

Confronting Saddam: The Challenge Ahead

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Brief Analysis

In confronting the UN Special Commission for the Disarmament of Iraq (UNSCOM), Saddam has two apparently contradictory goals: keeping his weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and lifting the UN sanctions on Iraq. According to UN Resolution 687, Iraq was required to provide a full and final disclosure concerning its WMD programs within 120 days of the passage of the resolution in April 1991. While UNSCOM has been successful in destroying much of Iraq's WMD potential, it has made very little progress regarding Baghdad's biological weapons program and its program to produce the nerve agent VX. Saddam has now had twenty-three days of no inspections to develop additional stocks of these agents. Saddam has achieved some gains in the current crisis. First, he has succeeded in ejecting the UNSCOM inspectors from Iraq. This is politically valuable for him because he has shown that he can defy the United States and the international community with impunity. Second, the recent Russian proposal for an end to the current crisis calls for making UNSCOM more "effective"; this is a euphemism used by Russian Foreign Minister Primakov for changing the composition of UNSCOM and for restricting its functions. Furthermore, Saddam has said that he has received certain guarantees from the Russians that so-called presidential sites would be free from inspection. Third, the Russians may lobby for the imposition of a time limit by which UNSCOM would have to finish its job, and for the separation of the various functions of UNSCOM so that Saddam could obtain certification of compliance on each weapons program separately.

Saddam and the Opposition

Following the Gulf War, the U.S. hoped that the Iraqi military would rise up and overthrow Saddam. This hope was a substitute for an effective policy for dealing with Iraq after the war. An uprising by the military, however, did not happen, for Saddam was aware of the possibility and was able to manipulate the situation internally. There was, though, a popular uprising that managed to take control of fourteen of Iraq's eighteen provinces in the north and the south and parts of the center of the country. Saddam managed to persuade the victorious allies to allow his helicopters to operate and to suppress the uprising. In effect, the U.S. allowed Saddam to destroy the revolution in the hope that a coup by the military would be successful. Last year, Saddam took a major risk by invading Irbil, the headquarters of the opposition. He massed his best troops and the bulk of his armor for the attack, leaving himself exposed to possible coalition air strikes. The fact that Saddam took this risk is a sign of how much he fears the opposition.

Establishing an Iraqi Provisional Government

In March of this year, Secretary of State Albright announced that the United States will not lift sanctions as long as Saddam Hussein is in power. Further, Albright indicated that the U.S. looks forward to a post-Saddam era when the US would assist Iraq with its rehabilitation and its integration into the international community. However, thus far there has been no development of this policy.

If the U.S. were to implement this policy the consequences would be clear. First, the U.S. would move to support the

campaign of the opposition to indict Saddam Hussein as a war criminal. Indicting Saddam is the cornerstone of any strategy in confronting him. An indictment would make it very difficult for civilized nations to deal with him as the head of the government of Iraq. Second, the U.S. could assist an Iraqi provisional government that would be established on Iraqi territory by the opposition. The provisional government would be a magnet for discontented Iraqis, and would offer a framework for the opposition groups to achieve their objectives. The idea of a provisional government, though less viable now than in the past, is still doable. The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) could be attracted to this effort, and with U.S. leadership and Turkish assistance, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) would likely be willing to work with a provisional government as well.

Forming the Provisional Government

First, the opposition groups should consult Western and regional powers about the formation of the provisional government and how to acquire the wherewithal for the success of this government. The government needs a secure area from which to operate; this secure area currently exists in the north and south of Iraq but it needs to be developed. This can be done in the south by creating an armor-free zone, an idea proposed by former Secretary of Defense Perry in 1994. The south holds numerous oil reserves which can be used to fund the operation. However, an immediate source of funding is necessary for establishing the provisional government; this funding can come from the \$4.5 billion in Iraqi assets frozen around the world-\$800 million of which is held in the United States. Once installed, the provisional government could attract army and Republican Guard units to the opposition. The issue is not a lack of popular support for the opposition but rather the need for resources to create an effective organization that can get rid of Saddam.

Linkage with the Peace Process

On July 17, Saddam Hussein made a speech in which he called on Turkey to stop supporting U.S. troops in Operation Northern Watch, announced that UNSCOM must end its inspections because Iraq had complied with the UN resolutions, and called on the Palestinians to threaten and weaken the "Zionist entity". With this speech, Saddam introduced a connection between getting rid of the threat within the country and then moving onto the other main arena of tension in the Middle East: the Arab-Israeli conflict. If Saddam emerges from the current crisis in a stronger position, he will move in the direction of upsetting the Middle East peace process in whatever way he can. Iraq straddles the Levant and the Gulf and it can act as a spoiler in both regions. Saddam intends to play this role to the fullest extent possible.

Sanctions

The UN sanctions on Iraq are not good for the United States, for the Iraqi people, or for the region. This state of confrontation that has lasted for seven years is destructive and the consequences of the sanctions have been felt economically and politically throughout the Gulf. The Iraqi people have endured great hardships but the easing of sanctions will not alleviate their suffering. There is no connection between Saddam receiving more funds and the Iraqi people getting more food. Saddam has demonstrated that whenever he has extra revenue he will use it for his weapons programs and not for humanitarian needs. A prime example of this is UN Resolution 986 which provides \$2 billion every six months for Iraq to buy food and other humanitarian supplies. Prior to the resolution, Saddam bought the minimum amount of food necessary to enable the population to subsist. Once Resolution 986 was enacted, he dramatically cut back on food subsidies, instead using the extra money to smuggle arms. The United States should work with the Iraqi opposition to bring about an end to the regime of Saddam Hussein, so that the suffering of the Iraqi people may finally cease.

This Special Policy Forum Report was prepared by Eytan Fisch.

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