

# The Regional Implications of Pursuing 'Regime Change' in Iraq (Part II)

Oct 4, 2002



## In-Depth Reports

In order to have my remarks put in the right context, I would rephrase the title of this session as "The Regional Implications of Regime Change in Iraq as a Result of External Military Action." Were change to come as a result of other actions -- by the Iraqi people or by God -- the vast majority of our worries would not be valid.

Regime change, should it come, would have several implications for the region -- some shared, some specific to individual countries. My aim here is to offer a general sense of regional sentiment on the issue with a specific focus on the implications for Jordan.

One of the most important realities is the Palestinian situation and its impact on how people view the Iraq debate. Over the past two years, the region has undergone obvious radicalization as a result of the current intifada. This is important when we talk about regional attitudes toward the Iraq issue. The radical groups that have gained currency in the past two years welcome the continuation of the cycle of violence and counterviolence, whatever its origin. Hence, the people of Jordan and the rest of the region do not accept public statements by officials supporting military action against Iraq.

Because of our proximity to both Iraq and Palestine, we Jordanians feel the impact of both situations. That does not mean there is great support for Saddam Husayn or his regime among the Jordanian public. Even those who supported Saddam strongly in 1990 are more receptive today to criticism against him and his policies of the last two decades.

But it is also true that the predominant perception in the region is that there is a double standard. People -- the press in particular -- refer on a daily basis to what is being published in Israeli and American media reports about calls coming from Israel to encourage the campaign against Iraq. Indeed, many such reports about U.S.-Israeli cooperation against Iraq are translated and published in the Arab press the next day. So, the debate in Israel and in the United States is being followed and is affecting regional views.

In Jordan, we have to be concerned about "the day after" -- not just the day after regime change in Iraq, but the day after the start of military action. The government has begun to prepare its people. There is a feeling among Jordanians that their country has done all it can to avert war and that Iraq is now responsible for fully implementing all Security Council resolutions and allowing the inspectors to return. By and large, this is acceptable to the Jordanian people. This is different from the war option.

The potential economic impact of war is very important as well. It is on everyone's mind in Jordan. Jordan receives all of its oil supplies from Iraq. At today's market price, this represents a value of \$1 billion. There is a grant component to this amount as well as a concessional price, and Jordan pays Iraq through exports; in fact, our exports to Iraq amount to 20 percent of our overall exports. The transportation sector will be severely hit, since one-third of it is devoted to business with Iraq. Jordan's foreign reserves will also be severely affected. Moreover, the foreign exchange price of Jordan's currency will be put under increased pressure. There might be capital flight as well, at

least at the beginning. In general, I expect the fiscal deficit to increase by 5 percent and the growth rate to fall sharply as soon as military action is launched. So, there is a major economic component to potential military action.

Jordan is also worried about an influx of refugees from Iraq. We intend to provide, in that case, humanitarian services on Iraqi territory, rather than allowing refugees to flood into Jordan. We did not experience an influx of Iraqi refugees in 1991, but we did have an influx of more than 1 million third-country nationals cross through Jordan. That influx was handled smoothly, but we will not allow Iraqi refugees to cross the border in large numbers. Our previous experience in the region teaches us that refugees do not go home easily.

There is also serious concern among the Jordanian and wider Arab public that we will see harsh Israeli measures against the Palestinians. More generally, all countries in the region will be under serious pressure. That pressure will become stronger the longer the military action lasts. The principle of changing a regime through external military force will negatively affect the Arab order and will also put pressure on countries that enjoy good relations with the United States. The opposition groups -- and here we are not talking about democratic opposition groups; we are talking about groups that oppose the existence of regimes -- will take advantage of the situation. Judging from the experience of the last two years and from the previous Gulf War, they will definitely benefit.

The territorial integrity of Iraq is another important element in people's thinking, as well as a source of great concern. Few in the region believe that military action will lead to the democratization of Iraq. There is no guarantee that overthrowing the Iraqi regime will open the way for positive change. Change may be chaotic. It may get out of control. It will definitely lead to the growth of terrorism, perhaps even affecting U.S.-Jordanian efforts to combat terrorism. The Arab press is also raising serious questions about whether it is in Israel's interest to have a democratic Iraq.

Personally, I think that the post-Gulf War sanctions have allowed Saddam's regime to sustain and concentrate its power. The goal of preventing Saddam from acquiring key components for Iraq's weapons of mass destruction program is less important in light of the fact that the regime has been allowed to persevere. We said this at the beginning of the implementation of sanctions, and we are now saying that war will have a long-term negative impact in the region.

Having said that, I must emphasize that Jordan values its relations with the United States very highly. We are keen to maintain and develop these relations. Jordan will continue to act as a close ally of the United States in the war against terror. As a friend, though, we are saying that there are other options apart from war. Effective inspections, with a role for certain Arab countries to affect the Iraqi position, would definitely be a better option. This approach could lead to an openness that would allow the Iraqi people to determine their own future.

Read remarks by the other participants on this panel: [Bernard Lewis, \(templateC07.php?CID=114\)](#) [David Ignatius, \(templateC07.php?CID=116\)](#) and [Saad al-Ajmi \(templateC07.php?CID=117\)](#) ❖

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