
Program Brief

A publication of **THE NIXON CENTER**

Vol. 7, No. 21

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"What to Do about Iraq?: American, Arab, and Israeli Perspectives" A Nixon Center Briefing

November 29, 2001

The Nixon Center, Washington, DC

As the war on terrorism continues to be waged in Afghanistan, policy experts are debating where Phase II of the war should take place. Should Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq be the next target? Since Iraq continues to develop weapons of mass destruction and refuses to allow UN arms inspectors into the country there are good reasons to carry the war to Baghdad. Although the confrontation in Afghanistan against Taliban and Al-Qaeda forces is not complete, the question of "what to do about Iraq?" is timely. Some suggest applying to Iraq a campaign similar to that being executed in Afghanistan with a massive air campaign and small elite units on the ground. However with most Muslim countries openly objecting to an operation against Iraq the realistic options against Saddam remain elusive.

On November 29 a distinguished group of experts addressed these questions at a Nixon Center luncheon entitled, "What to Do about Iraq?: American, Arab, and Israeli Perspectives." The speakers included R. James Woolsey, former Director of Central Intelligence; Ken Pollack, Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations; Hisham Milhem, Washington Correspondent for *As-Safir*, a Lebanese newspaper; Shai Feldman, Head of the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies at Tel-Aviv University. The meeting was moderated by Geoffrey Kemp, Director of Regional Strategic Programs at The Nixon Center.

"Saddam Hussein's regime is irredeemable and its demise is in everyone's best interest," stated Dr. Kemp to begin the discussion, "the issue for debate then is not about Saddam Hussein, but how and when to replace the regime and ensure a stable, humane Iraq free of weapons of mass destruction." If the war on terrorism is carried over to Iraq, the removal of Saddam's regime will be the key issue, and there was a general consensus by the panelists that this must be the primary objective. R. James Woolsey stated, "The mission is to remove the Ba'athist regime, not Saddam as an individual, you don't want to leave Uday or Qussay... (Saddam's sons) It would not be progress to get rid of Saddam alone. It's the regime, stupid."

Although the consensus in the United States is to eventually remove Saddam there are question marks in mustering moderate Arab support. "Our allies are opposed to Iraqi intervention," explained Mr. Pollack, "without support from our allies it will be difficult to mount operations." One of the keys in the campaign in Afghanistan has been access to neighboring countries like Uzbekistan and Pakistan. Therefore several panelists said it is essential to gain support from our friends and allies in the region. Dr. Feldman articulated Israel's position clearly, "Israel will do whatever it is asked to do." He further explained that Israel would exercise a similar restraint to the one shown in Desert Storm. "It was wise not to act 10 years ago, why act now?"

However Dr. Feldman did address a scenario that Israel would have to strongly consider responding to that is unlike Desert Storm. "Since the United States did not pursue Baghdad that time around (Desert Storm), Saddam Hussein did not reach the point of desperation...The question that we have to face is what if he does face the point of desperation. Would the same deterrence that kept Saddam Hussein from using the 42 chemical warheads that we subsequently confirmed at the time, keep deter Saddam today were he to reach the point of desperation?"

The most difficult task however rests in gaining support of Muslim countries especially the states bordering Iraq. "Turkey is an essential ally in the campaign. It borders Iraq and would be a path in." said Mr. Woolsey. Hisham Milhem agreed with Mr. Woolsey's assessment of Turkey's importance, but expressed uncertainty as to whether Turkey would support the United States, "I am not sure Turkey would allow the U.S. to station troops there. Turkey has an economic interest in Iraq, and Iraq prevents the Northern Kurds from being a pain." Mr. Milhem further elaborated his doubt that other crucial allies would join a new coalition against Iraq, "Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Kuwait would be reluctant to provide overt support." Mr. Milhem did go on to say these countries would possibly support the United States if the operation lasted only a few weeks. Absent this guarantee though, Mr. Milhem said they won't gamble. Mr. Woolsey concurred that it might be difficult to gain support, but argued action against Iraq should not be contingent upon allies support. "Certainty breeds support. The right approach is to go and say (to our Allies) we are going to destroy the Ba'athist regime, if there is something you can do to help we would like your assistance. If you can't help we would like you to be quiet about the whole thing because we are going to do it anyway."

Irrespective of which allies would be in a coalition against Iraq, another question concerned what a military operation against Iraq would look like. Mr. Woolsey emphasized the role air power has played in Afghanistan as a starting point for an offensive in Iraq and explained that an air campaign today in Iraq would be different than the one waged in Iraq over 10 years ago. "In the Gulf War 10% of our weapons were smart weapons, in Afghanistan 70% have been smart weapons. The reason hundreds of sorties were not necessary was because virtually every bomb has counted and you have seen it in the demoralized faces of the Taliban." Mr. Milhem worried that although

an air campaign could be successful, the opposition forces in Iraq would not be the same as the Northern Alliance. "Saddam's regime is far stronger than the Taliban, and the Iraqi opposition is far weaker than the Northern Alliance. The opposition is not going to turn into a Kurdish Northern Alliance." Furthermore, Milhem explained, the Iraqi opposition still feels the burn of American withdrawal in 1991 just when the opposition to Saddam was mounting. Mr. Woolsey agreed, "The decision not to support the opposition was a bad idea, 14 out of 18 provinces were opposing Saddam." Mr. Milhem and Mr. Woolsey both said it would be difficult to regain the trust of the opposition.

Mr. Pollack outlined three operations options currently being discussed, applying the Afghan model to Iraq. Invading, installing a new regime, and bolstering containment of Iraq. Uncertain of enough allied support to mount an operation similar to the one in Afghanistan, Pollack asserted, "We need to start thinking about the option of invasion (of Iraq) very seriously. It is a serious option, and as far as I am concerned it would be the best thing we could do. It would assure us of getting rid of Saddam Hussein and ensure there is a stable Iraq," Mr. Pollack went on to explain that while this option could result in higher casualties, it is the only course of action to take. "It is the only guarantee we have to get rid of Saddam. If he gets a nuke, we will wish we would have invaded."

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