

The Academy of Political Science

475 Riverside Drive · Suite 1274 · New York, New York 10115-1274
(212) 870-2500 · FAX: (212) 870-2202 · aps@psqonline.org · <http://www.psqonline.org>

POLITICAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY

Volume 115 · Number 4 · Winter 2000-2001

No part of this article may be copied, downloaded, stored, further transmitted, transferred, distributed, altered, or otherwise used, in any form or by any means, except:

- one stored electronic and one paper copy of any article solely for your personal, non-commercial use, or
- with prior written permission of The Academy of Political Science.

Political Science Quarterly is published by The Academy of Political Science. Contact the Academy for further permission regarding the use of this work.

Political Science Quarterly
Copyright © 2000 by The Academy of Political Science. All rights reserved.

After the Storm: U.S. Policy Toward Iraq Since 1991

DANIEL BYMAN

The end of the Persian Gulf War on 28 February 1991 was supposed to have ended the conflict between Iraq and the U.S.-led coalition. Yet Desert Storm was only the beginning. In the years following the Gulf War, the United States and its allies repeatedly used limited force against Iraq, maintained tight sanctions, conducted intrusive inspections of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and missile programs, supported anti-Saddam oppositionists, and otherwise strove to isolate and weaken Baghdad. Ten years after the war ended, a resolution of the conflict seems further away than ever. Since December 1998, the United States and Britain have conducted a sustained, if limited, bombing effort against Iraqi targets.

This massive effort carries a price. Critics claim that the Iraqi people, not the regime, bear the brunt of U.S. efforts to punish Iraq. Contingency operations in the gulf cost roughly \$1 billion a year, in addition to the money necessary for overall force posture in the region.¹ The large military presence in the gulf and the need to carry out frequent military strikes have hindered U.S. military preparedness and hurt the morale of U.S. forces.² U.S. policy and the associated military presence also anger Islamists and other anti-U.S. radicals, who have at times engaged in terrorist attacks against U.S. soldiers both in and outside the region.

U.S. policy toward Iraq is a regular bone of contention in Washington and abroad. In August 1999, a bipartisan group of members of Congress formally

¹ http://www.fas.org/man/dod-101/ops.iraq_orbat.htm [Accessed 3 March 2000].

² Paul K. White, *Crises after the Storm: An Appraisal of U.S. Air Operations in Iraq since the Persian Gulf War* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1999), 85.

DANIEL BYMAN is the research director of RAND's Center for Middle East Public Policy. His most recent publications include *Confronting Iraq: U.S. Policy and the Use of Force Since the Gulf War* (co-authored with Matthew Waxman) and *Political Violence and Stability in the States of the Northern Persian Gulf* (co-authored with Jerrold Green).

noted in a letter to the president their “dismay over the continued drift in U.S. policy toward Iraq.”³ Dissent is even more pronounced abroad. The Gulf states and Turkey in general support a hard line against Iraq, but have at times criticized or opposed key elements of U.S. policy, such as sanctions or military strikes. Among the major powers, only Britain is solidly behind the United States. France, Russia, and China have at times harshly criticized U.S. policy, claiming that it is both ineffective and unfair.

This article seeks to provide a comprehensive evaluation of U.S. policy toward Iraq since the end of Desert Storm. What are U.S. objectives? What constraints inhibit U.S. policy? How effective are the means used to achieve these goals? What obstacles may hinder success in the years to come?

I argue that much of the criticism of U.S. policy toward Iraq is overstated and fails to appreciate many of the accomplishments of the Bush and Clinton administrations and their allies.⁴ Most of the criticisms focus on one policy instrument, ignoring how that instrument works in combination with other elements. Thus, sanctions, inspections, or other instruments are denounced as failures even though they contribute in a variety of ways to overall U.S. objectives. Moreover, many assessments miss the range of goals the United States has in the region. Pundits regularly describe U.S. policy as a failure due to Saddam Hussein’s survival, even though Iraq since 1991 has not successfully menaced its neighbors—a signal achievement. The United States has accomplished the

³ As quoted in Robin Wright, “U.S. Nearing Key Juncture in Iraq Policy,” *Los Angeles Times*, 29 August 1999. Other senior lawmakers noted their concern over “signs of a reduced priority in US policy toward Iraq.” As quoted in Jonathan S. Landay, “Is Iraq Building Weapons Again?” *Christian Science Monitor*, 30 August 1999.

⁴ What works that exist on U.S. policy toward Iraq either fall into the category of punditry or focus only on an aspect of U.S. policy. Tim Trevan provides valuable insights into weapons inspections in *Saddam’s Secrets: The Hunt for Iraq’s Hidden Weapons* (London: HarperCollins, 1999). On inspections, see also Scott Ritter, *Endgame: Solving the Iraq Problem Once and for All* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999). F. Gregory Gause provides an incisive critique of sanctions policy in “Saddam’s Unwatched Arsenal,” *Foreign Affairs* 78 (May/June 1999): 54–65; see also John Mueller and Karl Mueller, “Sanctions of Mass Destruction,” in *ibid.*, 45–53. Works on the Iraqi opposition include Daniel Byman, Kenneth Pollack, and Gideon Rose, “The Rollback Fantasy,” *Foreign Affairs* 78 (January/February 1999): 24–41; Daniel Byman, “Proceed with Caution: U.S. Support for the Iraqi Opposition,” *The Washington Quarterly* 22 (Summer 1999): 23–37; and David Wurmser, *Tyranny’s Ally* (Washington, DC: The AEI Press, 1999). An assessment of the use of force to coerce Saddam can be found in Daniel Byman, Kenneth Pollack, and Matthew Waxman, “Coercing Saddam Hussein: Lessons from the Past,” *Survival* 40 (Autumn 1998): 127–152; and Michael Eisenstadt and Kenneth Pollack, “The Crisis with Iraq: Reviving the Military Option,” *PolicyWatch* (Washington Institute for Near East Policy), no. 295, 22 January 1998. Probably the best work on Iraqi internal politics since Desert Storm is Amatzia Baram, *Building Toward Crises: Saddam Hussein’s Strategy for Survival* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1998). Regis W. Matlak also provides a superb assessment. “Inside Saddam’s Grip,” *National Security Studies Quarterly* (Spring 1999), accessed at <http://www.georgetown.edu/sfs/programs/nssp/nssq/Matlak.pdf> (June 1999). A fine journalistic account is Andrew Cockburn and Patrick Cockburn, *Out of the Ashes: The Resurrection of Saddam Hussein* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999). An assessment of policy alternatives can be found in Patrick Clawson, ed., *Iraq Strategy Review* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1998).

most important task: keeping Saddam's Iraq contained (or "in the box," in Washington parlance). Because of the U.S. military presence, sanctions, and other measures, Saddam has not been able to attack his neighbors or other U.S. allies. Countering Iraq's WMD programs has met with less success, and the most ambitious objective—removing Saddam from power—appears far off today. The United States has made these limited gains without jeopardizing the stability of regional allies, another impressive accomplishment.

Several instruments have proven particularly effective. The use of force and the broader U.S. regional military presence have contributed to containment's success. Sanctions too have proved effective in containing Iraq, though they have not achieved more ambitious goals. The Iraqi opposition and weapons inspections have made more marginal contributions. For all of these instruments, however, their true contributions must be understood in the context of overall U.S. policy rather than in isolation.

Despite the generally positive U.S. record, considerable room for improvement remains. Perhaps most damning, much of the credit for the limited U.S. successes is due to Saddam's missteps rather than to skilled U.S. diplomacy and planning. Washington also wrongly emphasizes weapons inspections and other elements of the original containment regime despite their declining utility. The United States and its regional allies, which are vital to U.S. policy success, are often at odds over various policy instruments and their application, but U.S. domestic politics reduces policy makers' flexibility. Finally, the United States appears to lack a long-term plan for the region.

The remainder of this article has five parts. The first section describes U.S. goals since Desert Storm and notes how they have changed as the decade progressed. The second part examines constraints that have shaped U.S. goals and the means used to pursue them. Part three assesses the means used to meet these goals, noting what has worked and what has not. With this assessment in mind, section four reconsiders the overall question of whether U.S. policy in the gulf succeeded. Part five concludes by identifying several potential problems that could hinder success in the future.

U.S. OBJECTIVES

To understand whether U.S. policy toward Iraq has failed or succeeded, the most basic step is recognizing U.S. objectives. These include preventing any Iraqi regional aggression; stopping Iraq's nuclear, biological, and chemical and missile programs; and removing Saddam from power. A negative objective—preventing the spread of regional instability—has also guided U.S. actions. The relative priority of these goals shifted as the decade wore on, with concerns about Iraq's WMD programs and an emphasis on changing the regime in Baghdad rising in importance relative to the goals of containing Iraq and preserving regional stability. To meet these objectives, the United States relies on sanc-

tions, weapons inspections, a large military presence, occasional military strikes, and the Iraqi opposition.

Containing Iraqi Aggression

Initial U.S. policy emphasized containing Iraq, preventing any aggression against Kuwait, other gulf states, and U.S. allies more generally.⁵ Because Saddam's Iraq remained committed to regional domination despite its defeat in the Gulf War, the United States established a strong military presence in the region to deter, and if necessary defeat, any Iraqi aggression. To demonstrate its commitment, the United States has augmented its forces during crises and at times conducted military strikes. Another key element of containment is keeping Iraq's military forces—both conventional and unconventional—weak. Thus the United States and its allies, working through the United Nations, set limits on Iraqi oil sales and controlled how the money could be spent in order to prevent Iraq from rebuilding its forces.

Preventing a WMD Buildup

Although the conventional military threat Iraq poses remains an important concern, the United States is increasingly focused on Iraq's WMD programs. Before 1990, the world knew little of Baghdad's WMD efforts beyond the fact that Iraq had a proven chemical weapons capability. Moreover, strikes conducted as part of Operation Desert Storm were initially believed to have destroyed much of Iraq's WMD arsenal and capabilities. Information discovered following the Gulf War, however, indicated that Iraq was close to producing a nuclear weapon and had vast chemical weapons stores. After the defection of a key Iraqi regime official in 1995, it became clear that Saddam also had a vast biological weapons program. Military strikes during the war had only destroyed components of these massive programs.

Given Saddam's unrelenting hostility toward the United States and its allies in the region, both in the gulf and Israel, his possession of these weapons, which have the capacity to kill hundreds of thousands if properly delivered, alarmed Washington. Although the focus on WMD weapons began during the months preceding Desert Storm, the United States steadily elevated the WMD problem to near the top of its concerns, with President Bill Clinton declaring in 1998 that their proliferation "constitutes an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States."⁶ In various

⁵ See Zalmay Khalilzad, "The United States and the Persian Gulf: Preventing Regional Hegemony," *Survival* 37 (Summer 1995): 95–120.

⁶ As cited in Gerald Steinberg, "U.S. Responses to the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Middle East," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 2 (September 1998), electronic version.

crises after 1997, administration spokespeople emphasized Iraq's WMD programs as their justification for confrontation.

Like containment, preventing a WMD buildup requires several different policy instruments. Robust sanctions and import restrictions ensure that Iraq cannot acquire foreign technology and assistance for its WMD programs. Keeping the inspections and monitoring regime strong, however, requires agreement among the major powers at the United Nations, particularly those with strong defense industrial bases. Washington also has used military force to degrade Iraq's WMD capabilities, which in turn requires regional states to provide basing and access for U.S. forces.

Toppling Saddam's Regime

U.S. policy is focused on Saddam himself as well as the broader threat that a powerful Iraq poses to the region. U.S. leaders see Saddam as reckless, vengeful, and bloody—dangerous traits for a leader pursuing WMD weapons whose country is astride much of the world's oil supplies. At the end of the Gulf War, allied leaders assumed that the combination of military defeat and internal unrest would lead to Saddam's fall. To this end, the United States has used a range of instruments to remove Saddam from power. For many years after the Gulf War, Washington tried to foment a coup in Baghdad. The United States also used military strikes to discredit Saddam and to weaken regime protection forces. Policy makers also hoped that sanctions would foster popular and elite unrest, further destabilizing the regime.

In recent years, the most important instrument for removing Saddam has been the Iraqi opposition. According to its rhetoric at least, the Clinton administration is committed to working with the Iraqi opposition to topple the regime, even as it continues to contain Iraq. In November 1998, President Bill Clinton embraced the opposition, promising to work for "a new government" in Baghdad. Caution at home and opposition from major powers and allies in the region have led Washington to avoid the direct involvement of U.S. ground troops or aid to the Iraqi opposition that would require a major U.S. commitment. A policy more reliant on the Iraqi opposition would depend heavily on regional allies, who would be needed to provide bases, training, and support for opposition fighters.

Preserving Regional Stability

The United States has sought to preserve regional stability even as it pursued ambitious objectives regarding Iraq. Most importantly, the United States feared that the U.S. presence and actions necessary to contain Iraq or overthrow Saddam might decrease stability in regional allies. Sanctions are unpopular, as were many military strikes. In response, regional governments have at times criticized U.S. policy, failed to provide necessary support, or otherwise

distanced themselves from Washington. Over time, U.S. policy makers have recognized a tension between the use of force and the stability of U.S. allies. Large force increases and the regular use of force against the Iraqi regime have angered many radicals in the region, threatening the stability of U.S. allies and the lives of U.S. personnel. The large and highly visible U.S. regional military presence proved a magnet for critics of gulf regimes, particularly in Saudi Arabia. Terrorist attacks against U.S. servicemen that resulted in the deaths of five Americans in 1995, nineteen in 1996, and seventeen in an attack on a U.S. naval vessel in 2000 highlighted the lethal nature of this threat. In response, Washington often limited the use of force and the scope and visibility of the U.S. presence. For example, the United States has restricted the personal leave of its forces within Saudi Arabia, relocated U.S. forces far from populated areas, and avoided using planes based in Saudi Arabia to conduct direct strikes on Iraq.

The United States has also sought to keep Iraq itself stable. There is little love lost among Iraq's tribal confederations, religious communities, and ethnic groups. Iraqi national identity is weak in comparison to religious or tribal identity, and the collapse of the center could lead to complete disintegration of the state. Moreover, Saddam Hussein has devastated Iraqi civil society, destroying any independent organization and rending ties among citizens. If Saddam falls, as General Anthony Zinni, former commander of the U.S. Central Command, has testified, dozens of opposition groups might compete for power, destabilizing Iraq.⁷

The United States has also tried to prevent radical Shiah from dominating a post-Saddam Iraq. The United States has long worried that a growth in Shiah influence would lead Iraq to tilt toward Iran, support other Shiites abroad, or both. Regional allies are especially concerned about the growth of Shiah influence in Iraq. Saudi Arabia and other gulf states have long feared Iran's revolutionary government, seeing it as seeking to extend its influence over the region, particularly in Shiite-populated areas such as Bahrain, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province.

Iran, however, is not likely to dominate a Shiah led Iraq, and there is little reason to think a Shiah regime would be particularly hostile to the United States or its allies. Ethnic divisions between Iraqi Arabs and Persians, and Iran's economic problems, also diminish Iraqi Shiah ardor for Teheran's leadership. Nor have Iraqi Shiites shown a penchant for supporting radicals overseas.

Nevertheless, as a result of these fears, policy makers have hesitated to support efforts that might destabilize Iraq or lead to increased Shiah influence. In general, Washington has avoided policies that might contribute to an Iraqi collapse. It hesitated to support popular resistance to Saddam in the immediate aftermath of Desert Storm. In addition, for most of the 1990s, the United States has preferred a coup as a means of regime change, as this would be more likely to leave a strong government in power than would other methods.

⁷ "Commander Opposes White House Strategy to Topple Saddam." *Associated Press*, 28 January 1999.

CONSTRAINTS ON THE UNITED STATES

The United States does not have a free hand to pursue the above objectives. In particular, three concerns have complicated the application of force or otherwise limited U.S. options: a desire to preserve the anti-Iraq international alliance; public and allied concerns over Iraqi suffering; and domestic pressure opposed to any U.S. concessions with regard to Iraq. These three constraints have shaped both U.S. objectives and the means chosen to pursue them.

The United States seeks to preserve the alliance against Iraq forged during the Gulf War. Several core elements of containment and countering Iraqi WMD, particularly sanctions and UN inspections, depended on international support. Without the support of other major powers, sanctions would have little or no impact. UN inspections also require the backing of the Security Council. Furthermore, Washington believes that international support increases the legitimacy of U.S. policy in general, helping sustain the backing of key regional states such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

Maintaining an international alliance, however, places severe limits on U.S. freedom of action. With the exception of Britain, allies have tended to be far more skeptical of the need to use force against Iraq. U.S. allies have also been more critical of the humanitarian impact of sanctions, and several states seek renewed commercial ties. Since 1997, China, France, and particularly Russia have also expressed their opposition to a robust inspections regime. Washington has often softened its policy toward Iraq for fear of jeopardizing the anti-Iraq alliance.

The United States and its allies have taken steps to protect Iraqi Shiites and Kurds from the depredations of Saddam's regime, but these steps are limited and evince a weak commitment to humanitarian objectives. Washington backed UN Security Council Resolution 688, which demanded that Iraq respect the human rights of its communities, and has been enforcing a no-fly zone in northern Iraq (and later in southern Iraq) in part to protect Iraq's communities. Despite these diplomatic efforts, Washington has avoided any formal commitment to either the Kurds or to the Shiites and avoided direct military support. In both cases, Washington waited until an outcry in U.S. and international public opinion before acting.

The United States has also sought to limit the impact of economic sanctions in response to criticism along humanitarian lines. After pressure arose on humanitarian grounds over sanctions, Washington backed UN Security Council Resolution 986, which allowed Iraq to sell oil to buy food, medicine, and other humanitarian items.

U.S. ambivalence stems from both ideological and practical concerns. Washington feels little sympathy towards the Kurds, who have few constituents among the U.S. people and who war with each other as much as with Baghdad. Washington is also concerned that any commitments will be difficult to back up should Saddam make a concerted effort to repress these groups.

Domestic concerns are a final constraint. Both the Bush and Clinton administrations successfully forged a solid domestic consensus opposed to Saddam Hussein. The price of this success, however, is severe limits on the U.S. ability to make concessions to Iraq. Any tactical retreats are subject to criticism in Congress and in the media as being soft on Iraq. Political leaders must respond to limited Iraqi provocations to sustain domestic support even when the effectiveness of the response is questionable and the U.S. attacks may alienate vital allies.

POLICY INSTRUMENTS

The United States employs five instruments to meet its objectives, subject to the constraints enumerated above, with varying degrees of emphasis: economic sanctions; weapons inspections; a strong regional military presence; limited military strikes; and support for the Iraqi opposition.

The Limited Benefits of Sanctions

Sanctions on Iraq have served a variety of purposes, helping to contain Iraq and limit its WMD arsenal. Sanctions have threatened at times to loosen Saddam's grip on power, but also have inadvertently strengthened his hand. Sanctions' humanitarian impact and popular hostility to sanctions in the region, however, have hindered U.S. relations with allies and regional stability more broadly.

Sanctions were initially imposed as a pressure tactic following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Once the Gulf War ended, the rationale for maintaining sanctions was ostensibly shifted to Iraq's WMD programs, though the common perception at the time was that sanctions would continue as long as Saddam remained in power. Under UN Security Council Resolution 687, Iraq was to eliminate all its missile systems, WMD, and associated infrastructure in order for sanctions to be lifted.⁸ Under restrictions that continue to this day, the United Nations must approve Iraq's purchases, thus reducing Baghdad's ability to obtain arms or technologies related to its WMD programs.⁹

Sanctions have been criticized, often quite severely, on humanitarian grounds. Dennis Halliday, the UN official who coordinated the oil-for-food program in Iraq, has contended that over 500,000 Iraqi children have died as a result of sanctions.¹⁰ Writing in *Foreign Affairs*, F. Gregory Gause acidly argues

⁸ UN Security Council Resolutions 661, 665, 666, and 678 set the stage for Resolution 687, approving and elaborating on the use of an economic or trade embargo and UN monitoring until Iraqi forces withdrew from Kuwait. Resolution 687 is the basis of postwar sanctions.

⁹ Mueller and Mueller, "Sanctions of Mass Destruction," 49.

¹⁰ Gause, "Getting It Backward on Iraq," 58; Mueller and Mueller, "Sanctions of Mass Destruction," 49. Robert A. Pape uses the figure of 567,000 in his critique of sanctions; see "Why Economic Sanctions Still Do Not Work," *International Security* 23 (Summer 1998): 76. For an excellent review of sanctions, see Richard Haass, ed., *Economic Sanctions and American Diplomacy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1998).

that, “American policymakers need to recognize that the only ‘box’ into which sanctions put Iraqis is coffins.”¹¹

Critics of sanctions’ humanitarian impact, however, often overlook the oil-for-food program, authorized under UN Security Council Resolution 986, and its countervailing humanitarian impact since it was enacted. Iraq is allowed to sell oil to purchase food, medicine, and other necessities. This arrangement offsets, in theory at least, much of the suffering of innocent Iraqis. Moreover, the oil-for-food arrangement suggests that most of the blame for the suffering under sanctions lies with the Iraqi regime. Under the oil-for-food arrangement, 15 percent of the oil revenue goes to fund humanitarian aid in the northern Kurdish region, which is administered by the UN, while the remainder of the country receives food and medicine distributed by the Baath.¹² Saddam long opposed Resolution 986, even though it decreased popular suffering. Moreover, areas in Iraq under UN control have seen an improvement in health statistics. Finally, the Iraqi regime has smuggled humanitarian goods out of Iraq, preferring black market profits to the well-being of the Iraqi people. The regime has often not purchased humanitarian items, despite the urging of UN officials.¹³

Even if the humanitarian impact of sanctions is overstated (or should be blamed on the Baath regime), the political damage stemming from U.S. support for sanctions has hurt the U.S. position in the Arab and Muslim world. Saddam has successfully attributed the collapse in the Iraqi standard of living to sanctions rather than to his regime’s policies. By manipulating the access of the media and humanitarian organizations, the Iraqi regime has created a widespread perception throughout the world that thousands of Iraqi children are dying each month as a result of sanctions, ignoring the countervailing impact of the oil-for-food arrangement and the Baath regime’s own responsibility. This perception has generated considerable opposition to sanctions, which are seen in the Arab world, including the people of many gulf allies, as cruel and senseless, a tool that starves innocent Iraqi children while doing little to Saddam. It has also contributed to regional, and to a lesser extent U.S. public, disaffection with U.S. policy.

Given this price, how effective are sanctions in their ostensible purpose—stopping Iraq’s WMD programs? Clearly, they have not led Saddam to abandon his WMD programs. Citing UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) reports that Iraq still retains a good-sized WMD program, Gause argues that while sanctions do impede Iraq’s WMD programs, they only do so to a limited ex-

¹¹ Gause, “Getting It Backward on Iraq,” 56.

¹² Anthony Cordesman and Ahmed Hashim, *Iraq: Sanctions and Beyond* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 148.

¹³ “Photos Show Iraq is Smuggling Oil in Violation of UN Sanctions,” USIA Information File, 10 December 1999, available at <http://www.usia.gov/cgi-bin/washfile/display.pl?p=/products/washfile/geog/nea&f=99121001.nne&t=/products/washfile/newsitem.shtml> [Accessed on 13 December 1999].

tent.¹⁴ Yet this criticism uses a false baseline that underestimates the benefits of sanctions. The true baseline should be Iraq's probable WMD status if sanctions had never been imposed. Most experts estimate that if sanctions were lifted Iraq would long ago have produced several nuclear weapons and an even more extensive biological weapons program.¹⁵

Are sanctions effective in weakening the regime? Saddam's regime controls Iraqi food stockpiles and uses them to bolster the regime's control.¹⁶ Saddam has successfully exploited sanctions, using the money he controls through the black market to shore up support among elites, particularly in the military and the secret police. Like other despotic regimes before him, Saddam has shifted the burden of sanctions from his regime to the Iraqi people in general.¹⁷

Sanctions have, however, hurt the regime's standing somewhat at home, including with Saddam's core of supporters. The per capita income of Iraqis has plummeted, falling to less than one-fifth of the level Iraq achieved in the 1980s.¹⁸ The Iraqi leader has not increased salaries sufficiently in response to inflation and otherwise let a range of possible supporters suffer. The impoverishment of Iraq has decreased support for the regime in general. Saddam has not been able to shift the entire burden of sanctions on his foes or on the powerless. His power base sees Iraqi prosperity as one measure of Saddam's rule. Thus, Saddam has had to take short-term measures, including accepting the oil-for-food deal, which he otherwise would have refused, in order to keep the economy afloat.¹⁹ Sanctions have had a strong impact on the stability of Saddam's regime, but not enough to topple him.

Sanctions and import restrictions have had a considerable impact on Iraq's conventional readiness, thus augmenting containment. As with other uses of sanctions, they are often effective as a form of "brute force": rendering a target less capable of effective military action or other forms of resistance.²⁰ Sanctions proved quite devastating in Iraq, in part because of Iraq's dependence on oil, which must be sold on external markets to have value and can be easily monitored, and because it came on the heels of the Gulf War, which had devastated

¹⁴ Gause, "Getting it Backward," 57.

¹⁵ Michael Eisenstadt, *Like a Phoenix from the Ashes? The Future of Iraqi Military Power* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1993), 39.

¹⁶ Cordesman and Hashim, *Iraq*, 143.

¹⁷ Gause, "Getting it Backward," 57. This problem of shifting the impact of sanctions from elites to the people in general is common. See Robert A Pape, "Why Economic Sanctions Do Not Work," *International Security* 22 (Fall 1997): 93.

¹⁸ Cordesman and Hashim, *Iraq*, 150.

¹⁹ Baram, *Building Toward Crises*, 61–78.

²⁰ Kimberly Ann Elliott, "The Sanctions Glass: Half Full or Completely Empty?" *International Security* 23 (Summer 1998): 53. The "brute force" vs. coercion distinction was first made by Thomas Schelling, who noted the importance of distinguishing between efforts relying on the threat of force to change behavior (coercion) and those that simply force an adversary to do what the coercer seeks (brute force). See *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 3.

some of Iraq's infrastructure. Iraq's economic strength, the foundation of its military power, suffered dramatically because of sanctions.²¹

This impact is best observed by looking at changes in Iraq's military capacity since the end of Desert Storm. During the 1980s, including after the Iran-Iraq war, Baghdad made massive purchases of a range of weapons systems and was among the world's top arms importers. After the imposition of sanctions, this flood slowed to a trickle. As Iraq depended on imports for logistical and supply assistance, as well as for complete systems, its military readiness and effectiveness has plummeted.²² Efforts to meet shortfalls through smuggling and by increasing domestic production have largely failed.²³ Iraqi forces have not been able to conduct routine maintenance, let alone modernization. Iraq's military capacity is less than 20 percent of what it was in 1990.²⁴ Information on the progress of Iraq's WMD programs is limited, but an intuitive argument can be made that a regime under tight international scrutiny, with its dual-use exports being controlled, has made at best limited progress on these programs, particularly when compared to their rapid development in the 1980s.

Sanctions, however, also have had a negative effective on allied stability, particularly with regard to relations with Washington. In part because of the perceived devastating effects of sanctions but also because of a vestige of pan-Arab sentiment and hostility toward the West, many Arab governments are increasingly critical of the U.S.-led containment effort. Among U.S. allies, Egypt has led the effort to end containment. Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) also have questioned sanctions, and when fearing a loss of popular support, they objected to certain U.S. military strikes against Iraq.

This overall finding on the impact of sanctions on Iraq offsets somewhat the generally negative impact of sanctions in general noted by most academic studies.²⁵ As Elizabeth Rogers has argued, setting up the removal of a regime's leadership as the measurement of success is too demanding a test.²⁶ Lesser, but still vital objectives have in part been met by sanctions. Moreover, sanctions' impact is best understood by examining their contribution to U.S. objectives in combination with other instruments. Sanctions' ostensible purpose is tied to putting pressure on Iraq because of its WMD programs and is linked to the removal of the Iraqi regime—two goals that have met with limited or no suc-

²¹ Immediately after sanctions were imposed, Iraqi GNP fell by more than 50 percent and Iraq's currency plummeted. Elizabeth S. Rogers, "Using Economic Sanctions to Control Regional Conflicts," *Security Studies* (Summer 1996): 60.

²² Cordesman and Hashim, *Iraq*, 225.

²³ *Ibid.*, 227–231.

²⁴ Anthony Cordesman, "Hearings on the Current Situation in Iraq" Testimony before the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, September 1996.

²⁵ See T. Clifton Morgan and Valerie L. Schwebach, "Fools Suffer Gladly: The Use of Economic Sanctions in International Crises," *International Studies Quarterly* 41 (Spring 1997): 27–50.

²⁶ Rogers, "Using Economic Sanctions," 61.

cess, respectively. Pressure from sanctions, however, led Saddam to accept weapons inspections in the first place. If weapons inspectors enjoyed any successes (and clearly they did), then sanctions deserve at least some of the credit.²⁷ Sanctions also serve a brute-force purpose. They augmented containment, hindering Iraq's ability to acquire weapons and technology that can help it build up both its conventional and unconventional forces.

WMD Inspections

On 4 April 1991, the United Nations adopted Resolution 687, which required the destruction of Iraq's WMD programs as a condition for ending sanctions. Iraq was to declare its illegal weapons immediately and to destroy them within a year. The UNSCOM on Iraq was created to catalog Iraq's WMD arsenal and supervise its destruction. In the years that followed, inspections have helped reduce Iraq's WMD arsenal by uncovering and destroying a range of weapons systems, stockpiles, and production equipment. Inspections, however, did little to solve the long-term problem of Iraqi WMD and at times hindered the effective use of force against Iraq.²⁸

UNSCOM's task proved to be enormously difficult. Saddam refused to take UNSCOM seriously and neither declared his WMD arsenal nor cooperated in its destruction. He reportedly told his advisers, "The Special Commission is a temporary measure. We will fool them and we will bribe them and the matter will be over in a few months."²⁹ From the start, Saddam blocked the inspectors' access, lied to them about the extent or even existence of various WMD programs, and otherwise made a mockery of the process.

As the inspections dragged on, Saddam successfully forced concessions to the inspections regime that greatly hindered its effectiveness. In 1997, Iraq declared several sites to be "presidential" sites and thus off limits to inspectors, even though these sites included over 1,000 buildings and storage sites. In a fuzzily-worded Memorandum of Understanding between UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz signed on 23 February 1998, the United Nations agreed to respect Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity and legitimate concerns related to dignity, making particular reference to presidential sites. By implication, Annan agreed that the inspectors would limit their activities.³⁰

In addition to gaining the complicity of officials at the United Nations, Iraq has also gained the tacit and at times overt support of several major powers. France, Russia, and China all became highly critical of both inspections and

²⁷ *Ibid.*, " 60.

²⁸ For a review, see Daniel Byman, "A Farewell to Arms Control," *Foreign Affairs* 79 (January/February 2000).

²⁹ Cockburn and Cockburn, *Out of the Ashes: The Resurrection of Saddam Hussein*, 96.

³⁰ See "Interview: Richard Butler," *Talk* (September 1999), electronic version, accessed October 1999.

sanctions. After UNSCOM issued reports citing Iraqi noncompliance, these powers called for the end of sanctions and criticized UNSCOM rather than demand that Iraq respect the Security Council's previous resolutions. In 1997 and much of 1998, the United States did not conduct military strikes to back up UNSCOM, for fear of losing the international consensus behind its actions.³¹

Rather implausibly, Iraq insists that its WMD programs are terminated and demands an end to sanctions as a result. In reality, Iraq's WMD programs may have continued even as inspections went on, and Iraq's efforts probably increased once inspectors' wings were clipped, though information is extremely scarce. A White House report to Congress notes that, "Saddam Hussein has shown no hesitation in developing WMD in the past, and it is prudent to assume that he is still intent on such development."³² Press reporting indicates that Iraq may also be investigating new types of chemical agents and pursuing components for nuclear weapons.³³

Despite these formidable challenges, UNSCOM made some progress on identifying and then destroying elements of Iraq's WMD and missile arsenal. UNSCOM (along with the International Atomic Energy Association [IAEA]) has overseen the destruction of dozens of long-range missiles and missile warheads; tens of thousands of chemical munitions and 690 tonnes of chemical weapons agent; a biological weapons production facility; and nuclear weapons production facilities.³⁴

Equally important, when the inspectors had relatively free access throughout Iraq, their presence and vigilance made it more difficult for Iraq to continue work on its WMD programs. Although such judgments are difficult counterfactuals, it is plausible that if left to its own devices Iraq could have developed several operable nuclear weapons as well as a more extensive biological and missile program.³⁵ Thus, as with sanctions, the baseline for success should be comparing what Iraq's WMD programs would have been without inspections rather than simply judging it by the amount of material destroyed or the continued existence of Iraq's programs.

Even when the inspections regime was going full bore, however, its effectiveness was limited. Finding hidden weapons in a vast area is exceptionally difficult, particularly for biological weapons, which require a relatively limited infrastructure and can be easily concealed as legitimate medical or research facilities. The defection of Wafiq al-Samarrai, the former chief of Iraqi military intelligence, led to revelations that Iraq had manufactured and loaded the le-

³¹ Ibid.

³² Landay, "Is Iraq Building Weapons Again?"

³³ Richard Z. Chesnoff, "Bad Chemistry," *U.S. News and World Report*, 25 October 1999 (electronic version); Gary Milhollin, "Saddam's Nuclear Shopping Spree," *The New Yorker*, 13 December 1999, 44.

³⁴ From UNSCOM web-site, <http://www.un.org/Depts/unscom/achievement.htm> [Accessed 2 March 1999].

³⁵ Eisenstadt, *Like a Phoenix*, 39.

thal chemical agent VX—a surprise to UNSCOM.³⁶ Similarly, despite four years of intrusive inspections, the remarkable extent of Iraq's biological weapons program only became clear after the defection in 1995 of Hussein Kamel al-Majid, who headed Iraq's WMD programs. Only after this defection did Iraq admit that it had a large biological weapons program and, even more frightening, that it had weaponized some agents.

Military Presence

The U.S. military presence—as opposed to the actual use of military force—has helped in the containment of Iraq but carries a price in allied stability. After the end of the Gulf War, Washington signed a series of access agreements, sold large quantities of arms to its gulf allies, and arranged for the presence of substantial U.S. forces in the region. Since the end of the Gulf War, the total number of U.S. military personnel present both on the ground and at sea at any one time has fluctuated between 5,000 and 38,000, depending on the regional security environment and on rotation schedules. Troops in the region regularly include about 2,500 soldiers, 8,000 sailors and Marines, and another 1,000 staff from joint headquarters and joint units. In addition, about 200 combatant and direct support aircraft are deployed to the region to conduct Operations Northern Watch and Southern Watch—the no-fly zones over northern and southern Iraq—along with their crews and support staff. Saudi Arabia and Turkey are key states for air bases, but Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates also play an important role.³⁷

The most significant augmentation of U.S. forces in response to Iraqi defiance was in October 1994, when intelligence analysts discovered that Iraq was deploying two Republican Guard armored divisions near the Iraq-Kuwait border. Iraq made bellicose statements regarding Kuwait and also threatened to expel UNSCOM inspectors. The United States responded by rapidly deploying troops to the theater (Operation Vigilant Warrior) and threatening large-scale strikes if Iraq did not withdraw. Both the United States and Britain subsequently warned Iraq that they would use force to stop any Iraqi buildup south of the 32nd parallel. In response, Iraq drew back its forces, recognized Kuwait's independent status, and accepted the revised Iraq-Kuwait border. The United Nations Security Council also passed resolution 949, which limited the Iraqi troop presence near the Kuwaiti border—the so-called no-drive zone.

The United States also augmented its regional presence in 1997–1998 in order to make the threat of retaliation plausible after continued Iraqi defiance over weapons inspections. As 1997 drew to a close, Baghdad refused to allow the inspectors access and otherwise hindered the inspection process. In November 1997, the United States deployed the *U.S.S. George Washington*, which

³⁶ Cockburn and Cockburn, *Out of the Ashes*, 111.

³⁷ http://www.fas.org/man/dod-101/ops.iraq_orbat.htm [Accessed 21 February 1999].

joined the *Nimitz*, sent B-52s to Diego Garcia, and deployed fighters and bombers to Kuwait and Bahrain. Washington also deployed additional troops as negotiations continued, leading to a total presence of 30,000 troops by December 1997.³⁸

Tension continued to escalate in the weeks that followed. Iraq again obstructed inspections, leading the United States to deploy the *U.S.S. Independence* in January 1998 to join the other two carriers. In February, the United States deployed a Marine expeditionary force and additional aircraft. The Pentagon announced that the United States was ready to conduct military strikes on Iraq if defiance continued. In response to negotiations by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, which led to restrictions on the inspectors as well as to an Iraqi agreement to readmit them, Baghdad allowed the inspectors to return. Despite its favorable terms, Baghdad's agreement was only temporary, and Saddam soon refused all cooperation.³⁹

The above review suggests that the military presence, like other instruments, had mixed benefits. The military presence contributed to the goal of keeping Iraq contained by diminishing any hope of territorial aggrandizement. High-level defector reporting indicated that Saddam was considering another cross-border attack in 1994 if there was no U.S. response to his buildup.⁴⁰ Not only was an Iraqi invasion deterred, but Resolution 949 laid the groundwork for red lines that have since made a surprise attack far less likely. Iraq's subsequent recognition of the Iraq-Kuwait border and of Kuwait's independence both were important U.S. demands, suggesting that Saddam recognized that facts on the ground would not change as long as U.S. forces were in the region.

The impact of the U.S. presence on Iraq's WMD programs, however, was far more limited. Although Saddam did comply briefly with inspections in response to the late 1997 and early 1998 U.S. buildup, this compliance was both half-hearted and short-lived. Saddam also wrung important concessions out of Annan, reducing UNSCOM's ability to conduct intrusive inspections. Thus, while the buildup and the threat of force it conveyed led to token concessions on Iraq's part, it did not contribute substantially to long-term success.

The military presence is costly. These continuing operations and the regular surges required to deploy to the region in response to Iraqi provocations have challenged military rotation and leave schedules. Sustaining the no-fly zones over Iraq has proved draining. The inhospitable welcome often given to West-

³⁸ White, *Crises After the Storm*, 50–51.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 51–52.

⁴⁰ "Hussein Kamil on Army Strength, Saddam Fedayeen." *Al-Watan al-Arabi*, 24 November 1995, in Foreign Broadcast Information Service-Near East and South Asia, (FBIS-NES-95-227), 27 November, 1995, 33. Saddam may, however, have simply decided to call attention to the region, trying to bully Kuwait to have sanctions removed. The Iraqi dictator may also have been trying to prove to core supporters at home that he could defy the United States. The timing of the provocations suggests the importance of domestic motives: the Iraqi dinar was plummeting, forcing Saddam to increase food prices and otherwise making his regime unpopular. See Baram, *Building Toward Crises*, 79.

ern forces further strains the military. Morale, retention, and overall readiness have fallen as a result.

The U.S. military presence carries a political price as well. In Saudi Arabia in particular, both radical and mainstream dissident groups have focused much of their protest on the large U.S. military presence in the Kingdom. Saudis are particularly upset about the cost of maintaining the U.S. presence and the related arms purchases, arguing that the money could be better spent on services and infrastructure. Much of the business community, many of whom do not strongly oppose the U.S. presence on ideological grounds, criticize U.S. policy in the region because they believe the cost of the U.S. presence has led to a decline in government largesse and is generally bad for business.⁴¹

Military Strikes

The United States has repeatedly used limited force to achieve its goals. Since the end of the Gulf War, the United States conducted air and cruise missile strikes to compel Iraqi compliance with a range of goals regarding containment and WMD and also tried to use the strikes to foster discontent with the Baath regime. The four major instances are described below.

January 1993 confrontation. In December 1992, Iraq initiated a crisis with coalition forces, making limited incursions in the southern no-fly zone and threatening to shoot down U.S. monitoring aircraft by moving additional surface-to-air missiles to the southern no-fly zone. At roughly the same time, Iraq blocked the inspection of suspected WMD sites. Two-hundred Iraqi troops also made several crossings over the newly-demarcated Iraq-Kuwait border, seizing items that they claimed belonged to Iraq.⁴²

To coerce Baghdad to stop these provocations, U.S., British, and French forces conducted air strikes against several military sites. On 13 January, allied warplanes bombed, among other things, command and control facilities and air-defense sites in the southern no-fly zone. Several days later, the United States struck the Zaa'faraniyah nuclear complex outside of Baghdad with forty-five cruise missiles. The following day, allied aircraft again attacked Iraqi military facilities in the no-fly zones.⁴³

In the end, Iraq backed down and did not violate no-fly zones or actively challenge UNSCOM inspections for several years. Diplomatic support, however, was uneven. Saudi Arabia allowed strike aircraft to fly from its territory—the last time it authorized such strike missions. Turkey, however, did not sup-

⁴¹ Abdullah al-Shayehji, "Gulf Views of U.S. Policy in the Region," *Middle East Policy* 5 (September 1997); Andrew Rathmell, "Terror comes to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," *Jane's Intelligence Review* 3 (1 January 1996): 6.

⁴² White, *Crises after the Storm*, 20–23.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 22–25.

port the attacks, as concurrent attacks on Muslims in the Balkans had made Ankara reluctant to support perceived anti-Muslim operations elsewhere.⁴⁴

Operation Desert Strike (September 1996). In 1996, after months of growing strife, open warfare erupted between the two leading Kurdish factions—the Kurdish Democratic party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)—in northern Iraq, a zone under an ambiguous level of protection by the United States. The PUK, with help from Iran, appeared to gain the upper hand. To avoid defeat, the KDP called on Baghdad to help repel the PUK. On 29 August, Saddam moved into northern Iraq, the area his government had earlier assumed was under U.S. protection, with 30,000-40,000 troops and thousands more police and intelligence personnel, along with several hundred tanks and artillery pieces. Iraqi troops took much of the north, including the Kurdish-held city of Irbil. In addition, Iraqi security forces rounded up hundreds of opposition members and supporters, executing and imprisoning them. Thousands more were evacuated to the United States.⁴⁵

In response to Saddam's attack, the United States launched forty-four cruise missiles at fixed, above-ground targets in southern Iraq, primarily SAM sites, radar installations, and command and control facilities (Operation Desert Strike). In addition to the cruise missile attacks, the United States extended the no-fly zone in the south, which before had ended at the 32nd parallel, to the 33rd parallel. The zone's extension was intended to further limit Iraq's ability to move its forces and to improve the U.S.-led coalition's ability to monitor the regime.⁴⁶ By necessity, the U.S. response was limited, as both Saudi Arabia and Turkey refused to allow the United States to attack Iraq with planes based in their territories.⁴⁷ Both countries had little sympathy for the Kurds and did not see Saddam's incursion as meriting a large military response. Thus, the cruise missiles were launched from naval assets or from B-52s staging out of Guam.⁴⁸

Saddam responded quickly to the limited U.S. attack. Iraq had concentrated forces near Chamchamal, a Kurdish-held city en route to the PUK's base at Sulaymaniyah. After the strikes, Saddam dispersed the Republican Guard and pulled his forces back to the cease-fire line.

Operation Desert Fox (December 1998). In December 1998, Ekeus's replacement as head of UNSCOM, Richard Butler, reported to the Security Council that Iraq was not complying with its obligations regarding WMD disarmament. This report came after over a year of Iraqi obstruction, backsliding, and outright defiance. In response, the United States and Britain conducted a

⁴⁴ Ibid., 22–27.

⁴⁵ Bruce Reidel, "U.S. Policy Toward Iraq: Balance, Dismember, or Contain?" Testimony before the National Security Subcommittee, U.S. House of Representatives, 26 September 1996.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Cockburn and Cockburn, *Out of the Ashes*, 243.

⁴⁸ http://www.fas.org/man/dod-101/ops/desert_strike.htm [Accessed on 18 December 1999].

large-scale, four-day air and cruise missile campaign against Iraqi military targets. The United States and Britain launched roughly 600 aircraft sorties and 400 cruise missile strikes against approximately 100 targets, including Iraqi intelligence and security forces facilities, presidential palaces, air defense systems, WMD sites, and economic targets.

Though far more massive than any previous strike against Iraq since Desert Storm, Desert Fox remained a limited operation. Even though one ultimate aim was to destroy WMD capability, the allied strikes avoided some Iraqi chemical plants, fearing that a strike could unleash poisonous plumes and kill Iraqi civilians. The campaign was ended after only four days to avoid adverse political and diplomatic consequences expected to arise if strikes continued during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Nevertheless, France, Russia, China, and Egypt all protested the Desert Fox bombings, and demonstrations were held in much of the Arab world.⁴⁹

Saddam remained defiant of UNSCOM, but his reaction to the strikes indicates that he feared that military strikes might decrease support among his power base. In response to the bombing and overall crisis, Saddam divided Iraq administratively in a manner that would further increase the control of regime loyalists. He also reinforced areas such as Basra that might be prone to unrest and executed several officers who might have been considering a coup. In the following months, he also cracked down on any potential dissent among the Shiites, executing religious leaders.⁵⁰

Tit-for-tat strikes in 1999 and 2000. Following Operation Desert Fox, Saddam repeatedly made limited challenges to the no-fly zone and continued to refuse access to weapons inspectors. In 1999, Iraqi forces made over 400 separate attacks on coalition aircraft, and over 140 violations of the no-fly zones; the figures for 2000 are similar.⁵¹ In response, coalition forces have engaged in limited strikes, primarily against Iraqi air defense sites but also against communications nodes and other targets. As with the response to Operation Desert Fox, Saddam has stepped up efforts to prevent internal unrest.

Taken together, the various military strikes since the end of the Gulf War have helped the United States make marginal progress in keeping Iraq contained. The no-drive zone, enforced by the threat of strikes on any forces that deploy, has made it far harder for Saddam to concentrate his troops, which is necessary for large and sustained attacks across Iraq's borders. The strikes against Iraqi forces have hindered, if only in a limited manner, Iraq's efforts to rebuild its military power, forcing Saddam to rebuild scarce assets. Saddam has also displayed a remarkable sensitivity to military strikes, halting aggression in 1996 despite the pinprick nature of the attacks.

⁴⁹ Cockburn and Cockburn, *Out of the Ashes*, 284.

⁵⁰ See Matlak, *Inside Saddam's Grip*.

⁵¹ http://www.centcom.mil/releases/news_rel [Accessed on 11 December 1999].

Determining the true impact of military strikes is difficult, however, as their greatest impact may have been unseen, enhancing the credibility of U.S. deterrence. Given Saddam's sensitivity to limited strikes, it is reasonable to assume that he fears more massive attacks, which would be likely in response to more serious Iraqi aggression. The repeated strikes on Iraq, however, demonstrate both the limits of U.S. resolve and its depths. On the one hand, the United States has demonstrated that it will attack Iraqi regime assets for relatively minor provocations (interfering with a no-fly zone), suggesting that more considerable Iraqi aggression would result in more severe attacks. On the other hand, the United States appears unwilling to go beyond brief, if rather intense, bombing campaigns such as Desert Fox when seeking to punish or compel Baghdad. This hesitation may undermine many of the credibility benefits gained from the overall willingness to use force.

Destruction of Iraq's WMD programs through air strikes, however, has proved near impossible. Much of Iraq's WMD programs, particularly its biological programs, are difficult to detect even with on-the-ground monitors. Given that UNSCOM inspected and at times oversaw the destruction of the most obvious sites, the additional damage wrought by air strikes was probably limited. Thus, air strikes—including massive efforts such as Desert Fox—may have degraded known sites somewhat, but almost certainly did not represent a major setback for Saddam. Indeed, the WMD destruction effort at times hindered containment. The military posturing and strikes of 1997-1998 increased disgruntlement with containment in general, both in the region and among the major powers. These high profile confrontations and strikes eroded the consensus around inspections and sanctions, thus threatening the core of the anti-WMD efforts.

Military strikes, however, appear to have weakened Saddam at home—though they hardly led to the collapse of his regime. Saddam is intensely sensitive both to internal security and to any perceived loss of face as a leader.⁵² The repeated military strikes, which he could do little to counter, undermined his stature among Iraqis. Moreover, when strikes threatened key regime forces, such as the Republican Guard, they directly threatened Saddam's key supporters.

As the years progressed, allies grew less supportive of military strikes on Iraq. Saudi Arabia began curtailing the types of missions that could be flown from its territory, and Turkey at times refused the United States permission to conduct strikes on Iraq. Despite Saddam's defiance over UNSCOM in 1997 and 1998, the United States refrained from attacks until December 1998, in large part because of a lack of allied support. Only Saddam's refusal to offer even a hint of compromise or compliance led to allied support for Desert Fox. The tit-for-tat bombings after Desert Fox, however, represent a reversal of this trend.

⁵² See Matlak, *Inside Saddam's Grip*; and Baram, *Building Toward Crises*.

Because of their regular and low-level nature, they are off the front pages, thus reducing the pressure on regional allies.

Repeated limits to access suggest a tension, but a manageable one, between the U.S. goals of preserving allied stability and containing Iraq. For lesser U.S. objectives, such as efforts to protect the Kurds or protect the no-fly zones, allies have limited U.S. access and missions to preserve domestic stability. Yet their stability has not been threatened to the point that they refused to cooperate with Washington.

Backing the Iraqi Opposition

A final instrument, one increasingly prominent in recent years, is encouraging the Iraqi opposition to overthrow Saddam. Since the end of the Gulf War, the United States made limited efforts to unite Iraqis opposed to Saddam, helping form the Iraqi National Congress (INC) as an umbrella group and otherwise encouraging anti-Saddam forces. Washington, however, has refrained from providing substantial aid to the Iraqi opposition or direct military support for opposition military activities.

The opposition has met with at best limited success since the end of the Gulf War. Despite widespread hatred of the regime, the INC was not able to forge the opposition into a coherent, anti-Saddam front. The INC and its allies did not provoke significant defections from the regime.⁵³ Saddam's incursion into northern Iraq in 1996 wiped out the INC's local cadres or forced them into exile. Today, the opposition in the country appears divided by region, religion, and ethnicity and does not act in concert with foes of the regime abroad.

The opposition received far more attention in the United States once it no longer had a presence in Iraq. In 1998, Congress passed the Iraq Liberation Act, which authorized the transfer of \$97 million in military equipment to opposition groups as well as other forms of modest aid. In response, the Clinton administration embraced the Iraqi opposition, at least rhetorically. In 1999, Congress supplemented this aid with several million dollars of direct assistance.

The opposition has done little to remove the Baath regime, and its existence may have actually strengthened it. Although the regime has at most limited support even among Iraq's Sunni community, this community fears greater Shiah or Kurdish influence in the country. This fear is particularly strong among Saddam's core supporters, who would pose the greatest threat to his rule if they turned against the regime. Not surprisingly, Saddam has played up fears of Iraq's dismemberment and the shadow of Shiah domination in order to maintain their loyalty.

Efforts on behalf of the opposition also may hurt ties to allies. Saudi Arabia is concerned that any opposition success might increase Shiah influence in Iraq and further destabilize the region. Turkey, for its part, is suspicious of any plan

⁵³ Cockburn and Cockburn, *Out of the Ashes*, 187–190.

that might augment the military capabilities and increase the political aspirations of the region's Kurds. This skepticism is particularly acute outside the region. European allies oppose a strong commitment to the opposition, and Russia and China are highly sensitive to any U.S. efforts to foster internal unrest. Both states fear the precedent of recognizing insurgents, as they have their own restive minorities who oppose the central government.⁵⁴

The opposition, however, does serve a useful role in the service of containment as long as its activities remain limited. A viable opposition forces the Iraqi regime to use its assets for internal security rather than external aggression. Saddam has also demonstrated a surprising caution when confronting instability, suggesting he is less likely to take risks if an opposition is strong. Washington can thus strike a balance, strengthening opposition forces to some degree without greatly angering U.S. allies. So far, U.S. efforts to back the opposition have not led the gulf states and Turkey to do more than criticize; basing and access remain unaffected.

AN OVERALL ASSESSMENT: A QUALIFIED SUCCESS

On its own terms, U.S. policy in Iraq is generally successful, though hardly perfect. Most obviously, Iraq has been contained. A robust U.S. regional presence, a rapid surge capacity, and a willingness to use limited force probably have convinced Saddam that regional aggression will not succeed. Moreover, as a result of sanctions and the devastation of the Gulf War, Saddam's Iraq is far weaker than it was in 1990, both in relative and in absolute terms. Baghdad's few friends during Desert Storm, such as Jordan and the Palestinians, have largely abandoned it. Iraq's regional influence, while increased from 1991, remains limited. In Richard Haass's words, Iraq today is "better understood as constituting a dangerous nuisance than an actual strategic threat."⁵⁵

The United States has considerable capabilities to prevent cross-border aggression, and, if anything, the balance has tilted in favor of the United States and its allies since the end of Desert Storm. The United States now has large air forces in the gulf and is prepared to project additional force rapidly to the region. Access agreements have been completed with several gulf states, and prepositioned equipment would help ground troops gain their full strength far more quickly than they did in 1990. Advances in munitions and systems integration enable U.S. air assets to more effectively halt heavy Iraqi forces, which would have to advance through relatively open terrain.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Byman, "Proceed with Caution," 26-27. Even Britain has voiced its skepticism over the U.S. embrace of the opposition. See "Fatchett Reply to INC," 16 March letter circulated publicly by "Iraq News," 19 March 1999 (Electronic version).

⁵⁵ Richard N. Haass, "U.S. Policy Toward Iraq: Balance, Dismember, or Contain?" Testimony before the National Security Subcommittee, U.S. House of Representatives, 26 September 1996.

⁵⁶ See David A. Ochmanek et al., *To Find and Not To Yield: How Advances in Information and Firepower Can Transform Theater Warfare* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1999).

Stopping Iraq's WMD programs has proved far more difficult. Iraq probably has not attained a nuclear weapon; and progress on its biological and chemical programs has probably halted (though data remain scarce)—a clear success when we recognize that without UNSCOM inspections, sanctions, and other measures Iraq would probably have a nuclear weapon and a range of biological weapons. Nevertheless, the broader U.S. goals of discovering the extent of Iraq's programs, destroying them, and preventing Iraq from reconstituting them in the future have not been met. Inspectors never discovered the true scope of Iraq's programs, much less destroyed them. Effective inspections ended in late 1997, and even the pretense of effective arms control has now been abandoned. Saddam is probably trying to continue some programs and certainly will do so in the future if sanctions end.

The long-term prognosis is even bleaker. U.S. actions have not substantially induced a change in Saddam's long-term policies toward acquiring such an arsenal. Given Iraq's long-time rivalry with Iran and current conventional weakness, it is probable that any successor to Saddam would also seek WMD. Although the current level of WMD infrastructure in Iraq may be limited, the country's scientific and engineering base remains robust and has the capability to rapidly restore WMD programs to past levels and beyond should international efforts to prevent this continue to decline.

Maximal U.S. goals were not met. Efforts to change the regime—by inducing Iraqi elites to support a coup or encouraging the Iraqi populace to overthrow Saddam—probably are farther from success than at any time this decade. Saddam Hussein has foiled several coup attempts since the Gulf War, as well as at least two tribal revolts. Iraqi intelligence rolled up the U.S. network in Iraq in 1996.⁵⁷ The Iraqi opposition is fragmented. Several Kurdish and Shia groups maintain some, but very limited, capacity to operate against Saddam; but the regime vigilantly stamps out any sign of unrest.

When trying to overthrow Saddam, whether through a coup or an insurgency, the United States is pitting itself against the Iraqi dictator's strength. In effect, Saddam has "coup-proofed" his regime.⁵⁸ Not surprisingly for a man who has made many enemies, Saddam keeps a close watch on any access to his person. Members of his bodyguard are drawn almost exclusively from Saddam's home area. Other key regime protection assets, such as the Special Security Organization and the Special Republican Guard, also recruit largely from Saddam's al-Bu Nasir tribe and other nearby tribes that have good relations with the al-Bu Nasir. A key task of security forces is defending against a military coup.⁵⁹

The United States has largely met its negative objective: preventing regional instability. Instability from Iraq has not spread to Turkey or other U.S.

⁵⁷ Baram, *Building Toward Crises*, 27, 48–49; Cockburn and Cockburn, *Out of the Ashes*, 229.

⁵⁸ For more on this, see James T. Quinlivan, "Coup-Proofing: Its Practice and Consequences in the Middle East," *International Security* 24 (Fall 1999): 131–165; see also Matlak, *Inside Saddam's Grip*.

⁵⁹ Baram, *Building Toward Crises*, 25.

allies. Nor have the U.S. presence and strikes caused massive internal instability or led regional governments to turn against Washington. Although Islamists and other anti-U.S. oppositionists regularly criticize the United States for its military presence in the gulf region, the anti-Iraq campaign is only a limited source of their anger, and various strikes on Iraq have only marginally increased their resentment.⁶⁰

POTENTIAL FUTURE PROBLEMS

The successes that the United States and its allies have attained should not obscure potential weaknesses in regional policy. Four weaknesses are particularly acute: a reliance on Saddam Hussein's missteps; an overemphasis on keeping the forms of containment intact even when their utility has declined; a neglect of U.S. allies for the sake of domestic politics; and a lack of a long-term solution to the Iraq problem. These weaknesses could derail containment or otherwise gravely harm U.S. policy in the region.

Dependence on Saddam. The maintenance of sanctions and of allied support for military strikes depends in part on Saddam's mistakes. His utter refusal to make even token concessions regarding inspections, for example, has made it difficult for Russian and French apologists to press his cause. Similarly, his blistering rhetorical attacks alienated potential sympathizers among his neighbors, leading them to support U.S. military basing and strikes. A pretense of cooperation and repentance, while perhaps harming Saddam at home, would make it more difficult for the United States to maintain sanctions or attack Iraq. Thus, if Saddam becomes more temperate, sustaining containment will become more difficult.

Overcommitment to the forms of containment. The United States has also committed itself to several policies that no longer serve their original purposes yet are draining, both politically and operationally. For example, inspections are overvalued. Given the concessions made by Ekeus and particularly Annan regarding where the inspectors could go and how much notice was required, the inspectors cannot be expected to make major new discoveries or otherwise hinder Iraq's programs. The renewal of inspections under current conditions might actually hasten the end of sanctions and thus assist Iraq's WMD programs.

The United States nevertheless clings to the pretense of inspections, because retreat might be seen at home as well as in Iraq as backing down to Saddam. Washington, however, has weathered far more painful defeats, such as Saddam's invasion of the north in 1996, without suffering a fatal blow to its

⁶⁰ Daniel Byman and Jerrold Green, *Political Violence in the States of the Northern Persian Gulf* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1999).

regional position. The United States has put its credibility on the line unnecessarily, making the continuation of inspections an end in and of itself. Changing course, however, requires the political courage to withstand criticism at home about being soft on Iraq, regardless of its validity.

Neglecting regional allies. The United States runs the risk of letting domestic pressures hinder vital relations with regional allies. Maintaining the no-fly zones requires constant basing and support from regional allies. Although policy makers have gone to great lengths to minimize resentment, particularly from Saudi Arabia, regional allies may also turn against U.S. policy if American backing of the Iraqi opposition is not handled carefully.

Focusing on the short-term. The long-term resolution of the Iraq problem will not come even if the United States meets its most ambitious objective with Saddam's death. Rather, stability (and perhaps better governance) will only come to the region when Iraq is integrated into a regional structure that provides security. Baghdad's desire for WMD, mistreatment of national minorities, and irredentist ambitions are likely to live beyond Saddam Hussein. Although a long-term solution remains far off today, the United States needs a blueprint for the region that goes beyond the removal of a particular leader. Only then, can its current short-term strategy serve long-term objectives.

Although U.S. policy toward Iraq is far from perfect, most critical assessments are a clear case of moving the goalposts. Based on initial U.S. goals, the Bush and Clinton administrations have scored an impressive success: Iraq has not invaded its neighbors and remains militarily weak. Although containment is a frustrating policy, the persistent problems Saddam's Iraq poses should not drive us to despair. The post-Gulf War containment of Iraq demonstrates that the threat posed by aggressive regional powers can be managed, if the United States and its allies can continue demanding and at times unpopular policies to limit adversaries' powers and restrict their freedom of action.*

* The author would like to thank Nora Bensahel, Jeremy Shapiro, and Matthew Waxman for their comments on previous versions of this article.