

## How to Unseat Saddam (Part II)

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Brief Analysis

This two-part essay, prepared for the Foreign Policy Research Institute ([www.fpri.org](http://www.fpri.org) (<http://www.fpri.org/>)), is a condensed version of an article that appears in the Winter 2001–2002 issue of the National Interest. [Read Part I. \(templateC05.php?CID=1466\)](#)

### II. Psyops and Propaganda Activities

Psyops and propaganda activities that aim to diminish Saddam in the eyes of his supporters, exacerbate existing strains between his inner circle and the military, stir up popular discontent, and embolden opponents of the regime are a crucial component of any policy that seeks regime change in Baghdad. Such efforts could keep Saddam on the defensive and create an atmosphere of crisis and tension, forcing the regime to divert assets to deal with internal security, and leaving fewer resources available for clandestine technology procurement or trouble-making elsewhere. Such efforts could transform the psychological environment in the country, creating an atmosphere in which a coup or uprising might occur.

Saddam understands this well. He devotes enormous energy to efforts that make him appear larger than life and invest him with an aura of invincibility. This explains the huge posters and murals of Saddam found everywhere in Iraq. The importance Saddam attaches to the psychological dimension can be gauged from a speech he delivered to senior Ba'ath officials from Basra in June 1999 in which he exhorted them to "strive to defeat the enemy's plans" and to "stand firm in the face of the influence of hostile media and information," which has an "influence bigger than that of bombs." Saddam realizes that psychological domination of his subjects is the key to their physical subjugation, and that losing the propaganda and psychological warfare battle could threaten his regime.

For this reason, the United States should support opposition radio and television propaganda efforts that seek to diminish Saddam through ridicule, and by planting doubts and raising questions about the stability of his rule and the long-term prospects of his regime. Such propaganda -- especially on the eve of a crisis or in tandem with U.S. military action against Saddam's internal security organizations -- could help undermine his carefully cultivated image of omnipotence and erode the climate of extreme fear that paralyzes his opponents. It could help create -- at least briefly -- the necessary conditions for a coup or an uprising.

Relations between Saddam and the military have never been warm. Saddam distrusts the military and has

consolidated his control over them by fear. Moreover, the army quietly resents his interference in military affairs, and many officers are bitter at the ruinous impact that his rule has had on the country and its armed forces. American propaganda should play on this distrust and resentment, emphasizing the risks incurred by the armed forces as a result of continued Ba'athi rule. Such propaganda, along with the adoption of more aggressive rules of engagement for coalition aircraft patrolling the no-fly zones (e.g., allowing them to strike Iraqi ground forces, especially RG units), might encourage members of the armed forces to turn on the regime if given the opportunity to do so.

Finally, Washington needs to rebuild its credibility in the eyes of the Iraqi people. In particular, it needs to convince them that it is serious about removing the Ba'athi regime. Average Iraqis are unlikely to join another uprising if they believe that the United States will once again abandon them in midstream. The way to do this is by speaking out against human rights violations by Baghdad, supporting the opposition (the INC as well as other groups), and most importantly, by using massive force against regime targets. The bombing of organizations responsible for repressing the Iraqi people and ensuring the survival of the regime would be the most effective way to convince Iraqis that the United States is serious about ridding Iraq of the regime of Saddam Hussein.

### III. Intensified Economic Pressure

Sanctions are a crucial component of containment: they prevent Iraq from rebuilding its conventional military capabilities and recouping much of the political and economic clout it enjoyed before the August 1990 invasion of Kuwait. Nevertheless, Baghdad has been able to generate a stream of unsupervised income through illicit oil sales to Syria, Turkey, Jordan, and Iran, and by manipulating the "oil for food" program. The amount earned through smuggling amounts to \$1-2 billion a year (depending on oil prices) -- sums that Saddam uses to assure the loyalty of his largely Sunni Arab power base and to insulate them from the effects of sanctions. Intensified efforts to reduce the flow of unsupervised oil income in order to reduce the amount of money Saddam can disburse to his power base might make some of them more receptive to regime change.

### IV. Support for the Opposition

Support for opponents of the regime is one of the most tangible expressions of America's commitment to regime change in Baghdad. Such support -- including tangible assistance for opposition political and military activities -- could lay to rest the widespread perception in parts of the Arab world that the United States really wants Saddam to remain in power.

The external opposition also has a potentially important role to play in achieving regime change. As noted above, they could identify and vet potential coup makers, or army officers who might commit their units in support of an uprising. Moreover, oppositionists with paramilitary training might be inserted into the country by the United States to catalyze and coordinate an uprising with the help of U.S. advisors outside of Iraq, with whom they would be in radio contact. (The lack of an ability to communicate and coordinate between different regions and cities was a key weakness of the 1991 uprising.) They could videotape images of rebellion, to be beamed around the world by satellite television in order to mobilize international support for a nascent uprising. Under certain circumstances, opposition military personnel could also be used to direct U.S. air strikes against regime forces, and perhaps to coordinate the airdrop of light arms to rebels.

### Ensuring An Acceptable Outcome

How can Washington be sure that a coup or an uprising will bring to power a more acceptable government in Baghdad? It can't. While it can shape the environment and help create the circumstances that might lead to a coup or an uprising, Washington will have but modest influence over the potentially messy, unpredictable, and violent process of regime change. Moreover, as suggested above, even under the best of conditions, a coup attempt or an

uprising could prompt Baghdad to use chemical or biological weapons against its domestic enemies and those neighboring states associated with the United States. As a result, coalition airpower must be ready to conduct secondary strikes on nonconventional weapons stocks and associated delivery systems should they be deployed in preparation for use. This will require timely and accurate intelligence, and the ability to exploit it in real time. This is a very demanding requirement.

Although Washington might not be able to decisively influence the process of regime change once started, it would have some influence over a new government, which it could use to bring Baghdad to accept relevant UN resolutions related to disarmament, Kuwait's borders, terrorism, and human rights. Progress toward compliance on these issues should remain a precondition for an end to sanctions. The United States should also underscore its readiness to build a new relationship with a post-Saddam Iraq, to include very generous assistance with debt relief and reconstruction.

The approach outlined here involved daunting risks and challenges. But, the risks of further delaying a serious effort at regime change are even greater, particularly because the passage of time increases the possibility that Baghdad might acquire more advanced biological arms or nuclear weapons. Therefore, the Bush Administration should focus now on forging a serious, long-term strategy for regime change in Iraq, despite the formidable risks and challenges involved. For if ridding Iraq of the regime of Saddam Hussein will be difficult, experience has shown that living with it will be even more so.

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