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# Program Brief

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## **“U.S. Policy Options Towards Iraq” A Press Briefing by Geoffrey Kemp and Morton H. Halperin**

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Saddam Hussein and his regime pose a growing danger to the Middle East and the United States; and because rehabilitating Saddam is no longer seen as a feasible goal, replacement of the Iraqi regime must be on the list of U.S. policy options. However, given that the Iraqi opposition is weak and our regional allies do not support seeking his ouster – “absent an absolutely egregious [Iraqi] act of provocation” – current policy should focus on sustaining the military deterrent, controlling oil revenues, helping the Iraqi people, waging a more aggressive public relations campaign, and improving the prospects for a possible future regime change. These are some of the key conclusions from a report written by Morton Halperin and Geoffrey Kemp, co-chairmen of a roundtable sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations, and discussed at a recent press briefing. Kemp is Director of Regional Strategic Programs at The Nixon Center.

The speakers further noted that the current sanctions regime is “unraveling,” and that regional support for Saddam is growing; therefore, there is a particularly pressing need for the United Nations Security Council to revise its sanctions policy. The major provisions of any policy must be: the preservation of the escrow account and other measures to control Iraq’s finances; greater freedom for the Iraqi people to purchase civilian goods in order to alleviate their suffering and shift the blame for their hardships to Saddam; the continuation of the embargo on

conventional weapons; and a refinement of the list of dual-use technologies. In this context, Kemp discussed the idea of ‘smart sanctions,’ including the proposal recently debated in the Security Council. He asserted that in return for requiring regional states to increase their monitoring efforts and decrease cross-border smuggling, incentives need to be offered to offset financial losses. Incentives could also be crucial in increasing Russian and Chinese support for any future measures; the Russians are particularly concerned about the outstanding debt owed to them by Iraq.

Kemp also briefly reviewed the problems regarding the United Nations Monitoring, Verification, and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC): namely, that if its procedures are made acceptable to Iraq, it will not serve its intended function; however, if its presence is not permitted by the regime, it cannot monitor. Furthermore, if UNMOVIC conducts weak inspections, the sanctions may be prematurely lifted. The United States must continue to support UNMOVIC’s efforts because it is the central tenet of Security Council Resolution 1284, which set up the monitoring system and legalizes international control of Iraqi assets.

Kemp concluded his introduction with the warning that with the drastic changes in the regional environment – especially in the Israeli-Palestinian arena – the American position has been undermined.

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Furthermore, there is a growing regional rapprochement with Baghdad; as long as the United States contains the regime militarily, Kemp observed, long-term proliferation concerns will be subsumed to more urgent regional issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There has thus been a significant decrease in regional support for both the use of force and for arming the opposition – absent a serious Iraqi provocation – and the U.S. must be aware of this situation when formulating policy. Without “critical support in the region,” namely, the assistance of Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Kuwait, U.S. military options are limited to a few days of airstrikes only.

Halperin continued with another admonition: that although UN sanctions have been obeyed in the last decade or so, states will realize that there is no enforcement mechanism if the Iraqi sanctions regime collapses. Halperin then elaborated on the problem of American “red lines:” What exactly are they, what allied support do we want for them, and what support will our allies provide? In his analysis, three such red lines were identified: military threats and / or attacks against allied forces, threats against neighboring states, and WMD proliferation. Halperin asserted that Iraqi provocations such as an attack on the Kurds or support for the Palestinians would prompt little regional indignation. Halperin further suggested that changes in the No-Fly Zone – primarily regarding operational procedures and rules of engagement – might be in order. He reiterated concerns regarding the weak internal opposition to the Iraqi regime and the concurrent need for US intervention should an uprising against Saddam occur.

Halperin also questioned why so much blame is attached to the United States and UN for the humanitarian situation in Iraq, when the Iraqi regime is clearly at fault. Baghdad has generated more than sufficient revenue – both legally and illegally – to provide for its people; therefore, a ‘smart sanctions’ regime is imperative to clearly shift attention to Saddam. Such a policy would target the foreign travel and bank accounts of Iraqi leaders while allowing the population to purchase more civilian and humanitarian goods directly. Furthermore, U.S. public diplomacy must be strengthened to make the case that the fault lies with the Iraqi regime. Kemp added that those states that wish to profit from the situation should bear the brunt of responding to the regime’s record.

In response to questions from the audience, Halperin clarified that the U.S. must not rule out the possibility of working with some future Iraqi regime; the issue now is that we can no longer hope to deal with Saddam. Both speakers also stressed that the United States must be prepared for a sudden change in the Iraqi regime, and that when that occurs, Iraq’s territorial integrity must be preserved. Kemp and Halperin also discussed states that violate the sanctions, noting that if Turkey and Jordan could be induced to comply, Iran and Syria might be persuaded to do so as well, through incentives and / or isolation. They also confirmed that the U.S. currently has no reliable way to monitor Iraq’s WMD (weapons of mass destruction) programs, and that if the regime is allowed to raise more revenue, it could buy technology and even fissionable material on a variety of black markets.

The discussion concluded with the acknowledgement that the current sanctions regime is seriously flawed. Both Halperin and Kemp noted their support for a revised ‘smart sanctions’ policy, perhaps similar to the British proposal recently brought before the Security Council. Whether or not a new proposal succeeds, it is clear that Iraq will continue to concern American and international policymakers; the question is simply what form the solution will take.

*This Program Brief was prepared by Nixon Center Intern Shanna Kirschner.*

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