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TARGET IRAQ'S TERRORIST REGIME, NOT JUST OSAMA BIN LADEN, TO WIN WAR ON TERRORISM

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President George W. Bush has declared war against international terrorism in response to the September 11 terrorist attacks that killed more than 6,000 innocent people. That war will require eradicating Osama bin Laden's global terrorist network and uprooting its Taliban protectors from Afghanistan. But that alone will not be enough to stop terrorism. Troubling questions have been raised about possible Iraqi support for bin Laden's network; this is not surprising, given Iraq's past support for terrorist attacks against America and its allies.

Regardless of whether Iraqi involvement with bin Laden's network can be established conclusively, any war against terrorism that leaves Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein in power will be judged a failure. Saddam's brutal regime is propped up by systematic terrorism against its own people and neighbors. It could soon become even more of a threat due to its relentless drive to obtain nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons of mass destruction. The United States must push hard and fast for regime changes in both Baghdad and Kabul if terrorism is to be defeated.

Mounting Evidence of Iraqi Connections.

Although direct Iraqi involvement in the September 11 attacks has not been established, there are disturbing reports of several Iraqi contacts with bin Laden and his henchmen. U.S. intelligence officials have reported that bin Laden was in contact with Iraqi government agents shortly before the airline hijackings. New scrutiny is also being given to a December 1998 meeting between a senior Iraqi

intelligence officer, Farouk Hijazi, and bin Laden in Kandahar, Afghanistan. Moreover, Mohamed Atta, the suspected ringleader of the 19 terrorists who hijacked four U.S. airliners on September 11, reportedly met with an Iraqi intelligence officer in Europe earlier this year, according to U.S. intelligence officials.

Iraq has a long record of supporting terrorist groups and resorting to terrorism as an adjunct of foreign policy. During the 1991 Gulf War, Baghdad planned a series of terrorist attacks against U.S. targets around the world, but most were blocked by U.S. counterterrorism efforts in close cooperation with a wide variety of foreign governments. Iraqi agents had been apprehended in an aborted April 1993 assassination attempt against former President George H. W. Bush on a visit to Kuwait. Ramzi Yousef, the mastermind of the February 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, had strong links to Iraq as well as to bin Laden's terrorist network. He flew to the United States using an Iraqi passport on a trip that began

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in Iraq. He appears to have acquired a false identity with the help of Iraqi authorities, who doctored his personal file in Kuwait during the 1990–1991 Iraqi occupation. Another suspect in the 1993 bombing, Abdul Yasin, later returned to Iraq and is believed to be living in Baghdad. Former CIA Director James Woolsey has called for a renewed investigation of the 1993 bombing, which the Clinton Administration handled as a criminal conspiracy rather than as state-sponsored terrorism.

Washington has more than enough reason to include Baghdad in its war against terrorism even if no “smoking gun” is found linking Iraq to the September 11 attacks. Iraq repeatedly has violated the cease-fire agreement that ended the 1991 Gulf War; therefore, it is technically at war with the United States. Moreover, Iraq’s failed assassination attempt against former President Bush never received an adequate American response. The Clinton Administration equivocated for months before launching a symbolic pinprick cruise missile strike against the headquarters of one of Iraq’s many intelligence agencies in June 1993. Such a limp response did little to deter Saddam Hussein from future attacks, and in fact may have emboldened him to escalate his stealth war against the United States.

Iraq poses a much greater threat to U.S. national security than does Osama bin Laden. Its clandestine programs to build nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons of mass destruction and the missiles that can deliver them have proceeded without outside interference since the expulsion of United Nations monitors in 1998. The Iraqi dictatorship has used chemical weapons in its war against Iran and against Iraq’s Kurdish opposition. It is believed to have enough fissile material for two atomic bombs and soon may finish building such a device—the ultimate terrorist weapon.

A Necessary Response. To prevent Iraq from crossing the nuclear threshold and becoming an even more dangerous terrorist state, the Bush Administration should consider a full range of military options to disarm and remove Saddam’s dangerous regime. It should throw its full support

behind Iraqi opposition forces, particularly the Iraqi National Congress (INC), which received only lip service from the Clinton Administration. The opposition now controls only the safe haven in northern Iraq established 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 Kurds. Then INC cadres should return to Iraq’s northern mountains to establish a provisional government, to be protected by U.S. air power.

The United States also should establish a “no-drive zone” for Saddam’s army in the Kurdish safe haven and in southern Iraq, and expand the two “no-fly zones” already imposed on Iraq’s air force to cover the entire country. U.S. military forces should seize Iraq’s southern oil fields and channel oil revenues to a provisional government, with the INC as its nucleus. To increase the incentive for mass defections from Saddam’s regime, U.N. economic sanctions should be lifted on territory controlled by this government. Washington 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.

Conclusion. The concept of fighting a war against international terrorism is stillborn without the goal of removing terrorist regimes. There may be considerable debate about how best to topple such regimes, but a war against terrorism that dodges the issue of regime change in such countries as Afghanistan and Iraq is doomed to failure. Even if Osama bin Laden should disappear tomorrow, terrorist attacks against America will continue as long as the terrorist regimes in Kabul and Baghdad remain in power.

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