

Why the United States Should Not Attack Iraq

by Ivan Eland and Bernard Gourley

Executive Summary

For months the Bush administration has been preparing the country for war with Iraq. The administration has argued that only a forcible regime change can neutralize the threat that Saddam Hussein is said to pose. But the assumptions that underlie the administration's policy range from cautiously pessimistic to outright fallacious. First, there is a prevalent belief that if Iraq is able to obtain nuclear weapons it will inevitably use them. Second, there is a notion that Hussein is totally irrational and cannot be trusted to act in a predictable manner; and, because of that, his leadership creates a substantial risk of instability in the Middle East. Finally, many people in the United States have come to believe that war in Iraq may be the only means of nullifying the threat posed by Iraq's nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons programs.

There are less costly strategies for dealing with Hussein than conducting a war. Hussein, while he may not act morally, is rational in the sense that economists and political scientists use the term.

An examination of his past actions indicates that his principal need is to maintain his own physical and political survival. Using that knowledge, Washington can develop a strategy that would allow the United States to deter Hussein from taking actions detrimental to U.S. national security, without engaging him in warfare.

The key to neutralizing the Iraqi threat is to deter Hussein from aggressive action by sending a clear and credible message of commitment to protecting the United States against any challenge to its security; it is essential to communicate a willingness to massively retaliate in response to attacks against our homeland. This is crucially different from President Bush's message that overthrowing Hussein must be a top priority, regardless of his actual behavior. If Hussein believes that his political survival is being threatened, and there is nothing he can do about it, he may respond in a dangerous and unpredictable manner—with weapons of mass destruction.

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Introduction

The Bush administration is readying plans to remove Saddam Hussein's regime from power in Iraq. Last summer, plans about possible strategies for ending Hussein's rule were leaked to the press. Members of the Bush administration have met with leaders of Iraqi opposition groups to discuss the possibility of ousting Hussein and what an Iraqi government might look like in the aftermath. Vice President Cheney went as far as to tell the opposition leaders that the United States was committed to ousting Hussein and replacing him with a democratic system.¹ On October 11, President Bush received congressional authorization for military action against Iraq. On November 8, he obtained a unanimous UN Security Council resolution that threatens serious consequences if Iraq fails to fully comply with unrestricted weapons inspections and demands for disarmament, which could possibly avert war. While administration officials have not yet irrevocably committed the nation to war, it seems that they have taken the need to remove Hussein as a foregone conclusion.

This paper will examine the assumptions that underlie the Bush administration's conviction that Hussein's ouster is essential for the national security of the United States and will challenge those assumptions on the basis of a close examination of the historical record. Next, the paper will examine the true risks that Iraq poses and to what degree they present a realistic threat. Finally, some policy options will be outlined that will allow the United States to deal with the Iraqi threat without going to war.

The Iraqi Bomb

At the forefront of concerns about Iraq's leadership is its desire to obtain nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) weapons and the belief that its doing so will have disastrous ramifications. At first glance, this appears to be a reasonable enough cause for concern. It

does appear that Iraq is unrelenting in its pursuit of NBC weapons. Although much of Iraq's capability has clearly been damaged, it is known that Iraq has the knowledge and capability to produce quite an array of chemical and biological weapons and their associated delivery systems. The consensus among experts is that Iraq does not yet have a nuclear weapon, but it is working on one.

Iraq has produced chemical weapons such as mustard gas, as well as nerve agents such as sarin, tabun, cyclosarin, and VX.² Iraq has admitted that it produced a number of biological and toxin weapons as well, including botulinum toxin, anthrax spore slurry, and aflatoxin. Iraqi scientists have grown castor beans for the production of the toxin ricin.³ According to Khidir Hamza, the former head of Iraq's nuclear program, who defected in 1994, if Iraq had an adequate amount of fissile material, it could probably manufacture a nuclear bomb in a matter of months.⁴ Hamza has placed Iraq's timeline for obtaining the requisite enrichment technology (gaseous diffusion technology needed to make fissile material from natural uranium) to make its own nuclear fuel for a bomb at two to seven years, depending on what work Iraq has already completed.⁵ In addition, Iraq has developed a number of delivery systems for such weapons, most notably ballistic missiles. Although, without forward deployment, Iraq has no means of reaching the United States with its missiles, they do constitute a substantial regional threat.

Of course there must be more of a basis for concern than the mere acquisition and possession of such weapons. After all, several nations have acquired NBC weapons and are not viewed as nations of concern by our national leadership. India, Pakistan, and Israel are all nuclear powers; Iran is believed to have a nuclear weapons program; and North Korea has admitted having nuclear weapons and an ongoing nuclear program, which is in violation of international agreements. According to the Pentagon, extant and emerging threats include 12 nations with nuclear weapons programs, 13 nations

with biological weapons, 16 nations with chemical weapons, and 28 nations with ballistic missiles.⁶ But no other of those nations is facing the threat of having its leadership overthrown.⁷ Moreover, it is not the case that the only reason Iraq could possibly want NBC weapons is to threaten U.S. security. The possession of those weapons increases Iraq's status as a regional power and helps it to deter regional enemies.

So what makes the Bush administration, and others, pessimistic about the prospects of Iraq using such weapons? Hussein has a history of breaking the international norm against using chemical weapons. First, Iraq used chemical weapons against Iran in 1982 and 1983, during the early part of the Iran-Iraq War. The Baghdad government openly stated that it would use such weapons if Iran pushed the Iraqi army back across the border and continued the fight on Iraqi soil. When Iran did just that, Iraq made good on its promise.⁸ A second use of chemical weapons under Hussein's authority was the unconscionable use of a mix of mustard gas and nerve agents against two Kurdish villages in northern Iraq in 1988.⁹

It is undeniable that Iraq has both sought and used NBC weapons in the past. But is it logical to assume that it will seek to employ such weapons against the United States? The answer is no. Hussein had an opportunity to use chemical weapons against U.S. troops during the Persian Gulf War, and he did not take advantage of it. The lesson to be drawn from this is that Hussein was deterred from using chemical weapons against an adversary capable of massive retaliation. In contrast, he was not deterred from using them against the Iranians and the Kurds who had no ability to retaliate in kind for such actions. After the revolution that deposed Mohammad Reza Shah and brought to power an Islamic theocratic government, Iran decided not to continue the shah's NBC weapons program on religious grounds.¹⁰ (Of course, Iran later resumed NBC research and development.) Hussein showed restraint in not using NBC weapons against U.S. and coalition forces even when faced with an inevitable military

defeat during the Gulf War, because he knew that using chemical weapons on the United States would be inviting disaster (the United States had threatened to retaliate with its huge nuclear arsenal if such agents were used). Although there is little doubt that Hussein has acted immorally, it does not logically follow that he is irrational and cannot be deterred.

Many observers argue that, although the United States may be able to deter Hussein in principle, he has a history of bad decision-making, which makes him prone to stumbling over the brink. Kenneth Pollack made just such an argument in *Foreign Affairs*, stating that, although Hussein may be rational, he is prone to making risky decisions based on information of dubious character.¹¹ While it is certainly true that Hussein is prone to make poor decisions and is not risk averse, he has always stayed clear of actions that would be likely to lead to his removal. There are some boundaries that Hussein won't cross because he knows they will lead to his own political destruction. As Lawrence Freedman and Efraim Karsh, scholars at King's College at the University of London, put it, Hussein will not sacrifice his political survival.¹² That fact can be seen in Hussein's decision to withhold his best fighting units from combat in the Gulf War so that they would be free to protect him.¹³

Let us examine one of the most blatant examples of Hussein's risky strategic maneuvers. In January 1991, Iraq launched several Al-Hussein missiles (an indigenous Iraqi missile based on the SCUD-B) at Israel. That tactic was designed to draw Israel into the fight in hopes of splitting up the coalition, which included several of Iraq's Arab neighbors. Israel, although it has not openly admitted it, is believed to be a nuclear weapons state. Hussein apparently believes that Israel is a nuclear power, judging from comments he has made about Israel's working to maintain a nuclear monopoly in the region. (The comments were made in the aftermath of the Israeli bombing of the Iraqi nuclear reactor in June 1981.)¹⁴ Given that belief, it seems odd

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that Hussein would conduct an attack that might seem to invite nuclear retaliation.

Does Hussein's willingness to attack a nuclear power show that he is excessively prone to risk taking, cannot be reliably deterred, and is likely to stumble into nuclear war? One must first consider why Iraq fired ballistic missiles armed with conventional tips, as opposed to chemical warheads. Hussein was obviously counting on a response from Israel, but he did not want to take an action that would justify the most severe Israeli reaction possible. He realized that there is a strong international norm against using nuclear weapons, and only the most serious threats to national survival will lead to their use. Israel has been quick to state that it would not be the first nation to use nuclear weapons in the region.¹⁵ That statement stands as evidence that Israel understands the seriousness of using nuclear weapons, and it is not likely to respond with nuclear weapons to any attacks that do not put the nation in imminent peril. According to Avner Cohen, Israel had nuclear weapons but did not deploy them in 1973 when Israeli forces were attacked by Egypt and Syria.¹⁶ From that Hussein might conclude that he could taunt the Israelis into some form of measured response without fear of a massive retaliatory strike. Chemical weapons, which are viewed as weapons of mass destruction (WMD), might have incurred a more severe response.

Hussein's Penchant for Invading Other Nations

After the pursuit of NBC weapons, the next most serious concern is Iraq's history of invading other nations. The administration and its supporters worry that if he is left unchecked, Hussein will engage in expansionist behavior that will have dire ramifications for regional stability. The principal impact of such actions on the United States would be a possible reduction in the available supply of oil and the acquisition of yet more

oil wealth by the Iraqi regime.

On September 22, 1980, Iraq invaded Iran—an event that resulted in a destructive eight-year-long war. Almost a decade later on August 2, 1990, Iraq attacked Kuwait, initiating a second Persian Gulf War. In both of those invasions, Iraq wantonly disregarded the international norm against violating another nation's sovereignty. If Hussein is a rational actor, one might wonder how he thought he could get away with such actions.

Were those invasions rational decisions? Again, one must distinguish between rational and moral. Certainly it is not moral to invade a neighbor who has no intention of attacking, but that does not mean it is not rational. Hussein was acting to achieve his goals, and there was adequate reason to expect he could achieve them without facing a substantial risk of defeat. How could he expect that the outcomes of his acts of aggression would be successful? In the case of the invasion of Iran, Hussein recognized that the Iranian regime was very unpopular in the world community after the recent revolution that had installed a theocratic government run by strict fundamentalist Shiite Muslims. America was particularly unhappy with Iran because of the 1979 hostage crisis. According to James Bill and Robert Springborg, two experts on Middle Eastern politics, "Despite the fact that Iraq was clearly the aggressor state, the international community at the UN turned a blind eye to Iran's predicament and Saddam Hussein found himself holding a blank check for aggression."¹⁷ America not only turned a blind eye but proceeded to provide Iraq covert assistance in the form of intelligence information and satellite imagery.¹⁸ The United States also helped Iraq plan attacks on Iranian forces. With Iran as his only opposition (Iraq's Arab and largely Sunni Muslim neighbors were unlikely to intervene to help Persian Shiite Iran), Hussein may reasonably have thought victory would be easy. His military, after all, was technologically superior to Iran's. However, Hussein misjudged the strength of the Iranian resistance.

The invasion of Kuwait, on the other hand, was widely condemned by both regional and Western powers. Given that the United States and the international community disapproved of Iraq's moves against Kuwait, why would Hussein have believed that he could do as he pleased in Kuwait? Surely, he must have realized that he could not win the war if the United States became involved. According to a compelling argument by Janice Gross Stein, a political scientist at the University of Toronto, the reason Iraq was not deterred was that the messages sent by the U.S. administration were "ambiguous and contradictory."¹⁹ Stein points out that at times members of the first Bush administration said that the United States had no particular commitment to assist Kuwait, which Hussein might have read as a green light. Other officials stated that the United States was committed to supporting the free flow of oil and to the sovereignty of the Gulf States.²⁰

One must also consider Iraq's likely calculus in invading Kuwait. Although these reasons were largely ignored by both the media and the politicians planning a response to Iraq's aggression, they should be given due consideration in evaluating the nature of Hussein's decisionmaking. First, Iraq believed that Kuwait was "slant drilling" in the Rumaila oil fields.²¹ Second, Iraq was angered by Kuwait's lack of compliance with production restrictions on oil that had been agreed to by OPEC. The Iraqis therefore thought they were losing money because of such perceived Kuwaiti transgressions. While those are no justification for the full-scale invasion that Iraq carried out, Hussein may well have thought that they would give other nations pause in deciding to get involved. In particular, he may have believed that other oil-producing Arab states might side with him or, at least, remain neutral.

It should be noted that Iraq does not appear to be likely to invade anyone in the near future. This inactivity has not resulted just from Iraq's being in a weakened state in the aftermath of the Gulf War (Iraq has only a fraction of its pre-Gulf War military

remaining) and the harsh economic sanctions and limited military actions that have followed. Hussein likely recognizes that any attempts to violate the sovereignty of other states in the region would lead to a renewal of the coalition that stood against him during the Gulf War. One should not be too quick to believe that Hussein did not learn some lessons from the Gulf War. Lately, he has been seeking favorable relations with most of the other nations in the Persian Gulf region.

Rationality

Hussein's international conduct suggests that he is essentially a rational actor. By examining his past actions we can see that he apparently holds his physical and political survival as paramount among his preferences. Although he is prone to take risky and even foolhardy actions, he always does so with one eye focused on maintaining power over Iraq. This premise, combined with the fact that America has the military might to destroy the Iraqi regime, leads to the conclusion that Hussein can be deterred from attacking America by threat of such destruction. (That is, provided he believes that not conducting aggression will keep him free from such destruction.)

Hussein is clearly concerned about the outcome of an attack by the United States. He is prone to spouting rhetoric about how hard his forces will fight if war occurs. Those statements are likely for domestic consumption both in Iraq and in the United States (in Iraq to show that he is willing to stand up to the United States and in America to convince the U.S. public that President Bush will get their sons and daughters slaughtered). However, the fact that Hussein is so quick to engage in stalling tactics may indicate that he is not ready for a war. His response to U.S. invasion rhetoric was to invite both UN leaders and members of the U.S. Congress to visit Iraq to see what is going on with their own eyes. That apparently concessionary behavior seems to be designed to stave off attack. He

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has also welcomed the UN inspectors back into Iraq to search for weapons of mass destruction. Of course, presuming that Iraq is actually pursuing NBC weapons programs, Hussein is in a Catch-22 if he actually allows the legitimate return of inspectors. If he permits unhindered inspections, the inspectors may find evidence of the programs, and that finding will invite attack if he fails to allow destruction of the weapons. If he fails to allow such inspections, he will incur an attack for violating the terms of his agreement with the United Nations. His solution has been to attempt to stall, while advancing relations with nations other than the United States to isolate American policy.

The True Risks

If Iraq can be deterred from taking overt, direct action deleterious to U.S. security, is there no threat posed by Iraq whatsoever? What if Iraq gives terrorists an NBC weapon? That is a valid point of concern, so analysis of the likelihood of such an event is required. The evening news regularly airs stories about Hussein's giving the Palestinian suicide-bombers' families payment for the deeds of their "martyred" kin. If Hussein is willing to blatantly support terrorists in that way, Bush administration officials ask, how can we be sure he would not supply anti-American terrorists with a "super weapon"? Hussein gets utility from publicly awarding Palestinian terrorists' families money. By giving away that money for all the world to see, Hussein is presenting himself as a leader willing to stand up to Israel and the United States. Such actions gain him support on the "Arab street" and, perhaps in his eyes, move him closer to the coveted status of being the Arab world's premier leader. But Hussein would likely be deterred from giving or selling radical terrorist groups super weapons because any exposure of such activity would invite severe retaliatory attack by the United States. After all, terrorists do not have a return address and Hussein does. The fact that he is

not willing to take an action that will incur a massive retaliatory strike from the United States means he would be unable to take credit for any terrorist bombing using such weapons. Thus, he would get none of the perceived benefit that he gets when he lends public support to terrorists in Palestine. Despite such public support for Palestinian terrorist groups, Hussein has never given them weapons of mass destruction to use against his archrival Israel.

Would it be worth it for Hussein to give away WMD purely for the motive of revenge without being able to claim to the world that he has acted as a defender of the Arab cause? That seems unlikely. First, Hussein trusts only a small handful of people in this world, and they are all people close to him. To trust an outsider with a WMD and to not implicate himself in any use of the weapon seems out of character for Hussein. He has been unwilling to trust his own military commanders with control of NBC weapons.²² Trusting an outside party is even more unlikely—especially an ideologically incompatible one like al-Qaeda that could ultimately turn on him and use the weapons against him.

Second, Hussein has reason to believe that it would be hard for him to get away with such an action without being caught. When the tragic events of September 11, 2001, took place, many people considered Iraq one of the prime suspects. So even if Hussein is not responsible for a terrorist action, he might well get blamed for it; at a minimum, he would probably be a target of any investigation after the use of WMD by terrorists. Because of an alleged April 2001 meeting in Prague between an al-Qaeda member, September 11 hijacker Mohammed Atta, and a man believed to be in the Iraqi intelligence community, there are still some observers who believe that Iraq was involved in the September 11 attacks. But, despite pressure from the Bush administration, the CIA has been unable to confirm the meeting or Iraq's link to the September 11 attacks. Nevertheless, with the Bush administration looking for a good excuse to eliminate Hussein, any evidence, no matter how slim, that tends to incriminate him might

be used as justification for an invasion.

Finally, WMD—especially nuclear weapons—represent substantial investment, and it is unlikely that Iraq would be willing to hand over what it has worked so hard to achieve. Unlike the case of conventional bombs, Iraq cannot just set up an assembly line and start manufacturing one nuclear bomb after another. The Iraqis need to acquire adequate amounts of fissile material, and that is a painstakingly slow process when the world is watching your every move.

Invading Iraq and the War on Terrorism

Although the Bush administration has justified its bellicose posture toward Iraq as part of the war on terrorism, that claim rings hollow. Hussein supports terrorist groups in the Middle East, but most of them do not focus their attacks on U.S. targets. Instead of being part of the war on the terrorist network that remains viable and is still attacking the United States, an unprovoked invasion of Iraq would detract from it and actually cause more retaliatory terrorism against U.S. targets. Scarce intelligence resources, special operations forces, and the attention of policymakers would need to be shifted to an attack on Iraq. Furthermore, invading Iraq would inflame radical Islamists around the world, acting as a virtual recruiting poster for al-Qaeda and destabilizing friendly regimes in the Middle East. An attack on Iraq would play right into al-Qaeda's hands. Terrorists hope for an excessive, intrusive response by their adversary so that they can recruit more supporters. Instead of launching an excursion against Iraq, the Bush administration needs to put all of its resources and efforts into fighting the "enemy at the gates"—al-Qaeda.

Policy Recommendations

To reduce the threat to the United States from Hussein, his decisionmaking process

must be understood. Contrary to popular belief, Hussein makes decisions in the same manner that other rational actors do. That is, he develops a perception of what the payoff will be for a given action, taking into account the expected response of other actors. From this he determines whether the reward for an action outweighs the costs and consequences of the action. As noted earlier, Hussein is prone to misjudgments based on a skewed worldview. That skewed worldview is caused by getting bad information from his small inner circle and by an unrealistic perception of the capabilities of his nation. However, as this paper has argued, some of Hussein's miscalculations have been influenced by mixed messages from external actors.

With that in mind, the most critical policy requirement vis-à-vis Hussein is to send a clear message of commitment to protecting the United States from threats to its security. Hussein must be made to know that if he uses NBC weapons against America, or if he assists others in doing so, he and his regime will be destroyed as the Taliban were. Of course, it appears that Hussein already understands that message because, even in the face of defeat in the Gulf War and for a decade afterwards, he has avoided using biological and chemical weapons against nations with the capability to retaliate. But if there is any doubt that Hussein understands this point, Washington should make it explicit.

On the other hand, the signals that the current administration has been sending may have dire ramifications. By holding meetings with the Iraqi opposition groups, by leaking plans for conducting an invasion, and by the strident rhetoric in which his administration has engaged, President Bush has strongly communicated his intent to get rid of Hussein. A recent issue of *The Economist* quoted John Bolton, under secretary of state for arms control and international security affairs, as saying, "Our policy at the same insists on regime change in Baghdad and that policy will not be altered whether inspectors go in or not."²³ So the message to

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Hussein is, no matter what you do, the U.S. government is coming to eliminate you. That only gives Hussein more incentive to plan a counterattack—in the event of a U.S. invasion—using WMD against U.S. forces, Israel, or Saudi oil fields, or perhaps even smuggling such a weapon onto U.S. soil.

In the face of a threat to his own survival, Hussein will have little incentive to do anything but lash out. Imagine that a burglar breaks into a house and, while he is rooting through a closet, the owner of the house pulls a gun on him. He is startled and caught off guard. The owner might say, “Don’t move or I’ll shoot.” That is a deterrence message, and it is likely the criminal will heed it because he can avoid an extremely undesirable outcome by doing something that is much less objectionable. He is likely to disobey only if he questions the credibility of the owner’s commitment, believes the owner will shoot him regardless of his obedience, or is suicidal. Alternatively, the owner might say, “Put your hands on your head or I’ll shoot.” That is a message of coercion, and it will also probably be followed, unless the same set of conditions as before applies. Instead, what if the owner said, “Stand still so I can shoot you”? The burglar is likely to fight, or try to get away, because he has nothing to lose by doing so. At least if he takes action, he might have slim odds of survival; if he stands still he has no odds of survival whatsoever. That is the position in which Hussein is being put by the Bush administration. There is no “less painful” option that he can follow to avoid the thing he dreads most—the loss of control of his political regime and maybe his life. Under those circumstances, Hussein is very dangerous.

The second crucial policy recommendation is to maintain the highest possible level of intelligence gathering and analysis capability vis-à-vis Iraq. The more eyes are on Iraq, the less likely Hussein will be to think he can get away with taking risky actions. Again, Hussein is prone to making poor decisions, and he may be emboldened to do so if he believes he can take action without the world paying attention. In particular, it would be of

great usefulness to be able to track Iraq’s NBC weapons and delivery system capabilities and to be able to follow Iraqi military movements as they occur. By following military movements closely, the United States will have advance warning if Iraq intends to engage in expansionist aggression.

So collecting more information on Iraq to ascertain its intentions, as well as its capabilities, may be needed. The good news is that Hussein tends to be quite transparent and ham-handed in matters of strategy. In response to a question at a press conference during the Gulf War, Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf accurately stated that Hussein was neither a soldier nor a strategist. Hussein tries to use strategic maneuvers, but what he intends to accomplish is painfully obvious. When he fired missiles on Israel, he was trying to fracture the coalition. When he invited members of Congress to visit Iraq, he was attempting to stall momentum toward his own ouster. When he invited the United States to send officials to Iraq to investigate the pilots that had been missing since the Gulf War, he was attempting to ingratiate himself and stall for time. In short, Hussein has not been prone to using sophisticated strategic ploys, and that should make tracking his intentions easier.

Conclusion

Evidence that Hussein presents an imminent and uncontrollable threat is simply not there. Neither does evidence exist that having Hussein in power is any more threatening than the rule of other despotic tyrants around the world. Hussein’s threat to the United States has been overstated, and so have the increases in U.S. security that would be achieved by an invasion to oust him.

Furthermore, the Bush administration has given little thought to the time, effort, and expense that would be needed to ensure stability in a post-Hussein Iraq.²⁴ If officials in the administration think that once Hussein is out of power opposition groups

will be able to develop a stable government, they are deluding themselves. Despite attempts to portray the opposition groups as unified, they are very disparate and will likely have their own agendas once Hussein has been deposed. Numerous attempts were made to entice one prominent Kurdish leader to come to Washington, but he was apparently unwilling to make an appearance at the recent Iraqi opposition meeting with Bush officials. The opposition groups are unified only in the sense that they all oppose Hussein's regime. They will likely begin bickering once he is deposed.

The costs of a U.S. invasion may be high. Hussein held back his best fighting units during the Gulf War in order to protect himself. In a war to remove him, the Revolutionary Guard troops would be put to full use. One should keep in mind that Hussein would not be the only one in trouble if the United States invaded; there are others who have incentives to fight to the death. The Bush administration's statements about conducting war crimes trials in a postinvasion Iraq increase the incentives for the generals and elite military units to fight until the end. In addition, in the Gulf War, Hussein refrained from using tactics that would draw a massive retaliatory response. This time, faced with his own destruction, he will likely use little restraint.

The U.S. military has the ability to take Baghdad and overthrow Hussein, but it will do so at great cost unless Iraq's elite Republican Guard refuses to fight or a coup occurs before the United States invades. Unfortunately, the U.S. military needs to plan for the worst case, and overly optimistic assumptions could prove to be risky. Urban fighting in Baghdad alone could cause heavy casualties. The question is not whether the United States can defeat Iraq but whether it should and at what cost in lives and treasure.

At a time of economic sluggishness and red ink for the U.S. government, an invasion and long-term occupation of Iraq could cost billions of dollars, bust the budget, and throw the U.S. economy into a tailspin. The Gulf War cost \$80 billion (in 2002 dollars).

Because the United States would probably be faced with a long occupation of Iraq to stabilize the country after the invasion, the cost is likely to be higher this time around. Some analysts estimate the cost at well over \$200 billion. And unlike the case in the Gulf War, little financial support from other nations can be expected to defray the costs.

Despite the furor over Hussein in the world media, there is no reason to believe that removing him from power is critical to American national security. Americans should ask why the United States—half a world away—is more concerned about the Iraqi threat than are Iraq's neighbors. Furthermore, Hussein is exceedingly unlikely to take any provocative actions that would encourage the United States to remove him. Iraq's pursuit of NBC weapons may be a cause for concern, but it is not a sufficient reason for going to war. Many other rogue nations are pursuing such weapons—for example, many observers believe that the erratic North Korean leader, Kim Jong Il, already has enough fissionable material to build at least two nuclear weapons.²⁵ According to the CIA, Hussein is unlikely to use WMD against the United States unless he feels that the forcible halt of his political control over Iraq is going to be brought by a U.S. invasion. Then he could commission Islamist terrorist groups to use such weapons in the United States—the very threat the United States sought to avoid by attacking Iraq in the first place. His aggressive nature may be cause for concern, but it is not a threat to the United States a half a world away. In short, the Bush administration should keep an eye on Iraq's actions and should maintain a deterrence posture vis-à-vis Hussein's regime, but the benefits of war with Iraq are unlikely to outweigh the costs. The United States deterred and contained a rival superpower, which had thousands or nuclear warheads, for 40 years; America can certainly continue to successfully deter and contain a relatively small, relatively poor nation until its leader dies or is deposed. An unprovoked attack on another sovereign state does not square with—and actually undermines—the principles of a constitutional republic.

Evidence that Hussein presents an imminent and uncontrollable threat is simply not there.

Notes

1. Michael R. Gordon, "Iraqi Opposition Gets U.S. Pledge to Oust Hussein for a Democracy," *New York Times*, August 11, 2002, p. A1.
2. Timothy McCarthy and Jonathan 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 Lavoy, Scott Sagan, and James Wirtz (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 52.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 53–54.
4. Khidhir Hamza and David Albright, "Iraq's Reconstitution of Its Nuclear Weapons Program," *Arms Control Today* 28, no. 7 (October 1998), www.armscontrol.org/act/1998_10/daoc98.asp.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
6. U.S. Department of Defense, "Findings of the Nuclear Posture Review," January 9, 2002, p. 5.
7. Despite not openly declaring that they are nuclear powers, India and Pakistan have conducted tests and are therefore known to be. Israel has been very secretive about its nuclear program and has not conducted testing; however, few people doubt Israel's status as a nuclear power. There are also many more nations believed to have chemical weapons programs (for example, Syria and Libya).
8. Gregory Giles, "The Islamic Republic of Iran and Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Weapons," in *Planning the Unthinkable*, p. 81.
9. Scott Ritter, *Endgame: Solving the Iraq Problem—Once and for All* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), pp. 88–89.
10. Giles, p. 81.
11. Kenneth M. Pollack, "Next Stop Baghdad?" *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 2 (March–April 2002): 32–47.
12. Lawrence Freedman and Efraim Karsh, "How Kuwait Was Won," in *Use of Force: Military Power and International Relations*, ed. Robert J. Art and Kenneth N. Waltz, 5th ed. (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), p. 267.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 261.
14. McCarthy and Tucker, p. 57.
15. Avner Cohen, "Nuclear Arms in Crisis under Secrecy: Israel and the Lessons of the 1967 and 1973 Wars," in *Planning the Unthinkable*, p. 109.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 105.
17. James Bill and Robert Springborg, *Politics in the Middle East*, 4th ed. (New York: Harper Collins College Publishers, 1994), p. 385.
18. Bob Woodward, *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA 1981–1987* (New York: Pocket Books, 1987), p. 556.
19. Janice Gross Stein, "Deterrence and Compellence in the Gulf, 1990–91: A Failed or Impossible Task?" *International Security* 17, no. 2 (Fall 1992): 150.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 152.
21. That is, Iraq accused the Kuwaitis of drilling at an angle to access oil pockets that were under territory within Iraq's borders.
22. McCarthy and Tucker, p. 64.
23. "Come and Talk to Us, Says Iraq," *The Economist*, August 10, 2002, p. 41.
24. For a detailed discussion of the challenges likely to be faced by a U.S. postwar occupation of Iraq, see James Fallows, "Fifty-First State," *Atlantic Monthly*, November 2002, www.theatlantic.com/issues/2002/11/fallows.htm.
25. Vladimir Orlov, "Nuclear Programs in North Korea and Iran, Assessing Russia's Position," Center for Strategic and International Studies PONARS Policy Memo no. 178, November 2000, p. 2.

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