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Target: Iraq

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For several months now the Bush Administration has earmarked Iraq and Saddam Hussein's regime as the main target in the next phase of America's war against terrorism. While not linking Iraq directly to the September 11 terror attack, the administration claims that Saddam's regime is the key threat to stability in the Middle East and beyond, and that the presence of non-conventional weapons in Saddam's hands could have disastrous results for the United States and other countries, particularly if used as an instrument of terror. Sources close to the American government point out that the decision to proceed against Iraq has been made, that its realization is only a matter of time and method of operation, and that the American security establishment is already at the military planning stage.

However, beyond this provision, the administration leaves many questions unanswered regarding its anticipated move against Iraq. Although its official goal is to fell the Saddam regime, nonetheless, in the past the administration has also presented more limited objectives: halting Iraqi efforts at obtaining weapons of mass destruction, or reviving international inspection over this type of weapons development in Iraq. Bush has not made it clear which direction he intends to pursue – a military campaign, be it extended or limited, or a political process – but sources close to him generally allude to the administration's intention to carry out a large-scale military operation. The timing is also vague, although the administration has indicated it will not commence operations at least until 2003. To a

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that political dialogue with the Palestinians is an inseparable feature of the regional reality.

The fifth article, by Professor Isaac Ben-Israel, discusses the crisis in the Oslo process from the perspective of Israel's security doctrine in general, and its deterrence factor in particular, and points to the strategic-defense lessons to be derived from the crisis. The author claims that from a security point of view, the Oslo process symbolizes a turning point in Israel's security policy: a willingness to entrust the war against terrorism to the responsibility of others, while risking an erosion of Israel's deterrence factor. In Ben-Israel's opinion, this attempt has been proven premature, and has magnified the image of Israeli society's "weakness" and strengthened the illusion that the force of terror can defeat Israel.

The article by Israel's Head of Military Intelligence, Major General Aharon Ze'evi, outlines the policies of the key players in the Middle East and examines the mid-2002 strategic situation. Among his observations: 1. Unlike 1991, when the Arab states acted against the Iraqi invader, today they are asked to stand up and declare allegiance on the "Good Guys" vs. "Axis of Evil" antipodes, which they are reluctant to do. 2. Arafat is trying to implement reforms in a way that ensures he will remain in control of the budget and the security agencies. 3. Iran's reformist camp, which is dissatisfied with the state's radical policy, comprises 70% of the population. Yet while voices are being heard for reform and democratization, it is unclear when the expected changes will occur.

great degree this stems from the fact that it has not yet decided on which line of action to take. In addition, a number of government authorities have expressed reservations regarding a military strike, and even senior military commanders in the armed forces have challenged that American forces today are not logistically prepared to embark upon so ambitious a venture without serious preparations.

> Many governments fail to see the direct connection between the September 11 attack or the war against terrorism and overthrowing the Iraqi government.

The difficulty in deciding how to act is due to the complexity and obstacles involved. Iraq is not Afghanistan. Saddam's regime is much stronger and more stable than the Taliban regime, and the Iraqi army is incomparably better equipped than the Taliban forces. The opposition to Saddam's regime is weak, divided, disorganized, and militarily feeble. There is no element on the Iraqi horizon similar to the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan that could be mobilized into pulling down Saddam's regime. Moreover, while the Arab and Muslim world reacted with understanding to the move to topple the Taliban and demolish the al-Qaeda organization, both of which were widely condemned especially following their connection to the September 11 attack, the Muslim-Arab attitude to an American strike against Iraq today is decidedly different.

In addition, the deliberations in 2002 regarding a move against Iraq depart from those of 1991. On the one hand, American military power in the Gulf has expanded tremendously and the Iraqi army has been seriously weakened, even though its fighting potential is still a force to be reckoned with. On the other hand, there are great difficulties in the mustering of regional support for a Western-initiated move against Iraq. In 1991 the majority of the Arab states regarded Saddam as their main problem, and they themselves pressed for an operation against him once he crossed a red line in occupying Kuwait, thus posing a threat to other Gulf States. Today, most Arab countries still harbor no love for Saddam and are fearful of his attempts at developing weapons of mass destruction, but they view this mainly as an American problem, not an Arab one. The Arab world realizes that a key state like Iraq cannot remain ostracized for long, and it sympathizes with the suffering of the Iraqi people.

Against this backdrop, Iraq has gradually started to make a comeback in the Arab arena and improve its political and economic ties with a host of countries in the region, including rivals Iran and Syria. Countries like Turkey and Iran are also concerned

over an American military move that could precipitate a division in the Kurdish region in North Iraq, and snowball into destabilizing Kurdish districts in their own countries and elsewhere. Certain Arab and Muslim countries are greatly concerned over a vigorous demonstration of American power and the resultant anti-American rioting that would strengthen radical elements in their countries and upset internal stability. For all of these reasons, the Arab and Muslim world has great reservations over a full-scale military incursion into Iraq, and most of the countries in the region have openly expressed their misgivings about American plans.

The lack of enthusiasm for a United States-sponsored effort to topple Saddam is not limited to the Arab-Muslim world. In the international arena too, very few states are offering support for American military action against Iraq because of their concern about the aftershocks. Many governments fail to see the direct connection between the September 11 attack or the war against terrorism and overthrowing the Iraqi government, and they feel that the Bush administration's resolve in acting against Iraq is actually the pursuit of unfinished business from the days of the Gulf War.

American Options

The American government clearly leans towards a large-scale military action that will bring about the fall of Saddam's regime. It no longer has any faith in international monitoring for putting a halt to Iraq's assembly of weapons of mass destruction. It also doubts the effectiveness of a limited military move in toppling the Iraqi regime. Thus, most of the talk on American preparations for operations against Iraq refers to a large-scale attack. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to examine the various options facing the American government because if it decides that a major strike against Iraq incurs dangers that are too great or that the operation is unachievable, then it might choose an alternative method of action.

The type of action pursued by the American administration will be selected according to the operation's objectives, their attainability, and the difficulties involved.

Specifically, the type of action pursued by the American administration will be selected according to the operation's objectives, their attainability, and the difficulties involved. At the basic level, the administration could pursue two alternative aims:

- A limited objective – whose intent is to block and destroy the Iraqi projects for buildup with weapons of mass destruction. This may be accomplished by reinstating the international inspection teams expelled in late 1998, and by ascertaining that their work is carried out much more scrupulously.
- A large-scale objective – that aims to topple Saddam's regime, and replace it with a moderate one that is Western-oriented and less threatening to the region. The downfall of the Saddam regime is considered the surest way of bringing an end to Iraq's stockpiling of weapons of mass destruction, but it is also a goal in itself, namely, to rid the area of a leader who harbors aggressive intentions towards his neighbors and endangers United States interests in the region.

If the administration's goal is to thwart Iraq's non-conventional military buildup and bring back the inspection teams, then it could attempt at achieving it via political and economic pressure, along with a massive air strike if necessary, until Saddam relents. While the administration is assuming that political pressure alone will not suffice to reinstate the inspectors, a move of this nature contains a number of advantages: risks to the United States are minimal; it does not require a great amount of preparation; its cost is relatively low; the active support of states in the region is not required; and some of the neighboring states would even probably approve of it.

However, a move in this direction is also fraught with obvious disadvantages. After the Gulf War a similar plan was tried and Saddam displayed appreciable skill in countering it. For this reason, it should be assumed that if Saddam were

forced to readmit the inspection teams onto Iraqi soil, he would again try to be rid of them while seeking assistance from countries that are opposed to harsh sanctions against Iraq, such as Russia, China, and France. Saddam would also be aided by the fact that he has had four years since the expulsion of the United Nations monitoring teams to conceal sensitive arms installations, experience that is based on the lessons of eluding U.N. inspectors during the verification period. In addition, if the American administration succeeded in bringing back the inspection teams, it would find it difficult, in the long term, to devise an alternative plan for toppling Saddam, since many countries would be satisfied with the inspection teams doing their job inside Iraq. Returning the monitors to Iraq is preferable to the current absence of any inspection team and will indeed make it more difficult for Saddam to develop weapons of mass destruction, but it is still doubtful whether it would stop their development in the long run. For this reason, the administration does not put any trust in restoring the inspection teams and does not favor doing so unless it is forced to because it has failed to solve the logistical problems entailed in toppling Saddam.

Alternatively, if the American government attempts to bring down Saddam's regime, three options present themselves. The first is a covert operation, which would strive to mobilize Iraqi opposition forces and encourage a military coup or popular uprising. A coup could guarantee a speedy change in the regime if those involved consisted of a relatively small group, not the masses; furthermore, it would probably cause limited bloodshed and release fewer regional aftershocks. A popular uprising, on the other hand, could effect a deeper transformation in Iraq but it would be less controllable and liable to lead to a longer period of aftershocks and chaos until the next regime was stabilized. The advantages of an internal overthrow of this nature are clear: the dangers involved to the United States are few; its cost is relatively low; it does not require military action and the deployment of masses of American forces; it does not need the support of regional or international elements. However, the potential disadvantages loom even greater. Hatching such a plot would be a lengthy process and its success far from guaranteed, particularly since Saddam has already proven considerably adept at suppressing internal subversion. Therefore, American policy on Iraq cannot be based on it and the administration is not inclined towards it.

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The second option is a limited military strike relying on the lessons learned in Afghanistan: an intense aerial bombing of military and strategic targets; and a dispatch of limited American ground troops who, in conjunction with Iraqi opposition forces, would replace Saddam's regime when it began to totter. This plan contains a number of advantages: the dangers involved are not high; the required military preparations would not be drawn out; and international and regional support is desirable but not vital and could consist of air/logistics bases in Turkey.

The main problem with a move of this nature is its prospects for success. A concentrated air strike could knock out a major portion of Iraq's strategic infrastructure and military might, but it is doubtful whether it could topple Saddam's regime. Saddam has many enemies and people who hate him inside Iraq, yet it is highly questionable if they would dare to move against him because of their fear of his internal security agencies, and perhaps because of their unwillingness to identify with the United States and be seen as America's lackeys. As long as Iraq's army and security services remain loyal to Saddam, attempts at revolution are bound to fail, and assurance that external pressure would undermine their loyalty is far from certain. The opposition in Iraq, it will be recalled, is not a military force of any value. The Kurds in the north have very limited military

ability; the locus of their interests lies is Kurdistan, not Baghdad, and it is doubtful whether they would compromise their achievements in the north in order to serve as the protagonist in overthrowing the Saddam establishment. Kurdish leaders have already made it clear that for these reasons they would not take part in an American military campaign. In order to convince elements in the Iraqi army that are hostile to Saddam to take the plunge and move to topple him, it would be necessary to prove to them that the foundations of the regime are starting to wobble, that forces can be united to work against it, and that the United States would persevere in this goal to the end, lending whatever active support was necessary to depose Saddam and exact its revenge on him. The success of this option is feasible, but not guaranteed, principally because not all the required contributing variables are under American control.

The third option is a large-scale military campaign combining round-the-clock air strikes and the ground action of a large American invasion force. In the best of scenarios, the collapse of the Iraqi army would incite an uprising against Saddam; in a less optimal scenario, American forces would face the brunt of toppling Saddam, including entry into the capital city of Baghdad. This option has one main advantage: it seems to offer the best chances for getting rid of Saddam, establishing a new order in Iraq, and halting the race for weapons of mass destruction. If it succeeds, there are elements inside and outside of Iraq who would jump on the bandwagon. But the risks involved are extremely high: huge numbers of American troops would be required – U.S. estimates put the figure at 100,000-250,000 – and their deployment in the Gulf could take months. Accordingly, this option could become operational only in 2003. This option also has a more limited version, according to which only 50,000-75,000 American troops will conduct the operation in Iraq, which would require a shorter timetable. For either alternative, though, a lengthy postponement could take the wind out of the sails. Ground action is liable to incur heavy American losses because of the fighting in urban areas, terrorist attacks, and perhaps even the introduction by Iraq of chemical or biological weapons. The financial cost of the operation would be enormous, and this time, it seems, there would be no allies to assist in footing the bill. It might shake the oil market as well.

> The nightmare scenario would be if the United States launched a campaign for removing Saddam and had to call it off in the middle.

However, the main problem with a campaign of this magnitude is that it requires at least a minimum of international, and especially regional, backing. Logistically, without a land base in at least one of the countries bordering Iraq, the management of ground operations would be impossible. Jordan is not expected to grant concrete support, just as it shunned the Gulf War coalition because of its sensitive position vis-à-vis Iraq. The Jordanians have announced that their country will not be used as a base for an attack against Iraq, and they have expressed reservations over any such attack. It appears that for now Saudi Arabia is unwilling to cooperate, and if it persists in refusing to allow the United States forces use of its country, then American military planners would opt for a ground base in Kuwait, an airbase in Turkey, and logistics bases and command centers in Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman. However, it is doubtful whether Kuwait would agree to permit its country to serve as the staging center for an invasion unless Saudi Arabia also participates. Sources in the American administration are convinced that Kuwait would eventually agree to join in the American operation because of the unpaid account it has with the Saddam regime, but in the meantime Kuwait appears to be fence-straddling, and the option for a large-scale operation remains on the drawing-board.

A large-scale attack involves other problems as well. The danger exists that it would be regarded as a

confrontation between the United States and the Muslim world. This would be likely to spark a wave of anti-Americanism in the Arab and Muslim countries that could pose major difficulties in managing the attack. Thus, at least minimal Arab support for the operation is necessary, and embarking on an overseas campaign of this magnitude without Arab-Muslim support would probably jeopardize the United States' present achievements in the war against terrorism. The nightmare scenario would be if the United States launched a campaign for removing Saddam and had to call it off in the middle. In this case, Saddam would emerge as a hero, America's influence in the region would be damaged, its deterrent ability hurt, and its conduct of the war against terrorism impaired.

It may be assumed that Saddam would make every effort to hamstring the American incursion. Prior to the operation he might engage in political maneuvering so that if he sensed the approach of a military campaign, he could signal his approval for a return of U.N. supervision of his weapons program. This would divert international involvement to the restoration of inspection teams and eliminate the political support of the military operation. On the other hand, if an operation were launched, Saddam could disperse his forces into populated areas and make it complicated for the operation to succeed. An American military operation, especially one on a large-scale, would force the United States to prepare for the contingency that Iraq would unleash missiles or even any chemical-biological weapons it possesses, especially if Saddam felt that his back was to the wall.

Added to these obstacles is the link between American efforts at garnering Arab support for the downfall of Saddam Hussein and American involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian crisis. The crisis makes it difficult for Arab countries to back the American move because of their criticism of the American administration's support of Israel and seeming lack of determination to deal with the Palestinian issue. However, it can be assumed that even if the crisis did not exist, Arab states would still have a problem backing the American move against Iraq for the reasons discussed earlier. Furthermore, if the American administration does exhibit greater will in advancing the political process between Israel and the Palestinians, there is yet no guarantee that this would be sufficient to ensure the support of Arab countries in the move against Iraq. At the same time, Arab states may well take advantage of the American government's need of their support in order to pressure Washington into promoting a political settlement between the Israelis and Palestinians along the lines of the Saudi and Egyptian approaches.

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The Implications of an American Operation

At this stage the American government appears to opt for a large-scale military campaign against Iraq, aimed at toppling the Saddam Hussein regime, replacing it with a moderate government, and terminating Iraq's quest for weapons of mass destruction. Again, it is still unclear whether the administration has made its final decision, since it has yet to engineer how to overcome all of the hurdles involved in this move. Two main challenges remain between finalizing the objective and realizing it via a major military operation:

- The critical point in the large-scale campaign lies in obtaining the consent of the Arab states, especially in the Gulf, to lend active assistance. Without this support, so far denied, a large-scale military operation is inconceivable.
- Assurance must be guaranteed that after the ouster of Saddam a moderate, stable regime would be established, and that Iraq would not degenerate into a focal point of regional instability.

If these problems are not solved, the administration will have to consider a limited military strike against Saddam Hussein, one that includes the active participation of Iraqi opposition elements. However,

the success of a move like this depends on the unproven ability of these elements to unite and work against the regime. If the administration estimates that the chances of a successful military venture, large-scale or otherwise, are unrealistic, then it is likely, at least temporarily, to abandon the goal of toppling Saddam's regime and focus on the alternative limited objective: blocking the Iraqi effort at obtaining weapons of mass destruction and returning stringently-mandated, international monitoring teams to Iraq.

Even if the United States succeeds in bringing about the fall of the regime, the results of the campaign would be uncertain. A change of government in Iraq would undoubtedly be a major regional development. It would signal the opportunity for establishing a moderate government in Iraq, one that would be allied to the United States and ready to cease the pursuit of non-conventional weapons. The radical camp in the region would be weakened, instability in the Gulf region reduced, American influence in the area strengthened, threats to America's allies, including Israel, mitigated, and the political process in the Arab-Israeli conflict more positively addressed. In the wake of a change of government, sanctions against Iraq would be lifted and a weapons supply to Baghdad could be renewed, although the moderate regime in Iraq would be dependent on the West for its re-armament and the international monitors would continue to maintain their positions.

The American operation would certainly have an influence on Iran, perhaps even a positive influence. On the one hand, the presence of a large American force in Iraq – at a time when American troops are engaged in operations on Iran's eastern border – could heighten the United States' deterrent capability towards Iran. On the other hand, as a long-term prospect, if a genuine dialogue develops between the American administration and Iran, it is possible that, after the minimizing of the Iraqi threat and after Iraq ceased its efforts at developing non-conventional weapons, Tehran would decide to reduce its efforts at procuring weapons of mass destruction.

These bright prospects, however, are far from certain since the question of internal stability in Iraq after the ouster of Saddam remains open. For over two decades the Iraqi regime has evolved around Saddam and his cohorts, and has forcibly suppressed any change of government. The installment of a new, stable order in Iraq would be comprised of the representatives from the central bureaus in the Iraqi establishment, first and foremost, the army and security agencies. Their integration into the new regime would not be an easy matter. The new order would also require a large investment of resources and a relatively long-term American military presence until stability was restored. The likelihood also exists that the troublesome features of Saddam's regime – its aspiration for regional hegemony, its ambitions to create military and strategic power through weapons of mass destruction, its aggressive security concept, and its blatant hostility towards Israel and the peace process – would linger among his successors until sometime in the future.

But the core of the instability is apt to appear in the Kurdish region of northern Iraq. The Kurds might exploit the American operation to expand the autonomy they won after the Gulf War. If this happened, then the unrest could arouse demands for liberation among large Kurdish populations dwelling in Turkey, Iran, and Syria. The Shiites in the south of Iraq might also awaken and insist on their part in the new government. If the future Iraqi regime is not strong and stable, then the precarious situation in the Kurdish north and Shiite south could propel the country into anarchy and civil war, and in such an eventuality Iran and/or Turkey might also be dragged in. A development of this nature could turn Iraq into the hub of regional instability, and the American government would be obligated to calm the aspirations of the lead players in the Iraqi theater and reach a balance among them.

The United States military campaign against Iraq would also have implications for Israel – prior to, during, and after the campaign:

- Prior to the campaign: The more the American government is convinced of the link between Arab support of the Iraqi campaign and the advancement of a political settlement between Israel and the Palestinians, the more it will actively pursue a

settlement. Until now this has not translated into adopting positions incompatible with Israeli interests, but there is no guarantee that this policy will not shift in the future.

- During the campaign: Saddam might launch a missile strike against Israel, possibly using missiles equipped with chemical-biological warheads. Whether or not Iraq has the capability of attacking Israel with non-conventional warheads remains an unknown, and its conventional missile arsenal is small. In the case of a small-scale American assault against Iraq, it is doubtful that Saddam would respond with an immediate attack on Israel since he would reveal that his country still had missiles and launch systems, a military capability that goes against the decision of the United Nations Security Council and which would justify operations against it. On the other hand, a conventionally-armed missile attack against Israel is a possibility, especially if Saddam believes he is facing an imminent threat to his regime, that his back is to the wall, and there are no other alternatives to survival and preventing a collapse. Although not out of the question, the likelihood of a chemical-biological missile attack against Israel does not appear high for a number of reasons: it is doubtful whether Iraq has the ability to launch missiles with this type of warhead; Iraq would be caught red-handed in lying to the international community that it had demolished its non-conventional stockpile; and in this case Iraq could expect a severe response from both the United States and Israel, so that the benefits from such an attack would be rendered negligible.
- After the campaign: If the American operation succeeds, Israel's strategic situation is likely to improve. True, the demise of Saddam's regime would allow Iraq to re-arm, and there is no assurance that the results of Saddam's overthrow would remain in effect for long. Nonetheless, in the immediate years following the campaign, the establishment of a moderate regime in Iraq would diminish the strategic threat to Israel, strengthen the trend to temperance in the Arab world, perhaps assist in advancing the political process in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and possibly contribute to the reduction of the Iranian threat to Israel.

There is still no certainty that the American government will embark upon a large-scale military venture against Iraq, even though it is working towards one.

The bottom line is that there is still no certainty that the American government will embark upon a large-scale military venture against Iraq, even though it is working towards one. To carry out such an operation the administration must solve a list of Herculean problems, beginning with securing the cooperation of at least one of Iraq's neighbors and being convinced of the possibility of achieving the operation's political objective. Even if it sets out on a campaign like this, it will have to invest enormous resources in order to prevent a situation whereby Iraq becomes the center of regional instability. If it succeeds in overcoming these hurdles, then an American-dominated move might result in a genuine transformation in the region, and the majority of states in the Arab world and international arena that today harbor reservations over such an American move would welcome the finished product and support its outcome.

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