

Mid East Policy

30 September 2002

I have refrained from public comment on the Administration's policy regarding the overthrow of the Iraqi Regime because I do not want publicly to undermine efforts to force Saddam Hussein to comply with the United Nations' resolution requiring inspection for weapons of mass destruction. However, I have concluded that the White House rhetoric to unseat Hussein by force, without support of the world community, is more than bluff. It appears to me that President Bush's speech to the United Nations amounted to nothing more than a ploy to justify unilateral military action. His recently announced National Security Policy erases all doubt in my mind. Therefore, I want to express my views, as a loyal citizen who has served my country for my entire professional career. Much of this service was as a professor of political science at the National Defense University, where I taught national security policy and national security decisionmaking.

At the outset, I want to acknowledge that men of good will can honestly disagree on the issues I will discuss. Each of us is a product of our backgrounds, which have formed our belief systems and how we view the world. I can only tell it like I see it; I do not claim to be able to "tell it like it is", which would be presumptuous. With that caveat, let me tell it like I see it. That is the only way I can approach intellectual honesty.

A number of former national security officials, columnists, and a growing number of legislators from both sides of the aisle have articulated reasons for caution in the unilateral use of force to topple the Iraqi regime. I do not intend to repeat those views, or to be comprehensive in my critique of current policy toward the Mid East. Rather, I want to focus on four aspects of the problem: 1) Unilateral use of force to depose Hussein; 2) post-Hussein Iraq; 3) reaction of Arab/Islamic and other States; and 4) consequences for the International System.

Unilateral use of force to depose Hussein. There is a wide divergence of opinion about the difficulty in removing Hussein by military force. The consensus within the administration is that it can be done rather quickly if we can get basing rights to launch an attack. Senior retired military officers, such as Generals Shalikashvili, Hoar, Zinni, Clark, and others, are not so optimistic. I do not have the information to assess who is more correct, but in my judgment, there will be many military casualties on both sides and there is likely to be numerous civilian casualties. This will be a serious public relations problem, especially if Iraq concentrates its forces in urban areas and there is ground combat in these areas. This will cost the United States in the eyes of much of the world, especially Muslims.

Post-Hussein Iraq. There has been a great deal of speculation about what a post-Hussein Iraq will look like. Most of the predictions seem to me to reflect ideological, wishful thinking rather than rational analysis based on sound intelligence. I believe the following will be most probable outcomes even if we can unseat Hussein reasonably easy.

1. There is little likelihood of a stable regime to replace Saddam Hussein. Opposition groups will fight with each other from the beginning to assert their claim to rule. There appears to be little support within Iraq for any of these groups. Iraq is likely to balkanize into three groups—Kurds in the North, Sunnis in the center, and Shiites in the South. The Kurds will then proceed to

join their kinsmen in Turkey and other countries in demanding a country of their own. Already, Turkey has expressed concern about this likelihood. The Shiites will want to ally with Iran. Democratic regime? Little chance. Instead, we will have a puppet regime that the rest of the world will view as representing a U.S. colony, with mullahs vying to turn what was a secular regime under Hussein into a radical Islamic theocracy.

2. These conditions will result in chaos. **We will then have two options: a) Keep occupation troops in the country for an indefinite period propping up a puppet regime until we are driven out as the French were in Indo-China and Algeria; or b) pull out and leave the country in chaos (as we are likely to do in Afghanistan?). It will be a lose/lose situation.**
3. The U.S. public will not tolerate the prolonged cost in military casualties and economic burdens dealing with these events, **so we will eventually pull out and leave the country in a chaotic state.**

Reaction of Arab and other Islamic States. This requires a great deal of speculation, but my knowledge based on many years of study of the region and current contacts with key opinion formers in the Middle East leads me to predict the following likely consequences of unilateral action that deposes Saddam Hussein:

1. The reaction in the Arab world—and likely the entire Islamic world—will be an enduring disaster for the United States. Our image as the tool of an Imperial Israel bent on colonizing the West Bank will be confirmed beyond whatever slight doubt that now exists. We will have triggered a Crusade Two kind of polarization. This will not be undone for many generations.
2. There will likely be a disruption of oil supply lasting for an indeterminate time.
3. Several moderate governments in the region will be toppled and replaced by radical Islamic regimes. Afghanistan and Pakistan leaders will be deposed, likely by assassination.
4. Russia will continue to supply Iran with nuclear technology.
5. The rest of the world will stand by while the United States and Israel take on the Islamic world (with the exception of Turkey, and this government will come under pressure and likely be toppled).
6. Sympathy for terrorists—including those who target the United States—will increase, making it very difficult to contain that threat.

Consequences for the International System. **A less tangible and longer-term consequence, but more serious matter, is the impact on the nature of the international system.** Fundamental to the conduct of any foreign policy is the degree to which a nation respects international institutions, whether formalized in organizations such as the United Nations, treaties, or the informal norms generally recognized by the international community. No nation, regardless of its dominant position in the international system, can afford to ignore the protocols established by the world community.

As a general proposition it is in the interests of all nations to uphold the international institutions that govern the system by rules of law and moral consensus.

Understandably, no nation completely subordinates its policy to such international institutions, especially when its vital interests are concerned. While policymakers must carefully weigh the instances when a nation's vital interests call for ignoring international protocols, we should never underestimate the costs associated with the display of an arrogance of power that flouts such norms. White House rhetoric during the recent past regarding policy toward Iraq in particular borders on such arrogance.

The specific issue of using force to overthrow the Iraqi regime must be viewed in the context of our overall foreign policy. Too frequently, we have ignored international institutions when they hampered our perceived short-term interests. In doing so, we have used much of our credit for being a law-abiding, moral player in the international system. In much of the world, we are viewed as practicing a form of *Pax Americana* based on sociocentric, self-righteous moralizing made possible by the fact that we are the only super power. The recently announced National Security Policy erases any doubt on this matter. It is tantamount to a declaration of *Pax Americana* writ large. I believe this is a tragic blunder reflecting an arrogance of power.

World order based on international institutions requires shared values and beliefs about what is acceptable conduct. There are necessary compromises and each player in the international system has a moral obligation to support international norms based on those compromises. Setting aside moral considerations, from a practical standpoint powerful nations have the most to gain by strengthening these norms. As Henry Kissinger has said in his recent book, Does America Need a Foreign Policy, "America's ultimate challenge is to transfer its power into a moral consensus, promoting its values not by imposition, but by their willing acceptance." Joseph Nye has repeated this view in his recent book, "The Paradox of American Democracy: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go it Alone." We are ignoring that advice at our peril. The overwhelming evidence is that unilateral force against Iraq at this time will be viewed as a violation of international norms as established by the United Nations Charter. The argument that this is a special case that legitimates such action is disingenuous. It is based on the same argument made by Israel when it bombed a nuclear reactor in Iraq in 1981. The United Nations, including the U.S., rightly condemned that act.

With respect to the idea of assassination to remove Saddam, we must understand that use of that tactic will break a taboo and establish a new norm for the international community. The United States, with its open society, will have the most to lose under that new norm. I believe this would be a serious mistake. Added to the unilateralist approach we have recently taken in other matters, this will signal to the world our contempt for international institutions.

Conclusions and Recommendations. If the rhetoric coming from the White House reflects its actual intent, I believe the current policy will put the United States, allied with Israel, on a course of war against the Arab and other Islamic States, with the rest of the world (with the possible exception of the Brits) standing on the sidelines. This is a recipe for Armageddon and will make it impossible to contain terrorism. While working through the international institutions established to manage conflict may require patience and some risk, it is the only prudent way to go. Countering terrorism must be an international effort. The United Nations has been a useful agent for our national interests, as illustrated by the umbrella it provided for the Gulf conflict in 1991. To turn our back on this institution is folly.

Personally, I believe we have fallen under the influence of the Sharon wing of the Israeli hard-liners, which believes in brute force to solve the “Palestinian” problem. It is apparent to me that Sharon and the dominant Israeli lobby groups in the United States (AIPAC and ADL) intend to establish a “Greater Israel” encompassing the biblical “Land of Canaan.” Secretary Rumsfeld seemed to accept this goal when he referred to the “so-called occupation” of the West Bank; so-called because Israel won the 1967 war! So much for U.N. Resolution 242, which calls for the return of the West Bank to the Palestinians. The 9-11 event was a blessing for the people who favor the agenda of creating a “Biblical Israel”. Leaders of the “Christian Right—Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Franklin Graham—have endorsed this agenda. This is not in the long-term interests of the United States, Israel, or the world Jewish community. In fact, it is a recipe for Armageddon.

The argument that we must act now before Hussein has time to produce more weapons and furnish them to terrorists deserves consideration. As many have argued however, it defies reason that he would initiate use of such weapons with the full knowledge that it would be tantamount to suicide for him personally and for his people. From what I can gather, the threat posed by his weapons of mass destruction does not outweigh the likely adverse consequences of unilateral force to unseat him. Let us work through the U.N. to get an effective inspection team back into Iraq.

Therefore, I recommend:

1. Choose the primary road to Mid East peace through Jerusalem, not Baghdad. Until the world community is brought on board to depose Hussein, we should focus on solving the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.
2. Reject the “Greater Israel” notion based on fundamentalist religious claims to the “Promised Land” of Canaan.
3. Implement United Nations Resolution 242 **NOW!** The United States has consistently vetoed U.N. resolutions that call for the implementation of this resolution. Continuing a “Peace Process” of endless talks while Israel continues to build settlements is disingenuous.
4. Work through the United Nations to combat terrorism wherever it is—this includes Iraq.
5. Rid our rhetoric of the notion that “you are either with us or against us”. Terrorism is not a black and white issue as portrayed by President Bush—one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter.

Post Script:

Since I wrote this essay, the United States has worked through the U.N. to allow inspectors back into Iraq. Whether this is an honest effort of the U.S. to avoid war is yet to be seen. In his recent book, Bob Woodward details the battle within the Administration between the hard-liners and Colin Powell. While it appears Powell has won for the time being, the jury is out. Has Bush used the U.N. and Powell as a cover when he intends to go to war under some pretext that Iraq has refused to cooperate with the inspection team? Some of the rhetoric from the hawks indicates this is the case. 2 December 2002

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