

# What If Saddam Accepts?

Feb 20, 1991



## Brief Analysis

If Saddam Hussein accepts the Soviet peace proposal, President Bush will face a difficult dilemma. The President will have to choose between accepting terms for an Iraqi withdrawal which could well leave Saddam in power with much of his military capability intact and rejecting the Soviet terms with all the potential that could have for splitting the superpowers and generating Soviet-American tensions not seen since the end of the Cold War. But one way out of the dilemma could be to focus on cease-fire terms.

### Rejecting the Soviet Proposal

The first option open to the United States would be to argue that Saddam's acceptance of the Soviet proposal does not meet the requirements of the UN Security Council resolutions. This, combined with stepped-up military pressure, would make crystal clear to Saddam that a failure to commit to withdrawal without strings would only lead to a military collapse with all that would portend for the future of his regime. Assuming that Iraq's proposal to withdraw from Kuwait stemmed from growing desperation over the military situation, Saddam's acceptance of the Soviet proposal for withdrawal would rob the battered Iraqi army of any remaining will to fight for Kuwait. Thus a firm American position backed by increased military pressure might lead either to a quick Iraqi diplomatic capitulation or a military collapse.

But if the United States rejected the Soviet proposal it would also run several risks. First, it would jeopardize the U.S.-Soviet cooperation which is the cornerstone of the international anti-Saddam coalition. This could lead the Soviet Union to express outright opposition to continued prosecution of the war. Soviet backing for Saddam Hussein in these circumstances could have severe repercussions for Soviet-American relations as well as for American policy in the region. Second, a superpower split could lead to further fraying of the coalition, perhaps generating diplomatic efforts at the United Nations to support Iraq and undermine the sanctions regime.

### Building on the Soviet Offer

Alternatively, President Bush could indicate that the Soviet approach provided an interesting starting point but that, apart from rejecting any linkage to the Arab-Israeli dispute, the plan required certain specific refinements -- refinements that would make it consistent with UN Security Council Resolutions and Bush's stated objectives. For example, the President could indicate that he would be willing to authorize discussions with Iraq about a cease-fire once it accepted the following additional conditions: restoration of Kuwait's legitimate government;

- Iraqi payment for damages caused to Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and others;
- more extensive intrusive inspection of Iraqi chemical and nuclear weapons facilities;
- limitations on the size of the Iraqi armed forces;
- Iraqi renunciation of all territorial claims against its neighbors.

Until such time as Iraq accepted these conditions, the air campaign could continue -- although the United States and its coalition partners might temporarily delay the ground campaign pending an Iraqi response. Such an approach

might head off a diplomatic confrontation with the Soviet Union and delay a rally in support of Iraq at the UN. However, it does run the risk of the "slippery slope" -- once the United States accepts the Soviet proposal in principle, it may enter into a bargaining process which at worst could provide Saddam Hussein with the political victory he seeks and at best might make it impossible to launch a ground war.

#### Conditions for a Cease-Fire

If Saddam does accept the Soviet proposal for Iraqi withdrawal, a third alternative could be to focus the negotiations on the cease-fire terms. By definition, the Soviet proposal does not commit the United States in any way to end the fighting; at best it would establish the precondition -- Iraqi agreement to withdraw unconditionally from Kuwait -- for a cease-fire. Since the major allied participants in the fighting (Britain, France, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria and Turkey) all appear to share America's objective of leaving Saddam so weakened that he is no longer able to present a threat to his neighborhood, it should be relatively easy to maintain a solid front on the following cease-fire terms:

- immediate return of all coalition prisoners of war;
- retreat of Iraqi forces to specified locations;
- timetable for the speedy withdrawal of Iraqi forces;
- amounts and types of equipment which may be withdrawn.

These conditions will be designed to utilize the point of maximum American leverage -- the moments before a cease-fire -- to enforce allied demands in those areas which may be most difficult to achieve at a future point. The return of POWs is one clear example; the United States simply cannot allow itself to set this issue aside at the moment of maximum leverage in order to enter into negotiations at some future point.

In terms of promoting regional stability, an even more critical issue will be whether the United States can use the process of negotiating a cease-fire to reduce the threat that Iraq will be able to pose to its neighbors. A speedy withdrawal leaving much of Iraq's equipment behind, especially its armor and artillery, will make it extremely difficult for Iraq to reconstitute a significant military threat for a considerable period of time. Similarly, an insistence that Iraqi forces withdraw well beyond the border with Kuwait and Saudi Arabia -- a demand that King Fahd voiced today -- will provide an added measure of security to these two vulnerable neighbors.

Failure to insist on these terms could either mire American ground forces in the region for a prolonged period or permit Iraq to take revenge on its neighbors in the near-term. Conversely, the achievement of these cease-fire conditions would make it clear to the Arab world and the Iraqi people that Saddam had lost not only Kuwait but also his military muscle -- the very thing on which his political survival depends.

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