

Executive Memorandum

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AIR STRIKES ARE NECESSARY TO WEAKEN, DISCREDIT, AND PUNISH SADDAM HUSSEIN

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Saddam Hussein's continued obstruction of United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) weapons inspectors in Iraq is a dangerous provocation that threatens vital U.S. security interests in the Middle East. The United States must not allow Iraq's brutal dictator to evade these inspections and build chemical, biological, and possibly nuclear weapons. This would embolden Saddam and make him an even bigger threat. If Saddam refuses to permit unconditional UNSCOM inspections, the United States should unleash a robust and sustained air campaign to weaken his power base and threaten the long-term survival of his outlaw regime.

The air campaign should not seek merely to compel Saddam to allow UNSCOM inspection teams to return—a concession he could rescind at any time. Such a strategy would allow him to determine whether an air campaign was successful. Instead, air and missile strikes should be launched to:

- **Destroy** Iraq's stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction, along with the facilities to produce them and means of delivering them;
- **Pulverize** Iraq's ability to project military power by targeting its air force and elite Republican Guard; and
- **Cripple** the repressive internal security apparatus that keeps Saddam in power.

Clinton's Failure to Resolve the Crisis. The current standoff between Iraq and the United States is the result of the Clinton Administration's failure to resolve a crisis provoked by Saddam Hussein on October 29, 1997, when he barred Americans from UNSCOM inspection teams. Saddam sought to gut the UNSCOM inspection regime and eventually secure the lifting of U.N. economic sanctions without surrendering his cherished weapons of mass destruction. During this confrontation, the Clinton Administration unwisely acquiesced to cosmetic diplomatic efforts by Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov, Saddam's longtime personal friend. Primakov brokered a face-saving exit for Saddam from the crisis last November, despite his obstruction of the U.N. inspections. Although Saddam pledged to allow UNSCOM teams that included Americans to re-enter Iraq, he would not allow inspections of "presidential" sites suspected of concealing programs to develop weapons of mass destruction.

The present situation is intolerable. Since late October, Baghdad has had the opportunity to build more chemical and biological weapons in secret. The longer this situation lasts, the more dangerous Saddam becomes. Secretary

of State Madeleine Albright has toured Europe and the Middle East to shore up allied support for military action against Iraq. If such support is not forthcoming, the U.S. must be prepared to act unilaterally. Washington must not accede to another Russian-engineered diplomatic deal that removes the threat of military action against Saddam in exchange for another "promise" he could later break. Such a deal would advance Moscow's efforts to reassert its influence in the Middle East, but it would not serve U.S. interests.

Realistic Goals for Military Action. Saddam withstood five weeks of bombing during the 1991 Gulf War before over 500,000 coalition troops expelled his forces from Kuwait. It is therefore unrealistic to expect that four or five days of bombing would compel him to accept unfettered UNSCOM inspections. Saddam has foregone over \$100 billion in oil revenues under U.N. economic sanctions in a determined effort to retain his weapons of mass destruction. Air attacks alone cannot guarantee the destruction of all of these weapons. They can, however, inflict a stinging setback to his illicit weapons programs and enhance the security of U.S. allies and 40,000 U.S. personnel within range of Iraqi missiles. In the long term, a humiliating military riposte also can lay the groundwork for an overthrow of Saddam by demoralizing his supporters and encouraging opposition to his dictatorial rule.

To these ends, the U.S.-led air campaign should target Saddam's air force and air defense network; suspected sites of weapons of mass destruction, including presidential palaces declared off-limits to UNSCOM inspectors; elite Republican Guard units, especially the armored divisions garrisoned in Baghdad; key command-and-control facilities, including those used by Saddam himself; and Saddam's internal security forces, including his Special Republican Guard, secret police, and intelligence services. The U.S. also should target Iraqi oil export facilities and tankers involved in the smuggling of Iraqi oil. To ensure destruction of these targets, the U.S. will need to sustain a high-intensity air campaign for at least a week. If Saddam continues to block UNSCOM inspections, which is likely, follow-on strikes may be necessary as additional intelligence becomes available. In any event, the U.S. should expand the two no-fly zones now imposed on Iraq to cover the whole country.

Anticipating possible air strikes, Saddam has dispersed high-value military assets in heavily populated areas. He probably will deploy "human shields" around these assets and his presidential palaces to deter a strike. While the U.S. should take reasonable precautions to avoid the loss of innocent life, U.S. officials should state clearly that responsibility for civilian casualties lies ultimately with Saddam, who contemptuously flouts Security Council resolutions and deliberately exposes his people to danger to protect his own regime.

A Comprehensive Strategy to Oust Saddam. The Clinton Administration should not conceive an air campaign against Iraq in isolation, as it did with its previous military reprisals against Iraq. The air campaign should be an integral part of a broader strategy to overthrow Saddam by weakening his regime, seeding internal opposition, and exploiting external military and economic pressures. A full court press to oust Saddam should include concerted international efforts to revive and reunify the Iraqi opposition forces that were demoralized by Saddam's August 1996 invasion of the Kurdish areas in northern Iraq. The U.S. should work closely with Turkey to broker a renewed alliance of rival Kurdish factions and the Iraqi National Congress, an umbrella group of democratic Iraqi opposition movements. The U.S. also should work to lift the ill-considered U.N. embargo against Kurdish-controlled territory and help opposition forces set up an alternative government in northern Iraq, lobby for its international recognition, help it to mount a psychological warfare campaign through a Radio Free Iraq, and protect it from military attack. Many Iraqis would defect to an opposition government if they were convinced that a U.S.-led international coalition was serious about supporting it and ousting Saddam. Washington must make it clear that U.S. hostility is directed only toward Saddam's regime—not Iraq's people—and that Iraqi's national interests will suffer as long as Saddam is in power.

The air strikes should aim to punish Saddam decisively, not just to slap his wrist with symbolic pinprick attacks. An air campaign should weaken his ability to threaten his neighbors and repress internal opposition. A firm American military response that clearly leaves Saddam worse off for having challenged UNSCOM can discredit his leadership and encourage further defections from his eroding base of support. Combined with the relentless application of economic sanctions and patient support for Iraqi opposition, a strong riposte can help create the necessary conditions for Saddam's final downfall.