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**Iraq: What Force Can and Cannot
Accomplish Against Saddam
Hussein**

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CSIS Middle East Dynamic Net Assessment

February 16, 1998

During the coming weeks the US may conduct a military experiment in compellence which will be radically different from the Gulf War. It will involve a limited number of strikes which almost inevitably will have a limited effect. The following analysis considers what force can and cannot accomplish.

The Limits of Military Force: Killing Saddam

President Clinton has restricted the use of US strikes to the mission of substantially reducing or delaying” Saddam’s capability to proliferate. There are good reasons for doing so.

No credible combination of air and missile strikes is going to kill Saddam Hussein. We tried repeatedly to find and kill him during the Gulf War, although we called these missions attacks on the “leadership” or “command and control” facilities. Although we only dedicated 260 of our strikes to “leadership” targets out of 42,240 sorties, we did so because they had only a limited chance of success and often involved targets in heavily populated areas. We had no limits on how long or how often we could fly such attacks during the air phase of Desert Storm. We had the ability to maintain a massive supporting force of airborne intelligence and targeting platforms and refueling aircraft, and we did not have to fly large numbers of sorties over heavily defended urban targets. This time we may be limited to several hundred strikes and we are unlikely to exceed 1,000. We have limited refueling and targeting support. We face the fact that Saddam can hide anywhere, and he is very likely to hide among civilians.

As for assassination plots, Pierce Brosnan is not really James Bond and this is kind of intelligence action is largely a fantasy. If Saddam was easy to kill, he would have died nearly two decades ago. He has ruled Iraq since 1979, and hardly a year has gone by without some kind of rising or assassination attempt. He has reacted with purges and executions -- a new round of which took place only weeks ago. Even if sheer blind luck did give us success, most of his cronies and his sons might well survive. “Solving Saddam” might kill a truly vile and disgusting man, but it would remove an oppressive, tribally-based Sunni elite with massive, overlapping security and secret police services, and some 50,000 paramilitary security troops and border guards. Some day his own elite will drag him down, or the Iraqi people will pull him down, but this will not be stage-managed by America.

The Limits of Military Force: Iraq’s Military Forces Will Remain Largely Intact

For similar reasons, we are not going to destroy Saddam’s military machine or begin to cripple it. Iraq still has 388,000 active men in its military forces, and some 650,000 reserves. It has around 2,700 tanks, around 4,000 other major armored weapons systems, some 2,500 major artillery weapons, over 350 combat aircraft, about 300 helicopters, 340 major surface-to-air missile launchers, and at least that many lighter surface-to-air missile launchers. This is less than half the force Iraq had in 1990, but we are still talking about some 30,000 targets scattered throughout the country.

In 1991, we flew some 23,000-30,000 sorties against Iraqi ground targets that were concentrated in the Kuwaiti Theater of Operations, that were exposed in the desert, and located away from civilians. We flew another 3,790 sorties against military strategic targets. Revised damage assessments, made since the Gulf War, indicate that these air strikes killed some 2,600 Iraqi tanks, 1,670 other armored vehicles, 2,200 artillery weapons, and 50-80 aircraft. We can do immense damage to some of Iraq's most valuable military facilities with the forces we have deployed in the Gulf, and come close to killing a target per sortie, but most of Saddam's forces will remain intact.

Suggestions that we use ground forces to finish the job go beyond fantasy to absurdity. When we liberated Kuwait, the US Army had two full corps, a peak forward-deployed strength of over 200,000 men, and nearly 4,000 tanks in the theater or closing. The Marine Corps had a peak strength of over 90,000 men and well over 200 tanks. The US is prudently building up its US Army forces in Kuwait to one armored brigade, and is moving the equivalent of a brigade-sized Marine Corps force into the Gulf. This US force, however, is going to total about 3,500 US Army troops with less than 200 tanks and a matching number of Marine ground troops with little heavy armor.

Iraq still has 23 divisions in its force structure. At least 12 Iraqi divisions are effective enough to be used in an attack on Kuwait and in combat operations against Iran. There are five regular Iraqi divisions -- three relatively combat-ready -- in the southern border region north of Kuwait. There are two Republican Guards divisions that could be rapidly deployed to support the three more capable regular divisions in an attack on Kuwait which USCENTCOM has labeled the "Basra breakout."

The US Army and Marine forces we are sending to the Gulf are the minimum force needed to guard Kuwait from Iraqi raids and adventures, and have no offensive capability. It would take months to deploy even one US army heavy corps back into the Gulf, and this time we do not have access to Saudi Arabia, British and French ground forces, or three corps worth of Arab allies.

The Limits of Military Force: Some of Iraq's Capability to Proliferate Will Remain Largely Intact

We need to be very careful about saying that military force will deprive Saddam of the capability to proliferate. President Clinton was careful to say "substantially reduce or delay," but others -- including Prime Minister Blair -- have implied that we could go much further. We made similar exaggerated claims to have destroyed Saddam's capabilities in 1991, after we launched 990 strikes on Iraq's chemical and nuclear weapons facilities and 1,460 strikes on its Scud missiles.

Our success was limited. The US Air Force concluded after the war that we successfully hit a maximum of five out of 25-30 major facilities for producing weapons of mass destruction, we left virtually all of Saddam's chemical and biological weapons intact, and we never confirmed a single kill against a Scud. The problem was we simply could not detect the size and location of Iraq's efforts.

We know much about Iraq's wartime capabilities today, largely because the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) have spent seven years tracking down Saddam's incredibly large program, as well as his

post-war efforts to smuggle in new equipment and rebuild that program. It is UNSCOM and the IAEA that have supervised the destruction of Iraq's largely intact nuclear weapons production program, and helped us determine that Saddam has now lost 817 of the 819 Scud missile bodies and engines he imported during the period before the Gulf War.

The Limits of Military Force: The Importance of Allowing UNSCOM to Continue to Operate

Consider what the last bombing campaign failed to accomplish and what has happen since the Gulf War. UNSCOM has now supervised the post-Gulf War destruction of 38,537 filled and unfilled chemical munitions, 690 tons of chemical warfare agents, more than 3,000 tons of precursor chemicals, and over 100 pieces of surviving production equipment. It is UNSCOM that has forced new disclosures from Iraq that have led to the destruction of 325 newly identified production equipment, 120 of which were only disclosed in August, 1997, the destruction of 275 tons of additional precursors, the destruction of 125 analytic instruments, and the return of 91 analytic pieces of equipment to Kuwait. It is UNSCOM that discovered Iraq had concealed a massive program to produce VX nerve gas until 1995.

Similarly, UNSCOM found Iraq had concealed a massive biological weapons program until nearly five years after the Gulf War was over, and that it had imported 39 tons of growth media for biological agents, and built at least 166 bombs of the R400 type, some of which were filled with 85 liters each of Botulin or Anthrax spores. It found that Iraq armed 155 mm artillery shells and 122 mm rockets with biological agents, and produced at least 25 missile warheads with biological agents. Iraq manufactured 19,000 liters of concentrated Botulinum (10,000 liters filled into munitions); 8,500 liters of concentrated Anthrax (6,500 liters filled into munitions); and 2,500 liters of concentrated Aflatoxin (1,850 liters filled into munitions). Iraq is known to have produced at least 1,850 liters of Aflatoxin in solution, 340 liters of concentrated clostridium perfringens, a gangrene-causing biological agent, and 10 liters of concentrated Ricin Toxin.

The basic problem with these very real accomplishments is that there is still much that UNSCOM and the IAEA do not know, and much which we cannot target. There are still some uncertainties regarding Iraq's nuclear effort, particularly regarding high speed centrifuges and the bomb components Iraq might use if it could buy fissile materials. There are missile warheads, post war design efforts, and possibly a few missiles unaccounted for. (After all, Iraq was caught smuggling in the guidance platforms from nuclear-armed Soviet missiles in 1996.)

Why Vague Diplomatic Compromises Wont' Work

In the report that triggered the current crisis, UNSCOM reported to the Security Council in October, 1997, that Iraq systematically lied about the existence of its production facilities for VX gas until 1995, and has since made "significant efforts" to conceal its production capabilities. Uncertainties affecting the destruction of Iraq's VX gas still affect some 750 tons of imported precursor chemicals, and 55 tons of domestically produced precursors. Iraq has made unverifiable claims that 460 tons of gas were destroyed by Coalition air attacks, and that it unilaterally destroyed 212 tons.

UNSCOM has only been able to verify the destruction of 155 tons and destroy a further 36 tons on its own.

Iraq has also failed to account for special missile warheads intended for filling with chemical or biological warfare agents; the material balance of some 550 155 mm mustard gas shells; the rationale for the acquisition of various types of chemical weapons, 130 tons of chemical warfare agents; some 4,000 tons of declared precursors for chemical weapons, the production of several hundred tons of additional chemical warfare agents, the consumption of chemical precursors; and 107,500 empty casings for chemical weapons. It has left uncertainties as to whether several thousand additional chemical weapons were filled with agents, its claims to the unilateral destruction of 15,620 weapons, and the fate of 16,038 additional weapons it claims it discarded. "The margin of error" in the accounting presented by Iraq is in the neighborhood of 200 munitions."

UNSCOM found that Iraq has never provided a clear picture of the role of its military in its biological warfare program, and has claimed it only played a token role. It has never accounted for its disposal of growth media. The unaccounted for media is sufficient, in quantity, for the production of over three times more of the biological agent -- Anthrax -- Iraq claims to have been produced. Bulk warfare agent production appears to be vastly understated by Iraq. Expert calculations of possible agent production quantities, either by equipment capacity or growth media amounts, far exceed Iraq's stated results. Significant periods when Iraq claims its fermenters were not utilized are unexplained. Biological warfare field trials are underreported and inadequately described. Claims regarding field trials of chemical and biological weapons using R400 bombs are contradictory and indicate that, "more munitions were destroyed than were produced. The Commission is unable to verify that the unilateral destruction of the biological weapons-filled Al Hussein warheads has taken place." There is no way to confirm whether Iraq destroyed its remaining bombs of the R400 type, some of which were filled with Botulin or anthrax spores. Iraq has never properly accounted for its holdings of Ricin toxin and may be concealing dry, storable stocks of biological weapons.

Even the most intensive air and missile strikes cannot hope to resolve these questions by destroying all of Iraq's remaining capabilities. Regardless of the attention the media pays to Saddam's palaces, there are tens of thousands of facilities where Iraq can hide its capabilities, many of which are now packaged so they are small and easy to move. Iraq has been willing to abandon biological weapons unguarded in the desert in the past, or hide equipment in mosques and youth centers. Much of its potential production capability is now used in its civil economy. For example, it used Castor oil as an engine lubricant and a substantial part of the leftover mash is Ricin.

There are humanitarian and political considerations we cannot ignore. Many civil facilities -- including "infant formula" plants can be used to make highly lethal weapons. UNSCOM currently inspects 79 sites and only five were used to make weapons before war. The remainder consists of five vaccine or pharmaceutical sites; 35 research and university sites; 13 breweries, distilleries, and dairies with dual-purpose capabilities; and eight diagnostic laboratories. It might well be argued that it is better to kill hundreds of civilian now rather than see hundred of thousands die in the future. Certainly, we cannot

afford to be paralyzed by the risk of limited civilian casualties when the alternative is to put biological weapons with the lethality of nuclear weapons into the hands of a proven mass murderer. *But*, even if we were willing to attack all of these sites, kill the civilians involved, and deal with years of political protests, Iraq would still have its basic scientific resources and talent pool intact and be able to rapidly resume the small scale production of weapons in scattered facilities anywhere in Iraq.

None of these points, however, make an argument for hollow or symbolic solutions. The Russian and French proposals to date are not honest compromises, but opportunism that will allow Saddam to proliferate in return for France and Russia's ability to get the repayment of past debts and new oil and arms deals. A token or symbolic UNSCOM is merely a license to cheat. Things will be bad enough even if UNSCOM returns. No inspection effort, no matter how good, can find everything in so large and totally committed a dictatorship. Nothing can roll back the technological clock to the point where Iraq will not be able to proliferate at some level while UNSCOM is there and at a high level once it leaves.

What Strikes Can Accomplish

So what is the point of force? What can several days or weeks of air and missile strikes accomplish if we cannot drive Saddam from power, destroy all his military, or ensure the destruction of all of his weapons of mass destruction? The answers are grim, but they make a convincing case for the use of force if diplomacy fails to give UNSCOM full and meaningful access.

- First, if we “front load” our attacks to inflict massive damage during the first two days -- before Saddam can easily back down or seek a diplomatic solution -- we can “substantially reduce or delay” Saddam's efforts to preserve and rebuild his capabilities to deliver weapons of mass destruction. Saddam is neither strong nor immortal, and he can be deterred and contained. If we severely limit his capabilities to proliferate, we limit his ability to threaten his neighbors, the incentive to Iran to proliferate, and his ability to challenge our defense of our friends in the Gulf.
- Second, if we all launch significant number of strikes at the most valuable symbols of Saddam's power and at his most expensive and irreplaceable instruments of repression and military power, we may succeed in raising the cost to Saddam to the point where he will back down and accept a meaningful UNSCOM operations for a few more months, a year or even longer. Saddam cannot easily face the loss of critical facilities and personnel in his Special” or “Presidential” Republican Guards force, major military production facilities, Special Security Service, General Intelligence Service, telecommunications facilities, key command and control centers, or regular Republican Guards forces.
- Third, the inability to destroy the majority of Iraq's military power does not mean that much more limited numbers of strikes cannot weaken Saddam in important ways -- particularly since he cannot import arms or dual-use equipment unless Britain and the US agree to let him do in the UN Security Council. An attack that targets facilities costing hundreds of millions, or even billions of dollars worth of imported

equipment will buy us more time and limit the threat Saddam can pose to Kuwait, Iran, his Kurds, and his other neighbors.

- Finally, such strikes will show we have the courage and resolve to act, and that Saddam can never count on manipulating the UN Security Council, Arab world, or even some of our allies in ways that paralyze us if he conspicuously proliferates or threatens another neighbor.

Other Things Strikes Cannot Accomplish

That said, the most important aspect of the story is the political and strategic impact of our strikes as they occur. There are several key problems that need to be considered:

- We cannot control the stopping point beyond narrow limits and we need to carefully consider the fact that Saddam can control the timing. If Saddam does concede, we are virtually forced to halt according to his timing. If Saddam rides out the attack, it is far from clear that we can sustain our strikes. At some point we will have to stop, and by then we have made Saddam into a martyr.
- We cannot avoid significant collateral damage and civilian casualties and really accomplish anything. We must attack large numbers of civilian facilities to substantially reduce and delay his ability to proliferate, to control the Iraq people, and to produce conventional military equipment and accidents happen. The image of our strikes will be critical
- We will affect the Iraqi economy and increase the “hardship” problem. We will delay oil exports and civil imports, and have some impact on Iraqi jobs and economic activity. The “backlash” problem may grow steadily with time.
- We may inherit a situation where it will be almost impossible not to accept the UN proposal to increase oil for food sales to \$5.2 billion every six months (\$10.4 billion a year), making Iraq a major exporter, market, and customer for improved oil production and shipping.
- We will still have to deal with the Arab-Israeli problem and the growing linkage between the failure of the peace process and the problems in the Gulf. Israel rhetoric is getting more extreme and panicky and any Israeli military reaction will create vast complications.
- We may strengthen Iran, which is emerging as the “friend” of Iraq, strengthen hard-liners in Iran in their attacks on the US military presence in the region, and fuel an “I told you so” Iranian position on Israel.
- We will not have any impact in moving towards a meaningful regional arms control regime. Enforcing the NPT, Missile Technology Control Regime, Chemical Weapons Convention, and Biological Weapons Conventional may be even more difficult in the climate of tensions that will occur, although there was little prospect of success in any case.
- The deeply divided and militarily impotent Southern Gulf may have to distance itself from the US, or risk creating serious tensions between the leadership elite in given countries and their peoples.

The New Cold War in the Gulf

And here comes the punchline few will want to hear. No conceivable resolution of this crisis is going to end the problem. We are going to live with Saddam until his own people finally pull him down. Even then, his successor may simply be quieter, not better. We have a “new Cold War” in the Gulf, a region with two-thirds of all the world’s oil reserves and over 30% of its gas. We face a process of creeping proliferation that UNSCOM can limit and delay, but not prevent. We have further major uncertainties regarding proliferation in Iran and other nations in the region. Just as in the old Cold War, limited military action and clear resolve cannot bring instant victory but they can reinforce deterrence. This need to maintain a powerful deterrent presence in the Gulf will endure as long as Iraq remains an active threat and Iran remains a potential one. It will do so regardless of whether diplomacy succeeds in this particular confrontation, or force has some success. We will still need the patience, the resolve, and the strength to stay the course until stable political change occurs in both Iraq and Iran and the region is strong and united enough to provide for its own security.