



## Discussion Papers

# IRAQ: The Crisis Deepens

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### **Military on the move**

As the British Government announces a major deployment of combat ground troops to Kuwait, the sense of inevitability of war with Iraq deepens. For those, like the author, who over the years have argued that the containment and deterrence strategy was reasonably effective in keeping Saddam Hussein in his box, events seem to be racing ahead of logic. Nevertheless, like all planners, we must start from where we are today. For much of the past year, the US Administration has made it clear that it intended to change the Iraq situation. President Bush's axis of evil speech put Iraq firmly at the top of the agenda for action. After the terror attacks of 11 September 2001, those who advocated a more pro-active military strategy for the USA found wider domestic support.

The worry for the rest of the world has been that the new American strategic thinking seemed to ignore the constraints of the international system. It was therefore widely welcomed when President Bush brought the United Nations centre stage one year after the attacks on New York and Washington. Iraq had flouted a series of UN resolutions through the 1990s. Now, the will of the Security Council to disarm Iraq of any nuclear, biological or chemical weapon capability could be enforced. The real threat of force by the US made Iraqi compliance much more likely. As with any threat, it will only be credible if there is both a clear capability to carry it out if necessary, and also the political will to do so. On this basis, the deployment of US military forces in parallel with the beginning of the UN inspection process is entirely reasonable.

The military threat posed by 170,000 US troops within striking distance of Iraq is very real. Saddam Hussein can have no doubt of the political will of President Bush to use his air, land and sea power if necessary. Co-operation with the UN inspection process is therefore a better survival strategy for Saddam. However, the build up of forces has been swift and large. If as a result, Saddam comes to believe that war will happen whatever he does to disarm, then the calculus changes markedly. The presence of UN inspectors hampers Iraqi military preparations against any attack; they may also be suspected of providing intelligence which would help attackers. Co-operation with the UN thus depends not just on a credible military threat, but also on a credible non-military way forward. Getting that balance right is very difficult. The concern is that the US does not even want to try.

### **Disarming Iraq**

The advantages of an honest policy through the UN are significant. Disarmament in Iraq in the past has been more successful through inspection than through combat. Keeping the Security Council at the centre of policy allows much greater diplomatic pressure to be brought to bear on Iraq, and others who may plan to follow the same path. If it is clear that there is a real choice for Iraq between war or disarmament, then there will be much greater international support for military action should the work of the inspectors be subsequently obstructed. That support would translate into an explicit UN resolution for the use of force, which would leave no doubts about the legitimacy of any operation. The credibility of the UN would be strengthened, and future proliferators would be constrained.

The alternative route, which is now seeming more likely, is that the US decides to use force before the inspection process has had time to work. There are a number of drivers which point towards such a scenario. The US military planners are doubtless agitated about the rotation cycle in and out of the potential combat zone. With over 50% of the expected final deployment for a major war, they can no longer directly swap units on standby in the US with those in the region. For the UK, with a much smaller army, the problem is even more acute. The US Administration may also feel action is urgent for domestic reasons. Public support for military action appears volatile, and may decline. There are also strong voices arguing for the need for regime change in Iraq, and also those who look to secure oil supplies. The inspection route does not address these aims.

If the US pushes for early military action, it will justify it through discrepancies between the Iraqi 12,000 page weapons declaration and US intelligence information. The recent find of small numbers of empty chemical artillery munitions will be added to the list. Diplomatic and economic pressure will be brought to bear on the other Security Council members to sign up, or at least not object, to authorisation for war. At this stage there is a dilemma. Discrepancies in the Iraqi statement are a reason for more intrusive inspection. In any combat, sorting out where hidden chemical or other weapons have gone would be more difficult. Yet, the Security Council will be keen to maintain the credibility of the UN, and will try to avoid its being sidelined by the USA.

### **Choosing the Route**

There are three possible outcomes to any early push by the US for military action. The Security Council might pass a resolution authorising the use of force; it might be unable to agree on such a resolution, but the US acts anyway; or the US might decide to delay until it can get UN agreement.

A new UN resolution authorising the use of force would reduce much of the current anti-war sentiment. It would ease basing problems that the US currently has in Turkey and elsewhere. The United Nations credibility would be reinforced. Yet, the consequences of such a war remain unpredictable, and international security may well be put at risk by instability in the region and the rise of anti-Western sentiment more generally.

Much worse would be unilateral action by the US, with perhaps active military support only from the UK and Australia. The precedent, which has been trailed in the new US strategy document, would be set for others to try pre-emptive military action without legal basis.. The 1999 Kosovo example has no relevance to today's situation. Then, NATO acted over Kosovo because there was an urgent humanitarian crisis, not because it worried about some long term possibility of a growing threat. Iraq does not pose an urgent threat today. Indeed, it is much less capable than it was when it invaded Kuwait over a decade ago.

The best outcome will be for the US to stay its hand, and allow the inspectors to continue their business. We must be prepared to use military action if Iraq disrupts the inspection effort. However, if the inspectors find undeclared weapons, they should destroy them as they have done in previous years. This process can go on for many months, and will continue to diminish any regional threat that Iraq might pose. It should be the responsibility of all UN Security Council member states to try to achieve the disarmament aim without recourse to war.

### **European Perspectives**

As we approach the crucial milestone of the inspectors' report to the Security Council on 27 January, the position of Europe is important. Of the 15 Security Council members, four are EU member states. The UK and France as permanent members with a veto have greatest influence, but Germany and Spain are significant players. The EU has taken a low key approach. Javier Solana has already made clear his preference for a further UN

resolution before any military intervention in Iraq. As Greece took on the Presidency, Prime Minister Costas Simitis said that the EU would do everything possible to prevent war.

NATO is on the sidelines. Doubtless the US would like to see a coherent alliance approach, which could give it legitimacy for action even without express UN authorisation. Despite US briefings of the North Atlantic Council, there is little sign of NATO being prepared to take a central role in any war. The US would at minimum hope to see NATO defending Turkey from possible Iraqi counter-attacks.

Currently, Britain seems to be the only EU member making any serious preparations for taking part in a military operation in Iraq. The sailing of a naval force has attracted widespread publicity. Reserves have been called up and equipment modified for operations in Iraq. A small number of extra combat aircraft have been sent to the region. The announcement of the deployment of some 26,000 more ground forces was made on 20 January. This represents a maximum military deployment for the UK, which will be left with no scope for rotating fresh troops through the combat formation.

In France some precautionary military preparations have been undertaken, but there is little sign of imminent deployments to the region. Germany finds itself in continuing difficulty over relations with the US, and also with significant domestic anti-war sentiment. It has made it clear that its troops will not be part of a coalition force against Iraq. The mixed messages from Chancellor Schroeder add to the confusion. He will allow the use of German bases by US forces, and also German personnel in NATO AWACS aircraft defending Turkey. However, it is not clear that he will give Germany's support to a UN resolution, which authorises the use of force.

An interesting player in this crisis is Turkey. The new government has shown great reluctance to put at risk regional stability and its economy through support for a war in Iraq. Yet US pressure, and also internal Turkish military sentiment may make such independence unsustainable. The rest of Europe seems to be hoping that the problem will go away. It is a time when there is a real need for a common European position, but it looks as though the traditional division between the anglo-saxons and continental Europe is about to be reinforced. None of this bodes well for NATO or a European common foreign and security policy.

At a time when Europe and the US are under a real security threat from international terrorism, the focus on military action in Iraq is particularly unfortunate. In the UK, the Prime Minister has attempted to link action against Iraq with the war on terrorism. He has not yet managed to convince a sceptical public. Members of the US Administration are at pains to point out that "the US can walk and chew gum at the same time". Yet already the lack of strategic forethought has seen a crisis over North Korea, a worsening situation in Israel, an arms race in the Indian sub-continent, undermining of NATO, and divisions in Europe to add to the problems of the Gulf and a continuing threat from al-Qaeda.

## **The Way Ahead**

Never has the need for a grand strategy been more acute. We face a number of separate but inter-connected serious security problems. The most dangerous and urgent threat to the citizens of the UK (and the US and the rest of Europe) is from a mass casualty terrorist attack by al-Qaeda type extremists. This is primarily a matter for intelligence, police and border control action. The need for resources to cope with post attack consequences is one issue which has received insufficient government attention.

The second problem comes from the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and other conventional weapons. The primary sources of such weapon developments are states, some of which are less stable than others. Iraq is certainly on the list of proliferators, but is not the most threatening. North Korea sells on its weapon technology to gain hard currency. Russia has too many sources of such weapons under less than complete control. Pakistan has capable nuclear, and perhaps other, systems in a country with an uncertain future. These and other states of concern need to be addressed, but in a way which reduces the risks and allows control to be exerted. This means the tools of diplomacy and persuasion rather than the uncertainties of military combat.

There are a series of peace keeping tasks that remain important. The Balkans and Afghanistan are not yet stabilised, and will consume western military effort for years to come. There are then a series of long term security problems. They range from the peace process in Israel, though international crime to the spread of

disease and the implications of environmental change. These all require attention, and the longer they are left, the more likely they are to spawn more urgent problems.

For now, Iraq is in our sights. It saves the world from having to think about the more intractable problems. To get through this dangerous period, the member nations of the UN need to ensure that their organisation remains honest. The threat of force has put the inspectors back in to Iraq. The threat is needed to keep them doing their job. The consequences of war are always unpredictable, and usually less benign for all concerned than has been hoped. Only major obstruction of the UN inspection process should be the trigger for military action. Most of the EU states support such an approach. They need to speak with one voice.

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