



Why Not to Wage War with Iraq

Despite growing opposition, the Bush administration is pushing for a U.S. invasion of Iraq. Before the public and Congress allow such a dangerous and unprecedented use of American military power, they should seriously consider the following:

1. A War Against Iraq Would Be Illegal

The United Nations Security Council resolution authorizing the use of force against Iraq in 1990 applied only to the enforcement of previous resolutions calling for an Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait, nothing more. Iraq remains in violation of some subsequent resolutions, but the United Nations has not authorized the use of force to enforce them. Without the explicit authorization of the UN Security Council or an attack by Iraq against the United States or its allies, a war against Iraq would be illegal.

2. There Is No Hard Evidence Linking Saddam Hussein to Al Qaeda

Reports of an alleged meeting in Prague between an Iraqi intelligence officer and one of the hijackers of the doomed airplanes that crashed into the World Trade Center have been investigated by the FBI, the CIA, and Czech intelligence and were found groundless. None of the hijackers were Iraqi, no major figure in Al Qaeda is Iraqi, and no funds to Al Qaeda have been traced to Iraq. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld has provided no evidence for his assertion that important Al Qaeda operatives are in Iraq under Saddam Hussein's protection. Despite the regime's occasional use of Islamist rhetoric, the decidedly secular ruling Baath party in Baghdad and the Islamic fundamentalist Al Qaeda have long been in vehement opposition to one another. The State Department's latest annual study, *Patterns of Global Terrorism, 2001*, did not list any acts of international terrorism linked to the government of Iraq.

3. There is No Firm Proof that Iraq Possesses Weapons of Mass Destruction

Iraq has certainly developed weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in the past, but the Gulf War and then UN sanctions and inspections (which ended in 1998) reversed and retarded—though did not completely eliminate—its capabilities. The International Atomic Energy Agency has categorically declared that Iraq no longer has a nuclear program. UNSCOM—the UN inspections and monitoring mission in Iraq—reportedly destroyed at least 95% of Iraq's chemical weapons capability, but were unable to account for all of Iraq's biological weapons. Its current biological weapons capacity is therefore less clear. A September 2002 assessment by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) states that “after four years without inspections...Iraq has no nuclear weapons.” The report concludes, however, that Iraq “has extensive biological weapons capabilities and a smaller chemical weapons stockpile,” raising the risk that these could be used against Iraq's neighbors. However, the great improvement in anti-missile defense capabilities by American allies since the Gulf War and the likelihood—also noted in the IISS report—that dangerous biological agents would not likely survive impact, makes Iraq's offensive WMD capability questionable. More fundamentally, experts such as U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Edward Peck argue that Saddam Hussein cares first and foremost about his own survival and presumably recognizes that any effort to use WMD or to pass them on to a terrorist group would inevitably lead to his own destruction. However, with nothing to lose in the event of a U.S. invasion,

the likelihood of Saddam Hussein ordering the use of any WMD he still has at his disposal would dramatically increase.

4. Regional Allies Widely Oppose a U.S. Attack

The 1991 Gulf War was widely viewed as an act of collective security in response to aggression by Iraq against Kuwait and therefore had the support of several important Arab allies. This would not be the case, however, in the event of a new war against Iraq. At the Beirut summit of the Arab League in March, the Arab nations—including Kuwait—unanimously endorsed a resolution opposing an attack against Iraq. In the event of a U.S. invasion of Iraq, there would likely be an outbreak of widespread anti-American protests, perhaps even attacks against American interests. Some pro-Western regimes could become vulnerable to internal radical forces as part of such a reaction.

5. Iraq Is No Longer a Significant Military Threat to Its Neighbors

Iraq's offensive capabilities have been severely weakened by years of bombings, sanctions, and UN-sponsored decommissioning. Its current armed forces are barely one-third their pre-Gulf War strength. Iraq's navy is virtually nonexistent, and its air force is just a fraction of what it was before the war. Military spending by Iraq has been estimated at barely one-tenth of its level in the 1980s, and the belief is that the country has no more functioning missiles. None of Iraq's immediate neighbors have expressed any concern about a possible Iraqi invasion in the foreseeable future. The Bush administration has been unable to explain why today, when Saddam Hussein has only a tiny percentage of his once-formidable military capability, Iraq is considered such a threat that it is necessary to invade the country and replace its leader—the same leader that Washington quietly supported during the peak of Iraq's military capability.

6. There Are Still Nonmilitary Options Available

The best way to stop the potential of Iraq developing weapons of mass destruction would be through resuming United Nations inspections, which—despite episodes of Iraqi noncooperation and harassment—have been largely successful. It was Washington's ill-considered decision to misuse the inspection teams for spying operations and the decision to engage in an intense four-day bombing campaign against Iraq in December 1998 that led Saddam Hussein to cease his cooperation completely. The Iraqi regime has since expressed a willingness to allow the inspections to resume, but the Bush administration has shown little interest in pushing for a resumption of inspections, declaring its intention to invade anyway. In addition, there is no reason why the current emphasis on deterrence could not continue to work, particularly given the strict sanctions already in place on imports of technologies that could be used for weapons production.

7. Defeating Iraq Would Be Militarily Difficult

The U.S.-backed Iraqi opposition is almost exclusively in exile. There is no equivalent of Afghanistan's Northern Alliance to lead the fight on the ground. U.S. forces would have to march on Baghdad, a city of over five million people, virtually alone. Iraq's defensive military capabilities are still strong, since the regime's elite forces—which avoided conflict during the Gulf War and left poorly trained conscripts to do the fighting—are still intact. Unlike the Gulf War, which involved conventional and open combat on a flat desert that allowed U.S. forces to take full advantage of their superior firepower and technology, U.S. soldiers would have to fight their way through heavily populated agricultural and urban areas. To minimize American casualties in the face of such stiff resistance, which would largely come from within crowded urban areas, the United States would likely engage in heavy bombing of Iraqi residential neighborhoods, resulting in very high civilian casualties.

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