

The Crisis with Iraq: Options for U.S. Policy

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Brief Analysis

Saddam Husayn probably had several motives in seeking to disrupt UN weapons inspections. First, he sought to undermine the effectiveness of the UN weapons inspectors, if not expel them altogether, because they are the main obstacle to his efforts to transform Iraq into a regional power. Second, Saddam currently has no means of rebuilding his conventional military; on the other hand, Iraq could produce significant amounts of nonconventional weapons in a matter of weeks if weapons inspections and monitoring were to cease, and he wants to preserve whatever nonconventional capabilities he can. Third, in the past year and a half, the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) has made a major push to uncover Baghdad's "concealment mechanism," meaning those groups and individuals from Saddam's security forces-like the Special Republican Guard, Special Security Organization, and the General Intelligence Directorate-responsible for hiding Iraq's remaining nonconventional weapons. Saddam would like to prevent UNSCOM from learning how these organizations function. Finally, safeguarding Iraq's surviving non-conventional capabilities is a top priority of the regime, and in the regime's inner circles, Saddam would portray even a minor success in this area as a vindication of his policies.

The timing of the current crisis between Baghdad and UNSCOM probably derived from Saddam's frustration with the new UNSCOM chief, Ambassador Richard Butler, who dashed Saddam's hopes that the change in leadership at UNSCOM would result in a quick lifting of sanctions. Furthermore, Baghdad saw the long-standing rift between the U.S. and the French and Russians over Iraq (and Iran) growing wider and deeper, and he evidently thought that he could exploit these differences. Finally, Saddam probably calculated that, at worst, the U.S. would do no more than to fire a few dozen cruise missiles at inconsequential targets which he would be willing to endure if this enabled him to emasculate UNSCOM and show that America can not impose its will on him. Although UNSCOM has done a remarkable job ferreting-out Iraq's nonconventional weapons arsenal, there are still important outstanding issues.

Surface-to-surface missiles. UNSCOM has accounted for 817 of 819 of the Soviet-origin Scud-B missiles sent during the 1980's. In addition to the possibility that it retains two Scud-B missiles, current concerns focus on the possibility that Iraq may possess a number of indigenously produced Scud-type missiles as well.

Chemical and biological weapons. Iraq may have stores of Mustard and Sarin that it produced before the 1991 Gulf War, and it has admitted to having VX nerve agent. UNSCOM cannot verify Iraqi claims that it destroyed all of its stocks of these agents. Moreover, Iraq has the capability to produce considerable quantities of biological weapons in a matter of days, and chemical weapons in a matter of weeks.

Nuclear. The IAEA believes that Iraq's nuclear weapons production infrastructure has been destroyed. The main remaining threat is that Iraq could acquire fissile material from the former Soviet Union or elsewhere, and turn these materials into weapons without the knowledge of UNSCOM.

Although UNSCOM's inspections would not, strictly speaking, be hurt by the loss of American inspectors, the commission could not operate effectively without the U2 flights. These missions provide wide area photographic coverage of inspection sites before and during inspections, revealing attempts to conceal weapons and production capabilities. However, allowing Saddam to dictate the composition of the inspections teams would set a very dangerous precedent which would no doubt invite further challenges by Saddam and further attempts to obstruct UNSCOM.

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The U.S. response to Iraq's provocations must be crafted to allow the U.S. to obtain its goals while preventing Saddam from obtaining his own. Iraq's goals are to undermine the inspections regime, fracture the international coalition, and make the U.S. look weak and uninterested in containing Iraq. The international community has been willing to go along with the sanctions and inspections regimes only to the extent that the U.S. has shown itself willing to carry most of the weight. If the U.S. appears uninterested, the monitoring regime will fall apart. For its part, the U.S. has two principal goals. The cohesion of the international coalition must be maintained. At the same time Saddam must be aware that the U.S. will do whatever is necessary to contain him, alone if necessary. Although the optimal solution would be for the Security Council to respond decisively, Gulf stability is a vital interest of the United States and Saddam Husayn has demonstrated that he is a threat to the stability of the Gulf.

Diplomatic options. There are at least four possible diplomatic responses to the recent Iraqi provocations.

- The UN could suspend Iraq from all UN-related forums (such as its Human Rights Commission) and suspend Iraqi nationals from UN related organizations.
- It could limit the size of Iraqi missions and embassies abroad.
- It could ban Iraq from the UN General Assembly until such time as Baghdad complies with all UN regulations.
- The UN could ban states from issuing visas to Iraqi nationals. Because these options could only be enacted by the UN, they would unmistakably demonstrate the solidarity of the coalition while handing Iraq another defeat. The greatest problem with the diplomatic option, however, is that Iraq is already under an extremely comprehensive set of sanctions and still Saddam refuses to comply with the UN resolutions demands. This suggests that nothing short of military force will be likely to convince him to back down.

Military options. Unfortunately, recreating the status quo as of March 1991 and finishing the job of the Gulf War by eliminating Saddam Husayn is not a viable option. The recent actions by Saddam lead us to believe that he is willing and able to absorb or endure a cruise missile strike by the U.S. similar to previous ones. Consequently, if the U.S.

decides to pursue a military operation-with or without the UN-it will have to inflict a great deal more pain on Saddam than the last time. There are a variety of possible target sets that could cause Saddam such pain if they were destroyed.

- Hide sites for non conventional weapons. Of course there could be a high risk of civilian casualties near some sites so intelligence would have to be good.
- Republican Guard and Special Republican Guard barracks. Here the aim would be to convince these units that they will suffer for Saddam's continued recalcitrance..
- Airfields. Iraq still has jet fighters in their arsenal. The means of delivery to attack these targets is not as important as the choice of target itself.
- Facilities associated with Saddam personally. Examples would include his palaces or government buildings in his home town of Tikrit.

Recommendations. It is important for the U.S. give diplomacy a chance, to try to keep the international coalition together and retain the inspections and sanctions regime intact. These are the greatest limitations on Saddam's power. Since Saddam's real goal was to fragment the coalition, if the U.S. could act in concert with the UN it would be a real victory. At the same time, diplomacy also needs to be used to lay the groundwork for force. If the U.S. does use force it would be much easier to if we could honestly say that all diplomatic efforts had been exhausted first. The best option for new sanctions on Iraq would be to ban it from the UN until Baghdad complies with the UN resolutions. If all else fails, the U.S. should act unilaterally and strike a painful blow to Saddam. Although the U.S. diplomatic victories have bought some time, this crisis cannot be allowed to drag on for too long. Time is ultimately on Saddam's side, and if the Security Council cannot find a way to compel Saddam's compliance through diplomacy, the U.S. must force him to do so.

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