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## The U.S. Must Strike at Saddam Hussein

By RICHARD PERLE

Within hours of the Sept. 11 attacks, President Bush said, "We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them." From that first statement, Mr. Bush shaped a grand strategy for the war on terrorism that is as transforming of American policy as was Ronald Reagan's pledge to consign an "evil empire" to the "ash heap of history." It breaks with the past by taking aim at states harboring terrorists as well as at terrorists themselves. It is why we have destroyed the Taliban regime in Afghanistan even as we hunt down Osama bin Laden himself. It is why the war against terrorism cannot be won if Saddam Hussein continues to rule Iraq.

Three things about Saddam Hussein make the destruction of his regime essential to the war against terrorism

First, like Osama bin Laden, Saddam Hussein hates the United States with a vengeance he expresses at every opportunity. It is hatred intensified by a tribal culture of the blood feud -- one that he has embraced since Mr. Bush's father defeated him on the field of battle.

Second, Saddam Hussein has an array of chemical and biological weapons and has been willing to absorb the pain of a decade-long embargo rather than allow international inspectors to uncover the full magnitude of his program. The expulsion of inspectors from Iraq three years ago has rendered future inspections worthless; everything that could be relocated has been moved and hidden in mosques, schools, hospitals, farms, private homes. These programs -- now involving dozens, perhaps hundreds, of clandestine sites - - will prove even more difficult to find than Osama bin Laden.

Alone among heads of state, he has actually used chemical weapons against his own people, killing thousands of unarmed citizens in northern Iraq. We know that he has produced quantities of anthrax sufficient to kill millions of people, as well as other biological agents. Disseminated to would-be martyrs from Al Qaeda, Hezbollah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad or other terrorist groups, Saddam Hussein's biological arsenal could kill very large numbers of Americans.

With each passing day, he comes closer to his dream of a nuclear arsenal. We know he has a clandestine program, spread over many hidden sites, to enrich Iraqi natural uranium to weapons grade. We know he has the designs and the technical staff to fabricate nuclear weapons once he obtains the material. And intelligence sources know he is in the market, with plenty of money, for both weapons material and components as well as finished nuclear weapons. How close is he? We do not know. Two years, three years, tomorrow even? We simply do not know, and any intelligence estimate that would cause us to relax

would be about as useful as the ones that missed his nuclear program in the early 1990's or failed to predict the Indian nuclear test in 1998 or to gain even a hint of the Sept. 11 attack.

Third, we know that Saddam Hussein has engaged directly in acts of terror and given sanctuary and other support to terrorists. In 1993 he planned the assassination of George H. W. Bush during the former president's visit to Kuwait. He operates a terrorist training facility at Salman Pak complete with a passenger aircraft cabin for training in hijacking.

His collaboration with terrorists is well documented. Evidence of a meeting in Prague between a senior Iraqi intelligence agent and Mohamed Atta, the Sept. 11 ringleader, is convincing. More important is his long, continuing collaboration with a number of terrorist groups, some of whose leaders live in and operate from Iraq. He openly, defiantly pays the families of suicide bombers and praises the attacks on Sept. 11. If anyone fits the profile of support for terror, it is Saddam Hussein.

Saddam Hussein's removal from office, we are told privately, would be cheered in the Persian Gulf. The conventional wisdom that an attack on him would be seen as an attack against Islam is an insult to Islam, and it is wrong. To most Muslims, his reign of terror is an abomination. In Iraq itself, his downfall would be met with dancing in the streets. A decent successor regime would be very likely to encourage peace in the region.

The charter of the Iraqi National Congress, an umbrella group of Saddam Hussein's opponents, calls for eradicating weapons of mass destruction and renouncing terrorism. Those opponents need our political and financial support today, and when the time is ripe, they will need our precision air power.

In 1981 the Israelis faced an urgent choice: Should they allow Saddam Hussein to fuel a French-built nuclear reactor near Baghdad -- or destroy it? Once fuel was placed in the reactor, it could not be bombed without releasing lethal radioactive material. Allowing the fueling to go forward meant that the Baghdad regime could eventually get the plutonium to build a nuclear weapon. The Israelis decided to strike pre-emptively, before it was too late: in a spectacular display of precision bombing, the reactor at Osirak was destroyed.

Everything we know about Saddam Hussein forces President Bush to make a similar choice: to take pre-emptive action or wait, possibly until it is too late. We waited too long before acting broadly against terrorism. We were too late to save the victims of Sept. 11. We should have taken terrorism seriously three years ago, when our embassies in East Africa were destroyed. To leave Saddam Hussein in place and hope for the best would repeat that mistake. And narrowing the war against terror to exclude his regime would drain a bold and courageous policy of its great and vital strength.

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