

# HOW TO ATTACK IRAQ

It now seems fairly certain that some time in the next few weeks the Clinton administration will have to strike Iraq. There really are no acceptable alternatives. Saddam's recent demand for the expulsion of the U.N. weapons inspectors and for the removal of Richard Butler as head of the inspections regime is mostly a ploy to buy time. Saddam would, of course, like to force the United States and the U.N. to agree to further dilution of the already badly compromised inspection effort.

The deal he wangled with U.N. secretary general Kofi Annan last February has so far worked out wonderfully for him. The next deal he wants would look something like this: In return for backing down from his latest challenge, Saddam is rewarded with a U.N. Security Council commitment to wrap up its review of Iraq's compliance with the inspections regime and to move quickly to lift economic sanctions. France and Russia would agree to such a deal in a heartbeat. But even if the Clinton administration blocked it at the Security Council, Saddam wouldn't mind. The longer the present crisis lasts, the more weeks the United States spends arguing with its allies and with Russia, the closer Saddam comes to his real objective: finally acquiring chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction and the missiles to deliver them.

CIA director George Tenet said last January that Iraq already had the "technological expertise" to produce biological weapons "in a matter of weeks." And according to former U.N. weapons inspector Scott Ritter, Saddam needs only six months without inspectors looking over his shoulder to build those weapons and deploy them on missiles capable of reaching Israel and other targets in the Middle East. Saddam has already bought himself three of those

months, since the inspections effectively came to a halt at the beginning of August. He's halfway home. By the time the newly elected Congress returns to Washington, we could well be facing a Saddam armed with some of the most dangerous weapons known to man.

Even the Clinton administration must now realize that its preferred strategy—diplomacy backed by bluff—has failed and that Saddam is an inch away from (to use the administration's lingo) "breaking out of his box." Even the president and his team must know that more diplomatic compromises will only play into Saddam's hands. More hollow threats of force, more empty declarations that "all options are on the table," will only further erode America's already badly damaged credibility. As the Iraqi vice president said a few days ago, "Iraq does not fear the threats of

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the United States because it has been threatening Iraq for the past eight years." Even the Clinton administration, confronted by the inescapable and horrible logic of the situation, will soon come to the conclusion that military action is necessary.

But what kind of military action? Last February the administration geared itself up for a strike, only to realize belatedly that the action it had planned—a cruise-missile attack to destroy suspected Iraqi weapons-production sites—was not going to solve the problem. For one thing, military planners could not be confident that they knew where all the production facilities were—after all, that was precisely what the U.N. inspectors had been prevented from finding out. And for another thing, when all the U.S. missiles had been fired, Saddam would still be in power in Baghdad. What would military action have accomplished? The answer, the administration concluded, was not

much. That's one of the reasons Clinton officials decided to embrace the lousy deal that Kofi Annan negotiated with the Iraqi government.

So now we're back to where we were in February: the same crisis, the same high stakes, the same unpleasant options. The Clinton administration, of course, would still prefer to launch a cruise-missile attack because it carries almost no political or military risk. But officials should remember what they learned last February: It won't work.

It won't work, that is, if that's all the United States does. There is a way to deal with Saddam that can work, and we've outlined it in these pages over the past year: It is to complete the unfinished business of the 1991 Gulf War and get rid of Saddam.

Any sustained bombing and missile campaign against Iraq should be part of an overall political-military strategy aimed at removing Saddam from power. And as it happens, the elements of such a strategy are already falling into place. On Saturday, President Clinton signed into law the Iraq Liberation Act, which authorizes the provision of almost \$100 million in military assistance to anti-Saddam forces in Iraq. The idea, as outlined by former undersecretary of defense Paul Wolfowitz and others, is to establish a

"liberated zone" in southern Iraq that would provide a safe haven where opponents of Saddam could rally and organize a credible alternative to the present regime.

This is not a plan for victory on the cheap: The liberated zone would have to be protected by U.S. military might, both from the air and, if necessary, on the ground. And that would require beefing up our ground and air forces in the Middle East immediately. But unlike a one-shot cruise-missile strike, the Wolfowitz plan offers a chance for a lasting solution to the Iraqi crisis.

Saddam Hussein's behavior over the past year, not to mention over the past twenty years, ought to have proved that the world will never be safe, and U.S. interests and allies will never be secure, so long as Saddam is in charge in Baghdad. Unless we are prepared to live in a world where aggressive dictators like Saddam Hussein wield weapons of mass destruction—presumably not the legacy for which President Clinton would like to be remembered—then the time has come to take the necessary risks to prevent it. There is no more middle ground; there are no more safe options. Maybe even Bill Clinton now understands. ♦



Michael Ramirez