

How to Use the Bombing to Advance Long-Term U.S. Goals for Iraq

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Brief Analysis

The current bombing campaign against Iraq is clearly not going to solve all U.S. problems with Iraq. The issue of the day is then: how can the bombing be used to advance long-term U.S. goals?

Ratchet up the Pressure. The United States seems intent on convincing Saddam Husayn that the air and missile strikes are just the opening stage of a protracted campaign -- one that will run through Ramadan if need be -- and that the worst is yet to come. To this end, the flow of additional forces to the region continues uninterrupted. In its early hours, the U.S. bombing campaign has targeted appropriate objectives and has been framed in such a way as to do actual damage rather than to instill fear. While there may not be much that the United States can do to harm Iraq's ability to engage in nuclear weapons research or to reduce Iraq's chemical and biological weapons production capabilities, Iraq's missile production infrastructure is relatively large and fixed. This explains why such facilities have been targeted. Likewise, the United States may destroy Iraq's remaining strike aircraft. In this way, Iraq's ability to deliver weapons of mass destruction (WMD) against population centers in neighboring countries will be greatly diminished.

In addition, the United States is striking at the pillars of the regime -- the Special Security Organization and the Special Republican Guard, which protect Saddam and are charged with hiding WMD programs. This will serve to reduce Saddam's ability to defend against domestic enemies or to threaten Iraq's neighbors. Moreover, by threatening these organizations, the United States will maximize its ability to coerce Saddam. Only if Saddam worries that in a crisis he may lose assets he values highly will he stop provoking crises. To date, he has seen crises as no-lose propositions: either he retreated to where he was before (after evading inspections during a crisis) or he extracted some concessions.

Evaluate UNSCOM's Future. Saddam's past record of "cheat and retreat" suggests he understands the language of

force -- he may become more cooperative with the United Nations Special Commission on Iraq (UNSCOM) after being bombed. But it would be wrong for the United States to be overeager about UNSCOM; for one thing, if Saddam thinks he can make the bombing look ineffective by refusing to resume inspections, he will refuse to resume inspections.

As UNSCOM may not be let back in, it will be important to explain what the alternative is. In the short term, Saddam needs to know that if he blocks monitoring of the forty already-identified potential WMD production facilities, then the United States reserves the right to destroy those facilities. It would be unwise to threaten to automatically destroy those facilities, for that would be an invitation for Saddam to move women and children into them as hostages. Unfortunately, the already-identified sites are not likely to be as important as the places to which Saddam will move WMD production equipment in order to hide it. If Iraq does not allow inspection of suspect facilities, then U.S. forces should be ready to destroy those targets the United States can identify through intelligence.

> As for the longer term problem of disarmament, the loss of UNSCOM would be a blow. UNSCOM is a hobbled organization that is unlikely to achieve much additional progress toward disarming Iraq, but it still has an important role to play in more or less capping Iraqi capabilities at current levels (though the International Atomic Energy Agency may not be able to do the same in the nuclear arena, because of the danger Iraq could obtain fissile material diverted from ex-Soviet stocks). Without the inspections, the WMD problem would grow worse so long as Saddam is in power. Without UNSCOM, therefore, there is more reason to concentrate on efforts to replace Saddam's regime.

Explain the Goals. Given Saddam's track record of violating promises, the administration is wise to stick to its stance that no statement from Saddam will be adequate to stop the bombing. At the same time, it will be important to identify what steps are wanted from Saddam and what Iraq would have to do to bring a suspension of the bombing. The emphasis should be on specific and concrete actions completed according to a fixed timetable, with some actions taken up front, such as producing the documents and materials UNSCOM has demanded. And it would be wise to stress that the bombing is only suspended, not stopped, until the UN conflict with Iraq comes to a definite end.

In his address to the nation on December 16, President Clinton set forward the overall goals: "to degrade Saddam's capacity to develop and deliver weapons of mass destruction and to degrade his ability to threaten his neighbors." Unless the bombing campaign is sustained until Saddam's fall, those goals need to be complemented with more specific short-term objectives that can be clearly accomplished by bombing -- the more specific the better (for instance, destruction of several key facilities). The important political purpose will be to show that when bombing is suspended, that will be because it has met its initial objectives. Saddam and critics of the United States are certain to argue that the bombing was a failure because Saddam is still in power, and they can only be answered if the United States has clearly specified more limited short-term objectives.

> Meanwhile, the current bombing campaign can only be one stage in the overall process of resolving the basic problem, which is Saddam's regime. There is no inherent reason for the United States and Iraq to be in conflict; indeed, there are many shared strategic interests, especially preventing aggression by Iran and assuring full development of Iraqi oil resources. But Saddam cannot be trusted to work with the West for such goals. Therefore, the key question for U.S. policy is how best to end Saddam's regime. An urgent debate is needed about how to accomplish that aim -- that is, what is the best combination of military campaign to degrade Saddam's repressive apparatus, encouragement to coup plotters (covert or with overt pledges of what will happen once he is gone), and support to the opposition (political support as well as military assistance).

Cultivate Broad Support. The small Gulf Arab monarchies know that they cannot contain on their own a hostile Iraq, so it is only natural that they refuse to be in the lead in confronting Saddam. Only a large power like the United States can provide that leadership, and the stronger the lead, the more readily the Gulf monarchies will follow. Now would

be an opportune time for Secretary of Defense William Cohen or Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to visit the Gulf to assure those states that the United States is resolved to carry through to the end.

The United States should offer high-level consultations with France, Russia, and China on how to achieve the objective of dismantling Iraqi WMD. As they are displeased with the bombing, they should be asked what alternatives they would propose, given that their preferred solution -- compromise with Saddam -- has proven ineffective. It is worth pointing out to France, Russia, and China that their undercutting UNSCOM is leading the United States to turn away from the UN as the locus for resolving problems like Iraq, and that as permanent members of the Security Council, it is in their interest to see the UN remain central, because they are not likely to be as closely consulted if decisions are made outside the UN. As it is unlikely agreement will be reached with these other permanent Security Council members on how to dismantle Iraqi WMD, the United States must be prepared to rely on a more narrow coalition of like-minded states, primarily the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait.

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