If facing his own destruction at the hands of another American military campaign, Saddam might again target Israel, this time with the intent to bring down the Israelis with him and thus martyr himself for the Arab world. The danger posed by Iraqi chemical and biological weapons makes it imperative that American military operations are massive, fast, furious, and multidimensional to deny Iraqi forces opportunities to regain their footing and orchestrate counterattacks to defend the regime or strike out in vengeance against Israel and other regional US partners.

Saddam's WMD capabilities are cause for concern, but his conventional military capabilities are weaker now than they were during the Gulf War, while American forces are more capable. American air and ground forces ripped through Iraqi forces with dispatch during the Gulf War and cut them in size roughly by half. Over the past decade, the Iraqis have improvised and cannibalized their obsolescent aircraft, tanks, armored personnel carriers, and air defense network to keep them going. International sanctions, however, have been successful in stopping Saddam from procuring the massive infusions of modern weaponry—from Russia and Europe where he procured his most capable systems before the Gulf War—needed to revamp his conventional forces. American military capabilities, on the other hand, have grown considerably, with greater reliance on precision munitions and long-range B-2 bombers than was the case in the Gulf War. Smart money would bet on Professor Eliot Cohen's assessment that Iraqi conventional forces would quickly collapse in the face of a robust American military campaign.<sup>12</sup>

In the intervening years since the Gulf War, the United States has played a game of tit-for-tat with Iraqi forces in policing the no-fly zones in the north and south of Iraq. In countless episodes, Iraqi ground-based air defense radars have locked-on to patrolling aircraft in the no-fly zones and were subsequently targeted by coalition aircraft. But even in response to an egregious Iraqi act—an assassination plot against former President Bush while on a visit to Kuwait—the US response was limited: the ensuing four-day Desert Fox campaign under the Clinton Administration amounted to little more than a pinprick.

A major military campaign to oust Saddam would have to be a dramatic departure from the limited military options employed against Iraq since the Gulf War. The Iraqi military machine is large, with ground troops numbering about 375,000 men.<sup>13</sup> An American military campaign should concentrate massive air

bombardment at the Iraqi regime's center of gravity located in its leadership, intelligence services, the Special Security Organization (SSO), the Special Republican Guard (SRG), the Republican Guard (RG), and Saddam's Commandos, a paramilitary security organization.<sup>14</sup> The Iraqi Republican Guard consists of three armored, one mechanized, and two infantry divisions, and the Special Republican Guard consists of four brigades. Saddam's paramilitary Commandos number 18,000 to 20,000 men.<sup>15</sup> These forces are the regime's central nervous system and would most likely be responsible for the special handling of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction.<sup>16</sup> The military objective of an American military campaign should be the decimation of these security pillars of Saddam's regime.

Regular army forces make up the bulk of Iraqi ground forces, but Saddam sees them as cannon fodder because they are poorly trained, equipped, and manned. The regular army is not in Saddam's inner circle of power. It is the military bulk needed to bloody and blunt ground assaults by an adversary, whether American or Iranian. Only after an initial bludgeoning would Saddam commit his elite Republican Guard forces to battle; this was Saddam's practice during his eight-year war with Iran as well as his plan for fighting American forces during the Gulf War.

The American military campaign should not massively target Iraq's regular army forces but instead concentrate intensively on the security forces mentioned above on which Saddam's regime depends. Iraq's regular army consists of three armored, three mechanized, and 11 infantry divisions, but most of these units are at less than full strength.<sup>17</sup> Much of Iraq's army could be spared during a US military campaign, except for those units that choose to fight rather than surrender to invading American ground forces. American propaganda instruments such as radio broadcasts and leaflet drops should saturate Iraqi army garrisons and deployment areas before and during combat to inform Iraqi soldiers that: the United States intends to oust Saddam; if they surrender, they will be treated well, as Iraqi soldiers were in the Gulf War; and, if they resist, they will be killed. The Iraqi army would be useful for maintaining internal security and holding a post-Saddam Iraq together as one country. Such a policy objective would be essential if the United States is to gain critical basing and military support from Turkey in a war against Saddam. The Turks will need reassurance that a war will not bring about the breakup of Iraq with a Kurdish state bordering Turkey, as well as Sunni- and Shia-dominated states in middle and southern Iraq, respectively.

The American military campaign would have to be imaginative, as Eliot Cohen has urged, and not resemble the linear and ponderous Gulf War campaign.<sup>18</sup> An air campaign would seek to destroy Iraq's air force and ground-based air defenses, and the facilities, personnel, and equipment associated with the regime leadership, the Republican Guard, the Special Republican Guard, the Special Security Organization, and Saddam's Commando forces. The air campaign could be conducted simultaneously and in coordination with multi-pronged



Possible attack routes.

ground force invasions and airborne operations throughout Iraq to rapidly overwhelm Saddam's defenses, seize ground, and reduce Saddam's options for resorting to weapons of mass destruction. Conceptually, the ground campaign might contain these elements:

- One ground force prong could advance south from Turkey to drive to Saddam's hometown and family stronghold in Tikrit. Tikrit's capture would signal to the Iraqi populace that Saddam's hold on power is finished even if he managed to elude American air and ground attacks in the initial stages of the campaign.
- A second prong could bear down on Baghdad from the west from Saudi Arabia or Jordan while combing Iraq's Western Desert for mobile ballistic missile launchers that Saddam could use against Israel. Iraq's Western Desert is vast and American forces would not be able to occupy all of it, but they could at least control key lines of communication there to complicate Iraqi ballistic missile operations.<sup>19</sup>
- A third prong would speed north from Kuwait to capture Basra before moving on to Baghdad. This prong would likely constitute the bulk of the American invasion force because Kuwait would be the most suitable area for marshaling, and southern Iraq the most suitable area for maneuver of the heavy armored forces needed to march on Baghdad. This prong would also sweep its path for Iraqi ballistic missile launchers aimed at US support bases and partners in the Gulf. Kuwait might also have to be used as a staging base for ground thrusts into Iraq's Western Desert if Jordan and Saudi Arabia refuse access to American forces.
- A multiple-pronged American ground assault from the north, west, and south might draw out from around Baghdad the RG, SRG, and Commando

units that survived the initial air attacks, making them easier prey for American ground forces than if they were to stay entrenched in heavily populated areas.

- Airborne assaults against high-value regime leadership targets as well as air bases in and around Baghdad would augment the ground force invasion prongs. Strongholds would be established at captured air bases for the air ferrying of occupation forces and supplies.

The three-pronged ground invasion and airborne operations would try to seal potential escape routes for fleeing Iraqi regime officials. Strong American diplomacy would be required to serve notice to Tehran and Damascus that the harboring of fleeing Iraqi officials in Iran and Syria would not be tolerated.

Iraqi military intelligence would be in dire straits trying to form a solid picture of fast-moving ground and airborne forces in a massive campaign to unseat Saddam. The Iraqis during the Gulf War had little to no intelligence over a period of months about the status and disposition of coalition forces preparing for the liberation of Kuwait, and they have done little since to improve their intelligence capabilities. With an inaccurate and incomplete intelligence picture in the face of an American attack, Iraqi forces would be spread thin attempting to defend all fronts but would marshal too little and too late to blunt multiple American assaults throughout Iraq. With operations targeted against Saddam's pillars of security power, American forces probably would encounter little opposition from the Iraqi population; most Iraqis probably would take cover and wait for the dust to settle.

Saddam might not sit tight and wait for the American military onslaught, even if he has less than a perfect picture of the buildup of US assets in and around Iraq. The American forces needed for the campaign might be one or two American corps, with 200,000 to 300,000 troops.<sup>20</sup> These forces would not be able to avoid the media attention that would deny the United States the possibility of strategic surprise. Saddam might try a number of measures to disrupt the American build-up, such as targeting his ballistic missiles, perhaps with chemical and biological warheads, against suspected American staging areas in Kuwait and Turkey. He likewise might preemptively target Israel with ballistic missiles to draw the Israeli military into the war before American ground forces had even entered Iraqi territory. Saddam could portray himself as a modern Saladin waging war on behalf of the Arab world against the infidels. These attacks, however, would expose Saddam's covert missile and WMD capabilities and strengthen the American case in the West for war against Iraq.

One of Saddam's best options for countering the American onslaught would be to seek refuge for his forces in urban areas. He could flush his SRG and RG forces from their garrisons and deploy them to urban areas. SRG and RG forces are vulnerable to American air attack when deployed in the desert and less-populated areas, where the heat from tanks and armored personnel carriers is distinguishable from the cooler desert at night by infrared sensors. The deployment of Iraqi regime forces in heavily populated areas would give them cover and

complicate the task of American planners trying to minimize the collateral damage to Iraqi civilians. As Byman observes, "Perhaps uniquely in military history, America cares more about the suffering of the enemy regime's people than does the regime itself. Saddam has repeatedly shown that he will allow thousands of his own citizens to die when it suits him."<sup>21</sup> American ground forces would be forced to lay siege to occupied Iraqi cities unless Iraqi forces chose to surrender. The death and violence in recent standoffs in Afghanistan between American forces and Taliban and al Qaeda fighters would pale in comparison to that of urban warfare in Iraq. Saddam would wage war from urban areas to slow down American ground force advances, inflict casualties, and spin Arab opinion into a frenzy with live media coverage of Iraqi civilian deaths from American attacks.

### ***Prodding Uneasy Partners***

The United States must be prepared to go to war with few partners in such a massive campaign aimed at a regime change in Iraq. Arab leaders are already distancing themselves from the United States vis-à-vis Iraq policy. They are worried about the stabilities of their regimes and concerned that an American campaign against Iraq could be the spark that ignites the stacks of dry kindling wood that constitute Arab frustration with Israeli-Palestinian violence. Arab Gulf states as well as Egypt and Jordan would be loath to put themselves at greater risk by lending public support to a campaign against Saddam. They might lend assistance quietly and behind the scenes, though, if they were convinced that the United States was fully committed to a regime change in Iraq and would spare no resources to accomplish the task. In his recent tour of the Middle East, Vice President Richard Cheney—who has an impeccable reputation among Arab leaders for his central role in the Gulf War—appears to have begun the uncertain strategic and diplomatic process of trying to prod key regional states to support a US campaign.

The United States would have to rely on critical support from Kuwait and Turkey, and would have to look to Jordan and Saudi Arabia for auxiliary aid. Kuwait, unlike many Arab states that have greater geographic separation from Iraq, is keenly aware of its dependence on the United States to guarantee its survival and would be more willing to support Washington. Turkey, which is turning out to be one of the United States' most dependable NATO allies, would insist on American guarantees that there would be no separate state for the Kurds as a price for Ankara's support. Garnering Saudi and Jordanian help is likely to prove problematic, however. Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden have heightened Saudi sensitivities over internal stability, international criticism about Saudi society, and reliance on the United States for its security. Jordan's King Abdallah has been one of the most visible supporters of the US campaign against al Qaeda and the Taliban, but he would face enormous political risk with high-profile support of a war against Iraq. Jordan is heavily dependent on Iraq for its economic livelihood and would be vulnerable to internal Palestinian protests. Nevertheless, King Abdallah might want to avoid

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the mistake that his father made during the Gulf War by backing the loser and thus lend assistance—albeit quietly—to a US war effort.

The United States would be undertaking a campaign without military help from most of its NATO allies. The French and the Germans have made it plain that they would not support such a campaign. French Foreign Minister Vedrine has called President Bush’s “axis of evil” reference “simplistic”; German Foreign Minister Fischer has cried, “We won’t be treated as satellites”; and the European Union Foreign Affairs Commissioner has complained that the United States was going into “unilateralist overdrive.”<sup>22</sup> These European sentiments are peculiar in that during the 1990s both the French and the Germans were all too willing to draw the United States into the Bosnia and Kosovo conflicts where their military forces were not up to the tasks. While the Balkan conflicts posed massive humanitarian crises, Serb leader Milosevic never had the power to directly threaten European or American interests to the extent that Saddam could if he is left to his own devices. Americans should rightly take political offense at the failure of our close European allies to reciprocate for past American military support in the Balkans with at least a modicum of political support for a campaign against Iraq.

NATO made a grand political gesture in the aftermath of 11 September and—for the first time in its history and with great fanfare—invoked Article V of the North Atlantic Treaty to show solidarity with the United States. The paucity of European military power lent to the campaign in Afghanistan, however, shows that the alliance is increasingly an empty shell. The notable exception, of course, was the British under Prime Minister Tony Blair’s leadership. Blair has been a reliable, if lone, bastion of support for the United States both politically and militarily in the Afghanistan campaign, and his help will be important to a campaign against Saddam. In contrast, the United States would hardly be in need of French or German military assistance, other than possibly transit rights for forces, any more than it was during the Gulf War, when French contributions were marginal at best and German contributions were nonexistent.

Many observers, both in the United States and Europe, argue that American “unilateral” action against Iraq without the consensus of our European allies would compel those allies to move away from NATO and nurture their

own separate security arrangements in Europe to counterbalance the American “hyper-power.” From an American perspective, we might as well welcome that development if such a course would prompt the Europeans to redress the long, steady deterioration in their military capabilities. As it stands today, the United States is losing partners in Europe and gaining dependents, which over the long run will sap the American power needed to attend to more direct and potentially dangerous threats to international security, particularly in the Middle East and Asia, where the Europeans have no ability to project power. It is probably well past time for the Europeans to shoulder their responsibility for police actions and peacekeeping missions in the Balkans to free up American resources for security challenges elsewhere.

### *The Courage of a Statesman and Strides into the Unknown*

Marshaling a massive military campaign to oust Saddam from power would require enormous political courage from President Bush. More than a fair share of Middle Eastern, European, and Asian states would be sitting on the sidelines, few risking a political or military hand. Some would even hope that the US campaign gets bogged down and settles into an indecisive outcome. They would look for vindication of their political prognoses and savor the United States’ suffering a major political and military defeat, one that would “knock the US down a peg or two.” With less than stellar political, military, and economic performances throughout the Middle East and even among our once stalwart European allies, many would quietly relish a US failure in a military campaign against Iraq.

What some call “unilateralism,” however, should more aptly be called “leadership.” The United States, by force of history, circumstance, and power, needs to play the role of “balancer” in the Gulf. Saddam is not satisfied with the status quo and is seeking the military capabilities in weapons of mass destruction to disrupt it to the disadvantage of the United States and its partners in the region. The United States should take the initiative and move against Saddam before he has the means to move against our interests. The path ahead is laden with unknowns, such as the number of American military and Iraqi civilian casualties and the scope and duration of military occupation and administration of post-Saddam Iraq. The United States would have to cope with the unexpected challenges that would arise from the occupation of Iraq, much as it did with the occupations of Germany and Japan after World War II. The costs and risks of occupation would be high, but they are outweighed by the risks of the status quo that virtually guarantees that Saddam will acquire nuclear weapons—critical means for resurrecting Iraq into a powerful state capable of imposing its will on its neighbors and establishing an empire in the Gulf region.

Should a US military campaign oust Saddam with reasonable dispatch, the United States would be swarmed, at least for a time, by well-wishers who would emerge from the sidelines to proclaim, “We were with you all along,” without so much of a hint of shame. After the fall of Saddam, the establishment of an in-

terim Iraqi government, and the lifting of UN sanctions, European politicians and businessmen—particularly French, German, and Russian—would flock in droves to Baghdad to reestablish their lucrative ties severed by the Gulf War. The Arabs too would open their arms to welcome the Iraqis back into the Arab fold. The Gulf states would look to the new Iraq to counterbalance the Iranians to the east and the Israelis to the west.

The war would come with many downsides and many unforeseen and unintended consequences, as is the nature of all wars. What we can anticipate, though, is that Arab anger with the United States for perceived inequities in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would not substantially ease. This is likely to be the case even with redoubled American efforts to broker an Israeli-Palestinian cease-fire and a negotiated settlement as part of a diplomatic package to prod reluctant Arab partners to support a war against Iraq. Arab resentment against the United States and Israel would be exacerbated if Israel militarily retaliates against Iraq in the course of the war. Arab appreciation for delivering Saddam his deathblow, moreover, would likely diminish as quickly as the appreciation the region showed to the United States for liberating Kuwait. And that appreciation would wear increasingly thin with a prolonged American military occupation of Iraq. The Saudis, in particular, probably would worry that an occupation of Iraq would give the Americans too much sway in the world's oil market and threaten Riyadh's influence and power.

Political courage may well separate President Bush's legacy from that of his predecessor. President Clinton's cruise missile strikes against al Qaeda in Sudan and Afghanistan in 1998 in retaliation for the bombings of the American Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania were a reflection of a President perceived on the world stage as feeble and not of a political weight commensurate with the power of his nation. Clinton's power was sapped by a domestic scandal of his own making—much as Nixon's power had been during Watergate—and he was unable to fully exercise his authority as Commander-in-Chief. This hardly seems to be the case with President Bush. His statement that “you're either with us or against us” may not measure up to the elegance expected by the intellectual elite in the United States and abroad, but its message is well understood in the streets and in the rough and tumble of world politics. As Machiavelli assessed, a nation is safer if it is more feared than loved. The United States has suffered a major blow with the killing of some 3,000 of its civilian citizens on its own soil and must be prepared to do what it takes to ensure that we do not suffer such losses ever again at the hands of a foreign enemy.

President Bush and his national security lieutenants—Vice President Cheney, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, Secretary of State Powell, and National Security Adviser Rice—are all effective, plain-speaking individuals, and they ought to play to their strong suit and speak plainly about Iraq. They should describe an American military campaign to overthrow Saddam as a continuation of the Gulf War—one of necessity, not choice—rather than as a continuation of the war on terrorism set in motion by al Qaeda. In the wake of 11 September, Presi-

dent Bush's decisiveness and determination to destroy al Qaeda has won him well-deserved praise, respect, and confidence from the American people. The Commander-in-Chief may now tap that power to wage war against Iraq, a strategy separate from but enabled by the tragedies of 11 September. The United States should heed Niebuhr's wisdom about the dangers posed by evil men leading nation-states determined to overthrow the balance of power in geopolitical centers of world politics. It is time for the children of light to act.

#### NOTES

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1. Some observers argue that war between nuclear-armed nation-states is nearly impossible because of the grave risks. For a counterargument based on analysis of the security environment in the Middle East and South Asia, see Richard L. Russell, "The Nuclear Peace Fallacy: How Deterrence Can Fail," *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, forthcoming.

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3. David A. Kay, "Iraq Beyond the Crisis du Jour," *The Washington Quarterly*, 21 (Summer 1998), 11.

4. Richard Butler, *The Greatest Threat: Iraq, Weapons of Mass Destruction, and the Growing Crisis of Global Security* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001), p. xvii.

5. Khidhir Hamza with Jeff Stein, *Saddam's Bombmaker: The Terrifying Inside Story of the Iraqi Nuclear and Biological Weapons Agenda* (New York: Scribner, 2000), p. 237.

6. Daniel Byman, "A Farewell to Arms Inspections," *Foreign Affairs*, 79 (January/February 2000), 120.

7. For a critical analysis of policy options for supporting Iraq opposition plans to undermine Saddam's regime, see Daniel Byman, Kenneth Pollack, and Gideon Rose, "The Rollback Fantasy," *Foreign Affairs*, 78 (January/February 1999), 24-41.

8. Kenneth Pollack "Next Stop Baghdad?" *Foreign Affairs*, 81 (March/April 2002), 38.

9. Michael Eisenstadt, "Curtains for the Ba'ath," *The National Interest*, No. 66 (Winter 2001/02), pp. 60-61.

10. George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), p. 442.

11. George H. W. Bush, "Letter to Saddam Hussein," 5 January 1991, Gulf War Exhibit, George Bush Presidential Library.

12. Eliot Cohen, "Iraq Can't Resist Us," *The Wall Street Journal*, 18 December 2001, p. A16.

13. International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance, 2001-2002* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001), p. 134.

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15. *The Military Balance*, pp. 134-35.

16. For an insightful treatment of Iraq's chemical and biological weapons and command and control arrangements, see Timothy V. McCarthy and Jonathan B. Tucker, "Saddam's Toxic Arsenal: Chemical and Biological Weapons in the Gulf Wars," in *Planning the Unthinkable: How New Powers Will Use Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Weapons*, ed. Peter R. Lavoy, Scott D. Sagan, and James J. Wirtz (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 2000), pp. 47-78.

17. *The Military Balance*, p. 134.

18. Cohen, p. A16.

19. For a discussion about the difficulty of destroying Iraq's mobile ballistic missile launchers during the Gulf War, see Richard L. Russell, "CIA's Strategic Intelligence in Iraq," *Political Science Quarterly*, 117 (Summer 2002), 191-208.

20. Pollack, p. 43.

21. Daniel Byman, "Get Ready for a Nasty War in Iraq," *International Herald Tribune*, 11 March 2002.

22. "Who Needs Whom?" *The Economist*, 9 March 2002, p. 30.