Getting Serious About Iraq

Philip H. Gordon, Martin Indyk and Michael E. O'Hanlon

In his 29 January 2002 State of the Union address, US President George W. Bush put the world on notice that the United States would 'not stand aside as the world's most dangerous regimes develop the world's most dangerous weapons'.[1] Such statements, repeated since then in various forms by the president and some of his top advisers, have rightly been interpreted as a sign of the administration's determination to overthrow Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein.[2] Since the January declaration, however, attempts by the administration to put together a precise plan for Saddam's overthrow have revealed what experience from previous administrations should have made obvious from the outset: overthrowing Saddam is easier said than done. Bush's desire to get rid of the Iraqi dictator has so far been frustrated by the inherent difficulties of overthrowing an entrenched regime as well as a series of practical hurdles that conviction alone cannot overcome. The latter include the difficulties of organising the Iraqi opposition, resistance from Arab and European allies, joint chiefs' concerns about the problems of over-stretched armed forces and intelligence assets and the complications caused by an upsurge in Israeli–Palestinian violence.

Certainly, the United States has good reasons to want to get rid of Saddam Hussein. Saddam is a menace who has ordered the invasion of several of his neighbours, killed thousands of Kurds and Iranians with poison gas, turned his own country into a brutal police state and demonstrated an insatiable appetite for weapons of mass destruction. He is currently funding Palestinian terrorists who attack Israeli civilians as well as trying to disrupt world oil supplies. He is also, almost surely, still trying to build nuclear weapons. And he is powerfully motivated to seek revenge against his personal and political nemeses, as demonstrated most vividly in his assassinations of his sons-in-law in 1995 and his attempted assassination of former President George Bush in 1993. There is no proof that Saddam was involved in 11 September; indeed, he probably was not. But what happened on 11 September (and in the anthrax attacks that followed) nonetheless clearly demonstrates the kind of damage that could result if Saddam were to provide terrorists with biological or nuclear weapons.

Philip H. Gordon, **Martin Indyk** and **Michael E. O'Hanlon** are Senior Fellows in Foreign Policy Studies at the Brookings Institution in Washington DC. Gordon is Director of Brookings' Center on the United States and France and Indyk Director of Brookings' Saban Center for Middle East Policy. Parts of this article draw on Philip Gordon and Michael O'Hanlon, 'les défis de l'après-Saddam', which appeared in the summer issue of *Politique internationale.*

That is why there is a general consensus in the United States that overthrowing Saddam would be a good thing.[3] The hard questions are about how to do it. This is not just an issue of military tactics but also of strategy, diplomacy and what to do in Iraq once the military battle has been won. With sufficient American leadership, commitment and sacrifice, the military, diplomatic and nation-building challenges involved in regime-change in Iraq can all be met. But they should not be underestimated. The Bush administration, still flush with success in Afghanistan (though even there reality is setting in), is only now beginning to confront the imperial burden it would be taking on should the president decide to follow through on his rhetoric.

We should all hope that the Iraqi regime would crumble quickly under military pressure and that postwar stability could be ensured without a long occupation. But to assume all this would not only be irresponsible, it would also make such success less likely. If the United States decides to overthrow Saddam, it will need to deploy a large invasion force, convince Iraq's neighbours and the European allies of the need for action, do more to stop the fighting between Israelis and Palestinians, and make a commitment to stay what could prove to be a very complicated course. These challenges are not insurmountable, as many in Europe and around the world seem to believe. They are, however, far more significant than the Bush administration seems willing to acknowledge so far.

Diplomatic requirements

The diplomatic challenges of an Iraq invasion are even more formidable than they were in Afghanistan or the first Gulf War. This time, the United States would be pre-empting a threat that seems to worry Washington far more than Iraq's own Arab neighbours. Nor is Washington likely to have the justification this time of responding to a horrendous attack on the United States or an unprovoked invasion of another country. Attempting such a large military undertaking largely alone – with logistical support only from bases in Turkey and Kuwait and one or two other countries – would be a complicated, high-stakes endeavour leaving little room for error. Broader international support for action against Iraq – in the Arab world and from European allies – would both facilitate military operations and provide greater margins for coping with the inevitable unforeseen developments. International support would also lend legitimacy to the operation, increase the pressure on the Iraqi army to turn on Saddam, and reduce the fall-out in the Arab world and beyond. Allied support will also be critical when the time comes to rally contributions for peacekeeping forces and other efforts to stabilise the new government and rebuild the country. Given the dimensions of the undertaking and the attendant dangers, the last thing the United States should want is to try to tackle it – and bear responsibility for it – alone.

Rallying international support will not be easy. At present, practically all of Iraq's neighbours, and most of the international community, believe that the risks involved in overthrowing Saddam Hussein far outweigh the potential advantages. They worry about the effects of an attack on Iraq on their own

economies, on regional political stability, and on an Arab public already angry at the United States and the West, which they blame for the suffering of Palestinians and Iraqis alike. Nevertheless, there is no love for Saddam Hussein, even in the Arab world where his ruthlessness is blamed for weakening the Arab cause and prolonging the suffering of the Iraqi people. And European leaders share the US concern about the danger of Saddam's acquisition of weapons of mass destruction. It should be possible to rally international support for removing Saddam from power. But this will not be achieved simply by deciding on unilateral action and assuming that the rest of the world will follow.

Reviving the peace process

The first and most important step will be to make a determined effort to calm the Israeli–Palestinian conflict before action is taken against Iraq. If the United States ends up invading Iraq at the same time as the Israeli army is occupying the West Bank Palestinian cities, Arab leaders will fear the consequences for their own survival. Before the Sharon government's incursion into West Bank cities in April 2002, it was probably true that the Arab states would have mouthed opposition to an Iraq invasion while privately supporting it and quietly lending logistical assistance – so long as the United States had demonstrated its determination to overthrow Saddam Hussein quickly. Now, however, this is no longer true. Afraid of their own angry populations, most Arab states might well refuse to help the United States overthrow Saddam unless the Israeli–Palestinian violence had been stemmed.

The disadvantage of conceding such linkage is that doing so gives Palestinian and Lebanese terrorist groups – to say nothing of Saddam Hussein himself – the ability, by escalating the conflict with Israel, either to hinder American planning or to raise the price of Arab cooperation. It would be a strange and counterproductive policy indeed to announce in advance that the US will invade Iraq if terror attacks stop, but that it will forestall that invasion so long as the attacks, and the cycle of Israeli–Palestinian violence they provoke, continue.

Still, like it or not, the linkage between the Middle East violence and the Iraq issue exists. The more serious Washington is about toppling Saddam, the more engaged it will have to become in the effort to put the Middle East peace process back on track. Instead of denying this linkage, the administration should take advantage of it. Ironically, the fear that the United States will act against Saddam while the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is flaring appears to be motivating Arab leaders like Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Abdullah, Egypt's Hosni Mubarak and Jordan's King Abdullah to work with President Bush to try to resurrect an Arab–Israeli peace process. By matching this engagement with his own, as he made a rhetorical commitment to do in his Rose Garden speech of 24 June, Bush can both help contain the Israeli–Palestinian conflict while working to persuade these critical Arab allies to acquiesce in America's campaign against Saddam later.[4] Thus a wholehearted American–Arab joint effort to promote the restructuring of the Palestinian security apparatus to fight terror, the

reformation of Palestinian institutions to create a more responsible and accountable Palestinian leadership, and the convening of a peace conference to launch Israeli–Palestinian negotiations, could reap considerable dividends for the war against Saddam. It could reduce the temperature in the Arab street, cut short Iraqi and Iranian efforts to subvert Bush's anti-terror campaign through fuelling the Palestinian *intifadah*, and make it more difficult for the Arab states to avoid supporting a US campaign against Saddam.

However, it is far from assured that President Bush will commit to such engagement, given opposition in various parts of the administration to doing so. Some of his top advisors believe that the United States need not worry about Israeli–Palestinian peace, but should instead topple Saddam Hussein first as the key to peacemaking in the Middle East – just as his expulsion from Kuwait opened the door to the Madrid peace conference in 1991. Although it is true that the successful toppling of Saddam would dramatically shift the balance of power in the Arab world in favour of peacemaking and considerably enhance America's influence in the region, this argument is unlikely to convince any Arab government whose facilities the US needs to prosecute its invasion of Iraq. Washington would be better off first following through on the president's 24 June commitment to personal engagement in an effort to contain the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, the better to ensure Arab cooperation against Iraq. The alternative is to waste its energy trying to convince these Arab leaders that they would be better off ignoring what they now see as a threat to their very regimes from the Arab–Israeli conflict in favour of supporting a US–Iraqi conflict that will – they are convinced – only increase the threat to their regimes.

WMD and inspections

Another critical step in winning diplomatic support for an Iraq invasion is persuading not only the Arab world, but Europe and members of the UN Security Council, that military action to overthrow Saddam Hussein is both necessary and legitimate. This means justifying the military action not only in terms of preventing future threats, but also in terms of Saddam's refusal to abide by international law and uphold his commitments to give up all his weapons of mass destruction and long-range ballistic missiles. As reluctant as European and world leaders are to see the United States invade Iraq, it will be more difficult for them to oppose if the United States is acting in the name of very clear, existing UN Security Council resolutions.

Much of the Bush administration is highly reluctant to go down this route because it may give Saddam an 'out'. While Bush himself and other US officials have called on Saddam to allow weapons inspectors back in, the truth is that many in the administration actually fear they might get 'yes' for an answer and be trapped by Saddam's last-minute willingness to host UN inspectors. In their feared scenario, Saddam, sensing American determination to overthrow him, would accept the inspectors to forestall an invasion, but then do everything possible to hide his secret programmes and ensure that the inspectors were unable to do their jobs, as during the mid-1990s. Eventually, the UN Monitoring,

Verification and Inspection Committee (UNMOVIC) would be led to give Saddam a clean bill of health and Iraq's backers in the Security Council would press for the lifting of sanctions. The United States would then find itself isolated in the Security Council, forced to choose between vetoing the lifting of sanctions (which would precipitate the wholesale breaching of the sanctions regime), or allowing Iraq the advantage of uncontrolled revenues from lucrative oil sales, the better to pursue its acquisition of WMD.

These concerns are real. It would be ironic indeed if Washington used the inspection issue as a justification for invasion, only to discover that Saddam's mock cooperation actually isolated the United States instead of Iraq. To forestall this contingency, the United States and its international partners will have to raise the bar high on cooperation using anything short of full and rapid compliance with UN requirements as a justifiable *casus belli*. There could be no more protracted debates or second chances in the event of Iraqi non-cooperation either in allowing the inspectors into Iraq or in their conduct of no-notice inspections anywhere in the country.

The best way to approach the inspections issue would be to negotiate a deal between the United States, its European allies and Russia, preferably codified in a new UN Security Council Resolution. All would agree that inspections should be given a chance if Saddam allows the inspectors back in, but that military force would be used to overthrow his regime if Iraq refuses to meet its obligations to disarm. The US and its allies should insist that Iraq destroy the large quantities of VX agent, biological culture media, and other illicit materials it is strongly believed to possess immediately after the inspections/destruction process resumes. And they should insist on the right – already agreed upon in existing UN Security Council resolutions – to interview scientists in Saddam's weapons programmes, and if necessary grant asylum to them and their families in exchange for information. Although negotiating such an understanding with its allies will be difficult, the United States has two main advantages. First, most Europeans know that their unwillingness to countenance the use of force provides little effective pressure on Saddam, since the only way he will even consider cooperating is if he knows that the alternative would be the end of his regime. In this sense, given the Bush administration's determination to act militarily if no other way is found to deal with the WMD issue, Europe's best chance for avoiding an American use of force may be, perversely, to support it. Second, Russian President Vladimir Putin's strategic decision to ally with the United States has meant the loss for Saddam of his long-time backer. If Russia moves towards the United States on this issue, Europe and China are likely to follow.

Should Saddam resist inspections, as he might, the United States would go to war to remove him and his regime from power.[5] And it should continue to be crystal clear about that linkage between the fulfillment of Iraq's WMD

disarmament obligations and the use of force. In this way, the groundwork will be laid for a rapid decision on the use of force in the event of noncompliance.

Preventing the breakup of Iraq

The Arab states and Turkey will have other concerns about the effort to topple Saddam. The Gulf Arabs and Egypt will fear that Iran will try to take advantage of any loss of central authority in Baghdad to extend its influence through the entry of irregular forces into Shi'ite-dominated southern Iraq. Turkey will fear that the Iraqi Kurds, who already enjoy a substantial degree of autonomy under international protection in northern Iraq, will take advantage of the leadership vacuum in Baghdad to declare their independence. Turkey could well feel the need to take northern Iraq to forestall such a development. Syria and even Jordan might then feel that they have to move across the border into western Iraq to protect their interests, and Iran might do the same in the east.

Thus it is easy for the regional powers to envisage the dismemberment of Iraq, which would be highly destabilising in a region of great sensitivity to the West. To preempt such a centrifugal dynamic, the United States will need to make clear its commitment to sustaining the territorial integrity of Iraq. The willingness to commit large forces to maintaining a ground presence in Iraq would give real credibility to such a commitment by deterring neighbouring powers from intervening. So would a serious plan for nation building after the victory against Saddam is won, as discussed further below.

The military challenges

Iraq, unlike Afghanistan, is located in the heartland of the Gulf, a region whose stability is a critical US interest. A prolonged war there could undermine regional stability, put enormous pressure on friendly Arab regimes and Turkey, increase the terrorist threat against the United States, and wreak havoc on oil markets. Accordingly, if Saddam's regime is to be removed militarily, the action must be quick and decisive, and order must be subsequently maintained for as long as it takes to generate a stable and unthreatening replacement government. These requirements mean that the United States must be prepared to deploy a large invasion force – perhaps 200,000 troops, backed by some 1,000 aircraft – and to keep many of them in the region for some time.

Why the Afghan model won't work

Why not overthrow Saddam, Afghan-style, as some of the most prominent proponents of overthrow seem to be suggesting?[6] First, relying on insurgency operations based on Kurdish and Shia forces would have a very high probability of failure because of the disparity of power between Saddam's forces and anything that can be deployed by these surrogates. In Afghanistan, opposition forces were half as large and at least as well-armed as the Taliban, whereas in Iraq, Saddam's army is five times as big as all the fractious opposition groups put together. And air power alone would not be sufficient to tip that balance, especially in urban environments.

Significant US ground forces would also be needed because war planners cannot assume that the Iraqi army will adopt counter-productive tactics. Iraqi forces are unlikely to deploy their armour in the open desert (like Iraq had to do after attacking Kuwait) or to fire from static positions and become sitting ducks for airpower (as the Taliban did in Afghanistan). They are more likely to hunker down in the major cities, especially Baghdad, where Saddam will probably hole up. Many of their weapons will be placed near apartment buildings, hospitals, schools and mosques, as Iraq has learned to do during a decade of constant bombardment by the United States and United Kingdom in the southern and northern no-fly zones. Knowing that his only hope once an invasion began might be to ensure that enough civilians were killed to provoke unrest or rioting in other Arab capitals or major protest movements in the West, Saddam would probably seek to create an 'al-Jazeera' effect by forcing the United States to hit large numbers of civilians if it chose to attack certain military targets.

Trends in military technology development and recent American battlefield victories suggest (to some) that the United States' high-technology edge will make the deployment of a large invasion force unnecessary. Indeed, laser- and satellite-guided bombs, as well as new reconnaissance and communications systems such as JSTARS aircraft and *Predator* and *Global Hawk* unmanned aerial vehicles demonstrated enormous capability in the Gulf War, Bosnia and Afghanistan. But two other conflicts in recent American military history also need to be kept in mind: the 1992–1993 campaign in Somalia and the 1999 war against Serbia over Kosovo. In both cases, difficult battlefield terrain and conditions – the urban setting of Mogadishu, the forested settings of Kosovo – limited enormously what high technology could do.

The Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM) weapon that was so effective against the entrenched Taliban forces would be difficult to use against Iraqi armour deployed in urban settings, given its limited accuracy and thus the amount of collateral damage it would likely cause to civilians. Laser-guided bombs could be more effective, at least in good weather, but they require forward target designators and are useless against individual soldiers carrying small arms. If US aircraft tried to spot targets on their own, they would have to fly low over Iraqi cities, risking losses from Iraq's anti-aircraft artillery and shoulder-launched surface-to-air missiles. When coalition aircraft flew low in the first three days of *Operation Desert Sto*rm, the result was 27 aircraft damaged or destroyed – one-third of their losses for the entire war. And even low-flying aircraft cannot usually locate underground command posts or WMD facilities.

The need for *Desert Storm II*

US ground forces, on the other hand, would make a decisive difference in a war to unseat Saddam. Indeed, many Iraqi units might well change sides and move against the brutal dictator if they saw a massive army approaching. At present, many of the commanders of these units are loyal to Saddam only out of fear for their lives; however, if they understood that their survival depended on distancing themselves from him, their loyalty could well crack. It is unlikely to

crack in the face of opposition forces alone, led by rival ethnic groups who, if they were somehow able to prevail on the battlefield, would probably exact retribution on Saddam's commanders. Turning the Iraqi army against Saddam should certainly be a central feature of pre-war military planning. However, the US cannot base its strategy on such a best-case assumption. A large invasion force would be necessary if it does not happen. But this threat of overwhelming ground forces will also make it more likely that most of them would not actually have to be sent into battle.

Under these circumstances, the United States and any willing military partners would need a force large enough to defeat Iraq's military, unit by unit if necessary, while also establishing order throughout Baghdad and possibly other Iraqi cities. Military targets would include the command-and-control infrastructure needed to maintain control of the country, other major military assets such as bases, marshalling yards and equipment depots, major public buildings, utilities and of course, Saddam himself as well as his palace guard. Targets would also have to include the main military forces of the Iraqi state, which could otherwise mount counter-attacks against US-led troops even after the invading armies had wrested control of the country from the ruling regime.

In the initial phase, American forces would target Saddam's Republican Guard and Special Republican Guard, together about 100,000 strong, while trying to convince Saddam's other 300,000 forces and 650,000 military reservists at least not to resist, and, at best, to turn their firepower on the regime. If such a strategy were successful, only a few tens of thousands of American forces might ultimately see combat; in the best case scenario, Iraqi resistance might quickly crumble even in the ranks of the Republican and Special Republican guards. But the United States could not size its forces or develop its war plans based on that assumption, since Iraqi forces will only collapse if they are convinced of the inevitability of their defeat.[7]

What bases would be needed?

This type of operation could not be done without substantial access to foreign military bases. The alternative – for example, for the United States to mount an operation by flying forces directly into western Iraq – would be a huge logistical challenge. US airlift could deploy and sustain at most two divisions and their direct support, or perhaps 50,000 to 75,000 troops in all – and neither of these divisions could be particularly heavy with armour (US airlift would only be adequate to deploy and sustain about one heavy division in this way). The fact remains that the only way to ensure Saddam's quick removal from power is to deploy a large armoured force to the region by sealift, joining the 30,000 US troops and hundreds of British troops already there, and then mount an operation that would in many ways resemble *Desert Storm*.

The United States would require significant base access to carry out this type of operation. Facilities in Kuwait and Turkey would be indispensable – the former to provide air bases and permit deployment of the main armoured forces for their northward march on Baghdad, the latter for enough airfields to help

protect Kurdish populations and forces during the war. Ideally, Bahrain would also allow the United States to continue to use its 5th Fleet headquarters based there. But the requirements would also include air bases in at least one or two other Gulf sheikdoms.

More air bases would be needed due to the need to field up to 1,000 combat jets in the region (the Kosovo War, by way of comparison, required nearly that many against a much smaller country and enemy military). In rough terms, fielding 1,000 combat jets, plus associated support aircraft such as refuelling and electronic warfare planes, as well as airlifters, might require 15 airfields. Were Saudi Arabia to provide its facilities, the problem would be essentially solved. Without Saudi access, however, the United States would have to find that number of airfields in Turkey, Kuwait, other small Gulf countries and its own aircraft carriers. Even if the United States used four to six carriers, and even factoring in two to three bases in both Kuwait and Turkey, the United States would still need about half a dozen other facilities. Most of the smaller Gulf states have two to four long, paved runways, though the United Arab Emirates possesses eight (for comparison's sake, Saudi Arabia owns 31).[8] Ideally, attack aircraft would be based at least in Qatar with its extensive facilities; strategic bombers would be staged out of Oman; and refuellers would be based in the UAE. The US would also need access for its heavy transports to Cairo West airbase as well as transit through the Suez Canal for carrier battle group, if at all possible. If Saudi Arabia would permit overflights of its territory, it would be possible to avoid bottlenecks in air traffic which could otherwise occur at the northern end of the Persian Gulf. But the operation would still be difficult, since many of these bases are not nearly as well developed or stocked with fuel, munitions and spare parts as Saudi facilities. Clearly, Riyadh's active support for an invasion of Iraq, while not absolutely indispensable, would be enormously desirable on both political and military grounds. At a minimum, its quiescence would make it more comfortable for the other Gulf states to cooperate.

The WMD issue

The United States would have to plan for Saddam's use of whatever weapons of mass destruction capability he has retained or developed since weapons inspectors were kicked out in 1998. Facing his inevitable demise once Washington launched its invasion, he may well exact revenge by killing as many Americans as possible. Or he might again miscalculate the American willingness to bear casualties, hoping that US resolve would crumble at the first sign of Iraqi use of chemical or biological agents. Fortunately, Iraq probably does not have nuclear weapons – yet. But it almost certainly has chemical and biological capabilities and possibly radiological 'dirty bombs'.

To reduce the likelihood of WMD use, and to limit the damage if such agents were used, certain measures would need to be taken. The US would need to deploy anti-ballistic missile systems to Iraq's neighbours, and issue protective suits and gas masks to soldiers and possibly some civilian populations in the

region. Washington would also have to make clear that it would hold personally accountable any individual associated with such WMD use – Saddam's regional commanders might not want to run the risk of going down with him; however, the success of such a tactic could not be assumed.

To protect Israel and Jordan from *Scud* missiles and WMD-armed Iraqi strike aircraft, US ground forces might also be deployed into western Iraq. Because it would be difficult to deploy large numbers of forces and necessary equipment quickly by air, however, such a deployment would require agreement by Jordan and Saudi Arabia to deploy directly from their territory. That agreement would be worth pursuing but could not be guaranteed.

Casualties

It is difficult to predict casualties in such a war. Even the Pentagon's elaborate models overestimated likely US losses in *Desert Storm* by more than a factor of ten, a chastening experience that discourages precise predictions. But it is important to have a general sense of possible losses before taking the momentous step of going to war. Casualties would depend, obviously, on the strength and determination of the resistance offered by Iraqi forces. US experiences in recent urban operations, from Panama to Somalia, as well as recent Israeli experiences in the West Bank, suggest that assuming minimal casualties could be a grave mistake. In addition, Iraqi civilian casualties would probably be comparable in number to Iraqi military casualties, based on recent experiences in Panama, Kosovo, Afghanistan and, as far as we know, the first Gulf War. If elite Iraqi armed forces fight, then, Iraq could suffer 10,000 or more military deaths and a similar number of civilian deaths, while US troops might lose anywhere from many hundreds to several thousand soldiers in action. Widespread use of poison gas by Iraqi forces, or deliberate Iraqi gas attacks against Kurdish and Shia populations, would drive casualty figures higher, possibly by the thousand.[9]

These numbers are not predictions, but sober reminders of what could happen, in the event that Iraqi forces do not immediately collapse at the outset of hostilities. They also underscore two points. First, American forces would win the battles with far fewer casualties than in Vietnam or Korea, though quite possibly with several times more casualties than in *Desert Storm*. Second, the number of Iraqi civilians who might die in combat could greatly exceed the number of Serb and Afghan civilians lost in the last two major conflicts waged by American forces.

Exile for Saddam?

Thinking through the possibility of Iraqi use of weapons of mass destruction, one is left with the question of how to minimise the chances it will happen. The United States and its allies clearly can win this war anyway, but casualties could increase substantially – and Saddam might also kill any hostages if faced with his imminent demise.

For these reasons, the US and its allies might consider signalling to Saddam that it would be willing to provide him and his family safe passage to exile. Such an idea was considered during the first Gulf War, when Saddam reportedly had aircraft ready to take him out of Baghdad (subsequently targeted by coalition aircraft).[10] This time it might have to be considered more seriously.

Many would find such an offer repugnant, but it would be better than the precipitation of a WMD attack by Saddam. The Iraqi leader, who probably values his personal survival more than that of his regime, would be given the clear choice of exile before he used WMD, or certain elimination after he did so.

Post-victory challenges

Removing Saddam from power represents only the first step in the effort to neutralise the Iraqi threat in the Middle East. In the aftermath of Saddam's overthrow, ethnic and communal rivalries could well erupt into internal conflicts. The Sunnis in central Iraq will be very concerned that their interests will be subordinated to Kurdish and Shia demands. The Kurds in the north will not easily accept a diminution of the substantial autonomy they have enjoyed in the last decade. And the Shias, representing the largest ethnic grouping, will insist on a degree of power hitherto denied them under Sunni regimes. These tensions could easily undermine the interim government and generate considerable instability. Neighbours would be tempted then to meddle for fear of the consequences or because Iraq is such a rich prize. The region that Iraq inhabits is too critical to US interests for the US to just go in, remove Saddam and leave the clean-up to others. A large stability mission, led by the United States, would be needed, most likely requiring up to 100,000 military personnel, at least at first. This would not be a small or a short-term commitment.

The United States has not traditionally proven very good at making long-term commitments to regional reconstruction. America did it with enormous success in Europe and Japan after the Second World War, and in Korea and Taiwan to a lesser degree in the 1950s, but is now wont to use its powerful military forces and then leave the reconstruction job to others. US staying power and willingness to remain on the ground is being tested right now in the Balkans and Afghanistan. The Bush administration's inclination is to reduce US engagement as soon as possible in both places. But no one should underestimate the difficulty of putting a stable regime in place in Iraq once Saddam Hussein is gone, especially at a time when US attention and resources will already be burdened by nation-building efforts in these other places (and possibly Palestine as well). And to fail to meet that challenge would not only be irresponsible but could lead to the same sort of instability that produced the Taliban. If President Bush starts the job of transforming Iraq, he will have to finish it as well.

The first challenge is to prepare the ground for a post-Saddam government in Baghdad. Trying to organise the Iraqi opposition-in-exile into a credible government-in-waiting is proving as daunting to the Bush administration as it was to the Clinton administration. The Iraqi dissidents who have gathered in London over the past decade have lost touch with the Iraqi people and cannot

agree among themselves. And Saddam has made sure to execute any potential rivals who stayed in Iraq. The Iraqi military is likely to be quick to put forward a candidate; any generals who have turned against Saddam and helped the American effort to remove him will naturally be first in line. Arab leaders are also likely to support a Sunni general as the candidate for Saddam's replacement, fearing the consequences of greater Shi'ite and Kurdish representation in Baghdad, as well as the potential influence on their own authoritarian systems of a more pluralistic government in one of the most important regional capitals.

The United States will need to resist these pressures while distinguishing between self-promoters and leaders with genuine credibility among the Iraqi people. By definition, these leaders will not be identifiable in advance, since anyone courageous enough to stand up under Saddam's regime would already have been immediately eliminated (the most notable recent example was the Shi'ite leader, Grand Ayatollah Sadiq al-Sadr, who was assassinated by Saddam's agents outside a mosque in Najaf in February 1999). But the United States can take a number of other steps in advance. It should articulate a clear vision of a unified democratic Iraq that will ensure fair representation for all ethnic and religious groups; autonomy for the Iraqi Kurds; respect for the rule of law and protection of civil rights, including women's rights. The US should also now encourage Iraqis in exile to draw up a new constitution. And it should train a cadre of Iraqi professionals who can work with the US army to lay the groundwork for a functioning interim administration.

This is a complicated undertaking but by no means impossible. Unlike much of the Arab world, Iraqis are secular and have an educated middle class. Iraq also has considerable economic resources, a consequence of its abundant oil reserves, which would make a large-scale donor effort unnecessary. There is good reason to believe the Iraqi people would welcome the lifting of Saddam's oppressive yoke if it also resulted in an improvement in their material conditions and personal security.

An American-led peacekeeping force will be essential in providing that personal security: without it, there will be considerable risk of ethnic, religious or tribal strife in the wake of the regime's collapse. Some neighbouring governments will want to participate so as to better influence the outcome of the internal struggle for power. Although Arab and Turkish peacekeepers could help legitimise the operation, this advantage must be weighed against the dangers of creating opportunities for meddling. The Iraqi people are likely to want to jealously guard their new-found independence and, like the Afghan people, would probably be less opposed to American and European peacekeepers than to those from neighbouring countries.

The possibility of a transformed and peaceful Iraq raises intriguing possibilities for the future of the region. In particular, the possibility of a US–Iraq alliance, or a collective security structure involving the region's moderate states, could be given serious attention. Iran, which has already been put on notice by President Bush's 'axis of evil' speech, would find itself encircled by pro-American regimes backed by American forces on the ground. This could well

lead it to take more seriously US complaints about its pursuit of WMD and its sponsorship of terrorism. In short, toppling Saddam holds the potential to remake the region's basic security dynamics nearly as much as the aftermath of the Second World War and the Korean War reshaped Europe and East Asia. Such a possibility is a major incentive for overthrowing Saddam – provided, of course, that military victory is followed by the long-term work of stabilising and rebuilding the country.

Conclusion

The regime in Iraq can be changed, and Saddam deposed. But it is a much bigger, more complicated and more costly task than the Afghan model – or much of the discussion in Washington – would suggest. America would be taking pre-emptive action to remove a regime in the heartland of the Arab world. If it succeeds, it would end or at least greatly diminish the Iraqi WMD threat. It could also reduce Western dependence on Saudi Arabia (as well as Saudi dependence on the West), and remove the need to keep American troops there, thus dramatically changing the dynamics of the Middle East.

But America would also be shouldering a responsibility that the Bush administration has been reluctant to assume, at a time when the war in Afghanistan is not over and that nation has yet to be rebuilt. If America decides to go into Iraq, it had better do so with its eyes wide open.

Notes

[1] See The President's State of the Union Address, 29 January 2002, www.whitehouse.gov.

[2] See, for example, President Bush's 1 June 2002 graduation speech to the West Point Military Academy, in which he asserted that 'Containment is not possible when unbalanced dictators with weapons of mass destruction can deliver those weapons on missiles or secretly prove them to terrorist allies'. Bush warned his audience to be 'ready for preemptive action when necessary to defend our liberty and to defend our lives'. See Remarks by the President to the 2002 Graduation Exercise of the United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, 1 June 2002, www.whitehouse.gov.

[3] Most leading members of Congress range from strongly supporting President Bush to voicing doubts about the timing of any overthrow operation, but few challenge the basic desirability of the idea. See, for example, Peter Yost, 'Prominent Democrats endorse administration plan to remove Iraqi leader', *Associated Press*, 17 June 2002.

[4] 'President Bush Calls for New Palestinian Leadership', The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 24 June 2002.

[5] At that point, the United States and its allies would have to be very careful about preventing Saddam from taking Western weapons inspectors – or, for that matter, media personnel or other citizens – as hostages in an effort to save his own neck by threatening the lives of others. This challenge would be difficult, but one part of the solution would be to withdraw inspectors and other Western personnel quickly and before Western leaders explicitly stated their intention of deploying an invading force to overthrow Saddam.

[6] See, for example, Patrick Clawson, 'Why Saddam is Ripe for a Fall', *Washington Post*, 1 January 2002; Ken Adelman, 'Cakewalk In Iraq', *Washington Post*, 13 February 2002; Richard Perle, 'Should Iraq Be Next?,' speech to the Foreign Policy Research Institute, distributed by Copley News Service, 17 December 2001; Michael Dobbs, 'Old Strategy on Iraq Sparks New Debate: Backers Say Plan Proven in Afghanistan', *Washington Post*, 27 December 2001; and James M. Woolsey, 'Should the United States Go to War with Iraq?' CATO Institute Forum, Washington DC, 13 December 2001.

[7] For methods of estimating how large invading combat forces must be, see Michael O'Hanlon, *Saving Lives with Force* (Washington DC: The Brookings Institution, 1997). Assuming the need to defeat Republican Guard and Special Republican Guard units on the battlefield, a minimum of 100,000 US troops would be appropriate. Adding in the possible need to defeat, or at least intimidate, some regular Iraqi forces, as well as initial occupation requirements, 200,000 troops is a more prudent (if not still modest) size for the US forces.

[8] See Central Intelligence Agency, *CIA World Fact Book 2001*, at http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html.

[9] For a good discussion about how to estimate casualties, and historical data on other conflicts, see Trevor Dupuy, *Attrition* (McLean, VA: Hero Books, 1990).

[10] See Elaine Sciolino, 'After the War: Iraq's Leader; Saddam Hussein's Future: Options Raise Delicate Concern for US', *New York Times*, 2 March 1991, p. 7.