

# Italy Daily

Published with  
**CORRIERE DELLA SERA**

www.italydaily.it

Milan, Thursday, April 18, 2002

DISTRIBUTED WITH THE *Herald Tribune*

## Comment

# Reasons not to attack Iraq

By Dario Rivolta  
Special to Italy Daily

**F**or some time, a U.S. military attack on Iraq has been in the air. Reliable sources indicate that the moment may come this autumn, when the meteorological and political climates will be perfect — a few weeks of raids amid clear skies, delivering a dose of patriotism just before mid-term elections in America.

It might be useful to analyze just what the consequences of an attack on Iraq could be.

This time, the prospect is quite different from the Gulf War in 1991 and the bombing of Afghanistan last year. Very complex geopolitical contexts and ramifications ought to counsel against any attack, although whether they will suffice to stop unilateral American action is certainly in doubt.

First of all, any equation between Iraq and Afghanistan should be ruled out. An attack on Baghdad would not be able to count on a compact and resolute international coalition like the one mustered a few months ago against the Taliban regime. There is another difference: Kabul was vulnerable and disorganized, while Baghdad, from a military and institutional point of view, is solidly in the hands of Saddam Hussein.

Secondly, there is a big difference this time compared to 1991. Any attack today would have to include the definitive political elimination of Hussein. There are two possible scenarios for that: he could be replaced by a person recognized as authoritative both inside and outside the country and the context of Middle Eastern politics; or the Iraqi state could collapse.

There is no evidence that a person or leadership group with the necessary authority exists today.

As a result, a conflict could quite probably lead to the end of Iraq as it is known today, and the birth of a Kurdish state in its northern reaches.

This would have grave consequences. Even though Washington has assured

Turkey that no independent Kurdish state will be set up along its borders, and notwithstanding frequent reliance on factional divisions among Kurds, it is clear that bringing Hussein down would require mobilizing the people in northern Iraq for military action. It can't be ruled out that this itself would, at least provisionally, galvanize the Kurds into greater unity and prompt them to institutionalize the independence that they already exercise in fact.

The presence of such a neighboring state would push Ankara towards greater repression against Turkey's own Kurds, and would foster authoritarian trends aiming to maintaining the territorial unity of Turkey and discouraging its Kurdish citizens from trying to participate in the birth of a pan-Kurdish state in the region.

Such an authoritarian drift would be a disaster for Turkey, and would certainly postpone any talk of its eventual entry into the European Union.

The disappearance of Iraq would also be noticed by Iran, which since Ayatollah Khomeini's 1979 revolution and perhaps even before has always sought to exercise hegemony over the region. As Teheran's primary counterweight in this desire has been Iraq, the latter's collapse would create a local political vacuum enormously to the advantage of Iran, and much to the horror of the equally ambitious Saudis.

Only a lengthy American military occupation could counter Iran's hegemonic aspirations. But that is unthinkable, both due to its costs and the predictable reaction it would spark in nearby Arab countries.

The feelings of its Arab friends ought to dissuade Washington from any attack on Iraq, which would further ignite, exacerbated and radicalize the Arab masses who are already dissatisfied with their own governments. That is especially true in Saudi Arabia, where the royal family is already facing latent tensions — a recent poll found that 60 percent of the kingdom's subjects hate Americans and 49 percent loathe the West in general — and also in Egypt

and Syria and other countries along the Mediterranean, where officials are in different ways forced to confront a public opinion that is easy prey for fundamentalist and anti-Western feelings.

These are matters of serious concern, especially if the Palestinian question is not resolved soon.

One final point of worry regards Russia, which has already declared itself against any attack on Iraq. If Washington proceeds with its reported plans, Moscow might well become the rallying point of the many countries that oppose the operation, and so could return to its old Soviet role as a leader of weaker nations and the mascot of anti-imperialism.

I believe all of these questions have to be addressed clearly by anyone planning to move on Baghdad. Is eliminating Hussein really worth all the future troubles that act would likely create, from Russia's resumed leadership of developing nations, an intensification of the confrontation between the West and the Islamic world, the dampening of Turkey's trend towards European-style democracy, the destabilization of moderate Arab governments and more general conflict in a region already riven by it?

Before even responding to those questions, those deciding on military action against Iraq — America alone, or perhaps an international alliance that is very difficult to imagine — would have to be very confident of their ability to mobilize the public opinion of their own citizens.

But with the long shadow of Sept. 11 beginning to fade, how would Western public opinion react when Hussein inevitably musters civilians as human shields? That's yet another reason advising against military action on Baghdad.

*Dario Rivolta is vice-president of the Foreign Affairs Commission of Parliament's lower house and the foreign policy spokesman of Forza Italia. Comments to him can be addressed to rivolta\_d@camera.it.*