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Commentary

Exercise the power of the purse with Hussein

By Porcher L. Taylor III

In the same shrewd diplomatic spirit displayed by the Pentagon in its recent purchase of a squadron of MIG-29 fighter jets from Moldova in order to preempt the sale of the planes to Iran, the U.S. should offer to buy Iraq's entire biochemical weapons arsenal and then destroy it in place. Let's call this emerging instrument of U.S. foreign policy "preemptive economic diplomacy."

Without firing a shot, the U.S. might succeed in disarming Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction by floating large dollar signs in front of the tyrant's eyes. To ensure that neither the Iraqi dictator nor his elite Republican Guard personally profit from such a deal, Saddam would be required to stipulate that the money from the sale would be used only to feed and provide for his sick and starving people.

Prior to Hussein's recent expulsion of the American component of the United Nations Special Commission weapons inspection team, the UN distributed food and medicine bought with the funds generated by Iraq's UN-sanctioned sale of up to \$2 billion of oil every six months. Under the initiative proposed here, the UN would likewise deliver food and medical supplies to Iraq's masses.

This program would require the Iraqi dictator to bring out from hiding Iraq's entire cache of chemical and biological weapons for inspection, verification and destruction by UNSCOM inspectors. The rogue state's failure to abide by these terms would meet with swift, severe and sustained U.S. air strikes and cruise missile launches against the Republican Guard and vital command and communication centers.

No doubt, to some at Foggy Bottom and on Capitol Hill, this "poison for food" proposal might sound like diplomatic heresy. But, consider the military option and the Arab state of affairs in this implacable crisis. The Pentagon has all but publicly conceded that air and missile strikes would not necessarily wipe out Iraq's chemical and biological storehouses or ring in a new Iraqi leader. Despite the intimidating build-up of the U.S. armada in the Persian Gulf, traditional notions of brinkmanship are proving inadequate to resolve the Clinton-Hussein stalemate.

Unfortunately, President Clinton's threats of unilateral U.S. military action against Iraq are only deepening the already wide Arab schism within the 1991 American-led Gulf War coalition. American myopia to the supremacy of ethnic fidelity over sound policy appears to be setting in. Led by Egypt, many Arab



Illustration by Bob Newman

nations now perceive continued UN-imposed economic sanctions against Iraq as tantamount to the unjustified multilateral castigation

of a fellow Arab brother, notwithstanding Hussein's blatant "pestilence as policy" threat to them and the rest of the world

Such festering Arab world sentiment does not bode well for long-term U.S. policy in the region. In short, economic sanctions against Iraq simply are not eternal, and President Clinton needs to craft a cogent and cohesive policy now for that inevitability.

As to the feasibility of this bold diplomatic initiative to defuse Hussein's "poor man's atomic bomb" the Pentagon's episode with the former Soviet Republic of Moldova is quite instructive. After Moldova tipped the U.S. off that Iran was on the verge of buying 21 of its top-of-the-line MIG-29 fighters, the U.S. Air Force quickly moved in and bought the jets for \$80 million. Significantly, 14 of the planes are nuclear capable S models, which have never been scrutinized by the American intelligence community in the high-stakes Moldovan crisis, gunboat diplomacy was never a viable option. Quite the contrary, the Pentagon brilliantly exercised the power of the purse to buy away a prospective military threat from a renegade state.

Another equally compelling example of the efficacy of preemptive economic diplomacy is the revelation last year that the Pentagon entered into a rather lucrative contract with several of Russia's leading nuclear scientists to conduct a secret report on Soviet nuclear weapons testing

The incentive for the U.S. to employ these scientists in such a manner "To prevent brain drain" to nuclear weapons-hungry states like Iran and North Korea, who are only too eager to sign up the atomic geniuses for their own programs. Once again, the Pentagon probably neutralized a potential military crisis with dollars. With these two cases as precedent, a new paradigm in strategic foreign policy is being carved out by the U.S.

Recently, Secretary of Defense William Cohen graphically stated that Hussein's biochemical genie could "kill every man, woman and child on the face of the Earth." This is not alarmist rhetoric. The stakes could not be higher in the current U.S. deadlock with Iraq. Hussein might demand an astronomical sum of money before he turns over his anthrax and lethal nerve agent arsenal under this proposal. But that cost would probably be cheaper than what the Pentagon has already spent on the crisis, and would be a small price to pay to make the world safer from the specter of apocalyptic type plagues.

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