
Ending the dictatorial regime of President Saddam Hussein and eliminating Iraq's weapons of mass destruction would be President Bush's goal. But along the way, the United States could alienate many of its European and Islamic allies. Americans could be killed.

And perhaps most worrisome of all, a threatened Saddam, fearing he has nothing to lose, could strike back in the only way left to him, with unconventional weapons.

"We have to be prepared for the possibility, nay, the probability, that if there is a war, he will use chemical and biological weapons against our troops, against Israel and possibility against our citizens here at home," said Ivo Daalder of the Brookings Institution.

Bush's top advisers and government agencies have been told to prepare a full range of options for ending Saddam's regime, according to a senior U.S. official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Bush on Wednesday left open the option of a military attack on Iraq, saying Saddam "needs to understand I am serious."

Here is a look at options that may be on the table:

**Gulf War II:**

At a minimum, a full Army corps, aided by several Navy carrier battle groups and Air Force combat wings, would be necessary to invade Iraq, estimates Anthony Cordesman, an analyst at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. A corps comprises about three or four divisions – up to 200,000 troops. The Gulf War force peaked at more than 500,000.

Iraq's military has between 350,000 and 400,000 troops, U.S. defense officials say. Experts say a ground invasion likely would result in U.S. casualties, although few predict major losses.

Support from U.S. allies, especially Turkey and Saudi Arabia, would be critical, Cordesman said. But Saudi Arabia may be tiring of the politically sensitive U.S. presence on its soil, and it's unclear whether the United States could base tens of thousands of troops there as it did during the Gulf War, when nearly a half-million U.S. and allied troops gathered in the country. Turkey almost certainly would not help the United States support Kurdish rebels seeking independence in northern Iraq. Turkey has a large and restive Kurdish population in its eastern areas.

**Bombing campaign:**

Prime targets would be Iraq's air defenses, leadership compounds, military command centers and suspected weapons of mass destruction facilities. U.S. and British fighters already patrol no-fly zones over northern and southern Iraq, and frequently bomb air defenses that target them.

Iraq maintains a fairly sophisticated air defense system that conceivably could bring down U.S. aircraft. Saddam might escape a sustained bombing campaign, and the United States could face criticism if civilian casualties mounted.

**Threaten major war:**

The United States could move 200,000 troops to the region, and get its allies to publicly declare support for a U.S. war on Iraq, Daalder said. This would perhaps frighten the Iraqi army so much that the troops would refuse to back Saddam – allowing rebels to move on him – or perhaps they would overthrow him themselves.

Saddam might also back down in the face of threatened invasion, allowing U.N. inspectors to return to monitor for weapons of mass destruction – but maintaining power, Daalder said.
However, if U.S. threats aren't successful – and Saddam looks ready to fight – the United States and its allies must be ready to invade, Daalder said.

**Proxy war:**

U.S. special forces and the CIA would funnel money, weapons and training to Iraqi opposition groups, and the United States would support them with airstrikes. This would mirror the U.S. war in Afghanistan. However, some defense officials regard this as an unlikely option, as Iraq's military is 10 times the size of Afghanistan's Taliban fighters, and the rebels aren't as well-equipped or organized as the ragtag northern alliance that helped defeat the Taliban.

However, officials with the Iraqi National Congress, a London-based opposition group that seeks international support to overthrow Saddam, believes Saddam could be ousted with 3,000 U.S.-trained Iraqi rebels, an Afghanistan-style bombing campaign, several thousand U.S. special forces and a big assist from Iran. A show of American resolve would cause mass defections, they say, crumbling Saddam's regime.

The Iraqi National Congress, however, is regarded as unreliable by many in Washington.

**Covert action:**

The CIA already is authorized to try to destabilize the Baghdad government, but CIA Director George Tenet is said to favor a plan that would expand this into a much larger effort to topple Saddam.

This could include propaganda and targeted economic disruption aimed at increasing dissatisfaction with his regime, or direct action aimed at fomenting a palace coup against the dictator. However, Saddam is believed to have few enemies in his inner circle that the United States could turn to, as he's killed many of his potential rivals.

**Diplomatic and economic isolation:**

This has been the U.S. game plan through most of the Clinton administration and in the first year of the Bush administration – punctuated by the occasional airstrike. U.N. sanctions prevent Iraq from importing weapons. But some countries are dealing more and more with Iraq; Russia is providing technical expertise on an Iraqi nuclear reactor that U.S. officials say could aid Saddam's nuclear program.

**Wait:**

Secretary of State Colin Powell suggested Tuesday, apparently in jest, that "natural causes" might be the solution. Powell, 64, noted that Saddam was the same age but said he did not appear to be in as good condition. This method hasn't yet met with any success with Fidel Castro of Cuba.

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