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CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE / COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES

JCSP 33 / PCEMI 33

MASTER OF DEFENCE STUDIES – RESEARCH PAPER
MAITRISE EN ETUDES DE LA DEFENSE – PROJET DE RECHERCHE

THE ONLY OPTION LEFT:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE DECISION TO INITIATE REGIME CHANGE IN IRAQ

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30 April/avil 2007

ABSTRACT

By 2002, the conflict with Iraq, led primarily by the US and UK, had gone on for 12 years and had resulted in a continuous cycle of troop build ups, frequently punctuated by Iraqi attacks and coalition reprisals, as the coalition struggled to compel Saddam Hussein to comply with the UN mandated obligation to abandon Iraq's WMD ambitions. This essay outlines four potential options for dealing with the volatile situation. The first was to abandon the containment strategy and attempt to re-integrate Iraq into the international community. The second was to continue the containment strategy that had been in effect since 1991 with the bulk of the enforcement being conducted by the US and UK. The third was to continue the containment strategy using a more diverse, and potential more politically acceptable force. The final option was to initiate a regime change in Iraq.

The essay analyzes each option in terms of risk and viability. It concludes that Saddam Hussein's unrepentant regional hegemonic ambitions, combined with his obsession with WMDs, meant that simply abandoning the containment strategy would have involved too great a risk for the region, and given Iraq's strategic location, global stability in general. While containment, as it was practiced in the 1990s, was the most obvious option, international resolve had collapsed, making the second option nonviable. There were several potential approaches which the third option could have taken, including a Middle Eastern led force, an increased role for NATO or a UN force. However, none of these solutions materialized. The essay concludes that, given the strategic situation at the time, regime change was both legal in terms of international law and the only viable option.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In his January 2002 State of the Union Address, President George W. Bush put the world on notice that the US did not intend to stay the course with respect to the perceived threat posed by Iraq. Within the year, the US had assembled a coalition of allies, the so called "Coalition of the willing", and begun to build up its military presence in the Persian Gulf. The surge culminated in March 2003 with the invasion of Iraq and the removal of Saddam Hussein from power.

Since the conclusion of the 1991 Persian Gulf War (Gulf War), the US strategy on Iraq, with the full support of the UN, had been containment using three independent but inter-related elements: robust international inspections, economic and diplomatic sanctions, and military force to restrict Iraq's armed forces. The primary objective was to prohibit Saddam Hussein from re-building Iraq's military capabilities, particularly its weapons of mass destruction (WMD). While the strategy had been initially successful, by 2002 US confidence in containment had begun to wane. UN inspections had ceased in 1998 and international support for the UN-mandated economic constraints had begun to dwindle. Many nations were overtly flouting the sanctions with some, such as China, openly selling Iraq advanced technology.[1] Finally, popular support for the military elements of the policy, particularly in the Middle East, had declined substantially over the previous decade.   Significantly, Saudi Arabia, whose support was crucial, was among the nations whose citizens had grown increasingly uneasy with the Iraqi stalemate.

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[1] Kenneth M Pollack, "Next Stop Baghdad?" *Foreign Affairs*, (March/April 2002):34.

Nevertheless, in the view of the US, Britain, and the nations that eventually participated in the "Coalition of the willing", Iraq under the leadership of Saddam Hussein remained a significant threat to both the region, and given its strategic location, global stability in general. Furthermore, they feared that the danger would expand exponentially if Saddam Hussein was permitted to resume his WMD program - something that the evidence suggested he would have done if left unchecked. However, despite the decreasing effectiveness of the current containment strategy, consensus on an alternative approach remained elusive. Nevertheless, the September 11th attacks focused US attention in particular, on the danger of allowing perceived threats to fester, especially when the threats involved chemical, biological or nuclear weapons. As a result, consensus began to emerge among a majority of Americans that significant threats needed to be confronted rather than tolerated. Armed with this new public perception, the US Administration concluded that the only way to definitively resolve the threat posed by Saddam Hussein was to remove him.

It must be acknowledged that the ongoing turmoil in Iraq has resulted in increasing criticism of the decision to force a regime change. This argument has been significantly bolstered by the failure to locate the WMDs which provided much of the primary justification for immediate action.[2] However, such criticism, ignores the larger strategic fact that while it is now clear that Iraq's WMD program was significantly less advanced than either US or British intelligence believed, because of Iraq's continuous attempts to obstruct the inspection process, the status of the program was at best

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[2] Madawi Al-Rasheed, "Saudi Arabia: The Challenge of the US Invasion of Iraq," in *The Iraq War: Causes and Consequences*, ed. Rick Fawn and Raymond Hinnebusch, 153-161 (Bolder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006), 153.

unknown. It also fails to address Saddam Hussein's continued aspiration to acquire

WMDs and his increasing ability to potentially do so as a result of the deterioration of the

containment strategy. Given that Saddam Hussein had not only developed WMDs in the

past, but also had used them, the assessment of the Coalition that Iraq constituted a threat,

cannot be easily dismissed.   One must therefore look beyond the current operational

level difficulties, which can in large part be attributed to "how" the war was conducted,

and instead focus on the longer term benefits of regime change which is "why" the war

was initiated.

      While the alternatives available for dealing with Saddam Hussein spanned the

entire spectrum, this essay will argue that given the strategic reality at the time of the

invasion, there were really only four options. The first was to abandon the containment

policy and risk that Iraq, under the continued leadership of Saddam Hussein, would not

resort to any aggressive action against either its neighbors or the West.   While this was

the preferred option among many Europeans and the vast majority of the general

population in the Middle East, it involved substantial risk given that the bulk of the

evidence suggests that Saddam Hussein had neither abandoned his regional hegemonic

ambitions nor his quest for WMDs.

      A second option was to continue the containment strategy that had been in effect

since 1991 with the bulk of the enforcement being conducted by the US and Britain. This

option involved the least amount of risk and through most of the 1990s had been

relatively effective. However, while this was a UN-mandated operation, it placed the

bulk of the burden for the military elements of the strategy on just these two countries.

Furthermore, to be completely effective, it also required the remainder of the

international community to respect the economic element, as well as UN access to Iraq, for the purpose of conducting inspections. Both of these elements had significantly deteriorated by 2002.

The third option was a variation of the second, namely a continuation of the military element of the containment strategy by a more diverse and perhaps more internationally acceptable force. This new force could have taken any number of forms, including a UN, a regional, or a NATO force. As international concern over the pending invasion mounted in 2002, the international community had the opportunity to pursue this option. However, its inability to reach consensus on the best alternative for dealing with Iraq resulted in the opportunity slipping away.

The final option was the one which was ultimately selected: the removal of Saddam Hussein from power. While this option was always controversial, it had the potential to end 12 years of conflict in the region and free US foreign policy from the endless stranglehold of Iraq. The risks of this option were however generally recognized and hotly debated. Indeed, many of the more dire post-invasion predications have since emerged in Iraq. Equally controversial was the pre-emptive aspect of this option. Nevertheless, while the current unrest in Iraq is undesirable, the outcome of a rearmed and uncontained Iraq may have been even less desirable.

This paper will review each of the options with respect to both their feasibility and risks. In so doing it will demonstrate first, that the situation in the Middle East was not one of peace, but rather constant conflict. It could therefore not be ignored. Second, Saddam Hussein's actions demonstrated that he remained a threat and the containment option could therefore not simply be abandoned. Third, while the US and British led

containment strategy was the most obvious option, by 2002 it had ceased to be effective.

Fourth, although a more international force offered an opportunity to continue the

containment strategy, because of international division at the time, no such alternative

emerged. Finally, as a result, regime change became the only option.

CHAPTER 2

IRAQ 1991-2003

For many critics of the decision to invade Iraq, the logical alternative to the

invasion was a continuation of the status-quo. It is, however, important to recognize that

this was not peace. On the contrary, the status-quo involved a continuous game of

brinksmanship with Iraqi and coalition forces routinely firing on each other. In fact,

while largely unnoticed by the American people or the world, by 2000 the operation

represented the longest continuous US combat action since the Vietnam War.[3]

Since the end of the Gulf War, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) had

issued no less than 17 resolutions against Iraq. In an ongoing effort to enforce these

resolutions, the theater had seen multiple coalition troop build ups, many of which had

resulted in direct engagements. Between the completion of OPERATION DESERT

STORM in 1991 and the commencement of OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) in

2003, over 250 000 sorties - more than twice the number flown in the Gulf War - had

been launched against Iraq. Furthermore, between 1999 and 2003 alone, 380 of these

missions had resulted in coalition strikes against Iraqi weapons systems and

infrastructure.[4]

The strikes had primarily been in support of two operations: OPERATION

SOUTHERN WATCH (OSW), which restricted both the deployment of Iraqi ground

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[3] David Wood, "Our Un-war with Iraq Drags On, No End in Sight," *St-Louis Post Dispatch*, 23 September 1999, http://ebird.dtic.mil; Internet; accessed 15 December 2006.

[4] GlobalSecurity.org, "Operation Northern Watch," http://globalsecurity.org/military/ops/norther_watch.htm; Internet; accessed; 9 January 2007.

weapons systems and over-flights south of the 33rd parallel, and OPERATION

NORTHERN WATCH (ONW), which enforced the same restriction north of the 36th

parallel. For its part, since 1998, Iraq had responded to almost every over-flight with

anti-aircraft fire and the Iraqi leader himself had offered a US$14 000 bounty to anyone

who shot down a coalition aircraft.[5]   Remarkably, no manned coalition aircraft were lost

in either of the two operations.

A more detailed review of Saddam Hussein's actions during the 1990s and the

operations conducted against him in response will clearly demonstrate how volatile the

Iraqi theatre of operation had become.

OPERATION SOUTHERN WATCH (OSW)

OSW began on 27 August 1992 in response to a decision by a coalition of UN

members to actively enforce United Nation Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 668.

Passed on 1 June 1991, the resolution demanded an end to Iraqi military attacks against

Shiite Muslims in southern Iraq. Saddam Hussein ignored this resolution and instead

increased his bombing throughout the remainder of 1991 and 1992.[6] To facilitate the

enforcement, the coalition barred all Iraqi aircraft from flying south of the 32nd parallel,

and to ensure compliance the US, UK and France began flying surveillance and combat

air patrols inside Iraq and along its southern borders. Despite initially complying with

the restrictions, Saddam Hussein soon began to challenge the operation and in November

1992 an American F-16 shot down an Iraqi MiG-25 which had entered the no-fly zone.

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[5] John T. Correll, "Northern Watch." *Air Force Magazine* 83, no.2 (February 2000) [journal on-line]; available from http://www.afa.org/magazine/feb2000/; Internet; accessed 9 January 2007.

In response, Iraq positioned surface-to-air missiles below the 32nd parallel. Given that these systems posed a direct threat to coalition aircraft, their continued deployment was viewed as unacceptable and Iraq was ordered by coalition forces to remove them. When Iraq refused, coalition aircraft destroyed both the missiles sites and their command and control units.

In October 1994, Iraq once again began to move troops south towards Kuwait. Saddam Hussein, upset about the continuing UN sanctions, insisted that he had the right to deploy his forces anywhere within his own borders. The UN responded by issuing UNSCR 949 which demanded that Iraq not utilize its military or any other forces in a hostile or provocative manner to threaten either its neighbours or the UN operations in Iraq. More significantly, the resolution further demanded that Iraq immediately withdraw all of its recently deployed military units from the south to their original positions and not take any other action to enhance its military capability in southern Iraq.[7] While Saddam Hussein did eventually comply with the demands, he did so only after the US had deployed an additional 170 aircraft and nearly doubled the size of its ground component in the region to 6500 personnel as part of OPERATION VIGILANT WARRIOR.[8] Following an additional confrontation in September 1996, the OSW no-fly line was

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[6] GlobalSecurity.org, "Operation Southern Watch," http://globalsecurity.org/military/ops/southern_watch.htm; Internet; accessed; 9 January 2007.

[7] United Nations, Security Council, "*United Nations Security Council Resolution 949 (1994),*" 15 October 1994, http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/18082.pdf; Internet; accessed 15 January 2007.

[8] GlobalSecurity.org, "Operation Vigilant Warrior 14 Oct-21 Dec 1994," http://globalsecurity.org/military/ops/vigilant_warrior.htm; Internet; accessed; 9 January 2007.

moved 60 miles further north to the 33rd parallel by British and US forces.[9] French forces continued to patrol the southern no-fly zone but remained south of the 32nd parallel.

OPERATION NORTHERN WATCH (ONW)

ONW enforced a no-fly zone north of the 36th parallel. The operation began in 1997 following the completion of OPERATION PROVIDE COMFORT (OPC), which had been on-going since April 1991. OPC was initiated by the UN in order to provide both security and relief to an estimated one million Kurdish refugees who had fled into the Iraqi mountains on the Turkish border after OPERATION DESERT STORM. In the wake of an attempted revolt against Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi military had launched repeated attacks against the Kurds using artillery and air strikes.[10] Significantly, many of the attacks included the use of chemical weapons. While there is evidence that Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons against the Kurds on a number of occasions, the most notable attack occurred on 16 March 1988 when the Iraqi Air Force killed hundreds in an attack against the 80 000 residence of the town of Halabja. The air attacks reportedly began in the early evening and continued throughout the night and included the use of both SARIN and VX gas.[11]

OPC involved both the dropping of relief supplies and the insertion of ground troops into northern Iraq to stabilize the situation and assist in transferring the Kurds back to their home villages. Since it was unclear what Iraq's reaction to the operation would

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[9] GlobalSecurity.org, "Operation Southern Watch."

[10] GlobalSecurity.org, "Operation Provide Comfort," http://globalsecurity.org/military/ops/provide_comfort.htm; Internet; accessed; 9 January 2007.

be, it was supported by ground attack aircraft. To protect these aircraft the no-fly zone

was established and enforced by US and British fighter aircraft in conjunction with US

surveillance and command and control aircraft. While the provision of supplies ended

with the termination of OPC, the no-fly zone remained in place - principally to protect the

Kurds from Iraqi attacks - until the beginning of OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF)

in 2003.

OPERATION DESERT FOX

The most significant confrontation between Iraq and the coalition forces during

the 12-year containment period occurred in December 1998 with OPERATION DESERT

FOX. The operation involved a sustained four day aerial bombing of several key Iraqi

infrastructure sites, including a number of locations which the UN observers believed

either contained or were involved in the production of WMDs.

The air strikes came at the end of a year in which Saddam Hussein had repeatedly

attempted to renege on his obligations. Iraqi Foreign Minister Teriq Aziz had begun to

complain that the sole purpose for the continued inspections was to delay the lifting of

the sanction against Iraq. In addition, Saddam Hussein had begun to accuse the UN

inspectors of being spies for the US. The chief UN inspector, Richard Butler, who was

an Australian, countered that Iraqi obstructionism was actually motivated by the success

his team was beginning to have at unraveling Iraq's WMD secrets and the fact that they

had located key WMD sites.   Furthermore, the inspector's insistence that they be given

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[11] John Pike, "Chemical Weapons Program" http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/iraq/cw/program.htm; Internet; accessed 10 April 2007.

access to all of the sites they deemed suspicious was well within the mandate given them by UNSCR 687.

UNSCR 687 outlined the terms and conditions for the formal cease-fire ending the 1991 Gulf War. Among a host of other requirements the resolution called for

> the elimination, under international supervision, of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles with a range greater than 150 kilometers (km), together with related items and production facilities. It also called for measures to ensure that the acquisition and production of prohibited items were not resumed.[12]

In order to ensure compliance, the UN established the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) to implement the non-nuclear provisions of the resolution. UNSCOM was further mandated to assist the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in inspecting Iraq's nuclear programs. In order to fulfill this mandate both UNSCOM and the IAEA were to be given unrestricted access to any areas in Iraq they chose to inspect. However, on 13 January 1998, Iraq banned the inspectors from continuing their work and three days later ordered their removal. The expulsion prompted the coalition to immediately initiate a build up of forces in the region. Direct conflict was avoided only after UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan personally intervened and obtained a written agreement from Saddam Hussein that he would once again permit full UN access. Despite the agreement, ten months later, Iraq once again suspended its cooperation with the inspectors and on 7 November 1998 forced them to withdraw. In a clear attempt to divide the international community, Iraq this time agreed to allow the IAEA, with which it had much better relations, to resume its inspections but not UNSCOM.[13] Unsatisfied

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[12] United Nations, *United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) Charter*, http://www.un.org/Depts/unscom/General/basicfacts.html; Internet; accessed 22 March 07.

with this Iraqi dictated compromise, the coalition yet again began to deploy forces to the region and on 14 November, 1998, President Clinton ordered an attack. At the last minute, the attack was turned back when Tariq Aziz sent a letter to Kofi Annan announcing his government's intention to unconditionally cooperate with UNSCOM. Following the aborted raid, President Clinton stated that he had "concluded that the right thing to do was to use restraint and give Saddam one last chance to prove his willingness to cooperate."[14]

Over the following three weeks, the inspectors tested Iraq's willingness to cooperate. On 15 December 1998, Butler, in a report to Kofi Annan, concluded that rather than cooperate, Iraq had placed new restrictions on the inspectors and failed to turn over all requested documents. Butler further argued that "Iraq had ensured that UN inspectors could make no progress towards disarmament."[15]

Complicating the status of Iraqi compliance, however, was a parallel report issued by the IAEA Director, Mohammad El Baradei, which stated that "Iraq had provided the necessary level of cooperation in order for the agencies work to be completed efficiently and effectively."[16] Despite the second report, President Clinton concluded that Saddam Hussein's deception had ensured that "instead of the inspectors disarming Saddam, the

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[13] Amin Tarzi, "Contradictions in U.S. Policy on Iraq and its Consequences," *MERIA: Middle East Review of International Affairs* 4, no.1 (March 2000). [journal on-line]; available from http://meria.idc.il/journal/2000/issue1/jv4n1a3.html; Internet; accessed 10 Jan 2007.

[14] CNN.Com, "Transcript: President Clinton explains Iraq Strike," 16 December 1998, http://www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/stories/1998/12/16/transcripts/clinton.html; Internet; accessed 1 October 2007.

[15] Linda Kozaryn, "Saddam Abuses His Last Chance, Clinton Says," *American Forces Information Services*, [journal on-line]; available from www.defencelink.mil; Internet; accessed 9 January 2007.

[16] Tarzi, "Contradictions in U.S. Policy on Iraq and its Consequences."

Iraqi dictator had disarmed the inspectors."[17] President Clinton further concluded, based on the Butler report, that,

> the situation presented a clear and present danger to the stability of the Persian Gulf and the safety of people everywhere…Without a strong inspection system, Iraq would be free to retain and begin to rebuild its chemical, biological and nuclear weapons programs in months, not years. Second, if Saddam can cripple the weapons inspection system and get away with it, he would conclude that the international community - led by the US - has simply lost will. He will surmise that he has free rein to rebuild his arsenal of destruction, and someday – make no mistake—he will use it again as he has in the past.[18]

As a result, on 16 December, 1998, President Clinton authorized the air campaign which included air strikes by US and British aircraft as well as US Navy cruise missile attacks against over 100 targets in Iraq. The objective was ultimately to "degrade Saddam's capacity to develop and deliver weapons of mass destruction."[19]

Regrettably, this limited operation failed to persuade Iraq to re-admit the UNSCOM inspectors. In addition, shortly after the conclusion of the operation, Iraq announced that it would no longer recognize either the northern or southern no-fly zones. Iraq's resolve in this regard was demonstrated within days, when, on 28 December, 1998, an Iraqi SA-3 surface-to-air missile system fired three missiles at a pair of US Air Force (USAF) F-15s patrolling the ONW no-fly zone. This was the first attack by Iraq on coalition aircraft since September 1996. None of the coalition aircraft were hit and they consequently were able to counter-attack, destroying the Iraqi missile system. Two days later an SA-6 surface-to-air missile battery fired six missiles at OSW aircraft patrolling

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[17] CNN.Com, "Transcript: President Clinton explains Iraq Strike."

[18] *Ibid*.

[19] *Ibid*.

the southern no-fly zone. Once again the Iraqi missiles missed their intended targets and the SA-6 was promptly counter-attacked and destroyed.[20]

The engagements marked the beginning of a new phase for both ONW and OSW. Over the next four years, until the beginning of OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF), coalition aircraft were challenged on an almost daily basis. The challenges were often limited to the illumination and tracking of coalition aircraft by Iraqi missile fire control radars. At other times, however, Iraqi air defence systems actually fired both missiles and air defence artillery. Coalition forces always responded to the Iraqi attacks either by striking the Iraqi system which had fired on them orq by attacking a separate Iraqi weapons system. This allowed the coalition to maintain control of when and where it attacked.

WEAPONS INSPECTIONS and WMDs, 1999-2003

No aspect of the decision to invade Iraq in 2003 was more controversial than that pertaining to the status of Iraq's WMDs. Post invasion inspections have clearly shown that the US assessment of Saddam's WMD capabilities was wrong. However, the charge that regime change was solely the result of an ideological fixation within the Bush Administration - regardless of the status of WMDs - is not supported by the evidence.[21] The threat posed by Iraq's WMD program had been a focus of US policy throughout the 1990s. President Clinton clearly articulated this emphasis in his address prior to OPERATION DESERT FOX. As he noted,

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[20] Correll, "Northern Watch."

The international community had good reason to set the requirement [that Iraq declare and destroy its arsenal of WMD and long range missiles]. Other countries possess weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles. With Saddam there is one big difference. He has used them. Not once, but repeatedly; unleashing chemical weapons against Iranian troops during a decade-long war. Not only against soldiers, but against civilians, firing SCUD missiles at the civilians of Israel, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Iran. And not only against foreign enemies, but against his own people, gassing Kurdish civilians in Northern Iraq. The international community had little doubt then, and I have no doubt today, that left unchecked, Saddam Hussein will use these terrible weapons again.[22]

While the US policy shift away from containment and towards regime change became more evident after OPERATIOPN DESERT FOX, the seeds of change had been sown four month earlier with the passage of the Iraqi Liberation Act. This Act was introduced into the US Senate by six Republican and two Democratic Senators on 29 September 1998, and in a clear reflection of the US perception of the need for more decisive action in Iraq, it passed unanimously and without amendments. The Liberation Act called for the "establishment of a program to support the transition to democracy in Iraq."[23] It is, however, important to note that the Act did not specify the means by which this transition should occur. Consequently, the need for an invasion was not a forgone conclusion. While the Act clearly stated that US policy should seek the removal of Saddam Hussein, it is highly possible that Saddam Hussein could have avoided this fate by agreeing to comply with the provision in UNSCR 687.

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[21] Michael Lind, "How Neoconservatives Conquered Washington – Launched War," ANTIWAR (April 2003) [Journal on-line]; available from http://www.antiwar.com/orig/lind1.html; Internet; accessed 2 2 February 2007.

[22] CNN.Com, "Transcript: President Clinton explains Iraq Strike."

[23] United States, Senate, "Iraq Liberation Act of 1998", document S2525, September 29, 1998, http:/www.senate.gov/legilslative/index.html; Internet; accessed 10 January 2007.

Nevertheless, after 1998 and the expulsion of the UNSCOM inspectors, it became

virtually impossible for the international community to form an accurate picture of what

was occurring inside Iraq with respect to the reconstitution of its WMD program. The

lack of information often resulted in conflicting conclusions by different agencies. For

example, in July 1999, US State Department spokesman James Ruben stated that, "it is

fair to say that we have no reason to believe there have been significant efforts [on the

part of the Iraqi regime] to reconstitute their WMD program."[24] However, one month

later, the White House reported to Congress that,

> we are concerned by activity at Iraqi sites known to be capable of producing
> weapons of mass destruction and long-range ballistic missiles, as well as Iraq's
> long established covert procurement activity that could include dual-use items
> with weapons applications.[25]

The most accurate statement was likely made by a second US State Department

spokesman, Philip Reeker, who when questioned about the inconsistencies, responded

that "in the absence of UN inspectors on the ground carrying out the existing UNSC

mandate, the uncertainties about the meaning of Iraqi WMD activities will persist, and as

time passes, the concerns of the US will increase."[26]

The UN was also concerned about Iraq's WMD program and frustrated with

Iraq's refusal to comply with the existing Security Council resolutions. As a result, in

January 1999, two competing draft proposals were circulated amongst the Security

Council members, both aimed at reconstituting the inspection program. One proposal,

which had been proposed by France and supported by China and Russia, called for a

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[24] United States, Department of State, "Daily Press Briefing," 15 July, 1999,
http://www.secretary.state.gov; Internet; accessed 10 January 2007.

[25] Bill Gerts, "Saddam Secretly Making Weapons," *Washington Times*, September 2, 1999, 1.

more intrusive verification program than that authorized under UNSCOM, but also for the suspension of economic sanctions. The other proposal co-sponsored by the Netherlands and Britain and supported by the US, also called for the replacement of UNSCOM with a more intrusive inspection regime. However, it offered only a limited suspension of the sanctions until Iraq was deemed to be in full compliance with the relevant aspects of UNSCR 687 and other pertinent resolutions. While neither proposal was adopted, they clearly demonstrated that there was consensus among both the Permanent Five (P5) and rotating members of the UN Security Council that without an intrusive and on-going monitoring and verification program, ascertaining Iraq's intentions vis-à-vis its WMD program would be virtually impossible.

By 2002, the lack of information created by the absence of inspectors led the US to conclude that Iraq could have either already re-initiated some aspects of its WMD program or, more likely, was in a position to rapidly do so. Iraq, therefore, now represented the threat to the region that President Clinton had warned about. It is thus clear that, while the situation in the Persian Gulf between 1991 and 2003 was not one of war, it was also not peaceful. Any analysis of the options available for dealing with the security dilemma posed by Iraq must be made with this in mind.

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[26] United States, Department of State, "Daily Press Briefing," 15 July, 1999.

CHAPTER 3

OPTION 1 - ABANDON CONTAINMENT

The first option for dealing with the Iraqi security situation was to abandon the contaminant strategy and attempt to re-integrate Iraq into the international community. This was the approach preferred by many European countries. France, in particular, as far back as 1996, had begun to argue that sanctions would never achieve Saddam's full compliance with the UN resolutions and that trade, investment and diplomatic links offered much better prospects.[27]

To be sure, economic sanctions never did compel Saddam Hussein to comply with the obligations levied against him by the UN. However, there are at least two reasons why abandoning the containment option would have almost certainly failed to keep Saddam Hussein in check. First, the evidence is clear that despite his obligation to do so under the terms of the Gulf War cease-fire agreement, Saddam Hussein had not abandoned his ambition to acquire WMDs. On the contrary, prior to 1998 - the last year in which on-the-ground verification was possible - Saddam Hussein had managed to both maintain and in some cases advance his capabilities in all three of the WMD categories: chemical, biological and nuclear. Incredibly, he had succeeded in this regard despite the constant vigilance of the UN inspectors. It was therefore reasonable to assume that, given the additional resources that would have been available to him without the

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[27] BBC News, International Version, "France wants Iraq Sanctions Suspended," 22 April 2003. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/2967909; Internet; accessed 7 February 2007.

sanctions, Saddam Hussein would have almost certainly resumed his pre Gulf War WMD programs.

Second, and equally important, was the fact that Saddam Hussein had not abandoned his regional hegemonic ambitions and, in fact, continued as late as 2001 to lay claim to Kuwait.

Saddam Hussein and WMDs

In 1999, having served as an UNSCOM inspector for eight years, Richard Butler concluded that Saddam Hussein was still "addicted to weapons of mass destruction."[28] Furthermore, Saddam Hussein's willingness to use such weapons was indisputable. During the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War, he used chemical weapons against both civilians and military targets and, as discussed previously, continued to use them after the war against his own people, attacking Kurdish minorities living in northern Iraq. In addition, UNSCOM discovered evidence that in 1991, Saddam Hussein had forward deployed artillery shells and missile warheads containing chemical weapons to the front lines during the Gulf War. US concern that Iraq may have taken such action prompted Secretary of State James Baker to threaten an unspecified but dire response if they were used against coalition troops. According to Butler, Baker did this by quietly advising Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz that if Iraq used chemical weapons on coalition troops "there would be a resounding silence in the desert.[29]

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[28] Richard Butler, "The Inspections and the UN: The Blackest of Comedies," in *The Iraq Reader: History, Documents, Opinions* ed. Micah L. Sifry and Christopher Cerf (New York, Touchstone, 2003), 174.

[29] *Ibid*., 175.

Iraq's Gulf War actions contributed significantly to a shift in US national security priorities. In the 1991 National Security Strategy, President George H.W. Bush argued that no obligation was "more urgent than stopping the global proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons as well as the missiles to deliver them."[30] The Clinton Administration continued this theme by focusing heavily on Korea, Iran and Iraq - all of which were actively seeking WMDs.

Chemical Weapons

Iraq's capabilities were most advanced in the area of chemical weapons, both in terms of development and employment. Indeed, immediately following the 1990-91 Gulf War, UNSCOM inspectors were astonished to discover more than 55 000 munitions pieces capable of carrying chemical weapons along with sufficient quantities of both nerve and blister agents to fill them. Furthermore, Iraq claimed that an additional 45 000 pieces, primarily artillery rockets and gravity bombs, had been destroyed in the war. Significantly, it became clear that while much of the munitions had been imported, Iraqi industry was fully capable of producing comparable munitions. Consequently, in addition to destroying Iraq's chemical stores, UNSCOM undertook an extensive program to locate and destroy the specialized equipment required to produce both the chemical weapons and delivery systems.

By 1993, UNSCOM was confident that it had, for all intents and purposes, eliminated Iraq's chemical capability with one exception: Iraq's stores of, and ability to produce, VX gas. VX is a highly lethal nerve agent that, in addition to killing its victim

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[30] Steven E. Miller, "The Iraq Experiment and US National Security," *Survival, The IISS Quarterly* 48, no. 4, (Winter 2006-07): 17.

within an hour of exposure, also has an adhesive quality which enables it to stick to surfaces. The chemical, therefore, continues to kill long after it has been delivered.[31] Despite initially only admitting to having produced laboratory quantities, following an in depth investigation by UNSCOM, Iraq was forced to admit that it had produced 3.9 tons of VX.[32]   Even more disturbing was the discovery by UNSCOM in 1998 of a number of destroyed missile warheads that contained residue indicating they had once been loaded with VX.[33] Iraq subsequently claimed to have unilaterally destroyed the agent but was unable to provide any proof. While there was little concern that any of the gas produced prior to 1991 was still effective, UNSCOM remained concerned about Iraq's inability to account for 200 tons of imported chorine, a precursor for VX. Thus, UNSCOM feared that Iraq still had the capacity to rapidly produce the chemical agent.

Dual use technology was another area of concern for UNSCOM with its relevance increasing substantially after its 1998 expulsion from Iraq. An example of such technology was glass lined corrosion resistant chemical reactors, which, while they served an industrial purpose, were also critical to the production of chemical weapons. During its inspections, UNSCOM had determined that Iraq's chemical production plan was not to produce and store large quantities of weapons but rather to develop dual use facilities in the civilian chemical industry which could rapidly produce chemical weapons

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[31] United States, Centre for Disease Control: Emergency Preparedness and Response, "Facts About VX," http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/vx/basics/facts.asp; Internet; accessed 7 March 2007.

[32] Rolf Ekeus, "Reassessment: The IISS Strategic Dossier on Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction," *Survival: The IISS Quarterly* 46, no.2 (Summer 2004): 81.

[33] Butler, "The Inspections and the UN"…, 181.

for munitions when needed.[34] Iraq's motivation for using this approach had more to do with the difficulties it had experienced during production than a desire to hide the capacity. Iraq had experienced difficulty stabilizing the agents with the result that the lethality of the weapons tended to deteriorate quickly. Iraq's rationale did not, however, alleviate UNSCOM's concern that Iraq had retained the capability to rapidly manufacture WMDs and thereby produce the weapons just prior to use.

Biological Weapons

In contrast to its chemical program, Iraq went to extraordinary lengths to keep its biological program hidden, only admitting that it even existed after it was discovered by UNSCOM in 1995. The biological agents being pursued by Iraq included botulim and anthrax. While Iraq was forced to acknowledge the existence of the program, it claimed that it had destroyed its stocks in 1991. Once again, however, Iraq was unable to provide any evidence of the destruction, leaving UNSCOM with serious doubts about the claim.[35]

Nevertheless, UNSCOM's primary concern was not with the stocks of biological weapons that Iraq may have produced before the Gulf War, for even if Iraq had not destroyed them, the bio-agents would not have retained their characteristics over an extended period of time. Rather, UNSCOM's concerns were with potential on-going biological warfare activities. These concerns were validated in September 1997 when, during a routine inspection of what was described as a food-testing lab, inspectors seized a briefcase from two Iraqi officials who were attempting to escape through a back door.

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[34] Ekeus, "Reassessment…, 82.

[35] Ibid., 80.

The case contained both equipment for making bio-agents and documents linking it back to the Iraqi Special Security Force.[36] When Iraq was unable to explain the discovery, UNSCOM attempted to inspect the Special Security Headquarters, only to be denied access. Iraq never did account for the equipment.

Nuclear Weapons

The final element of Iraq's WMD program was its ambition to acquire a nuclear bomb. According to Khidhir Hamza, an Iraqi scientist who spent twenty years working on Iraq's atomic weapons program before defecting to the US in 1994, Iraq began its nuclear bomb program in 1971. In 1981 the program suffered a serious set-back with the destruction, by Israel, of its French built Osirak nuclear reactor, which Iraq had intended to use to produce weapons-grade plutonium. The Gulf War once again slowed Iraq's progress, but as Hamza's defection revealed, the program was quickly restarted after the cease-fire and by 1994, the clandestine effort was once again at full strength. According to Hamza,

> At its peak in 1993-1994, the bomb program employed more than 2000 engineers. The mechanical design team alone numbered more than two hundred engineers. We had at least three hundred employees holding PhDs in such fields as physics, chemistry, biology and chemical and nuclear engineering…With the addition of thousands of technicians, the total work force employed in making a bomb was in excess of twelve thousand people…How close did we get to perfecting the bomb? Very![37]

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[36] Butler, "The Inspection and the UN"…, 177.

[37] Khidhir Hamza with Jeff Stein, "Behind the Scenes with the Iraqi Nuclear Bomb," in *The Iraq Reader: History, Documents, Opinions* ed. Micah L. Sifry and Christopher Cerf, 191-195 (New York, Touchstone, 2003), 191.

Iraqi access to atomic expertise was further increased by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the sudden availability of experienced Russian scientists and engineers, many of whom came to work in Iraq.

The limiting factor in Iraq's nuclear bomb program was always its access to sufficient quantities of fissile material. Iraq had managed to salvage 25 kilograms of bomb-grade uranium from the wreckage of its Osirak nuclear reactor, an amount sufficient to build one Hiroshima-sized nuclear bomb. However, without the reactor, Iraqi scientists were unable to refine it and it therefore remained unsuitable for weapons production. While Iraq had begun to develop other refining methods, including the use of centrifuges, they had not yet succeeded when Saddam Hussein ordered the uranium, along with other key components, hidden away prior the 1991 Gulf War.[38]

While the Iraqi nuclear program appears to have stalled after 1995, it is significant, that despite the IAEA inspections, Iraq was able to clandestinely continue the program for five years. Even after the extent of Iraq's nuclear program was revealed, the IAEA appears to have been unconcerned. While it acknowledged that, as late as 1998, Iraq still aspired to produce a nuclear bomb, the IAEA appears to have been content with its assessment that Iraq had not produced more than a few grams of weapons grade nuclear material and was therefore probably years away from producing a nuclear weapon with indigenously produced material.[39] The fact that Iraq was not supposed to be producing any nuclear weapons material at all seems to have been lost on the IAEA. Furthermore, given Iraq's clear technical capabilities it is likely that this timeline could

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[38] *Ibid*., 192.

[39] Ekeus, "Reassessment …, 85.

have been significantly advanced had Iraq been able to secure an external source of fissile material.

Regional Hegemonic Ambitions

A second reason why abandoning the containment strategy was not a practical alternative, was Saddam Hussein's continued regional hegemonic ambitions, particularly with respect to Kuwait and Iran. Despite Iraq's 1994 declaration to the UN of its "irrevocable and unqualified recognition of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of Kuwait,"[40] Iraq continued, up to the invasion date, to routinely direct threats against the Kuwaiti regime. An example of such a threat appeared in an August 2000 edition of the government controlled newspaper *Babil*. The article, entitled "After 10 Years, Do They Need an Extra Lesson?" stated, "If they have eyes to see and brains to perceive, the rulers of Kuwait must keep in their heads that we never forget those who hurt us."[41] Another threat came in August 2001 when Saddam Hussein's son, Qusay Hussein, delivered a speech, which stated,

> We recall with pride and esteem the second of August, the great Call Day…when the splendid men of the Republican Guard and our brave Army charged in a powerful push to topple the center of corruption and treason represented by the House of Al-Sabah[42]

Equally important was Iraq's relationship with Iran. In an effort to solidify his legitimacy, Saddam Hussein frequently presented himself as a self-appointed guardian of

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[40] United Nations, "*Statement by the President of the Security Council,*", 16 Nov 1994, http://www.fas.org/news/un/iraq/sprst/sprst1994-68.htm; Internet; accessed 26 February 2007.

[41] Laurie Mylroie, "Kuwait and Saudi Arabia against Iraq," in *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin* 3, No 2, Feb 2001, http://www.meib.org/articles/0102_ir1.htm; Internet; accessed 27 February 2007.

[42] *Ibid*.

the Arab world against Iran's Persian population. However, with only one third of the population, Saddam Hussein found matching Iran's economic and military might a significant challenge. Indeed, it was this disparity in size which had been the main reason why Iraq had found it necessary to resort to chemical weapons during the Iran–Iraq War - a war which Iraq had initiated.

Given Iran's current nuclear ambitions, Saddam Hussein would have almost certainly felt compelled, for defensive and hegemonic reasons, to resume his own nuclear program as soon as the constraints had been lifted. It is therefore difficult to see how Saddam Hussein, if left unconstrained and given renewed access to Iraq's oil wealth, would not have been a threat to both his neighbors and, given the strategic importance of the Middle East, to global stability in general.

Critics of this assessment argue that Iran's nuclear ambitions are equally dangerous, and as a result, the overthrow of Saddam Hussein has done nothing to improve the security situation in the region. A significant difference between Iraq and Iran however, is that Iran, unlike Saddam Hussein, has not demonstrated a propensity to use WMDs. Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that the international community is still working diligently to try and subvert Iran's nuclear plans. What the consequences, both for Iran and the international community will be if these efforts fail remains to be seen. Finally, even if Iran does eventually develop a nuclear bomb, the region is still safer with only one nuclear-armed state than it would have been with two.

The post invasion inspections of Iraq have revealed that Iraq did not have a usable WMD capability at the time of the invasion. Furthermore, although much of the stocks were unaccounted for, it is also now clear that Iraq was not able to retain much of the

precursor material that would have enabled it to rapidly activate its capability. This, however, is not to say that Saddam Hussein, if left unchecked, would not have immediately reestablished his WMD program. Saddam Hussein's actions throughout the containment period clearly demonstrated his ambitions in this regard. Secondly, Iraq still possessed a significant number of scientists and technological experts with the required knowledge to restart all of the programs. Finally, given the strategic situation in the Middle East, it is very likely that Iraq would have felt compelled to re-start its WMD program, if for no other reason than to counter Iran's nuclear ambitions. Vice President Cheney expressed this opinion in a September 2006 interview:

> If Saddam Hussein were still in power the situation would have been worse than it is today. You have a man who had a demonstrated capacity for violence, who'd started two wars, who had, in fact been involved with weapons of mass destruction, who had every intention of going back to it once sanctions were lifted…Especially with Ahmadinejad, living next door in Iran, pursuing nuclear weapons, there is no doubt in my mind that if Saddam Hussein was still in power he would have a very robust program underway to do exactly the same thing.[43]

Because Saddam Hussein barred the UN from carrying out inspections in 1998, by 2002 there was no way of definitively knowing the status of his WMD program. Under the circumstances, the best the international community could do was to try and assess Saddam Hussein's intent. The evidence is clear that Saddam Hussein tried to maintain a WMD capability throughout the 1990s. Therefore, it was not unreasonable to assume that he had continued to do so after the inspections had ceased. While the post invasion inspections clearly demonstrated that he failed in this regard, Saddam Hussein had almost certainly not abandoned his WMD ambitions. Given the strategic realities in the Middle East, it appears unlikely that abandoning the containment policy, and

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[43] Miller, "The Iraq Experiment…, 35.

attempting to control Iraq by integrating it into the international community, would have been successful. On the contrary, there was a significant danger that this policy would have made the situation worse, since confronting Iraq after it had established a WMD capability would have been considerably more dangerous.

CHAPTER 4

OPTION 2 – CONTINUED CONTAINMENT

A second option available to the international community in the face of the perceived Iraqi threat was to continue the policy which had been in place since the end of the Gulf War: containment through robust inspections, economic and diplomatic sanctions, and military force. After all, this had been a sensible and largely effective option throughout the 1990s.

However, by 2002, the effectiveness of the strategy had become highly questionable. The inspection element had ceased after OPERATION DESERT FOX and while it did briefly resume just prior to the invasion, the inspections were a last minute concession by Saddam Hussein, which came only after coalition forces were well into yet another build up in the region. Considering Saddam Hussein's treatment of the inspections during the 1990s, there was little reason to believe that they would have been able to continue their work once the forces had withdrawn.

Equally significant, support for the continuation of the other two elements of the strategy - sanctions and military enforcement - had also begun to falter in a number of key regions. Firstly, Europe had become increasingly divided over the perceived effectiveness of the strategy. This, combined with growing concern among the European general public about the impact of the sanctions on the Iraqi civilian population, had led to increasing calls for the sanctions to be lifted. Secondly, in Saudi Arabia, public frustration over the perceived stalemate had begun to increasingly destabilize the already fractious political environment, resulting in significant pressure on the monarchy to

terminate its military arrangement with the coalition. Thirdly, other Middle Eastern countries, while still cognizant of the threat posed by Saddam Hussein, had succumbed to economic pressures and were actively aiding Iraq in its efforts to circumvent the containment strategy. Finally, the US itself, particularly after the September 11th attacks, had grown wary of the long term political costs of the on-going low level conflict.

Europe and Containment

With the primary exception of the UK, European concerns with the containment strategy were two-fold. On the one hand, many states, led primarily by France and Germany, had begun to argue that Saddam had demonstrated an ability to live with and even prosper both politically and personally under the sanction regimes. On the other hand, there was growing popular concern that the economic sanctions were placing an unacceptable burden on the Iraqi population and had been responsible for the suffering and death of millions of Iraqis since 1991.

Having become concerned about the nutritional and health situation in Iraq, the UNSC, in 1991, proposed that a program be implemented which would allow Iraq to sell limited amounts of oil under the strict supervision of a UN-Iraq Sanctions Committee. Known as the oil-for-food program, the proceeds were to be used to buy essential humanitarian supplies. However, despite the needs of his people, Saddam Hussein rejected the program for five years, claiming it was an infringement on Iraq's sovereignty.

Between 1996, when Saddam Hussein finally agreed to participate, and 2003, the program exported US$65 billion worth of Iraqi oil, of which US$43 billion was spent on

humanitarian needs in Iraq.[44] While the program originally limited Iraqi oil exports to US$4 billion per year, these restrictions steadily declined with time until December 1999, when they were removed all together. By this time, in addition to food, the funds were also being used for infrastructure requirements including electricity, irrigation, transportation, sanitation, housing and telecommunications.

Despite the success of the oil-for-food program, by 2001 the impact of the sanctions had become increasingly controversial. In 1995 a UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) study claimed the sanctions had resulted in the death of 567 000 children.[45] By 2001, critics of the program were claiming that the death toll had risen to over a million.[46] For his part, Saddam Hussein claimed that in 2001 alone, 84 000 children under the age of five had died as a direct result of the sanctions.[47]

There is, however, extensive evidence that these numbers were exaggerated. While the 1995 FAO study received wide scale media attention, the same cannot be said for a 1997 follow-up study by the same authors that found that the actual mortality rate was significantly lower than had been originally estimated. In 2000, Richard Garfield, after conducting a comparative analysis of more than two dozen major studies of malnutrition and child mortality rates in Iraq, concluded that the rate was roughly

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[44] United Nations, Office of the Iraq program – Oil-for-food, "Oil-for-food: About the Program," http://www.un.org?Depts/oip/background/index.html; Internet; accessed; 14 Jan 2007.

[45] David Cortright, "A Hard Look at Iraq Sanctions," *The Nation*, 19 November 2001, http://www.alternet.org/story/11933/?page=3; Internet; accessed; 28 April 2007.

[46] Frontline/World, "The Debate Over UM Sanctions," http://www.pbs.ord/frontlineworld/stories/iraq/sanctions.html; Internet; accessed 28 April 2007.

[47] Ibid.

doubled those of the preceding decade.[48]   Garfield notes that while most of the additional

deaths could indeed be linked to the sanctions, many were also attributable to the

destruction caused by the Gulf War and Saddam Hussein's mismanagement of the

resources provided to him under the oil-for-food program.

When it was established, the oil-for-food program was intended as a temporary

measure. Its stated purpose was "to provide for the humanitarian needs of the Iraqi

people until the fulfillment by Iraq of the relevant Security Council resolutions,

including, resolution 687."[49]   While the Iraqi people had undoubtedly suffered under the

sanctions - something Saddam Hussein had tried to exploit in his anti-sanctions

propaganda - ultimately it was Saddam Hussein himself who was responsible for this

through his failure to comply with the UN resolutions. Furthermore, while Iraq, through

the 1990s, became increasingly able to generate additional revenue through oil

smuggling, few of the funds appear to have reached the Iraqi people. Yet, during this

period, Saddam Hussein found sufficient funds to build 24 palaces for himself.

Nevertheless, under the circumstances, many European nations increasingly

began to argue that the only long-term solution was to gradually reintegrate Iraq into the

international community through trade and investment. Much has been made of both

France's and Germany's economic links to Iraq and their motivation for advocating this

approach. However, as Philip Gordon and Jeremy Shapiro note, the level of trade

between the two countries and Iraq was hardly sufficient to have had a major impact on

either's foreign policy. In 2001, French exports to Iraq amounted to 0.3 percent of

France's total exports while Germany's was even less at 0.001 percent. While lifting the

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[48] Ibid.

sanctions would undoubtedly have resulted in increased trade, the overall impact on either country's economy would have been minimal.

The root of the European argument appears to have been a belief that by the late 1990s, Iraq's military capabilities had been sufficiently reduced by the 1991 Gulf War and after a decade of sanctions there was little risk in gradually engaging him economically.[50] In support of this argument they pointed out that General Colin Powell, in his 2001 Senate confirmation hearings for Secretary of State, had testified that Iraq was "fundamentally a broken, weak country [with] one third the military it had 10 years ago."[51]

While there was no doubt that Iraq's conventional military had been reduced, its Army in particular was still a significant force by Middle Eastern standards. More importantly, as previously discussed, its WMD capability remained a significant source of unease. Powell, in the same confirmation hearing, affirmed this concern when he stated that "Saddam's only tool, the only thing he [could] scare us with was weapons of mass destruction and we have to hold him to account."[52]

The US, therefore, disagreed with the European approach of engaging Iraq.   In the view of both the Clinton and Bush Administrations, increased trade and investment

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[49] United Nations, Security Council, "*United Nations Security Council Resolution 986"(1995),* 14 April 1995," http://www2.unorg.ch/uncc/resolution/res0986.pdf; Internet; accessed 2 February 2007.

[50] Philip H. Gordon and Jeremy Shapiro, *Allies at War: America, Europe and the Crisis over Iraq*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 2004), 40.

[51] United States, Federal News Service, "*Confirmation Hearings of General Colin Powell to be Secretary of State,*" 17 January 2001. http://www.usunnewyork.usmission.gov/01pow117.htm; Internet; accessed 2 February 2007.

[52] *Ibid*.

would provide the funds, material and technology Iraq required to re-arm. This view was also reflected in Powell's testimony, in which he stated that,

> We must make it clear that we have to keep sanctions in place, we have to keep our hands on the money that flows from the oil-for-food program and to make sure that the money is not diverted to the purchase of weapons of mass destruction…as long as we are able to control the major sources of money going into Iraq we can keep them in a rather broken condition.[53]

It is thus clear that while both the US and Europe agreed that Iraq needed to be brought into compliance with the UN resolutions, they could not agree on the best approach to accomplish this. While the US and Britain supported containment, for France and Germany, two of Europe's most powerful countries, economic integration offered a greater chance of success.

Saudi Arabia and Containment

The importance of Saudi Arabia to the military element of the containment option cannot be overstated. While the use of its airbases provided an important contribution, it was Saudi Arabia's airspace which was vital to the mission. For over a decade, coalition combat aircraft had routinely entered southern Iraqi airspace. However, the equally important support aircraft, such as air-to-air refueling, command and control, and electronic support aircraft, had remained in Saudi Arabian airspace. Given Iraq's continued capability to harass coalition aircraft, often by firing at them, the risk of moving these high value, but vulnerable, combat support aircraft into Iraq would have been unacceptable. Nevertheless, continuing the mission without them would have been impossible.

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[53] *Ibid.*

To understand why Saudi Arabia's support was beginning to wane, it is necessary to understand both Saudi Arabia's relationship to it Arab neighbors and its internal composition. Saudi Arabia is a principle actor in the Middle East. It is one of the richest Arab countries, responsible for 35 percent of the OPEC output. It is also the keeper of two of Islam's most holy sites: Mecca and Medina. Furthermore, it maintains diplomatic ties with almost every nation in the region and plays a pre-eminent role within the Arab League. Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia's ability to exert hard power is limited. It has a relatively small indigenous population, limited military power, and is surrounded by potentially dangerous enemies. Saudi Arabia's international leadership is therefore predicated on compromise and the forging of consensus.[54] Its ability to take a hard stand in support of coalition operations in Iraq was therefore limited.

The power of the Saudi Arabian government to control its domestic affairs is also more limited than many in the West tend to believe. As President Jimmy Carter has noted, Saudi Arabia, like many other Arab countries, has increasingly struggled with domestic challenges caused by "resurgent religious identities, rising expectations among the more literate constituencies and the emerging middle class, a fear of further intrusion by external forces and the stirring of democracy."[55] While it is a monarchy, Saudi Arabia is also a fragmented entity which is ruled by hundreds of princes, most of whom are awash in extreme wealth. Although many of the princes have enjoyed a long and close political relationship with the US, many others have remained relatively isolated. In the view of Michael Doran, this legacy, in part, has led to a schism in the country between

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[54] Jimmy Carter, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), 102.

[55] *Ibid.*, 14.

two distinct political communities: "westernized elites that look to Europe and the US as models of political development, and a Wahhabi religious establishment that holds up its interpretation of Islam's golden age as its guide."[56]

Wahhabism is one of the most conservative forms of Islam and it has formed the basis of much of Saudi Arabia's religious culture since the 1700s. As Anthony Cordesman notes, it is important to understand that mainstream Wahhabi preaching rarely advocates the use of violence or terror in the name of politico-religious disputes.[57] Nevertheless, while certainly the minority, there are extreme elements within the faith that advocate religious hatred. In their view, Christians, Jews, Shiites and even insufficiently devout Sunni Muslims are enemies who are engaged in a grand conspiracy to destroy Islam. This extreme interpretation ensures a high political status for the Wahhabi clerics since they alone have the necessary training to safeguard the purity of the realm. These extreme views, combined with lax Saudi controls on charitable contributions, have resulted in considerable funding, often unintentionally, by Saudi Arabian citizens, of activities which have been viewed as terrorist by the West.

It is important to appreciate that much of the growth of the radical elements of Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia can be traced back to the 1990-91 Persian Gulf War. While there was consensus within the government over the need to liberate Kuwait, public opinion was divided on the method. According to Madawi al-Rasheed, for the extremists, the Saudi Arabian government's decision to accept US military forces was

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[56] Michael Scott Doran, "The Saudi Paradox," *Foreign Affairs* (January/February 2004): 36.

[57] Anthony H. Cordesman, "Saudi Arabia; Opposition, Islamic Extremism, and Terrorism," *ArabiaLink* (1 December 2002)[journal on-line]; available from http://www.arabialink.com/Archive/GWPersp?GWP2002/GWP_2002_12/01.htm; Internet; accessed January 13, 2007.

"religiously and politically unacceptable given Saudi Arabia's importance to Islam."[58] Furthermore, most extremists regarded the acceptance of US troops as symbolic of the country's dependence on the US, often to the detriment of Saudi Arabian independence and sovereignty. This conclusion was reinforced by the Saudi Arabian governments' agreement to finance a large portion of the war.

Until its withdrawal in 2003, the US and British continued presence in the Kingdom in support of the containment strategy remained a source of tension. Indeed, Osama bin Laden, an exiled Saudi Arabian citizen, cited the presence of the foreign troops as a core grievance in his holy-war against the US. This claim is supported by the fact that fifteen of the nineteen hijackers involved in the September 11th attacks were Saudi Arabian citizens.

Stability in the Saudi Kingdom is maintained by the monarchy through a combination of close and constant consultations and the judicious dispersal of the nation's oil wealth. Complicating the Saudi Arabian political situation in 2002, however, was the status of the monarchy. King Fahd's debilitating stroke in 1995 had triggered a succession struggle, and at the time it was uncertain who would win. Representing the more moderate elements was Crown Prince Abdullah, a reformer who supported incorporating into the political process groups that the Wahhabis consider non-Muslims and therefore not worthy of representation. This included Shiites, secularists and feminists. Domestically, Abdullah supported reduced restrictions on public debate, had promoted democratic reforms, and supported a reduction in the power of the clerics. In general, he subscribed to a brand of Islam that downplays the importance of Jihad and

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[58] Al-Rasheed, "Saudi Arabia: The Challenge of the US Invasion of Iraq…, 154.

allowed Saudis to coexist in peace with Christian Americans, Jewish Israelis and even

Shiite Iranians.[59]

In strong competition for the Saudi throne was Abdullah's half-brother, Prince

Nayef. In addition to controlling the powerful Interior Ministry, to the extent that it

supported his political ambitions, Nayef had allied himself with the Wahhabi clerical

establishment. There was little doubt that Nayef's successful ascension to the throne

would have significantly altered the US-Saudi Arabian relationship. Furthermore, given

the opposition of his political allies to the Western military presence, one could assume

that Saudi Arabian support for the military aspect of the containment policy would have

likely ceased.

The delicate situation was made even more difficult by the unofficial hostile

rhetoric which emerged from the US against Saudi Arabia after the September 11th

attacks. The criticism, as noted by al-Rasheed, was accompanied by,

> open accusations of sponsoring terrorism, princely connections with charitable
> organizations listed as having connections to Al Qaida, a lawsuit against several
> high ranking Saudi princes by families of the victims of the 11 September attacks,
> the expulsion of several Saudis with diplomatic status from Washington and the
> imprisonment of more than 100 Saudis in Guantanamo Bay.[60]

The result was that many Saudi Arabians began to increasingly view the US more as an

enemy than a protector.

In response, the Saudi Arabian government authorized an unprecedented level of

freedom of the press throughout 2003. It invited its usually heavily censored

intellectuals, religious scholars, lawyers, writers and journalists to publish their views on

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[59] Doran, "The Saudi Paradox"…, 38.

[60] Madawi Al-Rasheed, "Saudi Arabia: The Challenge of the US Invasion of Iraq…, 154

US policy towards the region, the presence of US military in the country and US policy towards Israel. The onslaught of negative stories damaged the Saudi-US relationship to such an extent that on 18 March 2003, Prince al Faysal stated that "under no circumstances would the Kingdom participate in a war against the brotherly nation of Iraq."[61] Saudi Arabia did ultimately allow its bases to be used for OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM, but only for combat support missions. All of the strike missions were flown from bases outside of the Kingdom.

Officially, the Saudi Arabian government recognized the potential threat of an unrepentant and un-contained Saddam Hussein and consequently continued to cooperate with coalition efforts. It had not forgotten the Iraqi SCUD missile attacks on Riyadh during the 1990-1991 Gulf War or the immediate US offer to assist Saudi Arabia in its defence following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Likewise, official US criticism of Saudi Arabia was more constrained than much of the unofficial criticism.

Nevertheless, as al-Rasheed notes, Saudi Arabia entered the 21st century with severe domestic problems, compounded by an unprecedented and overtly hostile US attitude. The population was becoming increasingly impatient with both US policy and its own leadership. In an attempt to ease the domestic pressure, Saudi Arabia had already begun to increase the restrictions on the use of its facilities. If these restrictions had been followed by others on the use of its airspace, the continuation of OSW would have been virtually impossible. This, in turn, would have crippled the military element of the containment strategy in the south.

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[61] *Ibid*., 156.

The Gulf Region and Containment

Weakening resolve for the containment policy in the Middle East was not limited to Saudi Arabia. While contempt for the Iraqi regime was almost universal, virtually every government in the region was under either economic or domestic political pressure to ease the sanctions.

Of all the Middle Eastern governments, Kuwait had remained the most supportive. It owed its liberty primarily to US efforts to evict Iraq from its territory in 1991 and was acutely aware of the threat even a diminished Iraq, under Saddam Hussein's leadership, posed to its own survival. Consequently, it continued to play an active role in the military aspects of the containment policy. This was primarily its authorization to use its military bases and airspace.

However, while US support for Kuwait's defence was crucial, equally important was that of Saudi Arabia's. As Kenneth Pollack has noted, Kuwait recognized the need to be forever mindful of the wishes of its huge southern neighbor which, had it wanted, could potentially pose as great a threat as Iraq.[62] Not only was Saudi Arabia militarily superior, but the combination of its tribal commonalities with Kuwait and its role as the dominant OPEC member in the region also made it a potential political and economic threat. Furthermore, while on the one hand, the US was providing security for Kuwait, the arrangement was not permanent. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, would always be Kuwait's neighbor. Maintaining a strong and amicable relationship was therefore equally critical for Kuwait. As Saudi Arabian support for containment began to wane, it was highly probable that support from Kuwait would also begin to diminish.

Support for the containment strategy outside of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia was even weaker. By 1995, Qatar, Oman and the UAE had begun to publicly call for the easing of sanctions and for reconciliation with Saddam Hussein.[63] Their motivations were complex. On the one hand their geographic location in the Gulf was such that they had never really felt threatened by Iraq. On the other hand, this was not the case with respect to Iran. They were therefore prepared to tolerate Iraq to the extent that it placed pressure on Iran.

To the west, support for containment in Syria and Jordan was virtually non-existent and both nations had become major smuggling conduits into Iraq. Jordan's economy was almost completely dependent on the roughly 100 000 barrels of oil Iraq provided per day, half of which was free and half which was sold at a substantial discount. What little funds were paid for the oil was paid directly to Baghdad, bypassing the UN oil-for-food program. In February 2000, Jordan and Iraq took their relationship a step further, by announcing plans to build a 700 km pipeline connecting the two countries. The close relationship provided a considerable degree of political influence for Saddam Hussein over Jordan, which was reflected in the large number of Iraqi front companies which operated out of Amman.[64]

Since the death of President Hafid al Asad, Syria's economy had become equally dependant on Iraq. In 2000, Syria had re-opened its pipeline to the Mediterranean, which had been closed since 1980, and was allowing as much as 200 000 barrels of Iraqi

[62] Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Threatening Storm: The Case for Invading Iraq* (New York: Random House, 2002), 191.

[63] *Ibid*., 193.

[64] Gary C. Gambill, "Jordan, Iraq Improves Ties," *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin* 2, no. 2 (February 2000), http://www.meib.org/articles/0002_me4.htm; Internet; accessed 27 February 2007.

oil to flow through it daily. Once again, the oil was pumped outside of the UN oil-for-food program and payments were made directly to Baghdad, rather than to the UN escrow account. In return, Syria received the oil at fifty percent of the market price and reaped the profit by then selling it at full price. The combination of oil trading and smuggling had resulted in a growth in annual trade between the two countries from US$50 million in 1997 to over US$2 billion in 2001.[65] In addition, in 2002, the two countries signed an agreement which allowed the free transfer of capital, unified their tariffs and established a joint telephone company.[66]

Even Iran had proved willing to circumvent the sanctions. Although Iran and Iraq were staunch enemies, having fought an eight-year war in the 1980s which killed 400 000 Iranians, Iran was also an enemy of the US. Iran resented the substantial US presence in the region and was concerned about its virtual encirclement, with the exception of Iraq, by countries friendly to the US. As a result, by 2000, Iran was allowing as much as 95 million metric tons or US$460 million dollars worth of Iraqi oil to be smuggled through its territorial waters annually to ports in the UAE and Oman.[67]

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[65] Pollack, *The Threatening Storm…,* 196.

[66] *Ibid.,* 196.

[67] Jim Garamone, "Embargo Chief Says Iran in Cahoots With Iraq Oil Smugglers," *American Forces Information Services* [journal on-line]; available from http://www.defencelink.mil/news/Apr2000/n04112000_20004111.html; Internet; accessed 27 February 2007.

The US and Containment

Significantly more important than the loss of European or Middle Eastern confidence in the containment strategy was the loss of confidence in its effectiveness by the US itself. There appears to have been four main reasons for this shift in opinion.

First, while the primary aim of the strategy had always been to prevent Iraq from re-arming, for many elements in the US, a secondary aim had been to stimulate the collapse of the Iraqi Baathist Regime from within. This goal reflected the perceived success of containment in initiating both the collapse of communism in Europe and in persuading communists in Asia to embrace capitalism.[68] However, even though it was generally accepted that sanctions take time, after 12 years, despite exacting a brutal toll on the Iraqi economy, there was little indication that Saddam Hussein was about to either relinquish power or be forcibly removed from within.

A second reason for the US loss in confidence in containment was the huge psychological impact of the September 11th attacks. The events left the US with a level of insecurity it had not felt since the Cuban missile crisis 40 years earlier. While there was no evidence that Iraq had any direct involvement in the terrorist attacks, it did not take a great deal of imagination to see that terrorists armed with WMDs could inflict untold damage. Given Iraq's previous use of such weapons, US tolerance of Iraq's persistent efforts to conceal the current state of its WMD program decreased substantially. As Lawrence Freedman notes, if future terrorist attacks could reach the proportions of those of the September 11th attacks, then the US dare not concede the

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[68] Lawrence Freedman, "Iraq, Liberal Wars and Illiberal Containment, "*Survival* 48, no. 4 (Winter 2006-07): 61.

initiative to the enemy.[69] If it could not rely on deterrence it needed to be ready to pre-

empt an attack before it could be launched. It therefore became necessary, in the eyes of

President Bush, to seek out and destroy any large potential threats.[70] This approach has

remained a key element of US foreign policy, as demonstrated in President Bush's 30

September 2006 radio address, in which he argued that "the only way to protect our

citizens at home is to go on the offensive against the enemies across the world."[71]

As has been pointed out by Steven Miller, the impetus for offensive action also

has a temporal dimension in that delayed action allows more time for hostile powers to

grow stronger, possibly obtaining or improving their WMD capacity. Indeed, playing for

time was thought to be one of Iraq's objectives.[72] Vice President Cheney explicitly

articulated this concern in an August 2002 speech:

> Time is not on our side. Deliverable weapons of mass destruction in the hands of
> terrorists or a murderous dictator, or the two working together, constitute as grave
> a threat as can be imagined. The risks of inaction are far greater than action.[73]

Yet a third reason for the US loss of confidence in containment was the increased

realization of the long-term political costs of US policies in the Middle East. Following

the September 11th attacks it became clear that, in addition to its long standing support for

Israel, perceived US toleration of repressive governments throughout the Arab world had

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[69] *Ibid*., 61.

[70] Miller, "The Iraq Experiment…, 19.

[71] United States, The Executive Office of the President of the United States, President's Radio Address, 30 September 2006, http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/09/20060930.html; Internet; accessed 25 February 2007.

[72] Miller, "The Iraq Experiment…, 20.

[73] Richard Cheney, "Remarks by the Vice President to Veterans of Foreign Wars 103rd National Convention," 26 August 2002, http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss/2002/, quoted in Steve Miller, "The Iraq Experiment and US National: *Survival: The IISS Quarterly* 48, no 2 (Winter 2006-07): 20.

been a factor in the alienation, resentment and hatred for the West that had fueled terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda. This included, according to Philip Gordon and Jeremy Shapiro, "resentment of the status quo in Iraq – sanctions, no-fly zones, periodic air strikes and the enduring brutal rule of Saddam Hussein."[74] Thus, while Iraq may not have played a direct role, it was in the eyes of the US at least a factor in the events of the September 11th attacks. Many Americans, therefore, concluded that the status quo could no longer be tolerated.

The final reason for the loss in confidence in containment was a growing belief that, were Iraq to further develop its WMD capability - particularly a nuclear capability - it was the US that would bare a significant portion of the burden. Containment obligated the US to maintain significant troop levels in the Middle East, and had Iraq used WMDs against any of its neighbors, it was entirely feasible that US troops could have been caught in the attack. Secondly, even if US troops had not been directly attacked, it was the US that would have almost certainly been expected to take the lead in containing the threat: a challenge that would have been significantly increased after Iraq had developed a WMD capability. Finally, while extremist elements frequently direct their criticism against the "West" in general, there is little doubt that it is the US, with its support for both Israel and a number of unpopular Middle Eastern regimes, which is the primary target. Any proliferation of WMDs therefore disproportionably threatens the US.

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[74] Gordon and Shapiro, *Allies at War…,* 85.

Containment - No Longer a Viable Option

The containment strategy employed against Iraq in the 12 years following the 1991 Gulf War involved a combination of diplomatic, economic, and military means. However, by 2002 the continued viability of this strategy had become highly questionable. While the policy had delivered a devastating economic shock to the Iraqi economy, the status of Iraq's WMD capabilities, the control of which was the primary UN objective, was unclear. Furthermore, while the Iraqi people were clearly suffering, Saddam Hussein did not appear to have suffered the same fate. This lack of progress, combined with the increased sensitivity of the US to the threat posed by a potentially WMD equipped Iraq, had significantly undermined support for the policy in the US. Of equal importance, global support for the policy had also begun to wane. Trade with Iraq was increasing and the prevailing view in Europe was becoming that Iraq should be engaged rather than isolated. Finally, due to a combination of domestic and economic pressures, support for containment had virtually collapsed in the Middle East. The combination of all of these factors meant that the continuation of the containment option had become increasingly untenable.

CHAPTER 5

OPTION 3 - CONTAINMENT BY OTHER MEANS

Given that Saddam Hussein's WMD ambitions were still generally assessed to be a threat to the security of the region, abandoning the containment strategy without an alternative would have involved, in the eyes of the "Coalition of the willing", an unacceptable risk. One alternative could have been to try and reinvigorate at least the military element of the containment strategy by using a more diverse military force. Such a force, depending on its composition, could have also re-legitimized the strategy in the eyes of some of those who had come to question it.

There were at least three potential options in this regard. The first, and most desirable, would have been a Middle Eastern led effort. An initiative such as this had been proposed in the past but had ultimately failed to materialize. The second option was NATO. Given that Turkey, a NATO member, borders Iraq, such an initiative would have been no more of an extension of NATO's mandate than was its efforts in Bosnia or Kosovo. Yet a third option was a "coalition of the willing," ideally under UN control.

Arab Peacekeeping Force

At the end of the Gulf War, a coalition of Middle Eastern states, known as the Cairo 8, proposed an initiative in which the Middle East would have taken on an increased role for its own security. The Cairo 8 consisted of Egypt, Syria and all of the Gulf States, with the exception of Iran. The proposal, which was outlined in the 6 March 1991 Declaration of Damascus, called for the creation of an Arab peacekeeping force.

Under the proposal, the relatively populous states of Egypt and Syria would have provided the preponderance of troops while the more thinly populated but oil rich members would have provided the financial resources. According to the declaration, one of the key objectives of the force would have been to assist in the abolition of all WMDs in the region. While the force failed to materialize in 1991, the declaration clearly demonstrated that Arab states were prepared to adopt a deterrent posture and play an active role in policing their own regional affairs. Regrettably, no such initiative came forth in 2002.

NATO Force

NATO offered yet a second alternative. Its performance in both Bosnia and Kosovo demonstrated that it could have easily undertaken missions such as OSW and ONW. In the north, in particular, transitioning from Kosovo to Iraq would have been relatively straight forward given that the principle base of operation for ONW was in Turkey. While in the south, the US would almost certainly have continued to provide the preponderance of assets, NATO could have contributed militarily by providing high demand assets such as AWACS, air-to-air refueling and intelligence collection aircraft. Given the high profile of these aircraft, such a contribution would not have gone unnoticed. It would have therefore had a political as well as military impact.

This option would nonetheless have required consensus, something which NATO did not have. On the contrary, NATO was bitterly divided on how to deal with Iraq. On the one side were those countries, led primarily by France, which, although they generally acknowledged the need for Iraq to be disarmed, had by and large opposed the

use of force to achieve this goal. Belgium, Germany and Greece were among these nations. On the other side were those nations which, like the UK, were not only wary of Iraq's WMD ambitions and disdainful of its human rights record but also tired of the constant brinksmanship. They were consequently more prepared to use force. The countries holding this view included Spain, Italy, Portugal, and Denmark. However, given the divide, using NATO as a formed alliance, to enforce the containment policy was clearly not feasible.

Coalition of the Willing

The option that had the greatest chance of succeeding was a "coalition of the willing," in which some NATO members may have been willing to participate. Canada, for example, while it ultimately opposed the 2003 invasion because it was done without Security Council approval, was an active supporter of the containment policy. As a member of the Security Council in 1999, it voted in favour of a resolution extending sanctions and it continued to advocate this position when it served as the President of the same body in 2000. In February 2003, Canadian Foreign Affairs Ministry officials publicly admonished Iraq for the "unacceptable limitations imposed upon the UN weapons inspection team."[75] At the same time, Foreign Affairs Minister Bill Graham stated that "Iraq did not have much time left to demonstrate compliance with UN resolutions" and called on it to abandon its WMDs.[76]

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[75] David Ljunggren, "Jean Chrétien: Canada Not 'Willing, '" Reuters, February 18, 2003, *Global Policy Forum*, http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/issues/iraq/attack/2003/0207francus.htm; Internet; accessed 2 March 2007.

[76] *Ibid*.

While Canada had not contributed aircraft to the Iraq mission since OPERATION DESERT STORM, it had fully supported the military element of the strategy since its inception through its contribution of 48 aircrew to the US AWACS program. A significant portion of these members were routinely deployed to the Middle East in support of both ONW and OSW. In addition, since 2000, Canada had contributed to the embargo through the deployment of Canadian naval vessels to the Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea. Given this commitment, it is not unreasonable to assume that Canada would have been willing to contribute more assets to a coalition effort to support the containment as an alternative to the invasion.

Spain, Italy and Portugal would likely also have been willing to contribute forces to either OSW or ONW. Spain and Italy participated in the Kosovo air campaign and all three countries had already offered the use of their airspace, transportation facilities and military bases as well as logistical support in the event of war with Iraq.[77] Given the number of nations that ultimately participated in the invasion, it is not unreasonable to conclude that this option, had it been pursued as an alternative, could have gained a sufficient number of nations to enable the continuation of OSW and ONW in a more internationally acceptable form.

Whether this alternative would have been acceptable to the US, however, is unclear. While a case can be made that a sufficiently robust coalition of the willing could have been assembled to handle the OSW and ONW missions, it is debatable as to whether such a coalition would have been strong enough to compel Saddam Hussein to permit the UN inspections to resume. Thus, while a coalition of the willing may have

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[77] Glenn Frankel, "Chirac Fortifies Antiwar Caucus," *Washington Post*, 22 February 2003, 1.

had more international legitimacy, in all likelihood it would have at best resulted in a continuation of the status quo rather than a return to the containment of the mid 1990s. There is also the question of how long such a coalition would have been willing to continue the operation. By 2003, OSW and ONW, in various forms, had been on-going for 12 years. British Prime Minister Tony Blair expressed all of these concerns in a statement to the British House of Commons in which he asked the question:

> …does anyone think that he [Saddam Hussein] would be making any concessions, that indeed the inspectors would be within 1000 miles of Baghdad, where it not for the US and UK troops massed at his doorstep? And what is his hope? To play for time, to drag the process out until the attention of the international community wanes, the troops go, the way is again clear for him.[78]

While these are all legitimate questions, they do not negate the fact that had the international community been serious about supporting its calls for continued containment; it should have offered to more actively participate. The sad fact remains, however, that the international community did not offer such an alternative.

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[78] United Kingdom, 10 Downing Street, "Prime Minister's Statement on Iraq," 25 February 2003, http://www.number10.gov.uk/output/Page3088.asp; Internet; accessed 16 Mar 2007.

CHAPTER 6

OPTION 4 - REGIME CHANGE

By 2002, Saddam Hussein's continued defiance had led most nations to the realization, including many which ultimately objected to the invasion, that his unrepentant WMD ambitions continued to pose a threat to both regional and global stability. Nevertheless, the inspection and economic elements of the containment strategy, which had been relatively effective throughout the 1990s, had virtually collapsed. In addition, support for the continued permanent presence in the region of the primarily US and British troops necessary for the military elements of the strategy was waning. While a more international force may have been able to reinvigorate this element, none had been forthcoming.

The reality was that while most nations conceded that Saddam Hussein needed to be held to account over WMDs, they were unable to offer practical methods on how this should be achieved. As a result, after 12 years of continued brinkmanship, the only practical alternative in the eyes of the "Coalition of the willing" had become regime change in Iraq.

From a security perspective, there were at least three perceived advantages to this strategy. First and foremost, it would remove the threat posed by Saddam Hussein's WMD ambitions. Second, it would permit a reduction of the size of Western forces in the region. Finally, it would free US foreign policy from the constant need to focus on Iraq.

The strategy was, however, controversial. First, critics argued that Saddam Hussein had been openly defying the UN since 1998 and yet regime change was only undertaken five years later. Secondly, the invasion was primarily undertaken to pre-empt Iraq from conducting a hostile act in the future rather than in response to a specific act of aggression. The legality of this approach, in terms of international law, was, and continues to be, highly debated. While both of these concerns had some merit, neither was significant enough, under the circumstances, to invalidate the appropriateness of the regime change option.

Why Invade?

The risks in overthrowing a relatively stable state and replacing it with a potential "failed state" were generally recognized prior to the invasion. In a remarkably prophetic article, political scientists Philip H. Gordon, Martin Indyk and Michael O'Hanlon warned that if the process was mishandled,

> In the aftermath of Saddam's overthrow, ethnic and communal rivalries could well erupt into internal conflict. The Sunni's in central Iraq will be very concerned that their interests will be subordinated to Kurdish and Shia demands. The Kurds in the north will not easily accept a diminution of the substantial autonomy they have enjoyed in the last decade and the Shia's, representing the largest ethnic grouping will insist on a degree of power hitherto denied them under Sunni regimes. These tensions could easily undermine the interim government and generate considerable instability.[79]

However, these concerns needed to be balanced against the on-going threat posed by Saddam Hussein. When this was done, despite the risks, removing Saddam Hussein and replacing him with a less threatening regime was, in the eyes of the coalition, of greater

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[79] Philip H. Gordon, Martin Indyk, Michael E. O'Hanlon, "Getting Serious About Iraq," *Survival: The IISS Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (Autumn 2002): 19.

importance. In this regard the invasion has met with some success. As Steven Miller has

written,

> Iraq may be a mess, but its government is not menacing its neighbors or pursuing
> nuclear weapons and hence the current situation is better for America and regional
> security than the previous reality.[80]

Given that Iraq's previous WMD initiatives were motivated almost exclusively by

Saddam Hussein's regional hegemonic ambitions, his removal should, in the long term

reduce this threat.

Yet a second anticipated advantage of regime change was the eventual reduction

in the tension caused by the ongoing US and British military presence in the region. It

was generally recognized that the invasion would have at least short-term negative

consequences in the form of increased anti-Western sentiment, particularly against the

US.   However, the removal of Saddam Hussein would also end the need for the

increasingly controversial OSW and ONW missions, thereby decreasing the need to

maintain large numbers of US and British troops in the region. While the US Navy

would likely maintain re-supply facilities in the Gulf, the majority of the US and British

forces would return to their pre-1991 posture. Forces would thus be maintained outside

of the region, projecting power over-the-horizon only when necessary.

Without doubt, the internal unrest that has plagued Iraq since the invasion has

been more severe and endured longer than the Coalition expected. However, it is

extremely important to distinguish between "why" regime change was undertaken and

"how" it was conducted.   It is generally accepted that the Coalition made errors in both

the planning and conduct of the post invasion phases of the war. Particularly damaging

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[80] Miller, "The Iraq Experiment…, 26.

were the twin decisions to try and secure Iraq with minimal force while also electing to demobilize the Iraqi Army.

These operational level errors do not, however, invalidate the longer term strategic advantages of removing the threat posed by Saddam Hussein. Furthermore, the short term relative increase in military personnel in the region is the first step in a longer term process that should eventually lead to a complete withdrawal of all troops. It must be remembered that the alternative was to either accept the threat posed by Saddam Hussein or continue indefinitely the almost daily attack and counter-attack which had gone on for over 12 years as part of OSW and ONW.

Finally, it was anticipated that regime change would begin to free US foreign policy from the constant need to focus on Iraq. This would include the constant efforts within the UN to maintain a coalition of nations willing to confront Iraq in response to its seemingly endless and frustrating cat and mouse games with the UN inspectors. Furthermore, it would also end the constant need to evaluate other foreign policy decisions in light of how they may have been exploited by Iraq and its supporters. Once again, it must be acknowledged that, at least in the short term, the strategy has failed to meet this objective.

Timing

A principle criticism of the regime change strategy was its timing. The Iraqi Liberation Act, which explicitly called for the removal of Saddam Hussein from power, was passed by the US Congress in 1998. That same year, President Clinton, in a speech following OPERATION DESERT FOX, stated that "as long as Saddam Hussein remains

in power he will remain a threat to his people, his region, and the world."[81] Nevertheless, from 1998 to 2002, there had been little appetite for escalating the military element of the containment strategy and, thus, no serious action was taken to remove the Iraqi dictator.

Throughout the previous decades, the US had absorbed a series of attacks. These included the 1993 attack on the World Trade Centre; the 1996 attack against the Khobar towers in Saudi Arabia, which housed many of the coalition servicemen enforcing the no-fly zone; the 1998 destruction of two US embassies in Africa; and the 2000 attack on the USS Cole in Yemen. Despite hundreds of US casualties, the US response had been relatively minimal.

However, as previously discussed, US tolerance for such actions ended with the September 11th attacks. In addition to dealing a serious blow to the US, both in terms of casualties and damage to the economy, the attacks caused many Americans to realize that a similar attack using nuclear or chemical weapons would be catastrophic. As a result, many Americans became increasingly aware of the danger of allowing potential threats to fester and began to conclude that problems such as Iraq needed to be confronted and permanent remedies found. In October 2002, according to the Council on Foreign Relations, 65 percent of Americans believed that Iraq was close to having a nuclear capability and 62 percent supported military action to end Saddam Hussein's rule.[82] Despite the fact that Iraq likely did not play a direct role in the September 11th attacks, or

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[81] *Ibid.*, 43.

[82] Lee Feinstein, "Most Americans Support War with Iraq, Shows New Pew/CFR Poll," *Council on Foreign Relations*, http://www.cfr.org/publication/5051/most_americans_support_war_with_iraq_ shows_new_pewcfr_poll_commentary_by_lee_feinstein.html; Internet; accessed 25 April 2007.

any of the attacks listed above, one of the first casualties of September 11th therefore became US confidence in the Iraqi containment strategy.

The US response to what it perceived as a new international security environment was to take the offensive. As Steven Miller writes, inaction was seen as dangerous. Threats requiring immediate action now included not only terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda but also so called 'rogue states' like Iraq.[83] In its 2002 National Security Strategy, the US concluded that rogue states "displayed no regard for international law…and callously violated international treaties to which they are a party."[84] It therefore followed that the ability to contain these states without using force was limited.

Pre-emptive Attack

The second and most controversial aspect of the regime change strategy was the use of a pre-emptive attack. At the root of the debate were two questions. First, what body has the legitimate authority to make the decision to engage in a pre-emptive war? Second, when was it justifiable to take action against an enemy to forestall action rather than respond to it?

The simple answer to the first question is the UNSC. Since an attack of this nature is a deliberate and planned act, rather than an unforeseen response to act of aggression by another party, the UN Charter is clear that approval must first be granted by the Security Council. However, as the months preceding the Iraq invasion clearly demonstrated, the practicality of this requirement was limited, particularly when dealing

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[83] Steven E. Miller, "The Iraq Experiment and US National Security"…, 19

with issues as sensitive and controversial as pre-emptive strikes. As Walter Slocombe

has noted, if UN approval becomes an absolute condition of engaging in pre-emptive

action then the structure of the UNSC ensures that no such action can ever be taken

without the unanimous approval of Russia, China, France, Britain and USA, no matter

how well justified.[85]

As to the second question, the issue is significantly more complicated. The

concept of self defence is well enshrined in international law and explicitly recognized in

Article 51 of the UN Charter. Nonetheless, the line between self-defence and aggression

remains vague. International law does not provide a threshold test for the legitimate use

of pre-emption. Rather, it simply offers four criteria, each of which is a continuum

against which any action should be evaluated. The criteria are: the severity of the threat,

the degree of probability of a threat, the imminence of the threat, and the cost of delay.[86]

The degree to which each of these criteria is met determines the justifiability of a pre-

emptive action.

The use of pre-emptive action using these criteria is by no means without

precedent. In 1962, the US justified its threat to attack Soviet missiles deployed in Cuba

on the grounds that the cost of delay was intolerably high, given the short time of flight

between Cuba and the US. Even if a launch was detected, there was no way to engage

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[84] United States, Executive Office of the President of the United States, "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, September 2002," http://www.whitehouse.gove/nsc/nss.html; Internet; accessed 15 Sept 2006.

[85] Walter B. Slocombe, "Force, Pre-emption and Legitimacy," *Survival: The IISS Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 122.

[86] William Galston, "Iraq and Just War: A Symposium," The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 30 September 2002.

the missiles. As a result, the mere presence of the missiles in Cuba made them a severe and imminent threat.

Israel's 1981 attack on Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor offers a more recent example. While Iraq had tried to argue that the purpose of the reactor was for peaceful research, Israel and most other nations, had concluded that its sole purpose was to produce plutonium for an Iraqi nuclear bomb. While it is clear that at the time of the attack the reactor was not yet operating, it was unclear how long it would take for Iraq to produce a bomb once it did become operational. Finding the bomb's storage location, if possible at all, and then destroying it, would have been significantly more difficult than locating the reactor. The Israelis consequently concluded that Iraq's mere possession of the capability to produce a nuclear bomb, combined with Saddam Hussein's rhetoric against Israel, represented a threat severe enough to justify a pre-emptive strike.

Critics of such pre-emptive action argue that while destruction is one way of dealing with an unacceptable threat, it may not be the only way, particularly when dealing with nuclear weapons.[87] They note that over the past decade many states have voluntarily given up their nuclear capability. These include South Africa, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan. This argument, however, ignores the fact that in three of the four examples offered, the states themselves did not acquire the WMD capability. On the contrary, they found themselves in possession of the expensive weapons when the Soviet Union dissolved. While it is true that some did initially try to retain their nuclear status, their primary motivation for so doing soon became to extract financial compensation for dismantling the weapons. In contrast, given the strategic situation in the Gulf, combined with Iraq's potential oil wealth and the fact that Saddam Hussein was himself trying to

acquire the weapons, there is little reason to believe that he could have been convinced to relinquish a nuclear weapon once he acquired one.

While the US argued in favour of pre-emptive action in the case of Iraq, it is important to note that the US also acknowledged that such action is only justified in very limited and specific situations. The US 2002 National Security Strategy clearly states that preemption may only be used against terrorist groups and "to stop rogue states…before they are able to threaten the use of weapons of mass destruction."[88]   Then National Security Advisor, Condoleeza Rice, further articulated these limitations in a speech following the release of the strategy:

> This approach must be treated with great caution. The number of cases in which it might be justified will always be small. It does not give a green light - to the US or any other nation - to act first without exhausting other means, including diplomacy. Pre-emptive action does not come at the beginning of a long chain of events. The threat must be very grave and the risk of waiting must far outweigh the risk of action[89]

The US legal argument presupposes that international law, in addition to unquestionably recognizing the right of self defence, also recognizes the right of nations not to have to accept the first blow.   This argument continues that given the power of WMDs, particularly nuclear weapons, the first blow may indeed be the decisive one. The problem is further compounded by the relatively small size of the weapons which could allow them to be deployed without a period of mobilization, such as would normally be

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[87] Lawrence Freedman, "Iraq, Liberal Wars and Illiberal Containment…, 59.

[88] United States, Executive Office of the President of the United States, "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, September 2002.

[89] Condoleeza Rice, "A Balance of Power that Favors Freedom," delivered to The Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, 2002 Wriston Lecture, 1 Oct 2002, http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itps/1202/ijpe/pj7-4rice.htm; Internet; accessed 14 March 2007.

expected in a conventional attack. The weapons could thus be delivered virtually without warning. As a result, the US argues that when dealing with states which are not only actively seeking WMDs, but have also demonstrated a willingness to employ them, the right of self defence must include the right to launch a pre-emptive strike.

While this argument was heavily criticized prior to the Iraq invasion, there is growing evidence that it is beginning to be increasingly accepted. Britain, Australia and Italy accepted the logic before the invasion but France and Russia did not. However, in 2003, Russian Defence Minister, Sergei Ivanov, stated that "we cannot absolutely rule out the pre-emptive use of force if Russia's interests or its obligations as an ally require it."[90] In 2004, following a series of terrorist attacks, Russian President Vladimir Putin declared that Russia was "seriously prepared to act pre-emptively against terrorism."[91]

Despite France's objection to the invasion, its 2003 to 2008 Military Program Bill of Law, clearly demonstrated that France also recognized that in certain circumstances, pre-emption may be necessary. It states,

> … the main objective of our policy is the defence and security of the French people and their interest at home and abroad. We might have to mount, most often in coalition, war operations outside of our borders, especially to prevent or to fight against asymmetric threats.[92]

Perhaps most remarkably, even the UN has become increasingly receptive to the idea that in special circumstances, pre-emptive attacks may be necessary. In its 2004 report, the 16 member UN High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change states,

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[90] Peter Dombrowski and Rodger A Payne, "The Emerging Consensus for Preventive War," *Survival: The IISS Quarterly* 48, no 2, (Summer 2006): 119.

[91] *Ibid*.

[92] Ibid., 122.

> The Security Council has the authority to act preventively, but has rarely done so. The Security Council may well need to be prepared to be more proactive in the future, taking decisive action earlier.[93]

The High-Level Panel did, however, recommend that authorization for the use of pre-emptive force be reserved for the Security Council.

Despite the growing international acceptance of the need in special circumstances for pre-emptive military action, the challenge remains one of operational practicality. In ideal circumstances, such as occurred during the Cuban missile crisis and the Israeli attack on Osirak, sufficient key elements of the WMD system in question can be identified and located to make it possible to neutralize the threat through a direct attack. This is, however, not always possible. The successful development of a nuclear bomb by North Korea clearly demonstrated this fact. Given that Saddam Hussein was able to hide significant portions of his existing WMD program for five years while under the direct observation of the UN weapons inspectors, it is highly probable that he would have also have been able to hide many of the key elements of any future WMD program. This would have effectively ruled out any surgical military operation against his capability. When there is not an operational option, the only choice then becomes a strategic one, which in the case of Iraq was regime change.

In many respects, regime change only became the preferred option by default. Even then, proponents were likely only able successfully advocate the option because of the shock brought about by the September 11th attacks. Nevertheless, it is clear that the option was capable of standing on its own merits. The use of pre-emptive military action

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[93] United Nations, "Report of the Secretary-General's High-level panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, 2004," http://www.un.org/secureworld/brochure.pdf; Internet; accessed 22 January, 2007.

to confront severe threats had precedence, and under the correct circumstances, could be defended in terms of international law as an act of self-defence. Furthermore, while it continues to be extensively debated, it is clear that there is growing acceptance among the international community that under certain extreme circumstances, pre-emptive attacks are appropriate.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Mounting military and civilian casualties in Iraq has led many to question the decision to undertake regime change. The decision has been further undermined by the failure to locate the WMDs, which provided the primary justification for the immediate invasion. However, by 2002, while other possible options did warrant consideration, based on the information available at the time, regime change had become the only viable option.

One alternative option was to end the US and British containment strategy. It had gone on for 12 years and had resulted in a continuous cycle of troop build ups, frequently punctuated by Iraqi attacks and coalition reprisals, as the coalition struggled to compel Saddam Hussein to comply with UNSCR 687. Saddam Hussein was obsessed with WMDs and was remorseless in his regional hegemonic ambitions. Consequently, simply abandoning the containment strategy would have involved an unacceptable risk for both the region and, given Iraq's strategic location, global stability in general. Nevertheless, this was the option preferred by many Middle Easterners and Europeans. Post invasion inspections have revealed that Saddam Hussein's WMD programs were less advanced than British and US intelligence had assessed. However, he successfully maintained his WMD programs throughout the 1990s, despite the presence of the UN inspectors. Clearly, if left unconstrained, Saddam Hussein would have immediately resumed the programs.

Continuing the US and British led containment strategy was the second option. However, while it had been generally effective throughout the 1990s, by 2002 the

viability of this option had been significantly undermined. This was due to the combination of domestic and economic pressures in the Middle East, declining resolve in many parts of Europe, and the increasing concern about the long term political implications of the strategy in the US. Most importantly, since 1998, it had failed to convince Iraq to submit to the UN mandated inspections of its suspected WMD activities.

A third option could have been to try and continue the containment policy with a more diverse and potentially more internationally acceptable UN force. However, given the divisions within the international community over whether to continue the containment policy at all, no such initiative emerged. Even if one had, there would have still been the issue of how to deal with the extensive violations of the economic elements of the strategy which had resulted in Saddam Hussein's ever increasing access to illegal funds. Given the non-viability of the other three, regime change thus became the only realistic option.

Lessons Learned

The ultimate failure of the containment strategy in Iraq offers several lessons which should be considered by future policy makers before embarking on a similar approach. The first pertains to the viability of containment as a strategy at all. Proponents often point to the collapse of the Soviet Union as proof that while containment is a long term process it will eventually be effective.[94] The assumption is that the fundamental economic problems with regimes such as the Soviet Union will eventually lead to their crumbling on their own accord.

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[94] Lawrence Freedman, "Iraq, Liberal Wars and Illiberal Containment…, 59

While this may have been true in the case of the Soviet Union, it was likely not the case in Iraq. The Soviet Union, at least economically, contained itself by dogmatically adhering to an economic system that ultimately proved to be fundamentally unsound. International cooperation was therefore not required to keep the Soviet Union economically contained. By comparison, maintaining international resolve to isolate Iraq required almost constant attention on behalf of the US and UK. Even then, despite their efforts, by 2002 the economic sanctions against Iraq had virtually collapsed, particularly in the Middle East. As a result, Saddam Hussein was able to increasingly access funds through the illegal but generally open smuggling of oil. The question thus becomes, if international resolve is unlikely to outlast the time required for sanctions to be effective, is containment through economic sanctions a useful policy option?

The long term political costs of maintaining a significant quantity of troops in forward deployed location was a second lesson learned. In the Cold War, each side possessed a massive arsenal which could be launched either from their own territory or from international waters. The consequences of open hostilities were thus clearly understood by both sides. It did, however, have the advantage of negating the need to maintain unwelcome military forces in forward deployed locations. To be sure both sides had forces forward deployed, but their roles were generally seen by their host nations as defensive and were therefore tolerated. By comparison, coalition forces deployed to the Middle East were generally unwelcome, at least by the general public. As a result, by 2002, continued support for the military aspects of Iraqi containment, particularly in Saudi Arabia, had become increasingly fragile. Given this, can containment realistically

be done without deploying military assets forward for sustained periods of time, and if not, what mitigating steps can be taken to ensure continued local support?

Third, despite the increasing resentment toward the US in many parts of the world, it is clear that US leadership will remain, for the foreseeable future, a crucial element in maintaining global stability. Iraq's neighbors understood the dangers posed by Saddam Hussein. Nevertheless, despite having 12 years to do so, they were unable to assemble a Middle Eastern force to confront Iraq over its WMD ambitions. Instead, for personal economic gain, they engaged in activities which clearly undermined UN efforts.

Finally, is the question of whether regime changes in an appropriate policy option and if so who should be authorized to approve it? If it is the UNSC, is regime change a realistic option given that it will require the unanimous consent of the US, UK, France, Russia and China? Saddam Hussein was a mass murderer who had no regard for his own people. He had started two wars and repeatedly demonstrated a willingness to not only develop WMDs, but to use them. Furthermore, he had repeatedly refused to comply with the UNCS's own resolutions. Finally, all indications were that if Saddam Hussein had been left unconstrained, he would have immediately resumed his WMD program. Despite all this, the UNSC could not agree on the need to remove Saddam Hussein from power.

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