"Iraq: Illustrative List of Potential Problems"
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Memo for National Security Council
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SUBJECT: Iraq: An Illustrative List of Potential Problems to be Considered and Addressed

Following is an illustrative list of the types of problems that could result from a conflict with Iraq. It is offered simply as a checklist so that they are part of the deliberations.

1. If US seeks UN approval, it could fail; and without a UN mandate, potential coalition partners may be unwilling to participate.

2. A failure to answer this question could erode support: "If the US pre-empts in one country, does it mean it will pre-empt in all other terrorist states?"

3. US could fail to restrain Israel, and, if Israel entered the conflict, it could broaden into a Middle East war.

4. Syria and Iran could decide to support Iraq, complicating the war.

5. Turkish military could move on the Kurds or the Northern Iraqi oilfields.

6. The Arab street could erupt, particularly if the war is long, destabilizing friendly countries neighboring Iraq—Jordan, Saudi Arabia, GCC states, Pakistan, etc.

7. While the US is engaged in Iraq, another rogue state could take advantage of US preoccupation—North Korea, Iran, PRC in the Taiwan Straits, other?

8. While preoccupied with Iraq, the US might feel compelled to ignore serious proliferation or other machinations by North Korea, Russia, PRC, Pakistan, India, etc., and thereby seem to tacitly approve and acquiesce in unacceptable behavior, to the detriment of US influence in the world.

9. Preoccupation with Iraq for a long period could lead to US inattentiveness and diminished influence in South Asia, which could lead to a conflict between nuclear armed states.

10. Oil disruption could cause international shock waves, and with South America already in distress.

11. Iraqi intelligence services, which have a global presence, including in the US, could strike the US, our Allies, and/or deployed forces in unconventional ways.

12. Countries will approach the US with unexpected demands in exchange for their support (an Israeli request for us to release Jonathan Pollard, Russia asking for free play in the Pankisi Gorge, etc.), which, if the US accepts, will weaken US credibility.

13. US could fail to find WMD on the ground in Iraq and be unpersuasive to the world.

14. There could be higher than expected collateral damage—Iraqi civilian deaths.

15. There could be higher than expected US and coalition deaths from Iraq's use of weapons of mass destruction against coalition forces in Iraq, Kuwait, and/or Israel.

16. US could fail to find Saddam Hussein and face problems similar to the difficulty in not finding UBL and Omar.

17. US could fail to manage post-Saddam Hussein Iraq successfully, with the result that it could fracture into two or three pieces, to the detriment of the Middle East and the benefit of Iran.

18. The dollar cost of the effort could prove to be greater than expected and the contributions from other nations minimal.

19. Rather than having the post-Saddam effort require 2 to 4 years, it could take 8 to 10 years, thereby absorbing US leadership, military and financial resources.

20. US alienation from countries in the EU and the UN could grow to levels sufficient to make our historic post World War II relationships irretrievable, with the charge of US unilateralism becoming so embedded in the world's mind that it leads to a diminution of US influence in the world.

21. US focus on Iraq could weaken our effort in the global war on terrorism, leading to terrorist attacks against the US or Europe, including a WMD attack in the US that theoretically might have been avoided.

22. World reaction against "pre-empt on" or "anticipatory self-defense" could inhibit US ability to engage in the future.

23. Adverse reaction to the US could result in the US losing military basing rights in the Gulf and other Muslim countries.

24. Recruiting and financing for terrorist networks could take a dramatic upward turn from successful information operations by our enemies, positioning the US as anti-Muslim.

25. The US will learn, to our surprise, a number of the "unknown unknowns," the gaps in our intelligence knowledge, for example:

      — Iraqi WMD programs could be several years more advanced than we assessed;

      — Iraqi capabilities of which we were unaware may exist, such as UAVs, jamming, cyber attacks, etc.;

      — Others one might imagine!

26. Fortress Baghdad could prove to be long and unpleasant for all.

27. Iraq could experience ethnic strife among Sunni, Shia, and Kurds.

28. Iraq could use chemical weapons against the Shia and blame the US.

29. Iraq could successfully best us in public relations and persuade the world that the war is against Muslims.

Note: It is possible of course to prepare a similar illustrative list of all the potential problems that need to be considered if there is no regime change in Iraq.

DHR/dh.