An unaccomplished *fait accompli*

S addam Hussein has a proven track record of being a pan-Arabist, an anti-Zionist, and a ruthless autocrat. He also rules over the world's second largest oil deposit. So, if Saddam Hussein holds nuclear weapons would he use them? More importantly, under what circumstances and against whom?

While reading an article that recently appeared in the New York Times I felt a strange mixture of anger, respect, and humor.[1] My anger was evoked by what appears to be an Israeli trick to divert the world's attention away from Palestine, against Iraq, and towards the War on Terror. My respect arose as I noted how deftly Ehud Barak, a former Israeli Prime Minister, has sought to manipulate the USAmerican mind in order to secure the safety of his own nation. My laughter was an expression of my gentle nature seeking positive relief from the tragedy and folly of my own fragile existence and the human condition.

What I found in Ehud Barak's liturgy and recitation of USAmerican values was an attempt to convince the USAmerican public of a *fait accompli*, which has not been, and probably should never be, accomplished. By promulgating choice between a surgical attack on Baghdad and a massive invasion into Iraq, the former Prime Minister assumes that the US President has decided, and that no amount of discussion will change his mind. Be this true or false, it is unfortunate.

On what is Barak's assumption based?

Surely, the former Israeli Prime Minister is not seeking to stuff Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden into the same trunk, is he. When he declared the presumptuous existence of a so-called "Axis of Evil", even the President did not make this mistake. Unlike the "transnationalist" Osama bin Laden, whose apparent mission in life is wreaking havoc on the advanced industrialized world, both Saddam Hussein and KIM Jung Il are closely tied to the land and peoples over whom they rule. Neither leader appears to have denounced the luxuries of modern living, and the dependency of each on the industrialized world for his lavish life-style appears unshaken. Of course, no one likes the idea of one's "arch enemy" carrying weapons of enormous potential destruction. Curiously however, KIM Jung Il, who is far more capable than Saddam Hussein of landing a nuclear device in North America, seldom appears in the news.

Would Hussein load a nuclear device on a ship and explode it in New York Harbor? This is unlikely, as he is preoccupied with his own problems in Iraq and the Middle East. Would he sell such a weapon to someone else who might? Yes, he could, but only at the risk of his own destruction. Fortunately, however, Saddam Hussein hardly seems the suicidal type. Besides, who in

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[1] Barak, Ehud. 2002. Taking apart Iraq's nuclear threat. New York Times, September 4. [online document]<http://www.nytimes.com/>

the Arab League would applaud the destruction of Baghdad in exchange for the annihilation of Tel Aviv, Haifa, New York, or Washington, D.C., unless of course it were Israel or the US who provoked the attack? Surely, such exchanges would not constitute a feather in Hussein's pan-Arabic cap. Thus, I find it difficult to believe that Saddam wants the nuclear bomb for anything other than a geopolitical bargaining chip. After all, half the fun of being a political leader is outsmarting one's opponent. Annihilation takes few brains, and Hussein does not appear to be surrounded by fools.

So, what about Israel? What does Ehud Barak offer the United States in exchange for either a surgical attack on Baghdad or a massive invasion of Iraq? Did Israeli soldiers die in the Gulf War? None to my knowledge. This was not permitted, so long as the United States depended on its Arab allies for secure overseas bases. Furthermore, few of Iraq's neighbors have shown any interest in a second invasion. Even Iran, who would like nothing better than to see Saddam's Sunni-dominated Baath Party removed from power, has shown little interest in another US led attack. More important to the theme at hand, would Israeli soldiers die shoulder to shoulder with US soldiers on Iraqi turf? Would the US be able to use Israel as a staging ground to launch its attack on Iraq? None of this seems likely. Why? Because the US still depends heavily on its Arab allies for oil. Moreover, little has changed in Middle East relations since the Gulf War. Israel does not appear to have grown closer to its Arab neighbors, and some indicators suggest that the relationship has even worsened.

Well, since Israel has nothing to offer, how would its position change in the Middle East, if Iraq were allowed to develop a deliverable nuclear device? This line of questioning is even more revealing. For example, would the Israeli government be more hesitant to raid Palestinian communities and destroy Palestinian homes, offices, and government buildings, were Saddam Hussein to threaten Israel with another conventional war -- this time with a nuclear device to fall back upon? Would the Israel government be perhaps more willing to negotiate land boundaries with its Arab neighbors? There are no winners in a nuclear exchange.... Would the Israelis finally settle for a joint Israeli/Palestinian capital in Jerusalem and satisfy the demands of an already very dated, but pending UN Resolution? Finally, would not Ariel Sharon be more attentive to Saddam Hussein's warnings to withdraw from Ramallah than to President Bush's?

Why are there so many in the US making arguments about the need for regime changes in Iraq and Palestine, but so few making the argument for policy change in Israel? And, who in the US government is lobbying the Israeli Diet to remove Sharon?

Let's try another line of argument. It is easy to make war when you have the upper-hand, and it is the upper-hand that both the US and Israeli governments share. Under such circumstances would not an Arab state, with effective nuclear power, be just what is needed to shake the already pathological relationship that characterizes US/Israeli friendship? Am I crazy? Maybe. But wait! What sense does it make to send US loved ones to die in Iraq, so that Israel might find it easier to crush Palestinian communities and homes in Palestine? Saddam Hussein may very well pay money to family members of deceased Palestinian suicide bombers, but who is going to pay the surviving family members of USAmerican GIs who die in Iraq? Surely not the Israeli government. It already receives 20% of all US foreign grants-in-aid.

What does Saddam Hussein obtain by supporting Palestinian suicide bombers, anyway? Is it not applause from much of the Arab community? What could he possibly gain by annihilating himself and Iraq in a nuclear exchange with Israel or the United States? Moreover, autocrats are self-conscious. Hitler killed himself, not because he was unhappy with life, but because there was no way he could escape from the humiliation of defeat. Suicide bombers give themselves willingly in order to die for a cause. Dictators only become self-destructive, when they are faced with inexorable shame.

Maybe you think it is crazy to empower the villainous Hussein with a weapon of mass destruction; then too, maybe it is just as crazy to have supported more than a half century of colonial oppression in Palestine.[2] Is it not likely that between these two "absurd" extremes there is a reasonable middle ground? What for example would happen, if the United States were suddenly to stop providing weapons and economic aid to Israel? Could Saddam Hussein not be pressured by the Arab League to open his nation to weapons' inspectors from the UN? One may not be able to reason with a dictator whose enemy one supports, but surely one can negotiate with a dictator while acknowledging the admiration of his friends.

Is it not bad enough that the United States government supports autocratic governments in the name of democracy and geopolitical stability? Does the name Marcos ring a bell? Why must the US also support a national democracy in the name of localized oppression? No one is asking the United States government to support Iraq, but many people have asked and are still asking the Israeli government to withdraw from the West Bank.

Finally, everyone has been told that the War on Terror will be a long, drawn-out war. So, who is in a hurry? Let's heal the wounds that are still open, before we incur more. The Karzai administration in Kabul is still unable to stand on its own feet, and we are probably still light years away from a peaceful settlement in Jerusalem. Better to keep USAmerica strong economically as the engine that pulls the world economy forward, than to plunge its already poorly administered budget deeper into deficit.

The United States needs the world, more than it needs Israel to fight its War on Terror, anyway. Wouldn't "tough love" toward the current Israeli government be just the medicine everybody needs. The Hamas are not going to go away any more quickly than world terror, and until the social, economic, and political environments in which they thrive is removed, they will continue to prosper. The Hamas are not driven by a dictator, they are driven by a deep felt sense of injustice. Removing Saddam Hussein will not improve conditions in Palestine, but it will incense other Arabs to make up for the loss of Saddam. Is another Kabul in Baghdad truly worth the effort? Many Iraqis may think so, but is it not a little late to be offering assistance? Ten years is a long time to have ignored the Iraqi people under Saddam's reign. Moreover, there are no guarantees about the outcome, just ask the Kurds. Indeed, the world is far more complex than either President Bush or former Prime Minister Barak would have us believe.

Hong Kong, September 11, 2002
R. A. Stegemann
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[2] Stegemann, R.A. 2002. The Frankenstein monster. July 27. [online document]<http://homepage.mac.com/moogoonghwa/earth/viewpoint.html>.

Taking Apart Iraq's Nuclear Threat

By EHUD BARAK

President Bush's policy of ousting Saddam Hussein creates an extraordinary standard of strategic and moral clarity. Millions in the Middle East, including many Iraqis, are praying that the in-depth, genuine — and so typically American — public debate that is developing before our eyes about Iraq will not dilute this clarity.

On a practical level, the whole debate can be reduced to three questions: whether a United Nations Security Council resolution calling for an inspection regime of the greatest rigor is needed now; whether unilateral or multilateral action against Saddam Hussein would need to honor the timetable of such a resolution; and whether the resolution's wording or timetable would provide Mr. Hussein with the means to postpone or cancel a future attack against him.

Saddam Hussein's nuclear-weapons program provides the urgent need for his removal. His previous violations of United Nations Security Council resolutions already provide the legal ground and legitimacy to remove him before it becomes too late. But at the end of the day, given the world as it is, a Security Council resolution is a must. Every choice has its risks, but ignoring the Security Council in this case would make the goal of removing Saddam Hussein much harder to achieve.

Such a resolution should not, however, paralyze the Bush administration. The timetables for compliance by Iraq should be short and the deadlines nonnegotiable. The risks of a resolution would be minimized by a clear American message that the United States will be ready to act and will expect the Security Council to back it if immediate and full Iraqi compliance is not forthcoming. If the United States does need to act, it will be in a much stronger position for having consulted first.

Those who prefer to wait and hope for the best should contemplate the following: no one really knows how close Saddam Hussein is to building a crude nuclear device — and it was a crude device that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Few will doubt Mr. Hussein's readiness to use a nuclear weapon against American assets or against Israel, if only under extreme circumstances. Once Iraq becomes a nuclear power, the very decision to go to war against it would become a totally different ball game.

If Saddam Hussein is allowed to cheat the inspectors and the world for another year or two, we might end up making an unforgivable mistake. We in Israel have already been through this. Prime Minister Menachem Begin ordered the destruction of an Iraqi nuclear reactor near Baghdad in 1981. This action delayed an Iraqi bomb by at

least 15 years. The whole world condemned Israel — only to realize later how farsighted it had been. Saddam Hussein now is much more cautious. His military-nuclear infrastructure is geographically spread out and protected to avoid a repetition of the 1981 defeat.

For a successful invasion of Iraq, two operational options are basically valid: a surgical operation to hit the core of the regime, and a full-scale operation to include major airborne and ground forces, perhaps 300,000 soldiers.

The interrelationship between these two options should be well understood. The surgical operation needs high-quality and timely intelligence and superb quick-response operational capabilities. The right thing to do is to have this option ready to go, because no one can know when or if the right moment will come to execute it.

If a surgical operation is launched and somehow fails, the point of no return has been reached and the United States will need to launch the wider operation immediately. When you launch a surgical operation, you must already be well deployed to follow it through with larger forces. That complicates matters: you need to be ready for a full-fledged campaign on the operational level and have the diplomatic backing lined up as well.

The "morning after" issue is also not simple. Many serious observers of the Middle East doubt whether a stable Iraq will emerge after Saddam Hussein's removal. They have a point. But so do those who argue that after 75 years of modern Iraq, a nation has been established that will stand the challenge.

Turkey will never support the effort to remove Saddam Hussein unless a firm commitment is made, in advance, not to allow a Kurdish state in northern Iraq. In regard to Iran, it may well see the benefits of having America, risking American lives, defeat Iran's major rival for the second time in 15 years. Whatever happens, some turbulence will result from Saddam Hussein's demise. But if he is removed decisively, it might accelerate positive internal processes within Iran — and not simply excite Shiites in the south of Iraq to shake off government from Baghdad.

Finally, it is clear to me that putting an end to Saddam Hussein's regime will change the geopolitical landscape of the Arab world. No Arab leader can afford admitting it now, even behind closed doors. But they are wise enough to see how much better off they will be once the Hussein regime is gone. Saddam Hussein has set an example of defiance, especially against the first President Bush, that other Arab leaders cannot and should not emulate; the example leads only to empty gestures and developmental stagnation, both of which the Arab nations have had enough of already. There is a generation of Arab leaders about to come into power who do not need to put

themselves through yet another version of secularist Nasserite despotism. An Arab world without Saddam Hussein would enable many from this generation to embrace the gradual democratic opening that some of the Persian Gulf states and Jordan have begun to enjoy.

Freeing the region of Saddam Hussein would also create an opening for forward movement on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It was only after Mr. Hussein's supporter, Yasir Arafat, found himself beaten and isolated in 1991 that he was willing to go to Madrid and enter fully into the Oslo peace process.

Nothing can be assured in advance. But the opportunities far exceed the dangers. The greatest risk now lies in inaction. The history of the last century showed us clearly what the price of paralysis can be. The public debate over Iraq policy must continue. But the readiness to act, once the time is ripe, should not fade away.

EHUD BARAK was prime minister of Israel from 1999 to 2001.