

The Political Forum

*A review of social and political trends and events
impacting the world's financial markets*

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AN OPTIMISTIC VIEW OF THE COMING WAR WITH IRAQ. Reserving the right to change my mind, here is what I think about the coming confrontation with Iraq.

I think America will go after Saddam early next year. I don't pretend to know how this attack will be carried out, but my guess is that it will be an all out assault conducted with overwhelming force. That's the way the military would prefer to do it, so that's the way it will probably be done. I could easily be wrong about this, but I don't think it matters, since we will know soon enough when the implementation stage begins later this fall.

What is more important, I think the effort will be an overwhelming military success. The United States is good at war. It has the best equipment, intelligence, officers, and soldiers in the world, and, when engaged, its armies can be ruthless. I think it is also safe to say that the Iraqi military will prove, once again, to be a joke.

In addition, while this is not a particularly happy observation to make, it is nevertheless true that, since September 11, American enemies can no longer assume that the U.S. military will be reluctant to engage in up close and personal warfare due to a zero tolerance for combat deaths.

I am also optimistic that Bush can pull this off without doing damage to America's relations with its allies, both in the Middle East and in the rest of the world. It is clear that a great deal of diplomatic work needs to be done in the next few months. But it is also becoming clear that a considerable amount has already been done behind the scenes.

The French, for example, are not as noisily opposed as they once were. And the Russians aren't stomping their feet either, despite the fact that they have a great many financial and strategic interests in Iraq. I don't pretend to know what the Bush administration is saying to these and other countries, but *my guess is that the talk is all about dividing up the spoils.*

Saddam is a thug. He has no friends. He has business associates. If these business associates can be convinced that their "business" interests will not only not be harmed, but might actually

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be enhanced by his ouster, then they are unlikely to care much about what happens to him, a despotic murderer who made the dumb “business decision” to make an enemy of the world’s sole remaining superpower at a time when that superpower was feeling decidedly cranky.

The key here is that Saddam poses a greater threat to world peace and commerce than does the United States. Individual citizens in Europe, Russia, and the various nations of the Middle East might not believe this, but, for the most part, their leaders do.

They can twist and turn and obfuscate all they want in front of their constituents, but they can’t ignore the fact that Saddam is continuing his efforts to accumulate the most horrible weapons imaginable and is certainly capable of using them against any and all nations and individuals that he considers to be his enemies, including his fellow Muslims.

Nor can they ignore the fact that if he were to use them, the resultant response, by America and Israel if from no one else, would do considerably more damage to the political, economic and social structure of the Middle East than would a preemptive move to destroy him.

Moreover, it isn’t necessary for people to believe the Bush administration to know that Saddam has such weapons. A brief review of a long article in the *London Times* last week entitled, “The dossier against a dictator,” contained the following items, which have nothing to do with American intelligence.

Since 1991 United Nations weapons inspectors have overseen the destruction of 480,000 litres of chemical warfare agents and precursors, and 38,000 chemical munitions. However, according to intelligence assessments, much of Iraq’s chemical warfare capability remains intact.

Before the 1991 Gulf War, Iraq produced four tons of VX nerve agent, 19,000 litres of botulinum toxin, 8,400 litres of anthrax spores and an unknown amount of sarin [gas]. However, the UN weapons inspectors believe that Iraq had failed to account for more than 7,000 pounds of growth media, obtained from European firms, which would be sufficient to produce huge quantities of bacteriological weapons.

After the 1991 Gulf War, the inspectors found traces of anthrax in several warheads from long-range al-Hussein ballistic missiles. About 200 air-launched biological bombs were also discovered.

What pray tell do those who oppose any action against Iraq think that Saddam wants with these materials? And what do they think would happen should he use them, especially against Americans? The term “massive retaliation” would probably not suffice to describe it.

In the end, whether an American attack on Saddam will damage relations with its allies and other nations around the world depends entirely on whether it is successful. All the carping and kibitzing will disappear if the effort succeeds. If it fails, Bush is a goat, no matter how much support he had going in.

Finally, there is little question that Europe, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Pakistan, and myriad other nations around the world all face big, long-term problems with militant Islam. America's war against this threat is their war also, whether they like it or not.

As I said shortly after September 11, it was no accident that when President Bush told the nations of the world that they had to choose sides, one after another chose the side of the United States. These nations may not like everything about the way Bush is conducting his "war against terrorism," and they may not even harbor any warm feelings toward America, but they all know that they are toast if militant Islam is allowed to grow and prosper. Even most of the so-called "Kings" and "Princes" of Saudi Arabia are probably aware of this as they sit on their golden toilet seats counting their money.

The wild card in all of this is, of course, Saddam. One concern that I, and others, have raised is the possibility that he will use "weapons of mass destruction" against Israel in an attempt to bring it into the war, which theoretically would bring Iraq's Arab neighbors in on Saddam's side. I no longer think this is likely to happen. I think both Israel and the United States will be prepared to launch a response to any such an action that is so devastating that it would quickly bring a halt to all Iraqi hostilities. In fact, I would not rule out the possibility that the United States would use tactical nuclear weapons if it becomes necessary to avert a biological or chemical attack on Israel or U.S. forces.

Two weeks ago I wrote that I thought that Saddam might try to cut some sort of deal with Russia for protection. I still think he might try, but I don't think Putin would buy it. I think Putin would rather play a major role, along with the United States and Europe, in a post-Saddam Iraq than continue to loan Saddam money on the come, so to speak.

If I am right about this, then the entire Middle East region could be in for some positive, long-term changes. Far from strengthening the hand of our enemies in the region, a Saddam-free Iraq, with lots of financial help and moral support from its "business partners" around the world, could put real pressure on the region's hardliners, most especially on the mad Mullahs of Iran. Even the Palestinians might begin to wonder whether sending their kids off to blow themselves up makes more sense than having their own state and living in peace. We'll see.

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