

# The Post-Thanksgiving Agenda:

## U.S. and Soviet Policy

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### Brief Analysis

## U. S. Policy

President Bush has made important strides in tackling the Gulf crisis during the past two weeks, consolidating his coalition and preparing the groundwork for Security Council approval of the use of force. He has begun to create an offensive option that will support coercive diplomacy or ensure military victory. While exhibiting characteristic caution, he has begun to prepare the American people for the possibility of war. Most importantly, he has begun to persuade Saddam Hussein that the United States is serious about securing Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait.

As the chance for war grows, approval of the President's approach has dropped among the American public and Congress. But there is no doubt the President can continue to use coercive diplomacy for at least the next several months. Indeed, there is little doubt that the other available options -- withdrawal or a declaration of war -- would be far less popular with the American public.

President Bush's approach has been reinforced by Saddam Hussein's reactions. There has been little attention to the fact that the threat to use force has compelled Saddam to take dramatic measures to influence U.S. policy. His offer to release all foreign hostages indicates how seriously Saddam perceives the U.S. military threat. Understanding that the most likely time for military action is rapidly approaching, Saddam hopes that if he can buy time until spring he may eliminate the threat of war.

Saddam's decision to increase troop deployments in the South should also be understood in this light. Because the U.S. previously responded to Iraqi troop build-ups with additional timeconsuming deployments, Saddam may have reasoned that another Iraqi build-up could prevent an American attack this winter. Thus the announcement of a troop build-up of dubious military value.

The President's coercive diplomacy strategy may work provided he can continue to persuade Saddam that the U.S. will go to war unless Iraq leaves Kuwait. After Thanksgiving and his return from the Gulf, the President will need to keep the following items on his agenda:

- securing a UN Security Council decision on the use of force. Security Council approval would provide a cover for military action; extended delay could confound the President's strategy.
- finding a way to secure Congressional and public support for the threat to use force. Given his approach to the UN

the President cannot do less at home. He must further concentrate on providing a compelling rationale to the American public.

- heightening Saddam's concerns. The President must find other means to threaten Saddam to increase his incentive for pulling out of Kuwait.

What the President must avoid are steps that play into Saddam's hands. He cannot permit attention to be focused on the hostage issue or the Arab-Israeli conflict. And while he must return to the Security Council, he cannot allow that body to tie his hands. If he plays his cards well, the President can succeed.

### Soviet Policy

President Bush's consultations in Paris with Mikhail Gorbachev did not result in Soviet agreement to support a UN resolution authorizing the use of force to evict Iraq from Kuwait. This does not represent a fundamental split in U.S.-Soviet approaches to the crisis, however, but rather a difference in tactics and timing that should be ironed out next week during discussions in the Security Council.

Two weeks ago, in Moscow, Gorbachev's message to Secretary of State James Baker was clear: the Soviet Union intends to maintain a unified stance with the United States on the crisis. This not only includes continued support for the goal of reversing Saddam Hussein's aggression, but also, if necessary, on using force to achieve that objective.

Before explicitly endorsing the military option at the UN, however, the Soviets have certain requirements. First, in the area of appearances, Moscow wants a resolution authorizing force to be seen as arising out of the considered deliberations of the Security Council; they are sensitive to the charge of being railroaded into accepting an idea stamped "made in the U.S.A." The withholding of immediate consent from Bush and Baker in Paris, and Shevardnadze's suggestion -- presented as a Soviet idea -- that "the time has come for the Security Council to take stock of things. . . and if there is a need, adopt a new resolution," allows Moscow to appear as a major actor in the crisis that is helping to shape and lead international opinion and behavior, rather than simply following the dictates of Washington.

A second Soviet demand regards the substance of the UN resolution. Because Moscow believes that sanctions and diplomacy should be given more time to work, it does not want to endorse a resolution that simply gives the United States carte blanche to attack Iraq immediately. As a result, in its effort to secure Soviet acquiescence, the United States has had to do more work on developing the specific wording of a resolution than it originally thought would be necessary. The idea now is to lay out a timetable for Iraqi withdrawal -- say, two to three months -- after which force can be used. While this would address Moscow's desire that more time be allowed for exploring a peaceful solution, it is also consistent with America's timetable for completing the build-up of an offensive force in Saudi Arabia.

Moscow's symbolic and substantive concerns have certainly slowed the administration's effort to gain Soviet support for a UN resolution authorizing force, but they have by no means detailed it. These are tactical obstacles, not fundamental rifts, that are likely to be overcome in next week's discussions at the Security Council. Indeed, the fact that the Soviets have now committed themselves to discuss a resolution at the UN suggests they have also decided to ultimately support it, rather than be seen as opposing the United States. The Soviets do want the appearance of being an independent actor, but their behavior throughout the crisis indicates that, at the end of the day, they have made a strategic choice to follow the U.S. lead. So long as this remains the case, President Bush's willingness to be patient with Moscow and go the extra mile in addressing its concerns remains the correct course to follow.

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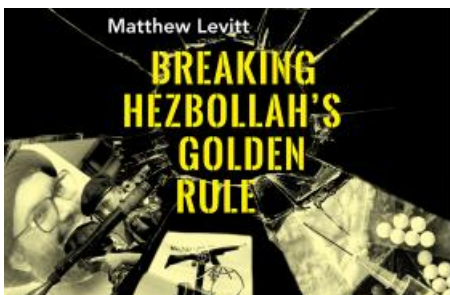
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