UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE

SPECIAL REPORT

ABOUT THE REPORT

In the face of persistent crises between Iraq and the international community over Iraq's failure to comply with international agreements governing its chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons development programs, the United States Institute of Peace convened a study group to understand better what options exist to deal with the threats that Iraq poses. Beginning in May 1998 and continuing through the winter, the study group met several times and brought together experts from the worlds of diplomacy, the military, and academia. The study group, whose membership included current and former U.S. government officials, did not seek to arrive at any specific recommendations. Rather, the goal was to develop a deeper understanding of the options that do exist and to think out loud about possible alternative policies. The following report, authored by program officer Jon B. Alterman, draws on the discussions of that study group, as well as other discussions in Washington and beyond. It is issued in the interest of sharing the fruits of those private discussions with the widest possible audience.

The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Institute of Peace, which does not advocate specific policies.

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Thinking Out Loud: Policies Toward Iraq

Briefly:

The Iraq problem is more important for the larger dilemmas it raises than for the specific ones:

• The problem of Iraqi weapons development has been changing from a multilateral conflict between Iraq and the United Nations to a bilateral one between Iraq and the United States. Such a change is in Saddam's interest, partly because it makes it easier for him to skirt sanctions, and partly because his mere survival in power represents a personal victory over the United States which he can use to build popular support in Iraq and throughout the Middle East.

• Saddam has undermined the authority of the United Nations. His flouting of his obligations to the United Nations has weakened the United Nations' ability to resolve conflicts around the world.

• The confrontation with Iraq has highlighted the importance of multilateral diplomacy, even for a country with a preponderance of global power like the United States. Although policies the United States adopts on its own have some effect, that effect is significantly multiplied when joined with similar efforts involving other countries.

• "Quick-fix" solutions do little to resolve problems like Iraq's persistent development of proscribed weapons. The global news media has put policymakers under increased scrutiny and heightened demands for effective action in very short time frames. Constant and high-profile attention to policy can make policy appear to vacillate, making the execution of any policy significantly more difficult.

• Proliferation remains a vexing issue not only in Iraq, but around the world. Although Iraq is the most high-profile case, the threat of weapons proliferation is expanding, and knowledge is proving difficult to contain. The kinds of problems Iraq poses for U.S. policy are harbingers of the kinds of challenges the U.S. will face in the early years of the next decade.

Introduction

Almost eight years after the conclusion of Operation Desert Storm, Saddam Hussein's regime continues to confound its opponents. Weathering sanctions, falling oil prices, a lack of control over Kurdish zones in the north of Iraq, intrusive weapons inspections, and what must certainly be the efforts of one or more foreign governments to induce Saddam's ouster, the regime in Baghdad continues to cling to power, if not thrive.

Most important from a policy perspective, Saddam Hussein appears to be successfully resisting the calls of the United Nations to fully disclose what his chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons capabilities were at the time of the Gulf War, presumably preserving his ability to resume those programs once international attention drifts to other issues. As a country with a persistent track record of invading neighboring states and one of only a tiny number of countries since World War I to use chemical weapons — first against Iran in the first Gulf War, and then against Iraqi Kurds in the Anfal campaign — any Iraqi arsenal of chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons is extraordinarily worrisome.

Saddam Hussein also poses a challenge to the international system in two ways. First, his record of perpetual defiance of United Nations Security Council resolutions is unprecedented and undermines the authority of the Council. Since the end of the Cold War, the Council has sought to become an increasingly active player in peace and security issues around the globe, but the Council's inability to solve the problem of continued Iraqi defiance threatens to undermine that role in the future.

Second, Saddam Hussein's Iraq presents a new kind of problem for international arms control regimes: a country that outwardly agrees to arms control, but then lies to inspectors, actively conceals prohibited materials, and undermines verification systems. Arms control practice, as it has developed throughout this century, has never had to deal with a problem like Iraq's resolute development of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons, despite the Iraqi regime's agreement to end those programs and the costs imposed by the international community for Iraq's continued violations.

The policy problems created by Iraqi behavior defy easy solutions. Unilateral actions by the United States are less effective than multilateral actions, but multilateral actions are harder to sustain over time as the memory of Iraq's repeated chemical weapons use and its invasion of Kuwait fades in people's memories and the deprivations of the Iraqi people continue to engender sympathy around the world. In addition, the United States and the world community have only a limited ability to affect events in Iraq because of the grip the country's ruthless security services maintain over the population.

The Problem: Iraq and Weapons of Mass Destruction

The present regime in Baghdad came to power through a coup in 1968. The coup gave prominence to a young officer in the Ba'ath Party intelligence apparatus named Saddam Hussein. Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr served as president and maintained titular power until Saddam deposed him and declared himself president on July 16, 1979. Just more than a year after seizing uncontested control over Iraq, Saddam declared war on Iran. While the goals of the war — reclaiming Iraqi territory conceded in 1975 border negotiations, ending Iranian support for Kurdish separatists in the north, and overthrowing a regime in Tehran that was openly calling for an Islamic revolution inside Iraq among others — can be debated, the gruesomeness of the war that followed cannot. The war produced about 1.5 million casualties during eight years of hostilities, ending in a cease-fire that essentially left prewar borders unchanged.

The Iran-Iraq war was the first time since the interwar years that chemical weapons were used in combat. Probably beginning in 1984, and almost certainly by 1986, Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons in the battlefield against Iranian troops. Such use

drew the condemnation of the United Nations in 1986, although such condemnation was muted by international antipathy toward the regime in Tehran.

The eight-year-long war exhausted both countries, but it allowed Saddam to further consolidate his rule in Iraq. The constant war footing allowed an already paranoid regime to more ruthlessly root out its opponents and more loudly proclaim the glories of its leader. When the war wound down, Saddam turned to damping internal divisions in his country and began a campaign against a Kurdish insurgency in the north. In that campaign, Saddam again turned to chemical weapons, using a combination of mustard gas and nerve gas that killed some 5,000 civilians in the town of Halabja in August 1988. As in his war with Iran, Saddam's use of chemical weapons (this time against civilian targets) failed to raise outrage. The Reagan administration actively opposed a Senate bill seeking to impose immediate sanctions on Iraq for using chemical weapons against the Kurds. In April 1989 the Bush administration settled on a policy of normalizing U.S.-Iraqi relations notwithstanding Iraq's aggressive development of chemical and biological weapons.[1]

With Saddam's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, the perception that Saddam Hussein was a potential ally against an ideologically expansionist Iran – as well as a potential customer for American grain and other products – gave way to a new consensus. Under the revised thinking, Saddam was seen as threat to stability in the Persian Gulf and to steady oil supplies from that region. American and other allied troops deployed to Saudi Arabia suddenly became the potential targets of Iraqi chemical weapons attacks, and they took that threat seriously. Troops were issued gas masks and inoculated against biological warfare agents.

When a coalition of allied forces rolled back the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in January and February 1991, the UN-imposed cease fire agreement bound Iraq to declare fully to the Secretary-General of the United Nations the "locations, amounts, and types" of biological and chemical weapons it possessed, as well as similar information regarding ballistic missiles with a range of more than 150 kilometers. Under the agreement, Iraq agreed to destroy such weapons under international supervision, and to accept ongoing international monitoring to ensure that such weapons programs were not revived in the future. Pursuant to that charge, the United Nations created a "Special Commission," or UNSCOM, to carry out on-site inspections of declared Iraqi facilities as well as any other sites UNSCOM designated.

The agreement, articulated in United Nations Security Council Resolution 687, established similar conditions for whatever nuclear program Iraq might possess, to be monitored by the International Atomic Energy Agency. Only after Iraq completed its responsibilities to fully disclose its programs to develop weapons of mass destruction, destroy prohibited materiel under international supervision, and dismantle any programs to develop such weapons in the future, all to the Security Council's satisfaction, would the United Nations lift the sanctions it imposed on Iraq after its invasion of Kuwait in August 1990.

Resolution 687 appears to envision a process that would take a matter of months. The Iraqis were to make their full disclosure two weeks after the Security Council adopted the resolution, and the United Nations was to form UNSCOM within 45 days. There are no indications that anyone envisioned the present sanctions regime to be in place after almost eight years.

Years of Frustration

While Iraq has never fully complied with the terms of Resolution 687, the extent of its evasion became clear only after the former head of the Iraqi program to develop weapons of mass destruction, Hussein Kamel, defected to Jordan. Kamel, Saddam's son-in-law and also a son of one of Saddam's second cousins, revealed to interlocutors in

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Jordan the vast extent of Iraqi noncompliance with the inspection and monitoring regime. It was only with Hussein Kamel's defection, former UNSCOM inspectors have said, that they began to understand the extent of Iraq's deception. Kamel and his family returned to Iraq in February 1996 for unknown reasons; he and other of members of his immediate family were executed shortly thereafter by their extended family, supposedly in retribution for the shame they brought upon the others. Their brutal murders notwithstanding, Hussein Kamel's defection put the conflict between the United Nations and Iraq on a new footing – one that was much more confrontational and began increasingly to resemble a game of cat and mouse.

Saddam Hussein's February 1998 agreement with Secretary General Kofi Annan, which averted Anglo-American air strikes over Iraq's obstruction of the weapons inspectors, established new rules for inspections that the Iraqis demanded. Even under the new rules, Iraq's seeming cooperation with inspectors on some routine issues only obscures their vigorous policy of concealment and deception.

American policymakers and their counterparts around the world are confronted with a series of unsavory policy options. Iraq is clearly flouting its obligations to UNSCOM and the Security Council. But how can one punish Iraq further? The United Nations sanctions regime, which is designed to prevent the Iraqi government from having the assets to develop prohibited programs, already has had a devastating effect on the Iraqi economy and, consequently, on the Iraqi people. While the sanctions are among the most stringent imposed anywhere in the world, they have not brought about Iraqi compliance. UNSCOM's inspection regime was the most intrusive in the history of arms control, yet in a hostile environment, inspectors have found it extraordinarily difficult to get beyond proving the existence of a pattern of lying and deception to find prohibited materials. Relying on a threat of military force is expensive because such a threat gives Iraq most of the power to decide when to escalate and de-escalate the conflict; because basing additional troops, equipment, and materiel in the Persian Gulf carries a high economic cost; and because residents of many Gulf Arab states resent the long-term presence of a large number of U.S. and other Western troops.

World support for strenuous action against Iraq appears to be dissipating over time. This is due partly to the Iraqi regime's deft use of the media, especially in the Arab world, to charge that the United Nations sanctions inflict suffering on the Iraqi people, particularly children. It is also due to the passage of time since Iraq last invaded a neighboring country. Just over a year after Saddam took uncontested power in Iraq, he invaded Iran, toward the end of that war began attacking Kurdish populations in northern Iraq, and two years after the conclusion of the war with Iran, he invaded Kuwait - a chilling record. But Iraq has not invaded another country for the better part of a decade. Combined with UNSCOM's inability to produce dramatic evidence of proscribed Iraqi weapons or weapons development programs, Iraq begins to look like a law-abiding country to many - a dictatorship under the sway of a cult of personality to be sure, but not a nation that is irredeemable.

Policy Options

Iraq's efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction have been on the international agenda for years, and have provoked a number of different kinds of policy recommendations. While none of the following are mutually exclusive, some tend to undermine others if pursued concurrently. For example, actively seeking the overthrow of Saddam Hussein tends to undermine support in the United Nations for U.S. policy, and a United Nations-led policy tends to make deterrence difficult to implement. On the other hand, some policies tend to complement each other. For example, some argue that U.S.-led

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containment is more effective if combined with support for a viable Iraqi opposition which threatens the regime's hold on power and forces it to look inward.
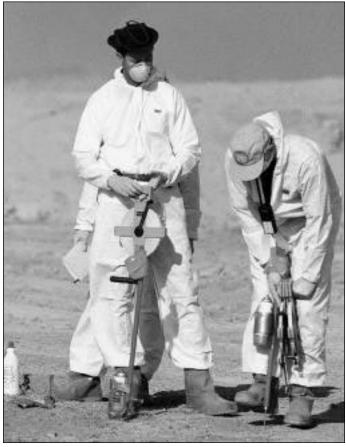
UN-led Containment

Although the world often turned a blind eye to Iraq's invasion of Iran in 1980 and the eight-year war that followed, the international response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait was systematic, sustained, and overwhelmingly multilateral. Just four days after the 1990 invasion, the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution strongly condemning the invasion, and by January 1991 a coalition composed of forces from more than 25 countries had assembled in the Saudi desert to roll back the Iraqi attack. Once the Iraqi armed forces had been routed, the war ended not by a treaty between Iraq and any of the invading powers, but rather via a United Nations resolution that continued sanctions on Iraq until the country ended its existing programs to develop weapons of mass destruction; pledged never to use, develop, construct, or acquire such weapons in the future; and disclosed to the United Nations the full extent of those programs in the past. In an unprecedented demonstration of multilateral arms control efforts, the United Nations established a special commission, UNSCOM, to monitor Iraq's compliance with the cease-fire resolution.

UNSCOM represented a dramatic departure for the United Nations. The United Nations Security Council had dispatched peacekeeping forces since the Korean War, and United Nations forces continue to monitor peace agreements around the globe, but never before had the United Nations attempted to enforce a disarmament agreement.

The United Nations established UNSCOM in a climate of great optimism. The Cold War had ravaged the organization, as the shrill tone of many General Assembly resolutions undermined their authority and Soviet-American competition in the Security Council —

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UN weapons experts during a search for missile parts Wednesday, June 3, 1998, in the dunes at Al-Nibai, 45 kilometers (28 miles) north of Baghdad.

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and the threat of vetoes from each side — prevented the Council from taking action on many of the most important security issues of the day. The end of the Cold War and the advent of what President Bush proclaimed the "New World Order" represented a singular opportunity in some people's minds for the United Nations to accede to a new and more active role resolving international disputes peacefully and holding the violators of international agreements to task for their transgressions. Certainly the establishment of UNSCOM in 1991 was part of the enthusiasm of those times.

The optimism of the early 1990s, however, proved misplaced. Rather than enjoy a new sense of prestige, the United Nations remained an organization challenged by budget woes, calls for reform, and an uncertain record of achievement. The United Nations' peacekeeping operation in Somalia proved a particular disaster, as local warlords battled foreign troops until the latter pulled out.

On the Iraq front, the United Nations has maintained an inspection regime (albeit one continually hampered by Iraqi obstruction), but calls have grown for a relaxation of sanctions. For one thing, eight years into the confrontation with Iraq, the United Nations' member states have grown weary of a problem that has refused to go away. According to some analysts, it is only the clumsiness of Iraqi policy which has kept the issue alive for this long. In addition, as the "New World Order" has evolved and the United Nations has imposed sanctions on several countries, most sanctions have been imposed on countries in which the population is overwhelmingly Muslim, such as Iraq, Libya, and the Sudan. Such a pattern has given rise to complaints of unfairness, and those complaints have some resonance among other nations with significant Muslim populations.

In addition, the sanctions on Iraq have been in place for so long that they appear to some to be vindictive rather than constructive. Initial estimates that sanctions would bring Saddam Hussein to his knees in a matter of months have proven drastically misguided. Eight years into sanctions against Iraq, many observers consider the losers to be the people of Iraq rather than the regime that represses them. More recent United Nations efforts to ease the effects of sanctions on the Iraqi civilian population — through an "oil for food" agreement between the United Nations and Iraq made in May 1996 and expanded in December 1997 — have failed to silence critics of the United Nations sanctions.

Sanctions policy has proven a special irritant in the Arab world, where Saddam Hussein has successfully turned the Iraqi people's suffering into a propaganda issue. Regardless of whether that suffering is a consequence of Iraqi government mismanagement of humanitarian supplies or the sanctions policy, the widely held perception among Arabs is that Iraqis are being singled out for punishment because they are Arab (or, in another argument, that they are being punished for their vocal opposition to Israel), and that perception has grown as sanctions have worn on.

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A further challenge to the United Nations' activities in Iraq has been the revelations of former weapons inspector Scott Ritter, who resigned from his UNSCOM position in August 1998 to protest what he viewed as U.S. government interference with UNSCOM's mission. Ritter's revelations about coordination between the White House and UNSCOM, about UNSCOM's cooperation with Israeli intelligence, and most recently about the Central Intelligence Agency using UNSCOM as a window on events in Iraq, have all undermined the United Nations' role in Iraqi disarmament by making it seem like the organization was serving the intelligence needs of United Nations member states rather than global interests.

American standing in the United Nations is under challenge on several fronts. On the one hand, longstanding U.S. arrears to the organization surpass $1 billion. Although the United States has made periodic commitments to pay past dues once a number of orga-

nizational reforms are made, the arrears remain unpaid. The American debt persists despite the fact that the U.S. maintains several privileged positions at the United Nations - it hosts the organization, enjoys a seat on the Security Council, and has a lock on the second-ranking position in the United Nations hierarchy. The United States also played a key role easing Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali out of office and electing Kofi Annan to the position.

In addition to conflict over payments to the United Nations, U.S. foreign policy itself has been a target for international ire. In the Middle East, the United States has come under fire for its continued support and defense of Israel in the face of United Nations resolutions condemning that country's policies. United Nations' members also have criticized purported U.S. obstruction on multilateral issues like the land-mine ban and the International Criminal Court, and its pursuit of extraterritorial unilateralism through such actions as the Helms-Burton sanctions on Cuba.

The December 1998 Anglo-American air raids on Iraq for its obstruction of UNSCOM inspectors served to push the Iraq problem closer to a bilateral conflict between Iraq and the United States and further away from the United Nations. While recent diplomatic efforts by the U.S. Mission to the United Nations have made progress in changing this perception, outright opposition to the Anglo-American action by France and Russia have made the situation difficult. In these efforts, the United States is certainly hampered by maintaining only an acting U.S. ambassador to the United Nations.

At the time of this writing, negotiations are ongoing at the United Nations to arrive at some sort of compromise on policy toward Iraq. Whether such a policy will be able to win Iraqi compliance on the one hand, and have sufficient teeth to convince the United States and the United Kingdom to forgo their own military action on the other, remains a question to be seen. The threat of American military force has a paradoxical effect: The clear and convincing threat of military force strengthens the United Nations by energizing Iraqi and member-government efforts to head off the use of force. However, the use of force — especially the unilateral use of force — represents the clear failure of the United Nations to head off war, and weakens the international body. But if force is never used, its loses its credibility, and that also weakens the United Nations' efforts.

U.S.–led Containment

American frustration with the United Nations has a long history, and it has been exacerbated by the ongoing crisis with Iraq. On the one hand, critics have charged that countries like France and Russia are using their positions as permanent members of the Security Council to undermine a strict sanctions regime against Iraq, because of those countries' strategic calculations, commercial interests, or other reasons. American diplomats have also quietly criticized the role of the Secretary General, who appears to some to be more concerned with averting conflict in the short term than removing sources of conflict in the long term. The Secretary General's supporters counter that he is merely reflecting the will of all of the United Nations' member states rather than those of the United States alone. Persistent tensions between the world body and U.S. policymakers have led some to call for an effort to contain Iraq led by the United States and independent of the United Nations.

The advantages of such a policy are significant. For one, a U.S.-led containment regime could promote a more coherent strategy for dealing with Iraq. Freed from the exigencies of bargaining with countries willing to overlook many Iraqi transgressions, a U.S.-led containment effort could impose strict sanctions on Iraq, strenuously restrict the import of dual-use technologies, and so preoccupy the government with internal challenges that it would have no chance to make mischief abroad. Coalition maintenance would also presumably be easier, because countries participating in such a pro-

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gram would presumably agree with its general thrust. Shifting to a U.S.-led approach would also take Iraq policy behind closed doors, because it would presumably be carried out through quiet, bilateral diplomatic contacts rather than public pronouncements in the Security Council. Absent the glare of public scrutiny, policymakers could concentrate on the hard work of making the policy work rather than trying to make points in a global public relations battle.

Indeed, the U.S. government appears to be basically following such an approach. Although the U.S. government has not completely abandoned the United Nations, there appears to be a clear preference for making gains in international diplomacy through U.S. bilateral ties rather than in international bodies beyond American control. The hope of present policy is that by de-emphasizing the United Nations, the U.S. can lead the implementation of a sort of "containment-plus" policy, which seeks to compel the government in Baghdad to comply with its international obligations, restricts the export of militarily useful supplies to Iraq, and eventually seeks the overthrow or replacement of the present regime by one whose policies are less anathema to peace and stability in the Persian Gulf.

The drawbacks of U.S.-led containment, however, are significant. For one, it is almost certainly the policy Saddam would prefer that the United States adopt. The more the Iraqi conflict is seen as a bilateral struggle against the United States, the more likely that Saddam will win sympathy and undermine multilateral sanctions. Iraq has already charged the United States with maintaining a double standard in the Middle East, ignoring Israel's defiance of United Nations resolutions but compelling Iraq's compliance — a charge that has a great deal of resonance in much of the world. In addition, Saddam can portray his survival in the face of U.S. opposition as a victory in the face of impossible odds.

Another drawback is the hostility such action arouses among other powers who lack the power to act decisively outside United Nations parameters. To such countries, many of which are in Western Europe, U.S. unilateralism is a sign of overwhelming arrogance and a challenge to the United Nations system. Alienating such partners will not only make it harder to implement a policy on Iraq, but could also complicate U.S. diplomacy in other regions. An additional complication of U.S.-led containment is that, absent formal agreements (such as Security Council resolutions), such a policy requires constant diplomatic maintenance. An advantage of the existing UN resolutions is that they remain in force until they are removed; a more ad hoc policy is implemented ad hoc as well.

For a U.S.-led containment regime to succeed, the U.S. must actually be leading others, rather than going it alone. Although Kuwait and Saudi Arabia appear willing to cooperate with such a policy, it faces significant opposition in Iran, Turkey, other parts of the Persian Gulf, and much of Europe. To date, U.S. diplomacy has been effective in keeping the Arab League from actively challenging the U.S. approach to Iraq; a diplomatic breakdown would significantly reduce the efficacy of U.S. efforts to contain the regime.

Perhaps the best effect of a U.S.-led containment regime is that it can galvanize the United Nations to action. A credible U.S. option to turn away from the United Nations strengthens the U.S. case for an energetic United Nations response to Iraq's and empowers the Secretary General to resist a softer approach.

Deterrence

Some observers suggest that the international community's continual confrontations with Iraq should be abandoned in favor of deterrence. Under such a scenario, the credible threat of overwhelming military force would deter Iraq from threatening its neighbors. The advantages of shifting to a deterrent strategy are significant. Deterrence would end Saddam Hussein's pattern of provoking crises on his own timetable and then pulling back from the brink at the last possible moment. That pattern has cost the United States bil-

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lions of dollars, and the constant redeployments have taken a toll on the morale of American troops overseas. Deterrence would also end the possibly futile efforts of UNSCOM to find the smoking guns behind Iraq's remaining efforts to develop proscribed weapons of mass destruction. UNSCOM itself shifted much of its focus in 1996 to trying to prove the existence of a concealment program rather than the proscribed weapons themselves, because of the enormity of the latter task. Finally, a deterrence strategy would bring policy in line with world opinion, which does not so much oppose the possession of weapons of mass destruction as it does their use. Were a deterrence regime in place, sanctions could expire, the suffering of the Iraqi people might be ameliorated, and Iraq would no longer be an irritant in global politics. Since the trigger for a deterrent strike would presumably be irrefutable (such as an invasion of a neighboring country, or the use of chemical or biological weapons), deterrence could reinvigorate the international consensus on Iraq policy, which has been withering over the last eight years.

Deterrence has drawbacks, however; the first and most obvious is that it may lead to large-scale death and destruction. Civilian casualties might easily exceed the highest estimates for all civilian deaths over the last eight years. In addition, allied resolve to carry out a truly punishing strike on Iraq remains unclear. As the public becomes increasingly unwilling to tolerate military and civilian casualties, military options against Iraq become increasingly circumscribed. The December 1998 Anglo-American attack was a good example of a campaign with an explicit mission to avoid casualties on both sides. Critics have charged that the result was a high-cost, low-benefit operation that did little to weaken the Iraqi leader's grip on power and that only highlighted the constraints Anglo-American military planners faced in drawing up an attack strategy.

An additional drawback to a policy of deterrence is that it may provide less security at greater cost than the current arrangement. The inspection regime, for all of its faults and tribulations, has halted Iraq's aggressive development of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons capabilities. The end of such a regime, perhaps combined with a lifting of United Nations controls on how Iraq spends its oil revenues, would almost certainly lead to a reinvigorated weapons development program. In addition, basing a significant Western military force in the region would raise the hackles of troops stationed in the Gulf for long periods of time and their host countries. The American military presence in South Korea is largely welcome, but political sentiments in the Persian Gulf agitate against establishing a large base of foreign troops. Foreign troops also complain about both cultural difficulties and a climate in which temperatures often reach 130 degrees Fahrenheit in the summer.

The most fundamental problem, however, is that deterrence is a strategy borne out of the Cold War, in which two roughly balanced adversaries squared off with the assumption of mutually assured destruction if deterrence failed. In the first place, there are more than two parties involved in the conflict with Iraq. France, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iran, and several other countries believe that what happens in Iraq is important to them, and none of these countries have interests identical to those of the United States. Even if the conflict with were two-sided, given the huge imbalance between Iraq and the United States — economically, politically, and militarily — the applicability of deterrence theory is unclear. The Iraqi regime is fighting for its survival and is willing to sustain significant casualties to do so, but to the United States, Iraq remains a sideshow of only intermittent interest to the public or the political leadership. Under such a scenario, it is difficult for the world community to credibly deter Iraq. The costs of forward-basing troops for long periods of time are high, the problems of multilateral coordination are significant, and the willingness to both inflict and sustain damage remains far higher in Iraq than among any of the countries confronting it.

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The Opposition

The problem of Iraq has little to do with Iraqis themselves and everything to do with their government. The Ba'ath Party has by all accounts terrorized the population. Extrajudicial killings are commonplace, informers are rampant, and the heavy hand of the government is seen everywhere. While there is little global support for overthrowing governments because of the way they conduct their domestic affairs, many believe that Iraq's international behavior is a product of this government rather than the regional environment and security conditions that Iraq faces.[2] As a consequence, some argue that removing this government will also end disruptive Iraqi behavior, or at least ameliorate it. Few expect that any new government of Iraq will swiftly forge the Switzerland of the Middle East, a multiethnic democracy with widespread freedoms and neutrality in regional affairs, but it remains hard for anyone to envision a government much worse than the one that is there.

For those who agree that the present government of Iraq is the problem, there remain widespread differences on how a change in government might come about. Some propose that the United States should create a government in exile to prepare for a day when Saddam's regime collapses. Others assert that the U.S. government ought to explicitly support a military campaign to remove Saddam from power. Taking heart in the Reagan administration's activities in Nicaragua and Afghanistan, advocates of this approach assert that governments are not immutable and that a well-managed covert action campaign may succeed where years of sanctions and air strikes have failed. One option that has been gaining a great deal of favor on Capitol Hill is U.S. backing for the Iraqi National Congress (INC), which the Central Intelligence Agency helped establish as an umbrella group for the Iraqi opposition in 1992 but which has since become a faction led by Shi'ite Iraqi businessman Ahmed Chalabi. The London-based Chalabi, who has assiduously courted Congress and pro-Israel groups in Washington, has argued that U.S. military and financial support for the INC would cost relatively little and return huge gains for American policy. Some deride his plans as a pipe dream at best and a Bay of Pigs in the making at worst, but it remains an option that refuses to disappear.

Others argue that the U. S. government should take a more secular approach to the Iraqi opposition, offering broad support and trying to encourage cooperation and coordination between different factions. A broader approach to the opposition is predicated on the idea that it is impossible to predict what leadership will emerge in a post-Saddam Iraq, and a broader approach increases the odds that whoever emerges will have ties to the U.S. government. In addition, a more united opposition is thought to have a greater chance of forcing a change in Baghdad. Finally, if a change in regime were the product of a united opposition effort, the odds may be greater that any new government that emerges will be more stable and allow the major ethnic groups in Iraq to participate, thereby helping ensure the unity of the country and assuaging regional allies' fears of a breakup of Iraq that threatens to alter the balance of power in the region.

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Support for the opposition is clearly a long-range strategy, and one that may take years to affect the situation on the ground in Iraq. Indeed, it is unclear how much support any Iraqi opposition groups have in Iraq because of the difficulty in obtaining information about Iraq and because of such groups' innate interest in exaggerating their support on the ground.

While a change in government in Baghdad is an attractive idea to many, some observers doubt whether U.S. support for an Iraqi opposition of any stripe is likely to bring that change about. For one thing, opposition movements appear to have very few assets in Iraq - not a surprising fact given the brutality of the Iraqi internal intelligence apparatus. In addition, the opposition tends to be riven by sectarian divisions that mirror divisions in Iraqi society. Shi'a, Kurdish, and Sunni Arab groups in exile all have their

bases of support, and those bases often do not intersect (one American triumph last fall was brokering an agreement between the leaders of the two major Kurdish factions, the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan). Another problem is the reportedly widespread infiltration of Iraqi opposition groups by Iraqi intelligence. While such infiltration may not result in the widespread assassinations of opposition figures, it can be enough to make an opposition group impotent in its efforts to affect politics in Baghdad.

One problem with the idea of extraterritorial opposition militias, such as the ones that operated out of Honduras during the Nicaraguan civil war and out of Pakistan during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, is that no country in the region appears willing to host such an opposition. Fearful of merely raising the ire of the Iraqis without changing the regime, surrounding governments have been cautious in word and deed about their interest in ousting the Iraqi ruler. Also arousing caution is the apparent blow-back that Pakistan's long-standing support for the Afghan Mujahideen has been having on Pakistani society. Long content to foster religious radicalism and ethnic divisions across the Afghan border, Pakistani officials are finding that religious radicalism and ethnic conflict are increasingly consuming their own state. To overcome these concerns, some have begun to talk of creating "safe havens" for opposition forces, especially in the south of Iraq. Whether such safe havens would be viable, have regional support, and be able to seriously affect the viability of Saddam Hussein's regime remains an open question.

Lessons

The Iraqi problem continues to defy solution by any single strategy. Any policy toward Iraq is fraught with difficulties in implementation and uncertain results, whether it seeks to change the behavior of the present regime in Baghdad or hasten the day when that regime is replaced. Public pressure to solve the problem quickly and decisively makes solving the problem harder. While the United States may try to effect change in Iraq, its ability to do so is only marginal. The brutality of the regime, combined with limited human intelligence capabilities inside Iraq, make changing the situation on the ground, or even understanding the effects of foreigners' actions on Iraq, a difficult prospect indeed.

Taken as a whole, however, the Iraq problem is more important for the larger issues it raises than for the specific ones:

- The problem of Iraqi weapons development has been changing from a multilateral conflict between Iraq and the United Nations to a bilateral one between Iraq and the United States. While the United States remains the preeminent global power, a bilateral confrontation invites Iraq to build allies who will undermine U.S. policy. Saddam's mere survival allows him to proclaim himself a victor against the U.S. and rally those disaffected from U.S. policy to his cause.
- Saddam has undermined the authority of the United Nations. Saddam Hussein agreed to United Nations demands in the wake of the Gulf War to disclose and then destroy his programs to develop weapons of mass destruction, and then engaged in a protracted and concerted effort to avoid doing so. By his actions, Saddam weakens confidence in the United Nations' ability to resolve conflicts in other parts of the world, even among countries with leaders less odious than Saddam Hussein.
- The confrontation with Iraq has highlighted the importance of multilateral diplomacy, even for a country with a preponderance of global power such as the United States. Although some in the United States call for solo action in international affairs, the containment effort has restrained Iraqi behavior thus far precisely because it has been multilateral. American diplomacy has won significant victories,

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especially in recent months, maintaining a coalition to contain Iraq some eight and a half years after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Effective multilateral diplomacy, however, requires the United States to have a coherent strategy toward the world's problems. Approaching allies with a long laundry list of demands for diplomatic support is unlikely to win effective cooperation, but well-thought-out agreements on shared goals and more limited objectives can go a long way toward that goal.

- Some continue to call for quick-fix solutions to global problems. The expansion of the global news media has put policymakers under increased scrutiny and heightened demands for effective action in very short time frames. In the case of a problem like the recurrent crises with Iraq, however, our policy tools are relatively blunt and the results of our actions hard to predict. While the allure of quick-fix solutions is undeniable, they can also make policy seem to vacillate erratically between different strategies, thereby making any individual strategy difficult to execute. The problem becomes especially vexing with regard to the Middle East, because politics there generally moves slower than in the United States and political memories are longer. While U.S. State Department officials often rotate out of their posts in two to three years, Arab policymakers can retain their positions for decades.

- WMD Proliferation remains a vexing issue not only in Iraq, but around the world. Iraq's efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction are among the most aggressive and persistent in the world, but they are by no means unique. North Korea's weapons development program poses many of the same challenges to nonproliferation regimes, and concerns have been raised (as they have been in the Iraqi case) about noncompliance with signed agreements. India and Pakistan exploded nuclear devices in 1998, and Russian scientists with expertise fields related to weapons of mass destruction appear to be engaged in active partnerships with a number of countries around the world. Knowledge is an exceedingly difficult commodity to contain, and after almost a century of disuse, chemical weapons seem to be experiencing a resurgence as a kind of poor man's atomic bomb.

Conclusion

Iraq poses a challenge to regional security and the global community. Its record of invading neighboring countries and of using chemical agents in warfare is a chilling reminder of what this regime is likely to do if left unchecked. On the other hand, Iraq's challenge to the United States in particular is not to any direct U.S. interests, but rather to broader U.S. concerns regarding energy security, regional stability, and the defense of the rule of law in international relations. Under such conditions, the United States would do well to treat its conflict with Iraq in those broader terms rather than allowing it to turn into a mere bilateral conflict.

The problems Iraq poses to the United States and the international community are unique, but they represent the kinds of problems we are likely to face in the future. Weapons proliferation, asymmetrical confrontations, and multilateral diplomacy are almost certainly typical of the forthcoming challenges to peace and security in the early years of the next decade.

Endnotes

1 See, for example, Bruce W. Jentleson, *With Friends Like These: Reagan, Bush, and Saddam*, 1982 - 1990 (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994), ch. 2 and 3, passim.

2 Some observers, including Center for Strategic and International Studies Middle East Program Co-Chair Anthony Cordesman, disagree with this view.