

# The Executive Memorandum

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## CALLING SADDAM HUSSEIN'S BLUFF IN KUWAIT

Saddam Hussein's provocative military buildup on the Iraq-Kuwait border underscores the continued threat that the Iraqi dictator poses to his neighbors and to United States interests in the oil-rich Persian Gulf. The Clinton Administration appropriately has dispatched more than 36,000 troops, an aircraft carrier battle group, and 550 warplanes to deter and defend against a possible Iraqi attack on Kuwait. But this military response by itself is not enough to counter Saddam's challenge to American interests in the Persian Gulf. The U.S. also must maintain firm international diplomatic and economic pressures on Saddam's brutal regime. Rather than seek an accommodation with Baghdad to resolve the current crisis, the Clinton Administration should seek Saddam's ouster.

Saddam's latest fit of saber-rattling is a continuation of his protracted war of nerves with the U.S. and the international coalition that defeated Iraq in 1991. Saddam periodically has trumpeted his stubborn defiance of the U.S. and its allies to demonstrate to his own people, other Arabs, and his foreign adversaries that he remains a force to be reckoned with. He has violated the terms of the 1991 cease-fire, violated the "no-fly" zones imposed on northern and southern Iraq in 1991, blocked United Nations arms inspectors, attacked Kurdish opposition forces in northern Iraq and Shiite forces in southern Iraq, and launched a failed attempt to assassinate former President George Bush in Kuwait in April 1993.

Saddam's goals in all of these confrontations have been to punish his enemies inside and outside Iraq, weaken the international coalition containing him, and reverse the conditions imposed on Iraq following its 1991 defeat. Saddam particularly wants an end to the U.N.-sponsored economic sanctions that have prevented Iraq from exporting oil, its primary source of foreign currency. The sanctions have devastated the Iraqi economy and helped to further erode Saddam's crumbling domestic power base, already undermined by his costly invasions of Iran in 1980 and Kuwait in 1990.

By massing roughly 80,000 troops on Iraq's border with Kuwait, Saddam hoped to deal himself a stronger hand in negotiations with the U.N. coalition. His apparent decision to withdraw at least some of these troops suggests that he may attempt to strike a deal with the U.S. and its allies: an Iraqi pledge to recognize Kuwait's sovereignty and stop menacing it in exchange for the lifting of U.N. economic sanctions. The Clinton Administration must adamantly reject such a deal. Saddam repeatedly has violated past agreements, and such a pledge would be easily reversible. Moreover, the ultimate source of Iraqi-American tensions is not the deployment patterns of the Iraqi army but Saddam's aggressive and hostile foreign policy. As long as Saddam clings to power, such tensions will persist and periodically will boil over into crises.

The challenge to the Clinton Administration is to resolve the current crisis in a manner that penalizes Saddam and reduces his ability to make trouble in future crises. This means the U.S. cannot allow Saddam to score a psychological victory that could revive his declining political support at home. Further, the U.S. must make sure that the outcome of Saddam's ploy leaves the Iraqi dictator in a worse, not a better, situation. To do so, the Clinton Administration should:

- ✓ **Insist that Iraq unconditionally and immediately withdraw the forces threatening Kuwait.** If Saddam balks at doing so by a specified date, the U.S. and its allies should launch air attacks to systematically destroy the threatening forces. Further, the U.S. should attack the assets that Saddam values the most—his internal security forces, the elite Republican Guard, and Iraq's military industries—throughout Iraq. The goal should be to punish Saddam and his closest supporters while undermining his ability to maintain himself in power, repress the opposition, and threaten Iraq's neighbors.
- ✓ **Maintain economic sanctions on Iraq until Saddam is ousted from power.** The economic sanctions imposed by the U.N. in 1990 finally have become a severe threat to Saddam Hussein's regime. Saddam was forced to cut food subsidies on September 25 and the Iraqi economy has been plagued by inflation, unemployment, and shortages of raw materials. Saddam engineered the latest crisis in part to distract Iraq's increasingly restive people from the predicament his blundering leadership has created. The U.S. not only must drive home to Iraqis that Saddam has blundered again, but signal them that no improvement in their economic situation will be possible until they have removed him from power. This will maximize the incentives that disgruntled members of Saddam's regime have to move against him to save their country.
- ✓ **Create an exclusion zone in southern Iraq where Iraqi armored forces would be banned.** To prevent Saddam from fomenting further crises by menacing Kuwait, the U.S. and its allies should prohibit the deployment of Iraqi tanks below the 32nd parallel, the northern boundary of the "no-fly" zone imposed in 1991 to halt Iraqi air attacks against rebellious Iraqi Shiites. Any Iraqi tanks discovered south of the 32nd parallel after a specified date would be destroyed by air attacks. This prohibition would greatly weaken Iraq's ability to threaten Kuwait and give the U.S. more warning time to prepare for future Iraqi aggression.
- ✓ **Maintain strong allied military forces in Kuwait and the Persian Gulf region to deter and defend against Iraqi aggression.** Initially the defense burden must be borne by the U.S. This necessity should lead the Clinton Administration to reconsider its plans to ax the defense budget and think twice about future military deployments that distract from the vital mission of protecting access to Persian Gulf oil, such as those in Haiti, Rwanda, and Somalia. But over time, American ground forces should be withdrawn from Kuwait and replaced with troops from Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Kuwait's allies in the Gulf Cooperation Council, such as Saudi Arabia, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates. Such an Arab force, backed up by American air power and naval forces, would reduce the need for an expensive long-term deployment of American ground troops. Moreover, by defending Kuwait with predominantly Arab rather than American troops, Saddam would be deprived of the political benefits of posing as an Arab champion standing up to a Western superpower.
- ✓ **Step up support of Iraqi opposition forces.** The Administration should increase its diplomatic support for the Iraqi National Congress, the opposition umbrella group. Further, it should offer economic and military aid, including anti-tank weapons, to the Kurdish resistance forces that have carved out an autonomous zone in northern Iraq.

The U.S. and its allies must maintain relentless pressure on Saddam Hussein to curb his aggression against neighboring states and Iraqi opposition forces. Saddam will remain a threat to regional stability and American interests as long as he remains in power. Washington's long-term goal therefore should be to oust Saddam, not merely to reach an accommodation with him that resolves the crisis at hand.

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