
SADDAM WINS—AGAIN

by Robert Kagan

LAST WEEK, PENTAGON OFFICIALS provided damage assessments of the four-day missile strike against Iraq. But they focused their attention on the wrong country. The most significant damage was not to be found in Iraq, where nearly half a billion dollars worth of U.S. missiles destroyed a handful of empty Republican Guard barracks and may have damaged some missile production facilities. These will be rebuilt in a matter of months. What will not be repaired, however, is the damage the otherwise ineffective missile strikes inflicted on the house of cards that is the Clinton administration's Iraq policy.

That policy, based on the preservation of sanctions against Iraq and on the intrusive inspections regime of UNSCOM, was, to use the Pentagon's lingo, "heavily damaged." The U.N. weapons inspections regime, as we have known it, is finished. France and Russia have demanded the resignation of UNSCOM chief Richard Butler, who, like Scott Ritter, has been declared *persona non grata* because he takes his job too seriously.

Remember last February, when the Clinton administration insisted that U.N. secretary general Kofi Annan's deal with Saddam would not undermine Butler and his team? Well now you can forget about it. Annan is working behind the scenes to create a new inspections regime that one of his advisers has dubbed "UNSCOM Lite." No more Butler. No more "intrusive" monitoring. No more challenge inspections. In Annan's plan, the task of keeping an eye on Saddam's nuclear weapons program would be handed off to the International Atomic Energy Agency, which managed to give Saddam a clean bill of health *before* the Gulf War. Iraq's chemical and biological weapons programs would be monitored by something called the Organization for Prevention of Chemical Warfare at the Hague, no doubt a most stalwart bunch.

And Annan's is the *compromise* plan. The French and Russians, with the support of China, are prepared to do away with UNSCOM and immediately lift all sanctions. French foreign minister Hubert Vedrine said last week that "it's time to move on to a mechanism more geared to the risk of future danger, rather than a systematic examination of what has happened in the past." That's a diplomatic way of saying that the international community should let Saddam build whatever weapons he's going to build and hope that he never uses them. Meanwhile, Vedrine said, it's time to "reconsider the question of lifting the embargo."

This is what last week's missile strikes accomplished. A year ago, the Clinton administration was

trying to build a consensus in the U.N. Security Council to tighten restrictions on Saddam's regime and to make the U.N. inspections regime more effective. Now Clinton

officials are going to have to fight a lonely diplomatic battle just to keep sanctions in place and to preserve a pale remnant of the inspections regime. And they will lose. Last week, administration officials were talking tough, promising to veto any proposal that "waters down" UNSCOM or lifts the sanctions. But in time they will buckle. What are the odds that the Clinton administration, with its visceral commitment to multilateralism and international consensus, is going to sit week after week at the Security Council, with its thumb down, isolated and embarrassed? The chances are they will cut a deal, accept some form of "UNSCOM Lite," and pray that Saddam doesn't blow anyone up before the end of Clinton's term in office.

The Clinton administration would not be under so much pressure to bend to the international campaign for appeasement if it actually had a plan of its own. Indeed, if it did, the international community, even the French, might be willing to listen. But the bombing proved, if further proof were needed, that the administration has no strategy either for "containing" Saddam or removing him.

The administration's muddle was on full display as senior civilian and military officials tried to explain exactly what they had hoped to accomplish with four days of cruise missile strikes and some limited aerial bombardment. Secretary of Defense William Cohen spoke of "degrading" Saddam's ability to launch a conventional military attack on his neighbors. This very limited mission at least had the virtue of being easily accomplished: The destruction of even one tank or airplane would have allowed the administration to declare success. But to what end? Another Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was not imminent. And since the ostensible trigger for the attack was Saddam's refusal to give up his quest for chemical and biological weapons, targeting his limited conventional capabilities would seem rather beside the point.

On the question of what it proposed to do about Saddam's chemical and biological weapons, the administration's answer was a cacophony of contradictions. When the strikes began Secretary Cohen declared that the "objective of the attack is to go after those chemical, biological or weapons of mass destruction sites to the extent that we can." This proved to be an artful and misleading claim. When the strikes ended, we learned that military planners had decided not to target weapons-production facilities after all because they were concerned about exposing innocent civilians to chemical and biological agents. According

to senior Pentagon officials, they also avoided targeting facilities, like pharmaceutical plants, that might have civilian as well as military uses. But these decisions raise some questions. Why, for instance, was it legitimate to target a dual-use pharmaceutical plant in Sudan last August but not legitimate to hit similar facilities in Iraq? And if it really is the administration's policy to avoid hitting production facilities in Iraq, what does that say about any future effort to "contain" Saddam's weapons programs?

Over the past year, before every threatened use of military strikes against Iraq, the Pentagon claimed that one of the goals would be to hit those sites where Iraq was producing weapons of mass destruction. This was always a dubious proposition, given our limited knowledge of precisely where those sites are, but at least in theory it was a strategy aimed at the heart of the problem. Even after last week's bombing, administration officials suggested that the United States could contain Saddam by launching missile strikes whenever U.S. intelligence detects a renewal of his weapons programs. But what good will more strikes do if the administration persists in declaring the weapons-production sites themselves untouchable?

Stranger still were the broad hints offered by civilian and military officials that the hidden purpose of the strikes was to spark an Iraqi uprising against Saddam. While Secretary Cohen repeatedly declared when the bombing began that it was "not our objective to remove Saddam from power," after the strikes ended, the commander of the operation, Gen. Anthony Zinni, said he hoped the strikes had "contributed" to destabilizing Saddam's regime. He lamely pointed to the fact that while the Republican Guard were not actually in their barracks during the bombing, they would now be without a roof over their heads and had "lost the ability to command and control." Such musings were especially ironic coming from Gen. Zinni. At the end of October, Zinni had declared that any effort to topple Saddam would be foolish and dangerous, since it would fracture Iraq, create an "Afghanistan-like" condition of warring factions, and destabilize the entire region. What changed Zinni's mind? Cynics might suggest that it was his need to find a purpose for a mission that had no purpose.

Finally, there was the explanation offered by national security adviser Sandy Berger. "For me," Berger said, "the most important reason for why we had to do this was that to have failed to do so not only would have lost UNSCOM but would have lost the credible threat of force." Since UNSCOM is as good as lost anyway, Berger's point boils down to this: The administration had to use force so that it could maintain the "credible threat of force." In light of the administration's earlier bluffs, which Saddam repeat-

edly called, this credibility problem is no doubt a serious one. But how credible is the "threat" of force if the actual use of force has no discernible impact on the adversary, and serves no purpose?

The Clinton administration is, in short, bereft of a policy toward Iraq, indeed more so today than before the missile strikes. It refuses to consider serious action to remove Saddam by supporting the Iraqi opposition. It won't even contemplate the idea of sending in U.S. ground forces to do the job. Clinton's national security team utters vague promises about containment, about keeping Saddam "in his box," but they cannot begin to explain how they intend to accomplish this. Guess who's in the box now.

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