

RUSH!

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PUNISH SADDAM HUSSEIN FOR HIS LATEST PROVOCATION

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Once again, Saddam Hussein has provoked an international crisis. Despite a unanimous vote in the United Nations Security Council on November 12 to sanction Iraq for preventing Americans on the U.N. Special Commission (UNSCOM) from participating in weapons inspections, Saddam is forcing the Americans to leave his country. The Clinton Administration should decisively reject Saddam's brazen attempt to undermine the U.N.'s inspection regime. It should convince the U.N. to penalize Saddam even further for violating the terms of the cease-fire ending the 1991 Gulf War. It should work to shore up the broad coalition that rolled back Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. But its highest priority should be to create conditions that lead to the toppling of Saddam's regime. As long as this vengeful dictator rules Baghdad, he will remain a major threat to U.S. interests and American allies in the Middle East.

These goals cannot be realized through diplomatic efforts that are not backed by a credible threat—if not the actual use—of military force. The Administration must be resolute in rejecting face-saving diplomatic “solutions” that give Saddam a chance to claim victory and prop up his beleaguered regime. It must be prepared to use force unilaterally if necessary to punish Saddam where he would feel it most: by targeting his internal security forces and destroying his military assets, defense industries, and weapons of mass destruction.

This confrontation with UNSCOM is driven by Iraq's desire to evade and undermine the U.N. inspection regime; to preserve its chemical and biological warfare, nuclear weapons, and missile programs; and to erode the willpower of the U.N. coalition containing Iraq. Periodic crises also remind Saddam's external enemies and internal opposition that he remains a force to be reckoned with. They distract Iraqis from focusing on their deteriorating standard of living and keep Iraqi military officers focused on external enemies rather than on plotting coups.

Since 1991, Saddam's “cheat and retreat” policy has sought to obstruct UNSCOM as much as possible, and to back down only when the Security Council threatened to use force. This time, however, Iraq also has escalated the confrontation by demanding the removal of U.S. inspectors and threatening to shoot down American U-2 surveillance planes, an integral part of UNSCOM's monitoring effort. Saddam may have been emboldened by the October 23 Security Council vote in which France, Russia, and China blocked American and British efforts to bolster sanctions against Iraq for obstructing the inspections. Rather than ban Iraqi military and intelligence officials from traveling outside Iraq, as the United States advocated, the Security Council opted to postpone any action. Saddam exploited this sign of weakness within the Security Council by precipitating a crisis to keep inspectors from closing in on the remaining portions of Iraq's military programs.

But by engineering this crisis, Saddam has strengthened the arguments for maintaining U.N. economic sanctions against Iraq and has revived a sense of urgency within the Security Council on the need to halt Iraqi harassment of UNSCOM. The Administration should move quickly to translate these gains into stronger Security Council actions against Iraq while retaining the option to use military force—the only language Saddam seems to understand. Specifically, the U.S. should:

- **Rule out compromise on UNSCOM harassment.** Washington should block any U.N. move to dilute UNSCOM's powers or to make concessions that would give Saddam a face-saving way to back down. It should forge a Security Council consensus that Iraq must comply with Security Council resolutions or suffer the consequences.
- **Push for tougher U.N. sanctions against Iraq.** Saddam's actions exploded the myth that U.N. restraint will encourage Iraq's compliance with UNSCOM. Washington should press for the strongest possible sanctions—far beyond the travel ban on Iraqi military and intelligence officials that the Security Council unanimously voted to impose on November 12—to penalize Iraq's continued failure to abide by its UNSCOM obligations. These sanctions should include rescinding Resolution 986, which allows Iraq to export limited amounts of oil to pay for food and medicine; suspending Iraq from the General Assembly and all other U.N. forums; prohibiting Iraqis from serving as U.N. agency officials; and requiring all U.N. member states to restrict the size of Iraqi embassies. Saddam's supporters should see that flouting the UNSCOM regime only isolates and weakens Iraq.
- **Maintain a military option to punish Saddam.** If the Security Council is unwilling or unable to force Saddam to back down, Washington should resort to military force: not just pinprick symbolic attacks designed to "send a signal," but a concerted campaign to force Saddam to pay an unacceptably high price for continuing the confrontation. Targets should include facilities to which UNSCOM was denied access; forces blocking the UNSCOM inspections and hiding prohibited weapons programs, including the Republican Guard and the intelligence and secret police agencies which form the backbone of Saddam's regime; and Iraqi military assets, including air bases, weapons depots, and defense industries. Strong and determined military action would further weaken Saddam's dwindling base of support, encourage defections and coup attempts, and demonstrate to the Iraqi people that Saddam's adventurism threatens their national interests.
- **Develop a comprehensive strategy to overthrow Saddam.** The ultimate goal of U.S. policy should be to oust Saddam, not just contain him. The Iraqi opposition, severely weakened by Saddam's August 1996 invasion of the Kurdish enclave in northern Iraq, must be unified and rebuilt. To this end, the Administration should broker a renewed alliance of rival Kurdish factions and secure the lifting of the ill-considered U.N. embargo against Kurdish-controlled territory. It should give greater economic and political support to the Kurds and guarantee air support against future ground attacks on their strongholds. It should work closely with Turkey to cement an alliance between Kurdish groups and the Iraqi National Congress, an umbrella group of democratic Iraqi opposition forces. It should help the coalition set up an alternative government in northern Iraq and lobby for its international recognition. Saddam's rule should be de-legitimized, and he and his lieutenants should be indicted as war criminals. The United States also should work to give the opposition government access to frozen Iraqi bank accounts and encourage international oil companies to negotiate with it instead of with Saddam. Many Iraqis would defect to this opposition government if they were convinced that the United States strongly supports it and would protect it from military attack.

Washington should deny Saddam Hussein a diplomatic victory over UNSCOM by injecting a spirit of resolve into the U.N. Security Council. And it should make sure that any military response is designed to punish Saddam, not just to slap his wrist. A firm American-led international response that clearly leaves him worse off for having challenged UNSCOM would help to create the conditions needed to weaken Saddam's grip on power and strengthen the opposition forces that seek his downfall.