

The Iraq Crisis and Regional Arms Control

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Brief Analysis

One of the most controversial statements during this crisis was Secretary of State James Baker's call for a new Persian Gulf security framework. If Saddam Hussein and/or Iraq's military might survive this confrontation, local states will face continued threats. For them to cooperate with the United States now they must feel more secure about avoiding Iraqi vengeance in the future.

American leaders have argued that arms control measures can be employed to limit Iraq's military capabilities no matter how the Gulf crisis turns out. An Iraq possessing nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them would be a nightmare for both its neighbors and the United States.

Iraq's former weapons suppliers, such as the USSR and France, have expressed support for international constraints. But would these and other countries stick to such promises after a crisis? Iraqi weapons development may be slowed, but its combination of oil wealth and technological competence will ensure that a determined Iraq can eventually obtain the weapons it desires, including nuclear, chemical, biological, and missile systems.

Possible Constraints for Iraq

Ideally, post-crisis constraints on Iraq would include:

- Iraqi agreement to abandon its chemical, nuclear, missile, and biological weapons programs and permit highly intrusive international inspection to guarantee compliance. Iraq would also agree to limitations on the size and location of its conventional forces;
- An international embargo on technology transfers to Iraq to prevent resumption of its strategic weapons programs. Conventional arms suppliers would also agree to severe limitations on the transfer of advanced weapons systems to Iraq.

Neither of these elements appears fully attainable. In the first place, it is virtually inconceivable that Iraq would abandon its strategic weapons programs or allow intrusive inspections. Instead, a Saddam-led Iraq would probably focus greater attention on acquiring capabilities that would intimidate neighbors and deter international action against Iraq.

With respect to international controls, there is somewhat greater hope. The international community may restrict some arms sales to Iraq for an extended period and it would be possible to enforce such sanctions with some degree of assurance. But Iraq may circumvent such sanctions for its French and Soviet-origin equipment. A great many countries now produce components for Soviet-style weapons and many others are legitimate users of French-origin equipment; Iraq could easily identify potential suppliers.

There is likely to be considerable international agreement that Iraq should not be allowed to acquire certain types of technology. However, while such an embargo might slow Iraqi weapons development, one cannot be optimistic that it would be effective in the long run. Ever since the development of gunpowder, countries have tried to restrict the transfer of military technology -- they have rarely succeeded.

Iraq's Assets for Evading Sanctions

Iraq has already had extensive experience in evading export controls and has trained agents and extensive contacts among the "techno-mercenary" community of engineers and scientists willing to sell their skills for the right price.

Most importantly, once Iraq resumes oil exports it will be able to generate substantial income to support such programs. Iraq has the second largest oil reserves in the world, and was determined to increase its share of the OPEC pie before the current crisis. Even if Iraq only matched its 1989 revenue levels, it would receive more than \$10 billion per year and could easily devote at least \$1 billion to strategic weapons. It would not be difficult for Iraq to conceal such expenditures in its defense budget or in other secret government accounts.

With large amounts of money, Iraq should be able to obtain virtually any technology that it wishes to acquire. International sanctions will slow Iraq's efforts and raise their cost, but all of our experience with technology and export controls during the past decade suggests that it is almost impossible to prevent a well-funded, knowledgeable purchaser from illicit acquisition of strategic technologies.

The United States-led effort to impose an arms blockade on Iran during the Gulf War -- Operation Staunch -- provides a vivid example of the potential difficulties. Despite many successes, Operation Staunch did not prevent Iran from acquiring armaments. Some countries, such as China and North Korea, refused to enforce the embargo. Indeed, China supplied Iran with Silkworm anti-ship missiles, which posed a direct threat to U.S. naval forces in the Persian Gulf. Similarly, North Korea provided its version of the Scud B surface-to-surface missiles.

Iranian agents also were able to make illegal purchases of equipment and weapons. Use of false end-user certificates and intermediaries willing to disguise the intended destination of purchases made it possible for the Iranians to acquire munitions even from countries that forbade arms sales to Iran. In some cases, they acquired critical components for equipment purchased from the United States from out of U.S. military warehouses. For the right price it was possible to find people willing to break export control laws.

Similarly, the Soviet Union had considerable success in acquiring Western technology for its military. Despite COCOM restrictions, Warsaw Pact countries were able to obtain a wide variety of strategically important technologies for their military industries. With respect to strategic weapons, Pakistan demonstrated a capability to evade export controls and even obtain important components from American companies.

Thus, if Iraq's defense establishment and oil production facilities remain intact, there is every reason to expect that it will be able to pursue strategic weapons programs. Even assuming that the United States achieves all of its stated objectives in the current crisis, we could face the prospect for an even more severe confrontation with Iraq in the future.

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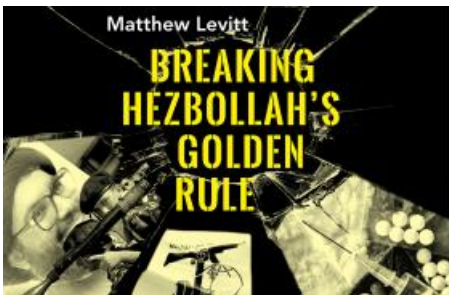
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