

War with Iraq

Costs, Consequences, and Alternatives

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Preface

This Occasional Paper has its origins in a discussion that took place at a meeting of the Committee on International Security Studies (CISS) of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences on October 11, 2002. Participants included: James Carroll (*Boston Globe*), Richard Garwin (Council on Foreign Relations), Janice Gross-Stein (University of Toronto), Harry Harding (George Washington University), Carl Kaysen (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Neal Lane (Rice University), Robert Legvold (Columbia University), Jane Holl Lute (United Nations Foundation), Martin Malin (American Academy of Arts and Sciences), Everett Mendelsohn (Harvard University), Steven Miller (Harvard University), Janne Nolan (Georgetown University), Robert Pastor (American University), Bruce Russett (Yale University), and John Steinbruner (University of Maryland).

At the meeting it was agreed that the ongoing public discussion of U.S. policy toward Iraq would be enriched by a timely, scholarly analysis of the underlying issues. The papers in this collection are an attempt to provide insight into the potential costs and consequences, over the long term, of going to war with Iraq. We thank the Academy's Executive Officer, Leslie Berlowitz, for encouraging us to share this analysis more widely.

"U.S. National Security Policy: In Search of Balance," by Carl Kaysen, John D. Steinbruner, and Martin B. Malin, was informed by the CISS discussion but is the product only of its authors; other members of the Committee may or may not agree with it in whole or in part.

"Gambling on War: Force, Order, and the Implications of Attacking Iraq" was originally written by Steven E. Miller for an International Pugwash Workshop (no. 276) on "Terrorism and Weapons of Mass Destruction" held in Como, Italy, on September 26–28, 2002. Professor Miller revised his paper for this publication.

"The Economic Consequences of a War with Iraq" was written by William D. Nordhaus. A substantially shorter version was published in the December 5, 2002 issue of the *New York Review of Books*.

As always, the argument and opinions presented in these papers are those of the individual authors, not those of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences or its Committee on International Security Studies.

Carl Kaysen and John Steinbruner
Co-Chairs, Committee on International Security Studies
November 2002

U.S. National Security Policy: In Search of Balance

CARL KAYSEN, JOHN D. STEINBRUNER, AND
MARTIN B. MALIN

On September 17, 2002, the White House, under cover of a letter from President Bush, issued a thirty-page document entitled “The National Security Strategy of the United States.” Its “Overview” states:

The U.S. national security strategy will be based on a distinctly American internationalism that reflects the union of our values and our national interests. The aim of this strategy is to help make the world not just safer but better. Our goals on the path to progress are clear: political and economic freedom, peaceful relations with other states, and respect for human dignity. . . .

To achieve these goals, the United States will:

- champion aspirations for human dignity;
- strengthen alliances to defeat global terrorism and work to prevent attacks against us and our friends;
- work with others to defuse regional conflicts;
- prevent our enemies from threatening us, our allies, and our friends, with weapons of mass destruction;
- ignite a new era of global economic growth through free markets and free trade;
- expand the circle of development by opening societies and building the infrastructure of democracy;
- develop agendas for cooperative action with other main centers of global power; and
- transform America’s national security institutions to meet the challenges and opportunities of the twenty-first century.¹

These goals are admirable. Many of the means proposed for achieving them – each of which is developed in a separate chapter of the document – have been features of U.S. policy for the past half-century or more.

1. *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, September 2002, pp. 1–2, <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html>>.

The new National Security Strategy is not, however, merely a continuation of past policies. Two relatively novel features of the contemporary international scene and the United States' place in it correspond to the two most significant new elements in the policy. These deserve more attention than they are currently receiving.

Preponderant U.S. Military Power

First is the United States' overwhelming preponderance of military power over any other nation or any plausible combination of nations that might oppose us. The reach and the striking power of U.S. forces far outmatch those of any others. The United States can today strike with speed and accuracy that was unheard of only a decade ago. A crude indicator of U.S. dominance: the U.S. defense budget is today larger than the combined defense expenditures of the next twenty-five largest militaries.²

Because of this condition of U.S. superiority, two questions will determine in large degree the character of the international order in the coming decades: In what manner will the United States use its military force? And for what purposes? On the question of manner, the central issue is whether U.S. force deployments will be attempted in accordance with international law and with authorization from the UN Security Council, or in defiance of legitimate international objection and in violation of legal procedure. On the question of purpose, the issue will turn on whether military force is used to serve broad national and international concerns, or to advance a parochial interest in maintaining U.S. global dominance regardless of the consequences for others.

The National Security Strategy document does not say explicitly that it is the policy of the United States to do whatever is necessary to sustain its global dominance. What it does say, in the final section on transforming American national security institutions, is that the United States intends to build and maintain its defenses "beyond challenge." The president had previously set this indefinite and operationally ambiguous standard in an address to the graduating class of West Point in June 2002 when he declared: "America has, and intends to keep, military strengths beyond challenge."³ The United States will retain, as it has in the past, the capability to deter threats to its vital interests and to defeat an adversary should deterrence fail. But a new criterion has been added. It is that the U.S. military be "strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in hopes of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States."⁴

The concept of fielding a military force so dominating that it prevents adversaries from contemplating resistance raises troubling questions. Is it justified on legitimate grounds of self-defense? Russian and Chinese officials have asked this question in response to U.S. plans for deploying a national missile defense system and aspirations for placing strike weapons in space. China has asked repeatedly that the United States negotiate at the UN Conference on Disarmament at Geneva new rules to prevent the competitive and unrestrained deployment of weapons in space. Following the U.S.

2. Christopher Hellman, "Last of the Big Time Spenders: U.S. Military Budget Still the World's Largest, and Growing," Center for Defense Information (4 February 2002). <<http://www.cdi.org/issues/wmc/spendersFY03.html>>.

3. <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020601-3.html>>.

4. *The National Security Strategy of the United States*, 30.

withdrawal from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty, China was joined in its request by Russia. The United States, seeking a standard of dominance that is beyond challenge, has refused to consider the Chinese and Russian proposal for negotiated restraints.

The concept of building weapons systems that are so advanced that they cause opponents to throw up their hands and forgo defiance should also be questioned on grounds of effectiveness. No potential adversary hopes to match U.S. military might head on, in symmetrical fashion. Rather, those who would harm the United States seek cheap and easy ways of exploiting U.S. vulnerabilities. Those points of leverage grow more numerous as the United States labors to extend its military superiority abroad. And the motivation of U.S. enemies to act grows with their resentment of perceived intimidation. By aspiring to a standard of dominance that would dissuade others from attempting a direct military challenge, the United States may in fact stimulate adversaries to work ever harder to exploit any number of vulnerabilities.

Weapons of Mass Destruction and Terrorism

A second novel feature of the international environment is the development of international networks of terrorists with a demonstrated willingness to undertake violence on a massive scale. These networks flourish within and between states whose political agendas overlap with those of the terrorists, and in countries where there is no authority capable of preventing terrorist groups from using the territories as bases, staging areas, and refuges. A grave and valid concern of the new National Security Strategy is that a terrorist group will acquire nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons and wreak catastrophic harm.

The weapons themselves are not new (though the development of new and more deadly biological weapons is particularly worrisome). Almost as soon as they were developed, the United States recognized the dangers inherent in the existence of nuclear weapons and participated in international efforts to limit their possession. Political and military leaders have shared the concerns of scientists and scholars that nuclear weapons are not simply more efficient explosives but rather a threat of an entirely different magnitude. Their dangers to civilians had to be weighed heavily in the reckoning of their usability. Similarly, biological and chemical weapons have been recognized as presenting special dangers, and international efforts to control their possession and forbid their use by law embodied in treaties had the support of the United States.

The corresponding policy in the new National Security Strategy is what the document calls “preemption” – using force in anticipation of a danger to prevent hostile states from acquiring weapons of mass destruction or harboring terrorists. The United States has been preparing in recent months to implement this policy against Iraq. In this particular case, “preemption,” as it is commonly understood, is a mischaracterization, since that term usually is taken to mean striking the first blow when war appears to be imminent and unavoidable. What the United States is proposing is more properly characterized as “preventive war,” that is, a war of choice to prevent the emergence of a threat further in the future. U.S. military advisors have contemplated preventive war before, notably against the Soviet Union at various points during the Truman and

Eisenhower administrations. But such thinking was consistently rejected at the political level on both moral and strategic grounds.⁵ Today, by contrast, it is our declared policy to maintain the capability to wage preventive war against those who may threaten us with weapons of mass destruction.

LAW VS. FORCE

An additional and striking novelty of the National Security Strategy document is what it omits. The international rule of law as an overarching goal of policy is nowhere mentioned. Neither is the Charter of the United Nations, a treaty that is largely of the United States' own making and to which the United States is bound. The United Nations itself receives only a few perfunctory mentions: the most substantive one is in the penultimate paragraph of the president's introductory letter, where it is listed with the OAS, the WTO, and NATO as examples of multilateral institutions that can "multiply the strength of freedom-loving nations." There is an additional mention of the United Nations in the chapter on strengthening alliances to defeat global terrorism, where it is mentioned as an example of international organizations "we will continue to work with" in rebuilding Afghanistan.

The aim of the UN Charter was to substitute law and diplomacy for force as the primary regulators of relations among nations. The primacy of law over force has been a major thread in American foreign policy since the end of World War II. From the United Nations to the World Trade Organization, the United States has led in the creation of international organizations that extend the reach of law, and seek to constrain the powerful as well as to give the weak a voice. It has all but disappeared from the fabric of national security that the administration now presents.

Indeed, the Bush administration has conducted an assault on major elements of the international legal framework that has been developed to regulate security policies and force deployments. In addition to abrogating rather than renegotiating the ABM treaty, it has forced termination of efforts to negotiate a compliance protocol for the Biological Weapons Convention. It has repeatedly denigrated and has refused to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, despite international consensus that a ban on nuclear testing is necessary to preserve the Nonproliferation Treaty. Senior officials have recently questioned the security assurances endorsed by all previous administrations in support of the latter treaty.

The National Security Strategy departs sharply from previous U.S. practices, and in so doing can be compared to NSC 68, the once classified national security policy statement promulgated by President Truman in 1950. Released in the wake of the North Korean attack on South Korea (though drafted earlier), that document provided a blueprint for the conduct of the Cold War and initiated a vast U.S. military build-up, especially of nuclear weapons. The Bush administration's National Security Strategy provides a blueprint for a perpetual series of hot wars and preventive strikes, initiated whenever it is determined that another state is accumulating threatening weapons or harboring terrorists. Is the administration's apparent confidence in the utility of military force and our capacity to use it without unnecessarily provoking "asymmetric" retaliation, from terrorists and hostile states, justified? And has the

5. Marc Trachtenberg, "A 'Wasting Asset': American Strategy and the Shifting Nuclear Balance, 1949-1954," in Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 100-152.

administration adequately assessed the potential indirect costs of the strategy, in the form of alienation and even isolation from the rest of the world?

If one could directly ask all citizens of the United States to identify their core political values, freedom would probably be the most frequently mentioned word. Certainly those who seek to represent the American electorate regularly evoke it. Images of enslavement run deep in the national consciousness. The more thoughtful answers, however, and the ones best informed about historical traditions would cite the rule of law. Government by consensually formulated law is the defining feature of American democracy, and as a practical matter the threat to freedom has much more to do with the possible defects in the internal rule of law than with the actions of any external aggressor. Although they might not volunteer that latter thought, a solid majority of Americans would probably acknowledge it.

Curiously, however, and ominously, one cannot be as confident of the answer if the question is posed about political values in international relations. There is a substantial strand of opinion that believes the international order to be fundamentally anarchic and concludes that freedom and other core interests can be protected only by the exercise of military power. That has long been a minority view, but it is an intense minority with disproportionate influence that adheres to it. In the wake of last year's terrorist attacks that view has acquired ascendancy in American policy. Most of the implications are yet to unfold, but the possibilities are quite apparent. The traditional balance between military preparation and international legal restraint has already been sharply shifted by repudiating a number of treaties that the United States itself originally sponsored. The most recent statement of policy suggests that the United States reserves the right to initiate war for reasons of its own choosing.

Based on the recent U.S. election returns, some would argue that this policy appeals to more voters than it dismays. Further, the 15-0 vote in the UN Security Council for the final U.S.-U.K. draft of the resolution on Iraq's obligations to end its program for acquiring nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons – though it does not provide, as the United States had sought, automatic authorization for the use of force if Iraq is found to be uncooperative – arguably reflects the weight of U.S. power. The United States appears to be the beneficiary of the occasional if commonly fleeting response to the amassing and exercise of power in the international arena, that of jumping on the bandwagon of the most powerful.

In a longer-term perspective, however, can the pursuit of ever more intimidating military forces, their use in preventive wars, and the neglect of international law and cooperation be the path toward our goals of a more democratic and open world of governments more responsive to their citizens and more concerned to promote their prosperity and liberty?

Before implementing the new National Security Strategy by going to war with Iraq, a clear accounting of the costs, consequences, and alternatives to that action is urgently needed.

Gambling on War: Force, Order, and the Implications of Attacking Iraq

STEVEN E. MILLER

Aided in large measure by the events of September 11, the Bush administration has achieved remarkable momentum in the direction of launching a preventive war against Iraq. For many months now, it has been laying out its case for this course of action. This is a serious case, with many elements that are meritorious or even unassailable. On the other hand, when the potential costs, risks, and consequences are fully assessed, the war looks very much like a dangerous gamble that could well be damaging to American (and Western) interests and the cause of a safe and congenial international order.

Judgments about the net wisdom of attacking Iraq must weigh the arguments for war against the case for dealing with Saddam's Iraq in some other way. The debate has been marked by deep divisions between the proponents and opponents of this war. These divisions are rooted in very different perspectives on potential costs, on possible consequences, and on the feasibility and effectiveness of alternatives to war. The following discussion provides an inventory of the arguments and concerns that animate the two sides of the debate. Such an inventory pits against one another two starkly contrasting visions of the war: an optimistic vision in which all goes well, the war is cheap, and the results are positive; and a skeptical vision in which things go wrong, the war is more costly than the Bush administration predicts, and the consequences of the war are more negative than positive. The administration's expectations about the war are alluring and could be correct. Skeptics, however, are haunted by the concern that Bush's predictions will be wrong.

THE GROUNDS FOR WAR

The Bush Administration's Case

The Bush administration has put before its critics a provocative challenge by making a coherent and plausible case for war. Indeed, the administration has got many things right:

- Bush's characterization of Saddam Hussein is essentially correct. One can quarrel over details – the extent of his recent involvement with international terrorism, for example. But the basic picture the administration paints cannot be disputed. Saddam is one of the most brutal, despicable tyrants in recent history. He is responsible for egregious human rights abuses. He has repeatedly menaced and attacked his neighbors. He has violated international law and broken treaty commitments. He has supported international terrorism. He has defied the UN and ignored the will of the international community. He has sought and, by all accounts, continues to seek weapons of mass destruction. In the past, he has used chemical weapons, both in the war with Iran and against his own citizens. Without question, he is one of the most unattractive leaders of modern times.
- For all these reasons, the Bush administration is correct to argue that Saddam's removal from power is a desirable objective. The world (and the population of Iraq) would certainly be better off if Saddam's regime were replaced by a more civilized and less violent government.
- The Bush administration is also correct that the response of the United Nations to Saddam's defiance, to his prolonged noncompliance with numerous UN Resolutions that were agreed in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf war, has been disappointing, if not disgraceful. At least in the American political context, this has raised the most profound concerns about the will of the international community to enforce arms control and nonproliferation agreements and has reinforced skepticism about the value of treaties and other legal instruments.
- The Bush administration is correct that Saddam could be more dangerous in the future than he is now. If he is able eventually to acquire nuclear weapons or to strengthen his alleged chemical and biological weapons capabilities, he will be an even more alarming figure, and presumably even more difficult to deal with. It is this fear of the future, this concern about the possible growth of Saddam's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) capabilities, that are at the heart of the case for war now. Indeed, this is the essence of the logic of preventive war: better war now than later.¹
- The Bush administration is correct that it possesses the military power to achieve its objective of regime change. Indeed, the American military advantage over Iraq is staggering – even greater than was the case at the time of the Gulf war in 1991. The United States might have to pay a price for its victory and it will need to possess the determination to see the war through if the costs mount. But there can be no doubt of the military outcome if the United States perseveres.

It is not easy to disagree in any large way with any of these points. Taken together, however, they do not constitute a wholly persuasive argument for war, not least

1. Though Bush's approach has been almost universally described, in the media and elsewhere, as a doctrine of preemption, this is incorrect. Preemption refers to a military strike provoked by indications that an opponent is preparing to attack. The logic is: better to strike than be struck. But no one is suggesting that Saddam is preparing to strike the United States. There are no indications that this is the case. Bush is instead making the case for preventive war, for removing today a threat that may be more menacing and difficult in the future. The administration may prefer to label its policy preemption because that is an easier case to make. But it is not an accurate use of the term as traditionally defined.

because there is little, if anything, new in this indictment of Saddam. Indeed, some elements on the roster of Saddam's transgressions date back into the 1980s, including from the period when he benefited from U.S. support. Saddam's reprehensible behavior and his defiance of the United Nations are objectionable but have been ongoing for years and hence are an awkward justification for immediate war now. Nevertheless, the Bush administration's characterization of Saddam and the threat he may pose moves the debate some distance in the direction of war and provides a context in which the use of force is a plausible option.

The logic flows powerfully: Saddam is a brutal and menacing figure who is likely to be even more dangerous in the future. He is openly hostile and explicitly threatening to U.S. and Western interests. The world would be better off without him. The United States possesses the power to eliminate his regime. And the next step in the logic chain follows naturally: the United States ought to do so before he undertakes even more unspeakable acts from an even stronger position. This is, it is suggested, one of those unusual instances in which the case for war is compelling.²

A cheap war. To this line of argument the Bush administration adds a vision of the war with Iraq that is more debatable, but still plausible. It is a vision that suggests that Saddam can be eliminated at modest cost (in military terms). In part, this is of course simply a reflection of Washington's tremendous military superiority. But there is more to it than that. The Bush administration's "theory of victory" is built around the notion that Saddam is a brutal dictator, despised by many of his own people, whose rule is based on fear rather than loyalty. This makes his regime brittle, vulnerable to a sharp rap from the outside. If it becomes clear, goes the argument, that Saddam is finished, that the United States is going to bring an end to his reign, then the Iraqi people will rise up to oppose him, the Republican guard will abandon him, the Iraqi military will refuse to fight, and American forces may be welcomed as liberators. For both the Bush administration and its supporters, this idea of preventive war as liberation, leading to the expectation that the Iraqi people and the Iraqi armed forces are more likely to turn against Saddam than to resist an American attack, seems to be a central component of the mindset for war.³

Senior Bush administration officials, writes one Washington journalist, "believe a significant number of Saddam's army commanders and units will either refuse to fight or will assist allied troops in toppling the Baghdad regime."⁴ According to another report, U.S. war planners "rely greatly on defecting Iraqi units to topple Saddam

2. An excellent articulation of the case for war against Iraq is Kenneth Pollack, "Next Stop Baghdad?" *Foreign Affairs* 18 (2) (March/April 2002): 32–47. See also Christopher Hitchens, "Machiavelli in Mesopotamia: The Case Against the Case Against 'Regime Change' in Iraq," *Slate*, 7 November 2002. Pollack's book on this subject has just appeared: *The Threatening Storm: The Case for Invading Iraq* (New York: Random House, 2002). For a respectful but dissenting review of Pollack's book, see Jack F. Matlock, Jr., "Deterring the Undeterrable," *New York Times Book Review*, 20 October 2002, p. 11.

3. This expectation echoes hopes that were voiced during the Gulf war of 1991 that Saddam would be overthrown during or immediately after the war by internal forces seeking to spare the country further suffering. According to one account, the first President Bush openly called for the overthrow of Saddam based on "a belief that Iraq's military forces and governing elites are increasingly desperate to stop the allied destruction of their country." This is recounted in Sarah Graham-Brown, *Sanctioning Saddam: The Politics of Intervention in Iraq* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999), 19. Needless to say, a dozen years later such expectations seem wildly off the mark.

4. Rowan Scarborough, "War in Iraq Seen as Quick Win," *Washington Times*, 18 September 2002.

Hussein.”⁵ Head of the Defense Policy Board, Richard Perle, one of the most outspoken advocates of war, has said, “I don’t believe we have to defeat Saddam’s army. I think Saddam’s army will defeat Saddam.”⁶ Such views are widely echoed outside the government. David Remnik comments, for example, “Saddam’s army barely fought for him a decade ago; now, at about a third the size it was then and far less formidably equipped, it faces an American military that is stronger than ever.”⁷ In the best case, the prospect of an American invasion induces the overthrow of Saddam without military action. Kenneth Pollack writes, “It is possible that the mere presence of such American forces on Iraq’s doorstep could produce a coup that would topple Saddam without significant combat.”⁸ In short, what many supporters of the war envision is not a war against Iraq but a focused attack on Saddam’s power base that produces a quick decapitation of his regime, generating a result that can be seen in Iraq and elsewhere in the region as the liberation of the Iraqi people.⁹

Here, then, is the scenario that the Bush administration finds powerfully attractive: that this highly desirable objective can be achieved quickly, cheaply, easily. If this scenario is plausible, why isn’t this an attractive option? If force is not a usable option under these circumstances, when will it be?

To those critics who raise potential costs and risks of this path, the Bush administration offers a further wrinkle. The perils of military action have to be balanced against the costs and risks of inaction. As Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz (an ardent supporter of war with Iraq) has said, “In the end, it has to come down to a careful weighing of things we can’t know with precision, the costs of action versus the costs of inaction, the costs of action now versus the costs of action later.”¹⁰ Failing to act against Saddam now may open the door for future travesties and transgressions. If at some future date, Saddam uses nuclear weapons against Israel or gasses more of his own citizens or engages in ethnic cleansing against the Kurds or launches a covert biological weapons attack against the United States, won’t history look back on the failure to remove him as a grievous error? Won’t people wish that Saddam had been stopped, much as people lament the failure to stop Hitler in the 1930s?¹¹ President Bush himself makes this point in his preface to his new national security strategy: “History will

5. Rowan Scarborough, “Military Planners Favor Striking Iraq in February,” *Washington Times*, 20 September 2002.

6. Quoted in Scarborough, “War in Iraq Seen as Quick Win.”

7. David Remnik, “Us and Them,” *New Yorker*, 23 September 2002. Quotation from web version available at <<http://www.newyorker.com>>.

8. Pollack, “Next Stop Baghdad?” 44. However, U.S. intelligence has cast doubt on Saddam’s vulnerability to internal overthrow. See, for example, Bill Gertz, “Saddam Safe on Home Front, CIA Says,” *Washington Times*, 29 October 2002. For another cautionary view, see Ephraim Kam, “Target: Iraq,” *Strategic Assessment* 5 (2) (August 2002). Kam writes (Ibid., 6): “Saddam has many enemies and people who hate him inside Iraq, yet it is highly questionable if they would dare to move against him because of their fear of his internal security agencies and perhaps because of their unwillingness to identify with the United States. . . .”

9. The decapitation approach is described in Thomas Ricks, “War Plans Target Hussein Power Base,” *Washington Post*, 22 September 2002.

10. As quoted in Bill Keller, “The Sunshine Warrior,” *New York Times Magazine*, 22 September 2002, p. 97.

11. The comparison of Saddam to Hitler turns up rather frequently in the prolific writings that now flood the media on the possible war against Iraq. See, for example, Richard Cohen, “Hitler and Bad History,” *Washington Post*, 24 September 2002. Also employing the Hitler analogy is Benjamin Netanyahu, “The Case for Toppling Saddam,” *Wall Street Journal*, 20 September 2002.

judge harshly those who saw the coming danger but failed to act.”¹² The message is clear: those who oppose this war must bear the onus of the costs, risks, and dangers of inaction. This is, indeed, a fair point.

The Bush administration has clearly rendered its judgment, concluding that inaction is unacceptably dangerous and risky, while war against Saddam is both desirable and likely to be cheap. And not only cheap, but in a number of respects effective.

A beneficial war. The Bush administration and other supporters of the war against Iraq anticipate that the war will produce a number of advantageous consequences. It will, of course, eliminate Saddam’s regime and bring to an end Iraq’s programs to acquire or develop weapons of mass destruction (WMD), thereby removing one of the gravest potential threats to U.S. and regional security. This will foreclose the possibility that Saddam might assist Al Qaeda or other terrorist groups by providing them with WMD. It will liberate the Iraqi people from the heavy yoke of Saddam’s oppression. Optimists within the administration hope that this in turn might lead to a wave of democratization throughout the region, something that has the potential to remake the entire Middle East.

More broadly, the exercise of U.S. military force against Saddam will restore respect for American power, enhance the credibility of U.S. threats, and reduce the likelihood that hostile forces will challenge U.S. interests. The successful prosecution of a campaign against Saddam will be a vivid display of American leadership and of America’s moral purpose in employing its power for benign ends against evil forces. The far-flung international skepticism about the wisdom of this path will, the Bush administration believes, be transformed into admiration and gratitude when its successful policy against Iraq results in a clearly preferable world; in any case, everybody loves a winner. Further, war against Iraq will also represent a rare and highly desirable instance in which UN resolutions are backed up by enforcement and in which the nonproliferation regime is shown to have teeth. This, it is suggested, is a blow for the civilized portions of the international community against the lawless forces of disorder. Such action is essential if the nonproliferation regime is to have efficacy.

According to advocates, in short, a successful war will remove Saddam from the scene, liberate Iraq, promote democracy in the Middle East, enhance regional security, bolster the international community by enforcing its will against a transgressor, and buttress American power, influence, and leadership. This is a lot of good to be achieved by a cheap war.

An unavoidable war. But advocates of the war argue not simply that this would be a cheap and beneficial step. They suggest that it is a necessary, even an unavoidable, war because no acceptable policy alternative exists. The only way to adequately deal with Saddam, according to this view, is to use force. The conclusion that preventive war is the only effective option rests on five key judgments:

- i. The containment of Saddam is failing. For nearly a dozen years, Saddam has been contained and handicapped by the constraints and limitations he was compelled to accept in the aftermath of his defeat in the 1991 Gulf war. But this approach never worked perfectly and has degraded across time. For many proponents of the war, the containment policy has deteriorated to the point that it can no longer be regarded as

12. *The National Security Strategy of the United States*, September 2002, p. ii.

effective. And, importantly, because international will to enforce Iraqi compliance has eroded, the system of constraints, sanctions, and limitations cannot be repaired or strengthened. As Pollack argues, while in theory it might be possible to create arrangements that would improve the containment system, “such a deal is unimaginable in the UN Security Council today, where many of the members compete to see who can appease Iraq most.”¹³

2. Inspections will never suffice. As a part of the settlement of the 1991 Gulf war, Saddam’s regime accepted disarmament provisions that called for its weapons of mass destruction to be identified and destroyed. Its WMD activities were to be subjected to unprecedentedly intrusive long-term international monitoring. From 1991–1998, an inspection system was in place and it did succeed in locating and eliminating significant WMD facilities and capabilities. But this was achieved uncertainly and painfully, in the face of willful Iraqi deception and noncooperation. There was never assurance that the original inspection arrangements succeeded in the mission of completely eliminating Saddam’s WMD capabilities. And in December 1998, the inspections were ended as a consequence of Iraqi recalcitrance. No UN-mandated inspections have taken place since that time.

A restoration and strengthening of the UN inspections and disarmament scheme might be seen as part of the answer to the WMD threat actually or potentially posed by Saddam. But this approach has, at times, been explicitly rejected by the Bush administration.¹⁴ It has argued that inspections were inadequate in the past and will be insufficient in the future to provide meaningful protection against Saddam’s WMD aspirations. At times, it has suggested not simply that inspections are worthless, but that they may be counterproductive. In a speech in August 2002, Vice President Cheney put the point unambiguously:

A person would be right to question any suggestion that we should just get inspectors back into Iraq and then our worries will be over. Saddam has perfected the game of cheat and retreat, and is very skilled in the art of denial and deception. *A return of inspectors would provide no assurance whatsoever of his compliance with UN resolutions.* On the contrary, there is a great danger that it would provide false comfort that Saddam is somehow “back in his box.”¹⁵

This comment has been echoed at various times by other officials and supporters of the war. Thus, after expending considerable time and effort to negotiate a new and stringent UN Security Council mandate for inspections, administration officials have openly expressed skepticism that the inspectors will make much headway on the ground. Indeed, a major objective of the administration’s UN diplomacy has been to build congressional and international support for military action when the expected reports of Iraqi noncompliance begin to accumulate. Inspections are not regarded by the most ardent proponents of war as an acceptable or satisfactory solution to the current crisis.

13. Pollack, “Next Stop Baghdad,” 35

14. See, for example, Ryan Lizza, “White House Watch: Sight Unseen,” *The New Republic*, 7 October 2002, which states flatly, “The Administration considers UNMOVIC hopelessly flawed.” (Quotation taken from web version, <<http://www.tnr.com>>).

15. “Vice President Speaks at VFW 103rd Convention,” White House Office of the Press Secretary, 26 August 2002, available at <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002>> (emphasis added).

3. Proliferation is inevitable. Proponents of the war believe that if Saddam is allowed to remain in power, it is only a matter of time before he gains a nuclear weapons capability. It is possible to debate how long this may take – one year, five years, ten years – but eventually his relentless efforts to acquire a nuclear arsenal will pay off. In the view of the Bush administration, neither the nonproliferation regime nor the sanctions imposed on Saddam's Iraq can prevent this outcome. Therefore, so long as Saddam's regime is in place, there remains the prospect of a future in which this brutal, aggressive, menacing figure possesses nuclear weapons. In the view of President Bush and his advisors, this is unacceptable. If the nonproliferation regime is destined to fail, especially in the most dangerous cases, then some different approach must be found. The Bush administration's answer, at least in the case of Iraq, is preventive war.

4. Saddam cannot be deterred. Saddam with nuclear weapons is unacceptable to proponents of preventive war in large measure because of a deep belief or fear that he is undeterrable. If Saddam could be deterred, then his acquisition of nuclear weapons, while still deeply undesirable, would be a more manageable outcome, one that would not justify an attack on Iraq. But an undeterrable Saddam with nuclear weapons raises the prospect that he will blackmail neighbors, engage in aggression, deter outside intervention, and otherwise use his nuclear capability to further his expansive aspirations.

Why is Saddam regarded as undeterrable when other, much more powerful, tyrants (such as Stalin and Mao) were in fact deterred? Some arguments focus on the individual psychology of Saddam himself; he is not, it is argued, a rational actor, and therefore deterrence – which relies on rational calculations of cost and benefit – is not an appropriate strategy in his case. Others detect in Saddam's past behavior a propensity for reckless action, suggesting that deterrence will be unreliable. Not only is Saddam a risk-taker, but he is, it is suggested, prone to serious misperceptions and miscalculations. In Kenneth Pollack's vivid phrase, Saddam is "unintentionally suicidal." This may seem an odd characterization of a political figure who has been in power for several decades and who has outlasted four American presidents. But Pollack elaborates: Saddam "miscalculates his odds of success and frequently ignores the likelihood of catastrophic failure. Mr. Hussein is a risk-taker who plays dangerous games without realizing how dangerous they truly are."¹⁶ Though some critics may believe that much the same could be said of the Iraq policy of the Bush administration, those who share the view that Saddam is undeterrable conclude that preventive war is necessary to forestall an unacceptable future in which Saddam has nuclear weapons.

5. Nuclear weapons will facilitate Saddam's aggressiveness. Once he possesses nuclear weapons, it is argued, Saddam will be emboldened to renew his efforts to achieve regional dominance. Even more important, it will be more difficult and dangerous to resist him, both for local actors and for outside powers. The U.S. Senate only barely approved of the Gulf war in 1991; how much more difficult would it have been to support a war against Saddam on behalf of Kuwait or other threatened parties if it was known in advance that Saddam had nuclear weapons? In this logic, the most likely risk associated with Iraqi nuclear weapons is not that Saddam would directly

16. Kenneth M. Pollack, "Why Iraq Can't Be Deterred," *New York Times*, 26 September 2002. Pollack also addresses this issue in his article, "Next Stop, Baghdad."

threaten or strike the United States (though that risk exists as well). It is that he would be in a position to coerce or deter others who might resist his drive for predominance in the Persian Gulf.¹⁷ This, in the view of proponents of the war, is an intolerable outcome.

If one accepts the logic that cumulates in these five points, then the containment and deterrence of Iraq is not an effective policy option. Accordingly, the United States has no choice but to act, no meaningful alternative to preventive war, no other path to an acceptable future. In this logic, war with Iraq is unavoidable.

Cheap, Beneficial, and Necessary

In sum, the Bush administration has identified a desirable objective – the removal of Saddam – and has articulated a willingness to use available and effective means – American military power – to achieve that objective. It has proposed a plausible theory of victory that offers at least the prospect of decisive and advantageous results at low cost. It has claimed that no alternative policy will produce acceptable results. For all except those who oppose the use of force under any circumstances, this case for war should give pause. If one of the world's worst despots can be eliminated at low cost, with the United States bearing the brunt of the cost and responsibility, this is arguably an appropriate and justified use of force, good for Iraq and good for the world.

What are the grounds for hesitation about the Bush policy toward Iraq? Why not support this war? Those who do not support war against Iraq see potentially very different answers to the three pivotal questions about the Bush policy. First, while the war may seem advisable if the costs turn out to be low, what about possible *unfortunate outcomes* that involve much higher costs? Second, even if one accepts that the demise of Saddam is a desirable objective, what about other, potentially *unfortunate consequences* of the war? What if other, broader U.S. interests are harmed? And is it really in the interests of the United States to set potentially dangerous precedents about the use of force and the role of American power in the international system? Third, are there *acceptable alternatives* to preventive war? Is it really true that nothing but full-scale invasion will do? Or could a stern policy of containment produce satisfactory results? When these other considerations and possibilities are taken into account, the case for war seems far less compelling and alluring. Those who fear higher costs, who anticipate significant adverse consequences, and who see acceptable alternatives to preventive war are skeptical of the wisdom of attacking Iraq. The Bush administration has made a credible case that there are grounds for war, as outlined above. In the following discussion, we consider the grounds for skepticism about the wisdom of that war.

UNFORTUNATE OUTCOMES: FEARS OF A COSTLY WAR

How Costs Could Mount

The discrepancy in military capabilities between Iraq and the United States is so enormous that there can be little doubt as to the result of a war between them so long as Washington has the will to persevere. As Vice President Cheney has said (reflecting the common view among advocates of the war that it will be easy), “I don’t think it would be that tough a fight; that is, I don’t think there’s any question that we would prevail

17. The vision of Saddam as nuclear-armed bully is described, for example, in Heidi Kingstone, “A Nuclear Saladin: What Would the World Look Like if Saddam Hussein Had Nuclear Weapons?” *The Jerusalem Report*, 21 October 2002, pp. 24–25.

and we would achieve our objective.”¹⁸ On the other hand, Saddam Hussein has had at least two years of strategic warning that this war might be coming his way, dating to George W. Bush’s presidential campaign in which he called for Saddam’s removal. Further, the war crisis of fall 2002 has arisen across many months in which the Bush administration has been increasingly blunt and unambiguous about its desire, its willingness, perhaps even its intention to use force to destroy Saddam’s regime. Saddam Hussein is not going to be surprised by this war (even if tactical shocks about the timing, location, and character of attacks are still possible).

Perhaps Saddam and his regime have sat idly by for all this time and done nothing in response to the massive and explicit threat posed by the United States.¹⁹ But it seems quite plausible that they have sought to provide themselves with options in the event of attack, that they will avail themselves of steps that will inflict pain on their attacker, that they will attempt to alter the course of conflict by whatever means they can, that they will reach for options that might provide some potential bargaining leverage. The United States will prefer a war that is a clean, simple, quick, decisive, and relatively painless contest between its own awesome military forces and the relatively weak conventional military machine of Saddam’s Iraq. Unless Saddam proves to be an utterly witless opponent, his strategy will be to do what he can to make the war messy, complicated, and painful for the United States and its supporters. Ironically, the more correct the Bush administration is about Saddam’s unfeeling brutality and unpredictable irrationality, the more likely it is that he will seek ways of inflicting great harm in response to an attack.

In the worst case for Saddam’s regime, if the war is going strongly against Iraq, it may attempt to achieve glory in defeat by imposing maximum possible harm before expiring. It is a long-standing proposition in strategic thought that a cornered, desperate opponent with little left to lose may be particularly dangerous and threats from such an opponent will be highly credible.²⁰ This may be just the circumstance in which Saddam finds himself if he is caught up in a hopeless war against an American administration determined to destroy him. Moreover, in the past, Saddam has shown himself capable of extreme steps even when not in complete desperation, so it is quite credible that in truly catastrophic conditions he would be willing to take truly catastrophic actions.

Thus, while the vision of a quick, easy win may be alluring, much less pleasant scenarios are also possible and must be taken into account. Those who attach worryingly high probabilities to one or more of these “nightmare” scenarios understandably will be more reluctant to advocate or endorse preventive war against Iraq.

What could Saddam do to make the war messy, complicated, and painful for the United States? What steps might he take to produce outcomes that would call into question the whole enterprise?

18. Eli J. Lake, “The Pentagon Versus the CIA on Iraq: Intelligence Test,” *The New Republic*, 23 September 2002. Quotation from the online version available at <<http://www.tnr.com>>.

19. Though there are public hints that Saddam is doing what he can to strengthen Iraq’s capacity to resist attack. See, for example, Arie Farnam, “Iraq Buying Arms in East Europe’s Black Markets,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 11 September 2002.

20. Thomas Schelling, for example, discusses the powerful strategic effect of “sheer desperation” in *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 43–45.

Use weapons of mass destruction. The most obvious fear is that Saddam would use weapons of mass destruction against U.S. forces or its bases in the region, against U.S. allies, against Israel, or against other regional powers. As is well known, this would not be unprecedented. Saddam has used chemical weapons twice in the past, against his own citizens and in the war with Iran. After some four years without UN inspections, there is uncertainty about what weapons of mass destruction Saddam may actually now possess. There remains widespread and warranted doubt that Iraq has nuclear weapons – though it is not impossible to imagine that it has obtained either nuclear weapons themselves or the materials to make them through illicit means on an international nuclear black market. But the more immediate concern is that Saddam has chemical and biological weapons (CBW), and that he would not hesitate to use them (again). The scale of this nightmare would depend on the extent and character of Saddam’s inventories of CBW and on his ability to deliver them.²¹ But if he possesses substantial quantities of such weapons, the war could grow very ugly very quickly. If U.S. bases are gassed or Tel Aviv is attacked with smallpox, the cost of this war will escalate considerably.

The Bush administration has argued that Saddam is undeterrable, that he will use any weapons in his arsenal, and this is the largest part of why preventive war is necessary to remove him from power. By this same logic, it seems highly likely that, if attacked, Saddam will attempt to use any weapons of mass destruction that are available to him. Arguably, the Bush policy of preventive war maximizes the likelihood of WMD use in the short run in order to eliminate longer-run fears of Saddam’s WMD capability. That is, Saddam’s WMD are most likely to be used if he is attacked. Moreover, U.S. intelligence has concluded that the probability of use of these weapons against the United States is low in all other circumstances, raising the question posed in the title of a recent article by Graham Allison: “Is Bush provoking an attack?” As Allison nicely summarizes the situation, “To prevent an attack the likelihood of which is low, the U.S. is taking action that makes the likelihood of the attack high?”²² Any who share this view will doubt the logic of the Bush case for war.

Set oil fields afire. During the Gulf war of 1991, Saddam’s forces caused large economic and environmental damage by setting oil fields on fire. During the disorganized retreat from Kuwait, approximately 700 oil wells were set ablaze and burned for eight months.²³ At their peak, these fires consumed an estimated five million barrels a day – more than Kuwait’s daily exports at the time. The direct economic losses from destroyed resources mounted to billions of dollars. Cleanup and repair cost in excess of a billion dollars as well. And the fires produced severe air pollution for months. Indeed, dense smoke blocked the sun over distances of several hundred kilometers and produced significant localized surface cooling effects. The volume of smoke emitted was so large that it raised concerns (later revealed to be unfounded) about possible

21. According to press reports, there are 6,000 Iraqi chemical munitions that are unaccounted for. Rowan Scarborough, “Latest Weapons Commission Will Inspect Iraq,” *Washington Times*, 18 September 2002. Iraq reported to UNSCOM that it had used 100,000 chemical shells during the Iran-Iraq war. See *London Daily Telegraph*, 18 September 2002.

22. Graham Allison, “Is Bush Provoking an Attack?” *Boston Globe*, 12 October 2002.

23. A convenient summary of the facts can be found in Heather MacLeod McClain, “Environmental Impact: Oil Fires and Spills Leave Hazardous Legacy,” on the CNN.com website at <<http://asia.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2001/gulf.war/legacy/environmental>>.

global climatic effects.²⁴ In addition, the oil fires left a lasting environmental mess (persisting to the present day) in the form of huge lakes of unignited oil. (Iraqi forces also intentionally released 11 million barrels of oil into the Persian Gulf, with devastating short-term ecological consequences.) The Kuwaiti oil fires did not have lasting geopolitical or macroeconomic consequences, but they were far from a trivial development.

A dying Iraqi regime might be able to do even worse if it undertook a planned, organized, and purposeful campaign to destroy its own oil fields and possibly sabotage and set oil fires in other oil producing countries of the Persian Gulf. This would be a way of at least temporarily denying the United States access to Iraq's oil in a postwar environment and of causing significant problems for any successor regime.

Disrupt the flow of oil. Following from and related to the previous point, Iraq could attempt to disrupt oil deliveries from the Persian Gulf. During the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, it did just that by attacking oil tankers (as did Iran). Indeed, by 1987 the United States had increased its naval presence in the Gulf and pledged to protect Kuwaiti tankers in response to these attacks. A very large volume of oil – something approaching one-third of the world's crude oil – passes by sea out of the Persian Gulf.²⁵ Interference with this flow could be troublesome. To be sure, Saddam is unlikely to be able to mount a sustained campaign against tankers in the face of U.S. air and naval power, nor is he likely to be able to seriously disorient the global energy supply. But he could impose some losses, cause delays in delivery, provoke short-term price spikes, produce environmental damage, and otherwise cause costly short-term dislocations in the international petroleum system. Similarly, petroleum-loading facilities at Persian Gulf ports may be vulnerable to attack or to sabotage. Permanent closure of such facilities is not to be expected even if the attacks were to be wildly successful and even major damage is probably unlikely (one assumes that such important facilities will be protected). Nevertheless, attempting to disrupt port facilities would be a plausible component of Iraq's strategy if Saddam's goals are to raise costs, cause complications, induce fear or panic, or handicap possible successors who are hoping to draw on oil revenues.

Urban combat in Baghdad (or, Jenin tactics on a large scale). On April 3, 2002, as part of its reprisal operations on the West Bank, Israeli forces entered the town of Jenin (and the adjacent refugee camp).²⁶ After a week of occasionally ferocious fighting, 23 Israeli soldiers and 52 Palestinians (some of them civilians) were dead. For Israel, Jenin turned into a nightmare of ambushes, booby traps, and door-to-door fighting in a densely populated urban maze. Israel's losses were high, civilian casualties were unavoidable, widespread and visible destruction of civilian infrastructure took place, and politically damaging television footage of the devastation flooded the world. In

24. Atmospheric scientists at NASA investigated the potential global implications of the oil fires in Kuwait. See, for example, Peter Pilewskie, Francisco Valero, and Wnrran Gnra, "Kuwaiti Oil Field Fires and Nuclear Winter Theory," available at <<http://www.geo.arc.nasa.gov/>>.

25. For a useful overview of these issues, see Energy Information Administration, "Persian Gulf Oil and Gas Fact Sheet," U.S. Department of Energy, March 2002, available at <<http://www.eia.doe.gov/emcu/cabs/pgulf/>>.

26. The pertinent facts can be found in "Report of the Secretary General Prepared Pursuant to General Assembly Resolution ES-10/10," UN General Assembly Document UN A/ES-10/186, 30 July 2002, available at <<http://www.un.org/peace/jenin/>>.

this combat context, Israel's enormous military superiority – its advantages in technology, heavy equipment, air power, and trained military personnel – were undermined, neutralized or irrelevant and could be employed in this heavily populated urban environment only if Israel were willing to cause enormous casualties among civilians.

As Saddam Hussein and his high command contemplate another war with the United States, the Jenin model is bound to be more attractive than a re-run of the 1991 Gulf war. It is hard to imagine that Saddam will again sacrifice his military capabilities in force-on-force engagements in the desert against the overwhelmingly superior Americans. If the United States puts significant ground forces into Iraq, Saddam's goal may be to lure them into a Jenin-like fight, but on a vastly larger scale, in Baghdad – a city of nearly five million people. And in fact, members of the Iraqi regime have openly proclaimed that this will be their strategy. Cabinet member Mohammed Mehdi Saleh has been quoted as saying, for example, "If they want to change the political system in Iraq, they will have to come to Baghdad. We will be waiting for them here."²⁷ Iraqi officials have invoked the disastrous U.S. experience in Vietnam, suggesting, as one account puts it, that they will "let our streets be our jungles; let our buildings be our swamps."²⁸

For Saddam, there are a number of advantages to the scenario involving urban combat in Baghdad. He can deploy his Republican guard there. He will have had plenty of time to lay traps and set up ambushes. His forces will have the substantial advantage of familiarity with the immediate environment. They will be able to use civilians as shields, as cannon fodder, and as political bargaining chips. The huge technological advantages possessed by American forces will be hard to employ effectively or decisively, especially if (as is likely to be the case) there is significant sensitivity about collateral damage. U.S. air power, even with its total dominance of the skies and its precision capabilities, may be difficult to bring decisively to bear in Baghdad if Iraqi forces have melted into the civilian population.

Opinion is divided about the implications of this scenario. Some dismiss the Iraqi threat as bluff on the grounds that it lacks the capability to effectively conduct urban combat operations.²⁹ Others worry that U.S. forces are deficient in urban combat skills.³⁰ In general, though, the prospect of urban combat in Baghdad raises fears that U.S. losses could be substantial; as one analysis reported, "The view in the Pentagon seems to be that street fighting in Baghdad could lead to heavy U.S. casualties. . . ."³¹ America's military planners, says another report, "foresee a battle for Baghdad, a sprawling city of five million people, as one of the most difficult and unsettling aspects

27. Rajiv Chandrasekaran, "Iraqi Officials Plan for Urban Warfare," *Washington Post*, 27 September 2002.

28. Scott Peterson, "Iraq Prepares for Urban Warfare," *Christian Science Monitor*, 4 October 2002. For an excellent discussion of the difficulties this scenario may pose for U.S. forces, see Barry R. Posen, "Battling for Baghdad," *New York Times*, 13 October 2002.

29. An excellent example is William Arkin, "Return of the Chapstick Syndrome," *Washingtonpost.com*, 30 September 2002, in which he portrays Iraqi threats of urban warfare as propaganda to be disregarded as nonsense.

30. See Kim Burger, "U.S. Joint Ops Urban Warfare Training Insufficient," *Jane's Defense Weekly*, 2 October 2002.

31. William Rees-Mogg, "An Angry Man with a Gift for Making Enemies," *London Times*, 12 August 2002. But for a more optimistic view of the urban combat scenario, see Mark Bowden, "Urban War, The Right Way," *Los Angeles Times*, 30 August 2002, which suggests that well-armed, well-trained forces can operate quite effectively in urban environments – with enormous advantages though not without losses.

of any invasion of Iraq.”³² From Saddam’s perspective, this must seem like a fight that is much less likely to be so one-sided, in which the Americans could well get bloodied, in which Iraq might garner political advantages by exploiting the propaganda opportunities occasioned by civilian death and destruction.

Certainly Washington will wish to avoid this fight for all the reasons that Saddam will seek it. But the goal of regime change may make it hard to avoid Baghdad. Can the Bush administration achieve its objective if Saddam and much of his Republican guard are still alive and holed up in Baghdad? The United States might decline to fight the door-to-door urban engagement that Saddam undoubtedly would prefer, but such a decision could preclude a quick victory and leave Saddam and some of his key forces intact. During the Iran-Iraq war, Saddam was willing to engage in various bloodbath tactics, even at a high price in Iraqi blood. No doubt he will be willing to do the same in a war against the United States.

Produce a bloodbath in Baghdad for political and propaganda purposes. If this war comes, Saddam will be a desperate man with no hope of military victory. He will need to find something that changes the political chemistry of the situation, that turns international public opinion and political pressure against the United States, that compels a stop to the fighting before he is eliminated. If the urban combat scenario comes to pass, Saddam may have an opportunity to exploit the fog of war by ensuring that there are large numbers of civilian deaths and wide destruction of civilian infrastructure in Baghdad. In what will likely be a confusing, messy, highly violent, and hard to describe situation, it will be easy for Saddam to claim that U.S. military action is causing large numbers of civilian deaths. His forces can certainly produce the bodies. His past record of ruthlessness suggests that few moral scruples would restrain him. Indeed, public accounts claim that since 1979 Saddam has killed one million of his own citizens, so a few hundred or a few thousand more sacrificed to the cause will be of no great moment to him.³³

In the intense battle in Jenin, a few dozen Palestinians died. There were allegations (false, as it turned out) that a few hundred more had perished. Many, though not all, were civilians. The outcry was heard around the world. The political damage to Israel was substantial. The pressure on Israel to alter its plan was considerable. The UN launched an investigation as to whether war crimes had been committed. Here, in short, is something that looks as if it might produce political leverage. Even if later investigations were to show that Saddam had ordered the killing of large numbers of his own population as part of a propaganda strategy, in the midst of the war this could be a significant complication. As was true in Jenin, the facts could be difficult to sort out. If U.S. forces were operating vigorously against serious resistance in Baghdad, most likely they would be causing some civilian deaths. (Indeed, significant military operations in and near Iraq’s cities could shatter already fragile and insufficient infrastructures and rapidly produce widespread suffering among the civilian population.)³⁴ If there is close quarters combat in dense areas, substantial destruction would be likely.

32. Vernon Loeb, “Bracing for Primordial Combat,” *Washington Post*, 31 October 2002.

33. German expert on Iraq, Thomas von der Osten-Sacken, offers the 1 million figure in Micha Odenheimer, “Interview: Vicious Circles Closing In,” *Ha’aretz*, 4 October 2002.

34. See, for example, Anthony Shadid, “War Would Crush Iraqi Cities, Analysts Say,” *Boston Globe*, 20 October 2002.

Even if there was suspicion that Saddam's charges were false, there might also be pressure to investigate. And without a doubt, the stream of gruesome footage of dead Iraqi women and children, allegedly killed by American action, airing ceaselessly on Arab television would be a public relations disaster for an American government that believes it must win Arab hearts and minds if it is to address effectively the terrorism threat. This may be one of the ugliest and most cynical of the options available to Saddam, but it is not one that seems completely out of the realm of the possible.

Launch an international campaign of terrorism. In making its case against Iraq, the Bush administration recurrently has claimed that Saddam has been a serious supporter of and has deep ties with international terrorists. This allegation has produced controversy, at least in specific connection with the attacks on September 11, because there is no conclusive public evidence linking Iraq directly to Al Qaeda or to the attacks. But the broader accusation has more merit: Iraq has long been regarded, at least by the U.S. government, as a state sponsor of terrorism. It has employed its own agents in numerous terrorist attacks and assassination attempts. Further, published accounts accuse Iraq of harboring international terrorists, providing them with funding and facilities, and supporting their causes – including the Fatah Revolutionary Council, the Palestine Liberation Front, and the Arab Liberation Front, among others.³⁵

Thus, to the extent that the Bush administration's interpretation is correct, this implies that Saddam has another strategic retaliatory option to utilize in response to an American-led attack: he can fund, fuel, and facilitate a campaign of terrorism against his attackers. Given the amount of warning that the Bush administration has provided him, Saddam has had plenty of time to pre-deploy his own terrorists in the United States or elsewhere (though this was undoubtedly harder after September 11 than before it). Perhaps he could forge or revive an anti-American/anti-Western alliance with other terrorist groups. Surely, from his point of view, if the United States can strike in Iraq then U.S. territory must be fair game. No doubt, under those circumstances he would regard any successful terrorist attacks against the United States as completely justified. Moreover, terrorism might be even more effective if directed not only against the United States but against other, less determined, members of whatever war coalition may form. Imagine the pressure that would likely be put on the Bush administration if its war in Iraq were producing terrorist reprisals in Riyadh or Paris or Brussels. If the Bush administration is right about Saddam's connections to international terrorism and if Saddam has been at all clever about thinking through his strategic options, then this is a scenario that cannot be discounted.

Inflame the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation. A common view throughout the past months of confrontation with Saddam holds that the Bush administration cannot initiate war with Iraq while simultaneously struggling to cope with the active and violent conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Among other things, it is argued, this will put excessive stress on U.S. relations with important Arab states and risks alienating Arab publics. In recent weeks, the Bush administration shows every sign of rejecting this proposition, mounting its pressure on Iraq though the conflict still burns in the West Bank and Gaza. But there can be no doubt that for the Bush administra-

35. For an overview of Iraq's connection to terrorist groups, see Anthony Cordesman, *Iraq and the War of Sanctions: Conventional Threats and Weapons of Mass Destruction* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999), 150–163.

tion's Iraq policy the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is both a distraction and a complication, if not an inhibition. Hence, despite the recurrent violence in the Middle East, the Bush administration, as one report puts it, retains the "hope of relegating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to the policy backburner as it concentrated its attention on the confrontation with Iraq."³⁶ The intifada of the last two years has denied Washington the ability to focus solely on Iraq and hence has been very much in Iraq's interest.

Obviously, this gives Saddam every incentive to support the prolongation and the escalation of the violence in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza. This has been true over the past months, and will probably be even more true as America's momentum toward war increases. As has been widely reported, for example, Saddam is paying the families of Palestinian suicide bombers. He has aligned himself with Palestinian extremists and supports their violent struggle, both politically and financially. Indeed, by some public accounts, some violent Palestinian groups are on Saddam's payroll.³⁷ It is not unlikely, even without direct Iraqi support, that Palestinians will actively oppose the U.S. action and will demonstrate their opposition in a variety of ways, including with the use of violence. In such circumstances, the Israeli government could conclude, to the consternation of the Arab world, that the time was ripe for expelling Yasser Arafat and others accused of orchestrating the violence. Perhaps, then, this is another card that Saddam can play: causing more trouble in Israel, as pressure on him grows, in the hopes of deflecting American policy.

Escalate the war by attacking Israel. During the Gulf war of 1991, Saddam launched 39 conventionally armed SCUD missiles at Israel. It was speculated that his aim was to provoke an engagement with Israel and thereby erode Arab and Islamic support for the U.S.-led coalition, incite Arab publics in ways that might produce pressures that would be transmitted from Arab governments to Washington, and in the best case, transform the conflict into one that pitted Israel and the United States against some coalition of Arab regimes. This stratagem did not succeed in 1991, but there is no guarantee that he will not try it again. Moreover, if events seem to be pushing Saddam in the direction of seeking a glorious defeat, lashing out at Israel would likely be a significant component of a final spasm of violence from his regime.³⁸

Iraq's ability to harm Israel has certainly been limited by the sanctions and constraints of the past decade. Saddam has not been able to replenish or modernize his inventory of missiles, nor in general has he had unfettered access to international arms markets. But it is possible to imagine that he can combine several of the options available to him – chemical or biological weapons, for example, provided to terrorist allies in Palestine, intended to widen the war to Israel. He does not necessarily need missiles to threaten Israel.³⁹ Moreover, he does still possess a small number of missiles – as

36. Glenn Kessler, "Violent Reminder of a Simmering Issue: Eying Iraq, Administration had Hoped to Keep Mideast on Back Burner," *Washington Post*, 20 September 2002.

37. On Saddam's connection with the Palestinian struggle, see, for example, Janine Zacharia, "Stealth Bomber: Why Saddam Doesn't Need Missiles," *The New Republic*, 2 September 2002, pp. 9–10.

38. This point is not lost on Israelis. Netanyahu comments, for example, "I write this as a citizen of the country that is most endangered by a preemptive strike. For in the last gasps of his dying regime, Saddam may well attempt to launch his remaining missiles with biological and chemical weapons at the Jewish state." From Nethanyahu, "The Case for Toppling Saddam."

39. This is precisely the scenario that is examined in Zacharia, "Stealth Bomber."

many as fifty by some estimates – that could produce a dramatic political effect if armed with weapons of mass destruction. Furthermore, Saddam’s friends and supporters in the region, who hate Israel (and the United States) at least as much as he, may be prepared to exploit the situation if Iraq is attacked to threaten or even to strike Israel. Israeli Prime Minister Sharon has expressed public concern about this possibility, noting: “The Syrians, together with the Iranians, are playing a double game, escalating tension on our northern border.” Sharon suggests that Teheran and Damascus, in league with the terrorist group Hezbollah, will “be surrogates for Saddam, opening a second front to help him.”⁴⁰ Similarly, journalist Youssef Ibrahim argues, “it is almost a certainty that a U.S. attack will trigger a wider regional war that will drag in Israel, Lebanon and Syria. Hezbollah in Lebanon, another Iranian creation, will start this one, or Israel, America’s best friend and ally in the region, will do it if attacked by Iraq.”⁴¹ It is, in short, possible to envision a number of ways in which Israel is drawn into any conflict with Iraq.

In the current crisis, Iraq has made explicit threats against Israel. Some of these threats appear to be efforts to deter Israeli involvement in a future conflict. Iraqi Trade Minister Mohammed Mahdi Salesh has stated, for example, that “Israel will suffer a profound and an unforgettable strike if it interferes in the war.”⁴² Implicit in any retaliatory threat, of course, is an implied ability to inflict great harm by initiating an unprovoked attack. Further, Iraq has openly threatened to widen the war if it is attacked by the United States, and these warnings have attracted notice in Jerusalem. Israeli President Moshe Katsav has said, for example, that if Iraq attacks Israel, then Israel will “for certain” retaliate.⁴³ If war comes, Iraq may not strike Israel, and even if it does, Israel may be restrained in its response. But the potential for a very messy escalation clearly exists.

Escalate the war by attacking or threatening others in the region. Iraq can also seek to complicate the war and perhaps produce pressure on the United States by threatening or striking some of its regional neighbors.⁴⁴ As with many of these options, this one is given credence by the fact that in the past Saddam has attacked two neighboring states and has menaced others. If he is battling an American invasion, he is unlikely to launch conventional campaigns against Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, or anyone else. But he could hit them with missiles, as he did against Saudi Arabia in 1991. And, probably more importantly (especially given his limited missile capabilities), he could seek to frighten them with a campaign, real or threatened, of terrorism, rebellion, and sabotage. An

40. Sharon as quoted in William Safire, “A Chat with Sharon,” *New York Times*, 21 October 2002. Prime Minister Sharon later elaborated on this scenario in testimony before the Israeli Knesset’s Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, suggesting that Hezbollah will escalate by “opening a ‘complex and difficult’ front against Israel in the North.” As reported in Nina Glibert, “Sharon: Israel Will Respond if Attacked by Iraq,” *Jerusalem Post*, 29 October 2002.

41. Youssef M. Ibrahim, “Bush’s Iraq Adventure Is Bound to Backfire,” *International Herald Tribune*, 1 November 2002.

42. “Iraq Will Attack Israel,” Drudge Report, 13 September 2002, <<http://www.drudgereport.com>>.

43. As quoted in Rajiv Chandrasekaran, “Iraq Threatens to Widen Conflict If U.S. Attacks,” *Washington Post*, 11 September 2002. See also Michael Gordon, “Israel Tells U.S. It will Retaliate If Iraqis Attack,” *New York Times*, 22 September 2002.

44. Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld has acknowledged this problem in Congressional testimony. For a report, see Bradley Graham, “Peril to Mideast Allies Acknowledged,” *Washington Post*, 19 September 2002.

Egyptian diplomat was quoted as saying, the Iraqi leaders “want countries like Jordan and Egypt and Saudi Arabia to know that if they support the United States, they’re going to have to deal with a new terrorism problem. . . . And the threat is not just going to be against the United States but the overall stability of other nations in the Arab world.”⁴⁵ Or, as another account has it, “What the Arab regimes fear most . . . is a cornered Hussein who, facing his own certain end with no option of personal survival, decides to lash out at his neighbors.”⁴⁶ Though many regimes in the Near East regard Saddam as a significant threat to their security and would likely be delighted if he were removed from the scene, they have been exceedingly reluctant to support the U.S. move toward war. No doubt Iraq’s explicit threat to jeopardize the stability of their regimes is a large part of the explanation for their cautious discouragement of the Bush administration’s push for war. And no matter what the outcome of the war in Iraq, it will have a Pyrrhic quality if some of America’s friends and allies in the region are undermined or overturned, if instability besets the region, and unfriendly forces come to the fore in key countries. Saddam will surely wish to exploit the fear of these outcomes if he can.

Preempt the preventive war. Under the label of preemption, the Bush administration loudly and laboriously prepares for a preventive war. But in fact, it is Saddam who possesses the option of preemption, who possesses the incentive to strike rather than be struck. So long as there is hope of avoiding the war, Saddam presumably will be reluctant to strike the blows that ensure armed conflict against the enormous military force of the United States. But the more inevitable this war seems, the more Saddam may be tempted to preempt. Most of his options for imposing costs and causing complications will be more effective if he takes the first swing. Waiting until American forces are already fully mobilized in the region and fully engaged in military operations against him will only limit Saddam’s options and reduce the likelihood that he can take actions that provide political room for maneuver or inflict telling costs on his attackers. Some of his options – attacking port facilities, sinking tankers, and so on – may require surprise for a high likelihood of effectiveness. And if Saddam is coming face-to-face with the “glorious defeat” scenario, striking first is undoubtedly the best way to maximize his final blaze of violent glory.

In 1991, Saddam sat quietly for months while the American buildup in the Persian Gulf took place. Despite enormous fears in Washington that Saddam would strike before adequate forces were in place, before the coalition was ready to fight, he did not. The results were disastrous for him. If war again seems unavoidable, is he likely to accept a re-run of this 1991 experience? Or will he be tempted to teach the Bush administration the meaning of the word “preemption”?

The Risk of Higher Costs

Strategy is an interactive notion in which one must take into account the potential options and moves of one’s opponent. In a deeply hostile collision of interests, as between the United States and Iraq, it is a basic error to assume that one protagonist will behave “cooperatively” by passively letting the other side impose its preferred sce-

45. Chandrasekaran, “Iraq Threatens to Widen Conflict If U.S. Attacks.”

46. Philip Smucker, “As U.S. Talks Up Iraq Threat, Gulf States Stifle a Yawn,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 20 September 2002.

narios for the war. Of course, Baghdad's capabilities are limited, its options are constrained, some of its gambits may fail, and it too must take into account the impact of its acts on American behavior (unrestrained moves may provoke unrestrained reprisals). Of course, American military superiority is telling; Iraqi options may disappear or fail as a consequence of effective operations by U.S. forces.

Nevertheless, it is necessary and strategically sensible to assume that Iraq will be powerfully motivated to maximize American risks and costs, to exploit every political and strategic vulnerability of the U.S.-led coalition, and to move the conflict in directions that provide political and military advantages to Iraq. What is striking about the list of possible options identified above is that for the most part it consists of actions that Saddam has undertaken in the past. There is little reason to believe that he will not be willing to act in these ways again. On the contrary, the Iraqi regime has explicitly threatened to exercise some of these options if it is attacked. The Bush administration will presumably seek to foreclose Saddam's options and to push the nightmare scenarios out of the picture. If this war comes, we can only hope that they succeed. But surely Saddam will struggle to deny the Bush administration the war it wishes to fight and the outcome – a quick, clean, easy victory – that it ardently desires. And unless his power crumbles very quickly, Saddam will have a number of options for making this war messy, complicated, costly, and potentially very ugly. To test the Bush administration's hypothesis that the vigorous application of American power can bring an abrupt end to Saddam's regime at an acceptable, perhaps even a low, cost, it is necessary to run the risk that Saddam will succeed in implementing one or more of the damaging options available to him. For many, this risk seems too high.

It is important to note, however, that the existence of these risks does not mean that the Bush administration theory of victory is incorrect. As noted, the Bush argument is plausible and could be proven right. (At present, war with Iraq seems likely, in which case we will have a test of their hypothesis.) Nevertheless, it is worrying that the administration appears to have given little thought to the possibility that they could be wrong.⁴⁷ How much of their case for this war at this time rests on the expectation of a quick, cheap victory?⁴⁸

To pose a hard test of their own views, however, opponents of the war should question what their position would be if they were persuaded that the Bush view of how the war will go was certainly correct. If a war against Saddam were certain to be quick, easy, cheap, and decisive, would it then be worthy of support? No doubt, a cheaper war is easier to support. However, positions for or against the war should depend not only on possible costs, but also on expected consequences. Will this war solve more problems than it causes?

47. The Clinton administration's mistaken confidence that a few days of bombing in Kosovo would suffice comes to mind.

48. The contrast in the Bush administration's handling of Iraq and North Korea is instructive. Unlike Baghdad, Pyongyang has admitted to having a covert nuclear weapons program. Though the transgression is flagrant and public, the initial Bush response has been to continue oil deliveries to North Korea, to preserve the 1994 Agreed Framework, and to pursue "discussions" with the North Korean regime. There has been not a single hint that the use of force will be considered in response to North Korea's affront, though it is a charter member of Bush's "axis of evil." Why war in one case and "discussion" in the other? The answer is that there is no theory of victory that promises a cheap war on the Korean peninsula. As one account puts it, "Attacking the North and destroying its weapons program simply isn't an option. Such a conflict would have disastrous consequences. . . ." See Stan Crock and Moon Ihlwan, "North Korea: Why Diplomacy is Bush's Only Weapon," *Business Week*, 4 November 2002. See also Karen DeYoung, "U.S. Might Try to Salvage Part of N. Korean Accord," *Washington Post*, 25 October 2002.