

Rumor of war: Alternatives to invasion

From the Editors in the [July 31, 2002](#) issue

The U.S.'s stated plan to take out Iraqi president Saddam Hussein is deeply troubling. To begin with, the American people, including the leaders of Congress, have not been offered convincing evidence that Hussein is an imminent threat to the security of the U.S. or of Israel or of Iraq's other neighbors. Further, it is not clear what would happen if Hussein were removed. Would another military dictatorship take his place? Would the U.S. be committing itself to propping up a puppet regime indefinitely and maintaining a military presence there? Would a weaker Iraq lead to even further destabilization of the region, tempting nations like Iran to adventurous mischief?

George Lopez and several colleagues at the University of Notre Dame have noted that there are two separate yet related empirical questions in the debate over Iraq that haven't been answered: What are Iraq's capabilities for using nuclear or biological weapons? And what are Hussein's intentions?

Ironically, Bush's announced plans to move on Iraq—perhaps after the November elections, perhaps sooner—may make Hussein more aggressive, provoking him to launch his own preemptive strike or pass on his weapons to a terrorist group.

Ethically, another set of troubling issues presents itself. Can a preemptive strike ever meet the criteria for a "just war"? Has the U.S. exhausted nonmilitary means of restraining Hussein? How the U.S. responds to these questions will say as much about its moral stature as about the threat posed by Hussein.

Lopez and his colleagues have outlined a threefold strategy for containing Hussein without military action. The first step is to revise United Nations sanctions to tighten controls on Iraq's oil revenues and military-related goods while easing restrictions on civilian economic activity. The second is to bring back UN weapons inspectors to complete the UN disarmament mandate and reestablish an Ongoing Monitoring and Verification (OMV) system. Finally, in the event Iraq refuses to allow weapons

inspections, create a border monitoring and control system.

Winston Churchill once said that the U.S. can be counted on to do the right thing once all the alternatives are tried. In this case, the alternatives to an invasion have not been tried. The U.S. has not exhausted possibilities of working with the UN, its allies and other countries in the region to address Hussein's threat. President Bush may not be, as the Europeans see him, a gunslinging lone ranger, but he isn't doing much right now to dispel that image. George the Elder built a coalition to take on Hussein the first time; George the Younger seems bent on going it alone, despite considerable nay-saying among American allies and without even trying to convince the American people that military action is necessary and plausible.