

# Saddam's Strategy: Turning the U.S. Hedgehog into a Fox?

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## Brief Analysis

All observers agree that the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait caught the United States by surprise. By the same token, the U.S. reaction to the invasion was equally, if not more, unexpected by Saddam Hussein. Given the policy of appeasement the Bush Administration pursued toward Iraq prior to August 2, Saddam can legitimately complain that he had every reason to believe the United States would not object so strenuously to his move.

The action the United States promptly took, and subsequently reinforced, has put Saddam in a tight spot. But since the age of twenty-one -- when he took part in an attempt to murder the then-dictator of Iraq -- Saddam has been accustomed to living dangerously and extricating himself from situations equally as perilous as the one he now confronts. How then might he attempt to get out of this particular tight spot?

The cool intransigence Saddam has so far displayed suggests he believes that U.S. threats are indeed mere threats which will not be acted on. The Americans, in his view, have no stomach for a fight. And despite the continuing build-up of U.S. forces, Saddam seems to be persisting in this view. A war might indeed break out because -- as has happened frequently in the past -- he will go on misreading his opponents' mind or determination until it is too late.

Should Saddam, however, become convinced that the United States means business, how might he attempt to make the best of a very weak position? What steps might he take to emerge not only with his power intact -- which he has in any case been promised if he gives up Kuwait in its entirety -- but also with some advantages which will enhance his ability to fight another day -- as we might expect someone with his character and record to be determined to do?

In attacking Iran in 1980, and in subsequently invading Kuwait, Saddam intended to make Iraq the most powerful country not only in the Gulf, but in the whole Middle East. The Iranian venture proved to be one fiasco, while Kuwait might prove to be another. Saddam, however, might seek to obtain a political advantage that would enhance Iraq's regional standing, by acting in another direction.

## Linkage

A clue to his possible actions may lie in some of the tactics he has employed since invading Kuwait. In order to undermine the U.S. position against Iraq, Saddam has sought to mix up the issue of Kuwait with other Middle Eastern problems. The ancient Greek poet Archelaos wrote that the hedgehog knows one thing, while the fox knows many things. If in the Kuwaiti affair the United States has been a hedgehog -- intent only on making Saddam disgorge Kuwait -- Saddam's strategy is to persuade the hedgehog that he is, or should be, a fox. Thus, in any "discussion" -- to use the administration's locution -- between him and Secretary of State James Baker, having bowed to the demand that he should give up Kuwait, Saddam might bring up two peripheral issues and seek to obtain a promise of U.S. action on both.

In so doing, Saddam would only be taking up promises hinted at more or less explicitly by various parties in the months since August 2. The first issue concerns an international conference on the Arab-Israeli issue. The French President and the European Community have made it no secret that they favor such a conference and that if only

Saddam would leave Kuwait -- or even indicate that he intends to do so -- then such a conference could be discussed or set up.

President Bush's vague language when addressing the UN in September might also be read as a hint going in the same direction. Israel has resisted such a conference in the belief that it is a device that will be used to coerce her. Israel's opponents share exactly the same belief. If their hope is realized through Saddam's "discussions" with the United States, he would be well on the way to becoming the hero of the Arab world. In such circumstances, his present Arab opponents -- Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Syria -- would find it very difficult to stop the Saddam bandwagon.

He would become even more of a hero if he obtained a U.S. commitment that not only Iraq, but also all other Middle Eastern states, would give up the possibility of possessing nuclear arms. Last week Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze threw out such a suggestion, without objection by the United States. If, as is generally assumed, Israel does have nuclear weapons, and if Shevardnadze's suggestion becomes a reality, then this would have dramatic consequences for Israel's deterrence posture, leaving it much less able to fend off an attack by its opponents. If this happens, Saddam might think, can an Iraqi-led coalition against Israel be far behind?

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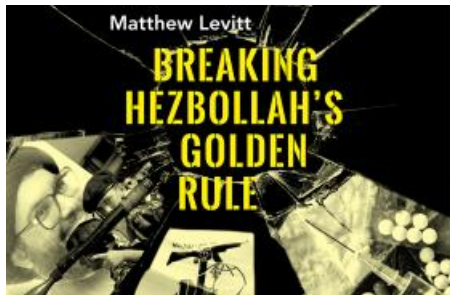
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