



## The Middle East and War With Iraq

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We need to be very careful about covering a potential war with Iraq in terms of the internal debate in the United States. This is not a duel between two nations, but a war where we will need the support of allies, particularly on Iraq's borders.

We do not have such allies today. No country in Europe presently supports such military action, although the Blair government might reluctantly go along with the United States under pressure. What is far more serious is the political situation in the Middle East.

At this point in time, the United States has virtually no support for a war against Iraq from any country in the Middle East except for Israel. Kuwait might support American action if we were convinced that the United States had an effective war plan that would be quickly and decisively implemented, and that there would be no backlash against Kuwait in the form of Iraqi military action, particularly use of weapons of mass destruction. Some Saudi leaders may feel the same way, but key leaders like Crown Prince Abdullah and Foreign Minister Saud al Faisal feel that Saddam is a devil they can live with and that any such American military action would create a need for a new massive basing presence in the Kingdom, and would make the Kingdom's problems with its Islamists far worse. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia prefers a Sunni regime and united Iraq to any alternative. Jordan has somewhat similar attitudes, fears, and concerns -- although it is far more worried about the Jordanian Palestinian reaction than Islamists per se.

Turkey too sees the Iraqi regime as one it can live with, does not want to host a potentially destabilizing U.S. presence, and fears any form of regime change on its southern border that might strengthen Kurdish nationalism. Iran's attitudes may be divided, but at least the hard-liners in Iran see the U.S. as just as bad as Iraq and as a continuing threat to the Islamic revolution.

No one on Iraq's borders regards outside Iraqi opposition movements like the Iraqi National Congress as anything but an ineffective joke, and few outside a narrow range of military and intelligence officers regard U.S. warnings about Iraq proliferation as more than political propaganda. Most security experts are deeply concerned that the United States may talk a far better overthrow effort than it will implement, and they will be left with greatly increased problems in terms of a surviving Iraqi regime or some form of political chaos in Iraq.

The rest of the leaders of the Arab world are focused on the Second Intifada, are willing to live with Saddam for the present, and are concerned about their own public opinion and "street." In general, both Arab and Iranian public opinion see the United States as the source of Israel's strength and ability to occupy and "persecute" the Palestinians. They also generally accept the Iraqi line that the United States has been the key source of the hardships of the Iraqi people. While there is little broad support for the Taliban or Al Qaeda per se, many see the United States actions in Afghanistan as one more case where the United States is taking excessive action against Islamic movements.

This situation might change if the United States could transform Secretary Powell's words about an Arab-Israeli peace into effective action, but the speech without such action has already lost much of its impact. It would also change if the United States could present a clear and convincing "smoking gun": evidence that Iraq was actively involved in the attacks on the United States, carrying out acts of aggression; or evidence that Iraqi proliferation really did present a major threat both in terms of military capability and the willingness to use it.

The attitudes of regional leaders might also change if the United States could present a convincing war or overthrow plan, show that it could be done quickly and with limited or no direct Arab and Iranian participation, show there would be little

military risk to neighboring states, and show that there was a clear alternative to Saddam that would meet the political needs of each border state. This need for a clear alternative to the regime decisively does not mean the Iraqi National Congress in any form, or any type of Kurdish or Shi'ite separatism beyond limited autonomy. The United States would also have to show it was totally committed to a decisive victory, regardless of U.S. casualties and costs.

In broad terms, however, the United States now cannot count on any form of meaningful coalition in attacking Iraq in the Middle East, in forcing the issue on sanctions beyond limited demonstrative military action, or in supporting more covert efforts to overthrow Saddam. Some regional leaders might be bullied into going along with us because they have little other choice. However, we as yet have done nothing effective to prepare the political and grand strategic conditions for war with Iraq.

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