



Executive Memorandum

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WHY THE UNITED STATES SHOULD HELP THE IRAQI OPPOSITION

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The Clinton Administration's reactive policy toward Iraq allowed Saddam Hussein to take the initiative and provoke three crises in the past year to wear down and extract concessions from the fragile coalition supporting the United Nations weapons inspection program. By focusing narrowly on the inspection regime, the Administration has failed to address the underlying cause of the problems in Iraq—Saddam's aggressive regime. So long as Saddam retains power, he will outmaneuver the Administration and obstruct U.N. efforts to dismantle Iraq's clandestine programs to build weapons of mass destruction, which threaten Iraq's neighbors and U.S. interests in the Middle East.

The Administration should adopt a proactive, long-term strategy to end Saddam's regime. It should build on the efforts of Congress, which passed the Iraq Liberation Act (ILA) by overwhelming bipartisan majorities in both houses in October. The ILA expresses the sense of Congress that the goal of U.S. policy should be to remove Saddam's regime from power. It authorizes, but does not require, the Administration to assist the growing opposition in Iraq to Saddam's regime with up to \$97 million in military equipment and training.

Although President Bill Clinton paid lip service to the ILA's goal when he signed it into law on October 31, his Administration has a long way to go to close the gap between its rhetoric and its minimal actions in supporting the Iraqi opposition movement. In 1996, the Administration did little to defend the opposition during Saddam's August

attack on the Kurdish "safe haven" in northern Iraq. Instead of responding forcefully in this region, the United States lobbed a few cruise missiles at Iraqi air defense radar sites located 500 miles to the south. This negligence demoralized the opposition.

Resistance to Saddam's regime continues inside Iraq, primarily in the north in the mountainous stronghold of the non-Arab Kurds, and in the south, which is inhabited predominantly by Shiite Arabs who resent Saddam's Sunni-dominated regime. Iran provides support to radical Shiite groups in the south and several Kurdish factions in the north. Iraq's other neighbors have extended little support to the opposition, in part because the Clinton Administration has vacillated in its support for them. Still, the smoldering popular discontent with Saddam's repressive rule is his Achilles' heel.

To exploit Saddam's vulnerability, the United States should:

- Clearly signal U.S. support for a unified

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Iraqi opposition. The United States should help the Iraqi National Congress (INC)—an umbrella group of many different opposition groups—to establish itself as the nucleus of an Iraqi government-in-exile. The Administration should name a high-level official to coordinate the U.S. economic, humanitarian, political, diplomatic, and military support for the opposition, and press Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan, and even Iran to increase their support for a unified opposition in neighboring Iraq.

- **Help the opposition to expand the territory it controls and increase its appeal among Iraqi citizens.** The opposition currently controls only the safe haven in northern Iraq declared by the Bush Administration in 1991 to halt Iraqi attacks on dissident Kurds. The United States, in close cooperation with Turkey, should cement a political-military alliance between the INC and the two Kurdish factions that signed a September cooperation agreement brokered by the United States to end factional fighting. Then INC cadres should return to Iraq's northern mountains to establish a provisional government, which would be protected by U.S. air power. The United States should establish a "no-drive zone" for Saddam's army in the Kurdish safe haven and in southern Iraq, and expand to the entire country the two "no-fly zones" already imposed on Iraq's air force. To increase the opposition's appeal, the U.S.-sponsored Radio Free Iraq, which began broadcasting on October 30, should publicize the opposition's political program. And to increase the incentive for mass defections to the opposition, U.N. economic sanctions should be lifted on territory controlled by the opposition. The United States also should state that it will agree to the lifting of all U.N. sanctions against Iraq as soon as Saddam's regime is replaced by a government that agrees to halt his weapons programs and live peacefully with Iraq's neighbors.
- **Pursue an incremental strategy to cripple Saddam's regime.** The Iraqi opposition will need many months to reorganize, build its cadres, and become capable of defending itself against Saddam's weakened army, even with

U.S. air support. Although the INC is unlikely to attain the conventional military strength needed for large-scale operations, it could develop a strong guerrilla warfare infrastructure that eventually could deny Saddam control over the bulk of Iraq's oil, located near resistance strongholds in the southern and northern parts of the country. Deprived of oil revenue, Saddam would be unable to reward his dwindling base of support; even staunch supporters would be tempted to recalculate the cost/benefit ratio of continuing under his regime, which produced two disastrous wars and great economic misery over the past 18 years. The United States can help to accelerate this process by responding firmly to Saddam's future provocations and inflicting a stinging military defeat. This means launching systematic air and cruise missile strikes at the repressive pillars of his regime (the Republican Guard and the intelligence and security agencies) as well as at suspected weapons production sites, command-and-control centers, and power-projection capabilities.

Supporting the Iraqi opposition will not give the United States a quick-fix for the threats posed by Saddam's regime, but such a policy—backed by the firm application of U.S. air power and the support of Iraq's neighbors—offers the United States a long-term solution. This policy may turn out to be even less risky and less expensive than the current policy of staging billion-dollar military buildups on Iraq's borders only to back down at the last moment and make concessions in exchange for empty promises.

The only way to rid Iraq of its prohibited weapons is to end Saddam's dangerous regime. The United States should use military force primarily to weaken Saddam's grip on power, reduce his capabilities to threaten his neighbors, and support opposition forces, not just to enforce sporadic weapons inspections that provide the illusion of arms control. And the Clinton Administration should work closely with the Iraqi opposition to end Saddam's threat, not just contain it.

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