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**CONFRONTATION WITH SADDAM'S IRAQ:
A MILITARY ASSESSMENT**

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A little more than a year ago, the most vile terror attack in the history of mankind took place in the United States, devastating the principal symbols of American military and economic power, indeed the very symbols of freedom and capitalism in the eyes of the world. September 11—the Pearl Harbor of the twenty-first century—brought darkness upon the United States, the backbone of the free world, and nothing will ever be the same. The foundations of democracy tumbled when the delicate balance between the freedom of the individual and the security of the country was violated.

Now, the United States is facing its most important fight: maintaining its values while enhancing its national security. America's latest challenge involves balancing the responsibilities of a superpower with the need to take action against what President George W. Bush has called the "axis of evil." The war against terror has become the primary strategic item on the international agenda. The thousands of victims of the September 11 attacks, along with the tens of thousands of terror victims all over the world, serve as a reminder to world leaders that violence should not be allowed to conquer the free man; otherwise, humanity will lose hope.

President Bush's post-September 11 declaration to wage war on terror was a pivotal point in history. As he reiterated in his June 1, 2002, speech at West Point,

the war on terror will not be won on the defensive. We must take the battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans, and confront the worst threats before they emerge. In the world we have entered, the only path to safety is the path of action.

Indeed, the West and the rest of the free world altered their thinking patterns following the war against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan—the first battle in the creation of a new world order.

Those countries deemed part of the axis of evil represent an unholy trinity—a combination of extremist regimes, nonconventional weapons, and terror sponsorship. The goal of such a trinity is to create terrorism of global reach through groups such as al-Qaeda, Hizballah, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad. This sort of global terrorism, which may eventually include the use of nuclear weapons, should be the primary target in the design of a new world order.

Dire consequences would result if one member of this axis in particular—Iraq—became a nuclear power. The U.S. policy of ousting Saddam Husayn should be a vital interest of the free world. If Saddam is allowed to continue amassing nonconventional weapons, global security and stability will be shaken to their foundations. Over the past two decades, he has made every possible effort to expand his arsenal of weapons of mass destruction. It is clear that Iraq possesses vast amounts of chemical and biological weapons of the most lethal kind. A nuclear device in Saddam's hands would be the ultimate tool of extortion.

In 1981, Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin ordered the Israeli Air Force to destroy the Iraqi nuclear reactor near Baghdad, delaying Iraq's nuclear weapons program by some fifteen years. In doing so, Israel changed the course of history. Yet, Iraq now appears to be stepping up its efforts to achieve nuclear capability, and the Western world must make the right decision for future generations. In particular, the growing correlation between terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction has become a most vital strategic challenge. Global terrorists are always looking for opportunities to inflict mass casualties. Although such terrorists are not contained within the borders of individual states, the role of those states that harbor them must not be overlooked.

The Bush administration's message regarding Iraq conveys a clear sense of mission. For a superpower faced with war against such a regime, victory is the only option. The increased attention focused on Baghdad by the United Nations (UN)—particularly the possibility that the Security Council might set higher standards for Iraqi compliance with arms control resolutions—is a clear indicator of Washington's determination to take action against Iraq. Given President Bush's September 12, 2002, remarks at the UN, as well as Vice President Richard Cheney's ongoing campaign to garner international support for an invasion, the United States has reached the point of no return. The decision to act has already been made, and rightfully so; the only remaining questions are when and how.

The support of the free world and of the coalitions that the United States is attempting to construct is important, but not obligatory. Rather, the determination of Washington and the American people is the key element for a successful operation in Iraq. In the end, it is not the coalition that will determine the mission, but rather the mission that will determine the coalition.

The goals of a campaign against Iraq are clear: ending Saddam's reign, destroying his nonconventional arsenal, improving Iraq's economic situation, and initiating an Iraqi administration that is favorable to both Washington and the Iraqi people. Some of these goals may require an international involvement of several years' duration.

What shape might military action against Iraq take? Although the possibilities for such a campaign are complicated, the modus operandi will be determined first and foremost by the goals that the United States sets. Other factors will play a role as well, including the level of international cooperation (diplomatic and military, direct and indirect), the domestic situation in the United States (particularly the level of public and administrative support for a campaign), the degree of Iraqi military resistance, and the stance of currently neutral countries. In any case, action against Iraq must be powerful and successful, sending a clear message to the other countries constituting the axis of evil and to those countries that are sitting on the fence.

Among the several specific tactical options available for a military campaign in Iraq, two stand out. In one scenario, air strikes and special forces missions could be launched first, with a simultaneous amassing of significant ground troops to be activated in subsequent stages. Although such an approach would have the advantage of surprise, it would also require a great deal of time to achieve the previously mentioned goals. This lag time could result in limited ceasefires, perhaps spurring UN

Security Council intervention and giving the current regime in Baghdad an opportunity to negotiate tolerable inspection arrangements.

A second tactical approach would be a combined strike in which U.S. land, sea, and air forces attack en masse, with the goal of reaching a resolution to the conflict as quickly as possible. This approach could increase the chances of Saddam using nonconventional weapons, particularly if he felt completely cornered. If implemented quickly and successfully, however, this strategy would prevent Saddam from fielding such an arsenal.

Whichever modus operandi the United States chooses for its campaign, the operational logistics will be complicated. For example, a strategy that concentrated military efforts against Saddam and his most immediate supporters would require accurate intelligence, especially given his well-protected palace complexes and his frequent use of look-alikes. In contrast, focusing all efforts against Iraq's military (i.e., crippling both its conventional and nonconventional capability) could lead to massive defections that would leave Saddam defenseless.

This latter scenario highlights one of the key questions for U.S. military planners: should Baghdad be targeted first? If so, the end result may be costly door-to-door fighting. Alternatively, U.S. forces could assume control of wide areas of Iraq while simultaneously surrounding Baghdad, focusing on the nonconventional capability of Saddam's army, keeping him unbalanced, and creating a sense of chaos.

How would Saddam respond to military action? First, it must be remembered that his primary goal is his own survival. When he is under pressure, he invariably attempts to maneuver regional, international, and domestic opinion in order to forestall any action against him. For example, he is currently making a diplomatic effort to increase Arab support for his regime, in part by identifying Israel as the force behind the seemingly imminent American attack. Saddam will no doubt use both the Palestinian issue and Iraq's economic clout as tools for creating an Arab coalition against such an attack.

At the international level, Baghdad is trying to negate Washington's justifications for military action, emphasizing that Iraq was not involved in the September 11 attacks and that it no longer possesses nonconventional capability. Accordingly, Baghdad is attempting to reach a favorable agreement for renewing international inspections.

On the home front, Saddam is likely to increase his control over the Iraqi population in preparation for military suppression of any domestic uprising, especially given Washington's encouragement of the Iraqi opposition. He will also try to strengthen his ties with certain threatening elements such as the Shi'i tribes in the south and the Kurds in the north.

Militarily speaking, Iraq is taking defensive measures in preparation for an attack. If the United States launches an all-encompassing campaign and Saddam comes to feel that the end is near, he may employ nonconventional weapons (e.g., using aircraft or ground-to-ground missiles) in order to make his permanent mark in Arab and Muslim history. Israel could be the first target of an Iraqi counterattack, conventional or nonconventional. The goal of such a provocation would be to drag Israel into a war, which could in turn increase Arab public support for Saddam.

What should be done to minimize the risk to Israel? First, in planning a strike on Iraq, the United States should provide Israel with enough time to prepare for the possibility of nonconventional attack; such preparations would include the completion of adequate civilian protection capability and defense systems. Second, western Iraq should be struck as early as possible in the campaign so that it is under allied control by the time the invasion begins in earnest. Third, the United States and Israel should work to preserve Israel's deterrent capability both before and during such a campaign, keeping in mind Hizballah's interest in opening a northern front and the potential for escalation in the Palestinian arena.

If the United States decides not to attack Iraq in the near future, several negative consequences could arise. For one thing, Baghdad would have more time to work on adding nuclear capability to its nonconventional arsenal. This would in turn increase Iran's regional weight by spurring Tehran to boost its own efforts at developing nonconventional weapons. Meanwhile, Syria would likely expand its role in the Damascus-Tehran-Baghdad triangle, perhaps even attempting to increase pressure on Israel through Hizballah. The Palestinian arena would likely deteriorate further, encouraging the notion that terrorism is an effective tactic and making the prospect of negotiations seem even more improbable. Egypt would likely begin to feel increasingly uncomfortable in its role as the leader of the region's moderate camp, and Jordan's existing economic and stability problems would likely be exacerbated as it faced increasing pressure from the West on one side and from the Palestinians and Iraq on the other.

Saddam, of course, would feel a measure of relief and security if the United States hesitated, and he might in turn develop an inflated sense of power. For example, he could work to erode the sanctions on his country, perhaps even causing the system to collapse completely.

Inaction would also harm America's standing in the Middle East and Europe, with countries such as Russia and China becoming increasingly influential on the question of Iraq. Moreover, in any future conflict with Iraq, the United States would face an enemy with nuclear capability. The overall campaign against terrorism would weaken as well; as the extremist views represented by the Syria-Iran-Iraq triangle grew stronger, public opinion in the Arab street would deteriorate and terrorism would increase. The diminished sense of restraint among Palestinians and others along the northern Israeli border would likely drag Israel into a regional escalation.

In contrast, a successful campaign against Iraq would signal America's determination to build a new world order against the countries forming the axis of evil. For example, Iran would likely begin to feel as if it were surrounded by the United States, which would serve as extra incentive for Tehran to change its policy of terrorism sponsorship. This could in turn lead to a dialogue with Washington and increase the potential for change from within.

As for other parts of the region, Syria would be forced to decide whether it is on the side of the "good guys" or the "bad guys"; Damascus would face pressure to bring a halt to Hizballah's terror activities, and President Bashar al-Asad would find it difficult to continue his current approach to Israel. Egypt would face a challenge to its dominance and would likely attempt to pressure Israel regarding the Palestin-

ian situation. Jordan would strengthen its ties with the United States while nevertheless exhibiting a certain restlessness.

By succeeding in Iraq, the United States would also strengthen its position as the world's only superpower and enhance its image among free nations through its resolve to act against extremist regimes possessing nonconventional weapons. This would in turn help prevent such regimes from violating individual freedoms and threatening democratic nations around the world. It would also reinforce the U.S. position on such issues rather than the positions of Russia or China.

Iraq's reaction to American intervention would probably unfold gradually. At first, Saddam would try to maximize his maneuvering space, believing in his ability to survive conventional aerial and ground attacks. If the campaign dragged on with no immediate results, Saddam could perhaps deploy conventional ground-to-ground missiles. As mentioned previously, however, once America's ability and determination to complete the campaign became clear, Saddam could well decide that his demise was imminent and that he should leave his mark, perhaps through the use of missiles with nonconventional warheads. Saddam is not known for his predictability, and an extreme Iraqi reaction to American intervention is possible, though not very likely.

America's commitment to the campaign against international terrorism is deep, and Washington appears to have made the decision to take action against Iraq, crossing the point of no return. Beyond military issues, the key will be America's determination and ability to alter the world order. It is of the utmost importance that Washington and its allies do the right thing in the right manner. Saddam's birthday—April 28—has become a national holiday in Iraq. Will Iraqis celebrate his birthday in 2003? We are at a historic point. In our hands is an opportunity to make a global change; it is an opportunity that we should not ignore.

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Discussion

Robert Satloff, *The Washington Institute*: How do you see Israel's role in the international effort against Iraq, both now and in the future? This question is not necessarily limited to Israel's role in a potential military campaign against Saddam Husayn.

Shaul Mofaz: To my knowledge, the Israeli cabinet has already set its policy on this issue, so I will say a few words about this policy. First, the decision about a possible U.S. attack on Iraq is solely an American decision. Second, Israel would not play a direct military role at the outset of such a campaign, nor would Israeli retaliation for Iraqi attacks during this campaign be automatic. Because of these factors, the effectiveness of U.S. military operations against Iraq would be a key determinant of Israeli policy.

Lately, many have asked what Israel's policy would be in the event of Iraqi missile attacks against Israeli targets. I can only answer that Israel's response, or lack thereof, would depend in part on whether the attacks were conventional or nonconventional and whether—and to what extent—they caused damage. In order to maintain its policy of refraining from automatic retaliation, Israel must establish effective coordination with Washington before any U.S. campaign is launched against Iraq.

Some Israelis feel that it was a wise decision not to retaliate for Iraqi attacks during the 1991 Gulf War, while others argue that Israel lost some of its deterrent capability by not acting. The central questions today, however, regard what steps the United States will take to prevent Iraqi attacks against Israel (especially nonconventional strikes) and whether Israel will face threats that are substantial enough to warrant retaliation in coordination with the United States. Again, though, such retaliation would not be automatic—Israel would have to analyze specific situations as they arose in order to make the right decision about its course of action.

Dennis Ross, *The Washington Institute*: You just drew a distinction between two scenarios: one in which Israel suffers damage from Iraqi attacks and one in which it does not. Given this distinction, what do you perceive as the greatest threat that Israel faces from Iraq, especially in the area of weapons of mass destruction? Which weapons are more worrisome: chemical or biological? What kinds of delivery systems are of the greatest concern to you? What options does Israel have for dealing with such weapons? Can they be countered if and when they are fielded, or should this threat be preempted?

Mofaz: Based on the British intelligence assessment of Saddam's nonconventional arsenal (as detailed in a September 24, 2002, dossier released by Prime Minister

Tony Blair), I believe that biological weapons are his most dangerous tool at the moment. In the near future, however, the greatest threat may be nuclear; according to the British assessment, Saddam may have nuclear weapons as soon as six months to two years from now. Frankly, we do not know exactly what weapons Saddam has; we have underestimated his arsenal in the past. We do know that he has more than twenty al-Husayn missiles, which have a range of 650 kilometers.

In any case, neither Israel nor the United States and the rest of the world can afford to wait while Iraq attempts to acquire nuclear weapons. A preemptive U.S. campaign against Iraq would be appropriate, in part because it could lead to a global change. Again, though, that is an American decision; it would not be wise for Israel to launch a preemptive attack at a time when the United States is considering a large campaign against Iraq.

Michael Bell, *Canadian ambassador to Israel*: You mentioned the possibility of disturbances or Hizballah attacks on Israel's northern border during an American campaign against Iraq. Could you clarify that possibility in terms of Iranian and Syrian policy? That is, would Hizballah attacks be in Tehran's best interests? Similarly, would Syria support such attacks, or would it instead assume a low profile until it could determine which way the balance of power was flowing as a result of U.S. intervention?

In addition to the potential threat at its northern border, Israel might face a threat from within the West Bank during a U.S. campaign in Iraq. How would you expect the Palestinian people and groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad to react to such a war, particularly if it were lengthier than expected? How would Israel defend itself from attacks on this front? Do Palestinian terrorists have the capability to reinforce the chaos that might ensue if, for example, Iraqi missile attacks penetrated Israeli defenses?

Mofaz: Full answers to these questions could fill a lecture of their own. In brief, the most important element of a possible U.S. attack on Iraq is success; that is, the campaign's degree of effectiveness would have a major influence on regional perceptions.

If the campaign were successful, Tehran would face two choices: (1) sit quietly and analyze the results in Iraq, on the assumption that the United States would target Iran next; or (2) continue to harbor terrorists, escalate the Arab-Israeli conflict, and increase its efforts to acquire nuclear weapons. Such escalation could include pushing Hizballah to open a second front against Israel while continuing to support Palestinian violence and terrorist activity.

Syrian policy on this issue is currently undecided. Attempting to open a Hizballah front or to start a war with Israel would not be a wise approach for the Syrians, even in the wake of U.S. action in Iraq. The military gap between Israel and Syria is growing every day; in fact, if President Bashar al-Asad asked his military commanders about this matter, they would advise him to sit quietly. Yet, Bashar is a young, inexperienced leader. One cannot reliably predict his reaction to an American attack on Iraq. But if such an attack were successful, Bashar might refrain from supporting a northern front against Israel.

Satloff: Following up on the Iranian point, would American success in Iraq spur Iran to accelerate its nuclear weapons program in order to protect itself from the United States, or would Tehran instead adopt a much more friendly, open, moderate line in order to achieve the same end?

Mofaz: Some have questioned why Iraq is being targeted before Iran, arguing that Iran's desire to acquire nuclear weapons and support global and Middle Eastern terrorism is at least as strong as Iraq's. Yet, the prospects for a successful attack are much better in Iraq than in Iran. For one thing, Iran presents a different military challenge. Moreover, given the gap between the Iranian people and the regime in Tehran, a successful attack against Iraq would likely push Iran's leaders to think about the future, that is, to become more moderate toward the population and perhaps curtail the quest for nuclear weapons in order to forestall U.S. action against Iran itself.

David Makovsky, *The Washington Institute*: Regarding the possibility of Israeli retaliation against Iraqi attacks, could you clarify the aim of retaliatory measures if they were indeed launched? That is, would such measures be used in order to obtain a military result that the United States could not achieve on its own, or would they instead serve the goal of enhancing Israeli deterrence and influencing regional perceptions of Israel? If the latter, do you think that Arabs in the region perhaps expect an Israeli retaliation, especially if Iraq employs nonconventional weapons?

Mofaz: U.S. forces could on their own achieve any military end that Israel contemplated. In fact, given the manner in which the Gulf War unfolded, many in Israel and other countries believe that the United States will take care of Israel's military needs in the event of another campaign against Iraq and that Israel will therefore refrain from retaliation.

Yet, in the event of nonconventional strikes or attacks that cause damage within Israel, deterrence against the Arab world would indeed become a factor. A nonconventional attack would almost demand retaliation, in coordination with the United States.

Joyce Davis, *Knight Ridder*: You stated that a U.S. attack against Iraq would need to be completed rather quickly. What in fact are the prospects for quick success? What potential repercussions could a drawn-out war in Iraq have, particularly on America's Arab allies? Would certain governments in the region face destabilization or overthrow in such a situation?

Mofaz: The United States is the most powerful country in the world, and I have no doubts about its ability to launch a successful attack on Iraq. Nevertheless, two key elements would help to ensure that the goals of such an attack are readily met. First, Washington must maintain its determination. Second, U.S. military leaders must develop the right plan for a successful operation. Once these two elements are in place, the United States will have no problem completing a powerful, massive, and quick campaign against Iraq.

Satloff: You seem to have even more confidence in American military capability than many Americans do.

Haleh Esfandiari, *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars:* In all likelihood, Israel has kept close watch on Iraq's development of nonconventional weapons over the years. Has the Israeli government ever considered a repeat of its 1981 attack on Iraq's nuclear facilities, and if not, why not? After all, Israel could probably launch similar unilateral strikes with success. Moreover, has Israel ever considered using such measures to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons or matériel?

Mofaz: As I mentioned previously, the 1981 attack on Iraq's nuclear reactor was launched in part because Iraq seemed to be on the cusp of developing nuclear capability. The current situation in Iran is different, but not entirely so. I believe it is only a question of years before Iran acquires nuclear weapons. I am not part of the Israeli administration and cannot speak on its behalf, but if the government were faced with a situation in which an extremist regime obtained nuclear capability and threatened the existence of the state of Israel, there would be no question as to the proper course of action.

Edith Everett, *The Washington Institute:* Precisely how would you define success for a campaign against Iraq? For example, would ground troops have to remain there for any period of time following the campaign? Would elections be held in the immediate aftermath?

Mofaz: For most military operations, the definition of success is clear: achieving the political goals established beforehand. As stated previously, in the case of Iraq these goals include removing Saddam's regime, destroying his nonconventional capability, improving the country's economic situation, and establishing a government that is more amenable to both the international community and the Iraqi people.

As for the question of how military action could achieve all of these goals, one need only remember that the United States came very close to doing so in 1991. Yet, that campaign was halted, and Saddam is still in power. Hence, one major lesson to be learned from the Gulf War is that the United States must accomplish all of its initially established objectives, military and otherwise.

From the Israeli point of view, another lesson of the Gulf War is that western Iraq should be captured and controlled at the beginning of a campaign, which would prevent any launching of missiles against Israel. During the Gulf War, both the planning and the implementation of military operations in western Iraq were unsuccessful. If these operations had been in Israeli hands, they would have been handled somewhat differently. Currently, however, the United States has the appropriate capability and plans to prevent the vast majority of potential missile strikes from western Iraq into Israel.

As mentioned previously, U.S. forces could gain control over Iraq rather quickly with a massive, combined air and ground attack. Attempting the capture of Baghdad at the beginning of a campaign could prove to be a costly mistake. Similarly, a surgi-

cal strike against Saddam himself would be difficult and not necessarily successful. A better strategy would involve gaining control over western Iraq, destroying nonconventional sites, and surrounding Baghdad, after which U.S. forces could deal with Saddam.

Barton Gellman, *Washington Post*: Previously, you claimed that Iraq possessed twenty operational al-Husayn missiles. According to intelligence from the British, American, and Israeli governments, however, inspectors from the United Nations Special Commission on Iraq concluded in late 1998 that only eleven or twelve such missiles were unaccounted for and that, if these missiles still existed, they were most likely disassembled into key components (e.g., engines, guidance systems, special fuels). Do you believe that Iraq has operational missiles now, including mobile erector launchers? If so, do you believe that Iraq could use them to deliver biological weapons with any success? In other words, is there a realistic Iraqi missile threat against Israel?

Mofaz: This is not a question of belief, but of information. The previously mentioned (and quite reliable) British intelligence assessment of Iraq's nonconventional weapons capability states the following:

[Iraq] illegally retained up to 20 al-Hussein missiles, with a range of 650km, capable of carrying chemical or biological warheads. . . .

Iraq could assemble nuclear weapons within months of obtaining fissile material from foreign sources. . . .

[Saddam] does not regard them only as weapons of last resort. He is ready to use them, including against his own population, and is determined to retain them in breach of United Nations Security Council Resolutions. . . .

[Iraq has] military plans for the use of chemical and biological weapons, including against its own Shia population. Some of these weapons are deployable within 45 minutes of an order to use them.

Such facts give one a sense of the real threat posed by Iraqi nonconventional weapons, particularly since they are in the hands of a madman. Saddam is unpredictable and may well use this arsenal, which makes him a threat to Israel and the rest of the world.

Gellman: The British report is ambiguous on at least three issues: whether the al-Husayn missiles are operational, whether they are the same weapons that are referred to as being deployable within forty-five minutes, and whether Iraq is capable of using biological agents in such missiles without destroying the agents themselves upon impact.

Mofaz: Again, according to the British intelligence assessment, Iraq does indeed have approximately twenty operational al-Husayn missiles, as well as the ability to place viable chemical and biological warheads on them.

Bernard Kalb, *Reliable Sources (CNN)*: Some have mentioned the possibility that a single bullet might be the cheapest or most effective way of achieving regime change in Iraq. Is the assassination scenario at all realistic?

Mofaz: That would be a very difficult mission. It is certainly achievable, but a nation as powerful as the United States cannot rely solely on that option, in part because assassinating the leader of a hostile country would give extremist regimes an excuse to use the same approach against other countries.

Launching a military campaign with the goal of removing Saddam's regime, however, would be qualitatively different. This goal would not necessitate killing Saddam; both he and his regime could be removed from power without resorting to assassination. Such a campaign would be the proper way of achieving American goals, particularly since the United States is the backbone of democracy in the world.