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Working Paper

July 27, 2001  
4:47 PM

TO: Honorable Condoleezza Rice

CC: Vice President Richard B. Cheney  
Honorable Colin Powell

FROM: Donald Rumsfeld



SUBJECT: Iraq

I recommend we have a Principals Committee meeting on Iraq, to be followed by a National Security Council meeting.

Background

We have discussed Iraq on a number of occasions. The discussions have been inconclusive. Several things have evolved in the intervening period:

- Sanctions are being limited in a way that cannot weaken Saddam Hussein. He undid the UN inspections in the 1990s and is working now to further undo the sanctions and the no-fly zones. He appears to believe he is getting stronger. His general behavior and relationships with his neighbors suggest he is riding higher than a year ago.
- The routes into and out of Iraq seem to be increasing. One has to assume the volume and mix of materials he desires are increasing.
- We have had a series of coalition air incidents, which, thus far, have not resulted in the shooting down of a coalition plane, but this is an increasingly likely danger. The recent firings demonstrate two things:
  - a greater degree of Iraqi aggressiveness; and, even more important,
  - what appears to be significantly improved Iraqi air defense capability, coupled with a reduction in U.S. ability to know what they are doing—partly because of their improved fiber optic linkages.

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### Proposal

We have a number of options with respect to the northern and southern no-fly zones. They include:

- Continue current U.S. course, with the distinct possibility that a coalition plane will be shot down and the crew either killed or captured in the period immediately ahead. If some important U.S. interest is being accomplished by the flights, it is well worth the risk. If not, it isn't.
- Undertake a fairly significant U.S. strike against Iraq's fiber optic links, radars, SAM sites and perhaps some asymmetrical strategic assets that would impose a more-than-tit-for-tat cost on Saddam for his endangerment of our pilots. A number of the currently proposed targets are near Baghdad. Hitting them would result in a great deal of attention on CNN, accusations that Iraqi civilians were killed and strong—potentially explosive—public expressions of consternation from our moderate Arab friends in the region, even more so than was the case during the last major strike in February.
- Finally, the U.S. could either discontinue or significantly reduce the number of flights in the northern and southern zones. However, if we seek to limit the risk to coalition aircraft by cutting back on the number and/or locations of patrols, Iraqi air defenses will continue to improve, which will further add to the risk and create increased pressure to limit the patrols still further or to stop them altogether.

### The Broader Context

While it is important, indeed necessary, that we confront the no-fly zone issues, the NFZs are only a piece of a set of broader Iraqi policy issues. It is the broader subject of Iraq that merits the attention of the Administration.

There are people in the Administration who can come up with a variety of more nuanced options. However, for the sake of beginning the discussion, here are some possibilities:

- The U.S. can roll up its tents and end the no-fly zones before someone is killed or captured. We can try to figure out a way to keep an eye on Saddam Hussein's aggressiveness against his neighbors from a distance.

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We can publicly acknowledge that sanctions don't work over extended periods and stop the pretense of having a policy that is keeping Saddam "in the box," when we know he has crawled a good distance out of the box and is currently doing the things that will ultimately be harmful to his neighbors in the region and to U.S. interests—namely developing WMD and the means to deliver them and increasing his strength at home and in the region month-by-month. Within a few years the U.S. will undoubtedly have to confront a Saddam armed with nuclear weapons.

- A second option would be to go to our moderate Arab friends, have a reappraisal and see whether they are willing to engage in a more robust policy. We would have to assert strong leadership and convince them that we will see the project through and not leave them later to face a provoked, but still incumbent, Saddam. The risks of a serious regime-change policy must be weighed against the certainty of the danger of an increasingly bold and nuclear-armed Saddam in the near future.
- A third possibility perhaps is to take a crack at initiating contact with Saddam Hussein. He has his own interests. It may be that, for whatever reason, at his stage in life he might prefer to not have the hostility of the United States and the West and might be willing to make some accommodation. Opening a dialogue with Saddam would be an astonishing departure for the USG, although I did it for President Reagan the mid-1980s. It would win praise from certain quarters, but might cause friends, especially those in the region, to question our strength, steadiness and judgment. And the likelihood of Saddam making and respecting an acceptable accommodation of our interests over a long period may be small.
- There ought to be a way for the U.S. to not be at loggerheads with both of the two most powerful nations in the Gulf— Iran and Iraq—when the two of them do not like each other, are firing at each other and have groups in their respective countries that are hostile to the other side. The particularly unfortunate circumstances of Iraq being governed by Saddam and Iran being governed by the clerics have suspended the standard rule that "my enemy's enemy is my friend." If Saddam's regime were ousted, we would have a much-improved position in the region and elsewhere.

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### Closing Thoughts

Two problems coming down the road are the following:

- Iran will almost certainly have a nuclear weapon sometime within the next five years, and that will change the balance in the region notably.
- Somebody, whether Iran, Iraq, or Usama Bin Laden, could take out the royal family in one or more of the Gulf states and change the regime and the balance, perhaps inviting Iranian or Iraqi troops in to protect them.

Clearly, the Arab-Israeli situation makes it more difficult to take strong action, but it is at least questionable to assume that our ability to act will improve by waiting. It is possible that Saddam's options will increase with time, while ours could decrease. We certainly need to consider the effects of the Arab-Israeli situation on U.S. Iraq policy. We also need to consider the reverse effects. A major success with Iraq would enhance U.S. credibility and influence throughout the region.

Why don't we get some smart people to take this memo, rip it apart and refashion it into an appropriate paper for discussion at an early Principals Committee meeting?

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