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The Threatening Storm: The Case for Invading Iraq

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bombers, arsenal planes, and long-range, high-speed strike craft.

Concluding strategic recommendations include maintaining open lines of communication with as many parties in Asia as possible, maintaining U.S. transparency so that U.S. objectives are clearly understood, and expanding the net of U.S. security partners.

This RAND outline of a comprehensive, realistic, flexible U.S. strategy in Asia, with appropriate military reconfiguration, is an important contribution to our search for continued stability in this part of the world.

GRANT F. RHODE
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The United States and its allies once more stand on the brink of war with Iraq. What makes this war different, however, is that its primary goal is to replace the dictatorial regime of Saddam Hussein with a democratic form of government. In the opinion of the Bush administration, removal of Saddam and his weapons of mass destruction will bring stability to the Middle East and the world. While there is consensus to remove Saddam and destroy his weapons, there is disagreement among the experts as to how to accomplish it. Kenneth Pollack is a specialist on Iraq whose experience as an analyst for the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Council gives him a unique vantage point from which to comment on U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. In The Threatening Storm, Pollack posits that a U.S.-led invasion of Iraq is the only logical means to end Saddam’s regime. This argument results from a thorough discussion of the rise of the current regime and of Iraq’s relationships with its neighbors and the West, followed by a painstaking analysis of the several options available.

In the case of Iraq, says Pollack, our vital national interest, as well as that of the entire world, clearly lies in the economic stability of the region based on ability to export crude oil without interference. Following the Gulf War of 1990–91, the United Nations implemented a number of measures to contain Iraqi ambitions. A short time later, teams of weapons experts entered the country to locate and destroy chemical and biological weapons stockpiles and production facilities. In 1998 Iraq threw out the inspection teams, and for the past four years, notes Pollack, the Iraqis have allegedly been reacquiring chemical and biological weapons and have reenergized their research programs to develop nuclear weapons. Some world leaders and strategists have proposed five options for dealing with what they claim is a clear and present danger to their vital national interest in the Persian Gulf. These options are containment, deterrence, covert action, the “Afghan” approach, and invasion.

Containment has been the policy since the end of the Gulf War. Originally, it had two key components: weapons inspections and economic sanctions. With the eviction of the weapons inspectors, economic sanctions became the sole functioning component of the policy. The oil-for-food program and smuggling, as well as reluctance on the part of some allies, notably France and...
Russia, to abide by the terms of the
United Nations resolutions have served
to undermine the sanctions effort. Con-
sequently, Saddam has been able to
acquire continuing funding for his
weapons of mass destruction programs.
Pollack maintains, therefore, that nei-
ther reimplementation of sanctions nor
unilateral imposition of sanctions by
the United States will work, because
they either do not have meaningful sup-
port from the international community
or will place the United States in con-
flict with its allies. In addition, sanc-
tions would not be the most effective
way of quickly overthrowing Saddam’s
regime.

If the United States accepts the view
that Iraq should occupy a lower priority
in American policy, says Pollack, it
must choose a policy of deterrence. Pol-
lack explains that deterrence relies on
the threat of American military action
against Iraq to ensure regional stability,
which assumes that the one deterred is
concerned about the consequences of
continuing to act uncooperatively. In
Saddam’s case, that is not a part of his
psychological profile. Pollack, there-
fore, rules out deterrence as a viable op-
tion, because it would leave Saddam
“free to acquire nuclear weapons” and
would be a hope against the odds that
American use of power would be suf-
cient to keep him in his pen. This sce-
nario, says Pollack, is very risky and
very dangerous.

The United States has tried covert ac-
tions before with little success. Covert
actions, such as assassinations and
coups, are extremely complicated op-
érations, and the risk of failure is high.
However, short of actually removing
Saddam from power, covert actions can
set the stage in terms of intelligence
gathering, communications, and liaison
work for a successful change in govern-
ment. However, this approach, though
useful, would also not meet the stated
objective of quickly overthrowing
Saddam’s regime.

The fourth option, the “Afghan ap-
proach,” limits the use of force to spe-
cial operations troops and precision
aerial bombing. In addition, there is the
issue of using opposition forces to
accomplish the overthrow and reestab-
ishment of government. Unfortunately,
Iraq’s opposition forces are much
weaker than, and not as well organized
as, those in Afghanistan. This option
too represents a lengthy engagement
without guarantee of success.

Each of these four options has loop-
holes that could leave Saddam Hussein
in power. Pollack believes that the only
real solution is an invasion of Iraq by
conventional ground and air forces.
Pollack argues his case well, going be-
yond the vituperative pronouncements
of the administration to link opera-
tional objectives to national strategy,
but he does not spend much time on
the reconstruction of the country,
which is, after all, the reason for inva-
sion in the first place. He does make
two noteworthy points, however: the
removal of Saddam would allow for
withdrawal of most of U.S. forces in the
Persian Gulf region; and second, with
its wealth in oil, Iraq can pay for its
own reconstruction. Naturally, there
are advantages and disadvantages to
each option, and critics abound, but for
Pollack the question is “not whether
[we invade], but when.”

Public opinion polls may show general
support for a war in Iraq, but many
people remain doubtful of the need for
war or for U.S. involvement. Though this book is out to sell a policy option, Pollack’s detailed analyses provide readers with an excellent basis for understanding the situation in the Middle East.

PRESTON C. RODRIGUE
Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Army


This is an extraordinarily timely work, published when the United States may be about to conduct large-scale combat operations in the Middle East. It examines the relationship in a democracy between military and political leadership, “or more precisely, . . . the tension between two kinds of leadership, civil and military,” especially in time of war.

Two themes run implicitly throughout the book. First, war is about more than purely military considerations (Clausewitzians, rejoice!), and consequently “war statesmanship . . . focuses at the apex of government an array of considerations and calculations that even those one rung down could not fully fathom.” The resultant differing imperatives at each level explain much of the inherent tension between civilian and military leaders over strategy.

Second, the essence of successful wartime leadership depends crucially on the civilian leadership’s receiving constant, reliable “truth” from its military commanders. The hierarchical military structure militates against delivery of harsh facts or unpleasant news; as per Winston Churchill, “the whole habit of mind of a military staff is based on subordination of opinion.” Hence the importance of civilian leaders constantly asking questions, forcing military leaders to lay bare their assumptions and explain their reasoning, because nothing else will force the harsh but vital intellectual debate about whether military plans actually will achieve the desired strategic ends. Military expertise is not decisive here; as David Ben-Gurion noted, “In military matters, as in all other matters of substance, experts knowledgeable in technique don’t decide, even though their advice and guidance is vital; rather an open mind and a common sense are essential. And these qualities are possessed—to a greater or lesser degree—by any normal man.”

Citing Samuel Huntington’s classic The Soldier and the State, Cohen describes the “normal” theory of civil-military relations, “which holds that the healthiest and most effective form of civilian control of the military is that which maximizes professionalism by isolating soldiers from politics, and giving them as free a hand as possible in military matters.” This idea is widely and often unquestioningly accepted by serving military officers, reinforced by the apparent lessons of Vietnam, when such tenets were held to be violated, in contrast with the successes of DESERT STORM, when the military was ostensibly properly left alone to win the war. Indeed, for civilians to “ask too many questions (let alone give orders) about tactics, particular pieces of hardware, the design of a campaign, measures of success, or to press too closely for the promotion or dismissal of anything other than the most senior officers is meddling and interference, which is inappropriate and downright dangerous.”