

The Executive Memorandum

The Heritage Foundation

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RUSH!

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HOW TO DEFEAT IRAQ

America may be getting ready to go to war in the Middle East. In the fastest military buildup in history, the United States is moving into position near Iraq: an entire Marine Expeditionary Force of 50,000; parts of at least two tank-laden Army mechanized divisions; four aircraft carriers; and Air Force fighters, bombers, and ground-attack aircraft from the venerable B-52 bomber to the ultra modern radar-evading F-117A stealth fighter.

This military buildup should bring to mind the lessons of history. The Vietnam War taught the U.S. that slow-motion military escalation does not impress a determined opponent, and that putting unnecessary political constraints on the military will lead to defeat. Vietnam also taught that using military force for murky political objectives and without any clearcut idea of victory undermines public support and saps the morale of U.S. fighting forces. Unlike Vietnam, military force was used swiftly and decisively in Grenada, Libya, and Panama and was successful each time. Iraq is a tougher foe, but the principle still stands. George Bush and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Colin Powell appear to have learned well the lessons of recent history, particularly the Vietnam War.

If there is to be war with Iraq, America's rapid military buildup provides the force to strike fast, fight hard, and win. Bush said plainly on August 8 that U.S. objectives are to protect Saudi Arabia and to force the withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait. If it comes to war, two other objectives should be added: Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's fall and replacement with a more moderate leadership, and the destruction of Iraq's ability to wage modern warfare. These objectives are necessary not only to protect American security interests, but to fulfill the United Nations mandate "...to bring the invasion and occupation of Kuwait to an end and to restore sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity to Kuwait." If war comes, Kuwait will never be safe unless the rule and power of Saddam Hussein is destroyed. Anything short of this could lead to a protracted struggle with unclear objectives and uncertain public and congressional support.

Issuing An Ultimatum. Several events could require a U.S. military response: if American hostages are harmed; if Iraq attempts to undermine or invade Saudi Arabia or Jordan; or if Iraq fires on any U.S. forces. But Saddam is calculating. He may not provide the U.S. with a clearcut reason for military action. He may prefer instead to play the waiting game in hopes that he will be able to rally Arab support, particularly among the Palestinian Arabs in Jordan, and break the solid front of international support for sanctions against him. If Bush sees that the blockade is not working and Saddam is succeeding, and that time is starting to work against the U.S., he would be justified in issuing an ultimatum to Saddam to release American hostages and withdraw from Kuwait, or face war.

Under any of these circumstances, Bush's military action should be decisive. He should ask Congress for a declaration of war against Iraq. This will galvanize public opinion and free Bush's hand to fight on whatever terms he sees fit. He should use as much force as necessary to bring the crisis to a quick and successful conclusion with minimal loss of American lives. The U.S. cannot afford militarily or politically to become bogged down in a protracted land war on the Arabian peninsula.

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Fighting to win. America's major advantages in a war against Iraq are its air power and ability to strike deep inside Iraqi territory, including Baghdad. American, Israeli, and other intelligence sources have identified most of these. If given the leeway, U.S. military commanders are likely to use air power based on aircraft carriers and on the ground in Saudi Arabia and surrounding countries to achieve the following:

Objective #1: Destroy the Iraqi Air Force on the ground and in the air. Also targeted for destruction should be Iraqi short-range ballistic *Scud B* missiles, which may be armed with chemical warheads, ground-based anti-ship *Silkworm* missiles, and the tiny Iraqi navy; these strikes would give the U.S. control of the air and the sea.

Objective #2: Annihilate key strategic targets in Iraq including chemical weapon production plants, nuclear research facilities, and ballistic missile research facilities; this would destroy Iraq's capability to threaten its neighbors – and eventually the U.S. – with weapons of mass destruction.

Objective #3: Target the Iraqi civilian and military leadership, including Saddam himself, until a leader comes to the fore who is willing to negotiate peace on U.S. terms.

Objective #4: Strike key psychological targets, such as electrical generation plants serving Baghdad, to bring home to the Iraqi people the futility of Saddam's policies; avoid strikes against civilian targets, to press home that America's quarrel is with Saddam and the Iraqi government, not the Iraqi people. The air campaign against Iraq should not subside until Iraq has given in to U.S. demands.

This may be enough to bring the Iraqi government to its knees, but if not, the U.S. then can focus the offensive on the Iraqi army. With Iraqi planes grounded, the Iraqi army is open to air attack by U.S. A-10 *Thunderbolt* ground-attack and other jets. Round-the-clock air attacks can cut off most fuel, food, and water to the Iraqi army in Kuwait, immobilizing Iraqi forces. If the Iraqis go on the offensive into Saudi Arabia, they will become even more vulnerable to air strikes as they leave defensive positions and spread out across the open desert. Counter-attacks by highly mobile Marine and Army forces at the flanks and rear of the Iraqi army in Kuwait, combined with actions to slow any Iraqi advances into Saudi Arabia, should halt offensive Iraqi operations, and send the Iraqi army retreating to within its own borders.

Stopping A Menace. America inevitably will pay a heavy price for war against Iraq. Even if the Pentagon is given free reign to fight as it sees fit, hundreds or even more than one thousand GIs still may lose their lives. As tragic, so will a number of U.S. hostages held by Iraq. Some countries may turn against the U.S. But these costs must be measured against the price of appeasement. Saddam is a menace. If he succeeds in his aggression, he will have demonstrated that America cannot protect its own interests and those of the West in the Middle East. He will emerge encouraged in his aggressive course, and stronger politically and militarily. He will continue his programs to develop nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, and the next time he strikes he could have missiles capable of attacking American cities with these weapons. He will continue his expansionist ways, controlling Kuwait, probably someday Jordan as well, and he would exercise tremendous influence over Saudi Arabia. He will control much of the world's oil. And he surely will have split the Arab alliance against him, creating greater hostility in the Middle East against the U.S. and Israel, and making an Arab-Israeli War more likely. If he is not stopped, the price to America and its friends and allies will be tremendously greater than the cost of war against Iraq today.

So far, Bush has handled the crisis flawlessly. His decisive action has given him widespread public support. If he proves as decisive in war, America can win quickly and bring its troops home in victory.

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