

Executive Memorandum

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BUSH TO GORBACHEV: CHOOSE BETWEEN SADDAM AND THE WEST

Unlike most international conflicts the United States has faced since World War II, Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait is not mainly an East-West confrontation. Moscow and Washington are not squared off eyeball-to-eyeball as they were in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, or even backing opposing sides, as they were in the 1982-1983 Lebanon crisis. Even so, Moscow has been a major player in this most recent Middle East crisis; sometimes supporting the U.S., sometimes helping Saddam, but always pursuing its own interests. This more subtle Soviet game requires a different American response than previous Middle East conflicts. This time, George Bush must draw out Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and force him to choose sides: Saddam or the West.

On the one hand, Moscow has joined Washington in condemning Saddam's aggression. The day of the August 2 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, Gorbachev said he would cut off all arms deliveries to Iraq. In the United Nations on August 6, the Soviet representative voted with America in supporting a U.N. Security Council resolution imposing a trade embargo on Iraq. Again, this past Saturday, Moscow voted with America, calling for the use of military force, if necessary, to enforce the U.N.-imposed embargo. On the other hand, Soviet military policy since Saddam's invasion has been less encouraging. Before endorsing the use of force to back the embargo, Soviet diplomats worked hard behind the scenes to place U.S., Soviet, and other forces in the Persian Gulf under the U.N. flag. This action would have tied U.S. hands by giving the U.N. — and therefore Moscow, which has a veto in the U.N. Security Council — a measure of control over American military operations in the region.

Moscow also has been careful not to burn its bridges with Saddam. While condemning the Iraqi invasion, Gorbachev continues to assist Saddam militarily. By Moscow's own admission, at an August 22 official press conference by Red Army Colonel Valentin Ogurtsov, 193 Soviet military advisors still are training and assisting Iraq's one million-man armed forces. Privately, Pentagon sources say that between 3,000 to 4,000 Soviet military advisors still may be in Iraq. Moscow has been silent on their whereabouts or activities. But traditionally, these advisors have played a prominent role in training the Iraqi military, helping to plan Iraq's military operations, maintaining such advanced Soviet-supplied weaponry as MiG-29 *Fulcrum* fighter aircraft and building Iraq's air defense network.

Creating A Menace. This continuing military support for Saddam builds on longstanding Soviet policy in the region. Without Moscow's support, Saddam could never have turned Iraq into the predominant military power in the Persian Gulf region. Moscow's military ties with Baghdad date back to 1958. Moscow and Baghdad signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in 1972. Since then, the Soviet Union has remained Iraq's largest arms supplier, helping create the menace that American forces face today. (The menace also partly is the creation of Western arms suppliers, particularly France, which has supplied Iraq with advanced *Mirage* jets and *Exocet* anti-ship missiles.)

Soviet fence-straddling over Iraq may be explained by Moscow's interests in the current crisis. In part, Moscow gains from instability in the region. This at least to some extent explains why it consistently has stirred up trouble by arming and abetting such dictators and terrorists as Saddam, Libya's Moammar Qad-

hafi, the Palestine Liberation Organization's Yassir Arafat, and Syria's Hafez Assad, and why it continues to do so. War and political instability in the Middle East generally lead to higher oil prices, which have tended to work in Moscow's favor. Today, for every dollar increase in the price of a barrel of crude, Moscow gains some \$1 billion annually in badly needed hard currency from its export of oil.

But Moscow today also may have its own reasons for promoting stability in the Middle East, or at least appearing to do so. First, its policy of unequivocal support for expansionist tyrants has failed to dislodge the U.S. from the region or to gain for Moscow an internationally-recognized role in the Middle East. Second, Gorbachev is in the midst of wooing Western aid and technology to bail out his sinking economy. Furthermore, as long as conflict in the Gulf persists, Western defense spending levels — which were heading down fast — are likely to remain high. Gorbachev would like to set Western defense spending back on its downward slide.

Charting A Middle Course. Gorbachev appears to be charting a middle course in the Iraq crisis, maintaining his military ties to Baghdad while offering some rhetorical and diplomatic support to the West. He hopes, perhaps, to emerge as a peacemaker, his image polished in the West, and his relations with Saddam still intact. If he is lucky, he may gain for Moscow what it long has sought but failed to achieve through a more overtly belligerent course in the Middle East: a recognized role as a regional power and diplomatic arbiter to rival the Western powers. U.S. policy must be geared toward forcing Gorbachev to choose sides. If Gorbachev wants to gain stature and legitimacy, he will have to earn it through cooperation with the U.S. to bring stability to the region, and a clear rejection — in word and deed — of Saddam and his expansionist policies. In pursuit of this objective, Bush should:

◆◆ **Introduce a resolution in the U.N. Security Council calling for the withdrawal of all foreign military advisors from Iraq.** Moscow will be forced to comply by withdrawing its advisors or to veto the resolution. Either way, the resolution will flush out Moscow's true intentions in the region.

◆◆ **Call publicly for Gorbachev to terminate the Soviet Union's 1972 "Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation" with Iraq.** Abrogation of this treaty would send a clear message to Saddam, and the rest of the world, that Moscow no longer has an interest in backing Iraqi aggression.

◆◆ **Urge Gorbachev to share information with the U.S. on the strategic vulnerabilities of the weapons Moscow has sent Saddam.** Some of these, such as Soviet air defense missiles and *Scud B* surface-to-surface missiles, threaten the lives of American soldiers. If Gorbachev really wants to right the wrong his country has committed in arming Iraq, he can help the Pentagon figure out how to defeat the Soviet weaponry in the Iraqi arsenal with minimum loss of life. France already has supplied the U.S. with needed information on French weapons in Saddam's hands.

◆◆ **Continue to reject Soviet calls for a joint U.S.-Soviet military command in the Persian Gulf or for putting U.S. forces in the Middle East under the U.N. flag.** America and its NATO allies have sent forces to the Middle East to stop aggression and defend Western interests. Countries without interests in the region, or with opposing interests, can only hamper operations.

George Bush has been establishing a personal relationship with Mikhail Gorbachev. Bush should tell the Soviet leader that the U.S. understands that Moscow, as Washington, is in the process of crafting its post-Cold War foreign policy. Bush should say that he thus understands why Moscow's signals on Iraq may be confusing. The time has come, Bush then should stress, for Gorbachev to end the confusion. In this critical moment in the evolution of post-Cold War geopolitics, Bush should tell Gorbachev, Moscow must decide: Is it committed to roiling troubled waters or is it ready to work with the West in opposing aggressors like Iraq's Saddam Hussein?

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