

TOP REPUBLICANS BREAK WITH BUSH ON IRAQ STRATEGY

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Editors' Note Appended

Leading Republicans from Congress, the State Department and past administrations have begun to break ranks with President Bush over his administration's high-profile planning for war with Iraq, saying the administration has neither adequately prepared for military action nor made the case that it is needed.

These senior Republicans include former Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger and Brent Scowcroft, the first President Bush's national security adviser. All say they favor the eventual removal of Saddam Hussein, but some say they are concerned that Mr. Bush is proceeding in a way that risks alienating allies, creating greater instability in the Middle East, and harming long-term American interests. They add that the administration has not shown that Iraq poses an urgent threat to the United States.

At the same time, Secretary of State Colin L. Powell, who summoned Mr. Kissinger for a meeting on Tuesday, and his advisers have decided that they should focus international discussion on how Iraq would be governed after Mr. Hussein -- not only in an effort to assure a democracy but as a way to outflank administration hawks and slow the rush to war, which many in the department oppose.

"For those of us who don't see an invasion as an article of faith but as simply a policy option, there is a feeling that you need to give great consideration to what comes after, and that unless you're prepared to follow it through, then you shouldn't begin it," one senior administration official involved in foreign policy said today.

In an opinion article published today in The Wall Street Journal, Mr. Scowcroft, who helped build the broad international coalition against Iraq in the Persian Gulf war, warned that "an attack on Iraq at this time would seriously jeopardize, if not destroy, the global counter-terrorist campaign we have undertaken." An attack might provoke Iraq to use chemical or biological weapons in an effort to trigger war between Israel and the Arab world, he said.

His criticism has particular meaning for Mr. Bush because Mr. Scowcroft was virtually a member of the Bush family during the first President Bush's term and has maintained close relations with the former president.

Senator Chuck Hagel, Republican of Nebraska said that Secretary Powell and his deputy, Richard L. Armitage, had recently told President Bush of their concerns about the risks and complexities of a military campaign against Iraq, especially without broad international support. But senior White House and State Department officials said they were unaware of any such meeting.

Also today, Lawrence S. Eagleburger, who was briefly secretary of state for Mr. Bush's father, told ABC News that unless Mr. Hussein "has his hand on a trigger that is for a weapon of mass destruction, and our intelligence is clear, I don't know why we have to do it now, when all our allies are opposed to it."

Last week, Representative Dick Armey, the House majority leader, raised similar concerns.

The comments by Mr. Scowcroft and others in the Republican foreign policy establishment appeared to be a loosely coordinated effort. Mr. Scowcroft first spoke out publicly 10 days ago on the CBS News program "Face the Nation."

In an opinion article published on Monday in The Washington Post, Mr. Kissinger made a long and complex argument about the international complications of any military campaign, writing that American policy "will be judged by how the aftermath of the military operation is handled politically," a statement that seems to play well with the State Department's strategy.

"Military intervention should be attempted only if we are willing to sustain such an effort for however long it is needed," he added. Far from ruling out military intervention, Mr. Kissinger said the challenge was to build a careful case that the threat of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction calls for creation of a new international security framework in which pre-emptive action may sometimes be justified.

Through his office in New York, Mr. Kissinger relayed a message that his meeting with Secretary Powell had been scheduled before the publication of his article and was unrelated. But a State Department official said Secretary Powell had wanted Mr. Kissinger's advice on how to influence administration thinking on both Iraq and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In The Wall Street Journal, Mr. Scowcroft wrote that if the United States "were seen to be turning our backs" on the Israeli-Palestinian dispute "in order to go after Iraq, there would be an explosion of outrage against us."

He added: "There is a virtual consensus in the world against an attack on Iraq at this time. So long as that sentiment persists, it would require the U.S. to pursue a virtual go-it-alone strategy against Iraq, making any military operations correspondingly more difficult and expensive."

Richard N. Perle, a former Reagan administration official and one of the leading hawks who has been orchestrating an urgent approach to attacking Iraq, said today that Mr. Scowcroft's arguments were misguided and naïve.

"I think Brent just got it wrong," he said by telephone from France. "The failure to take on Saddam after what the president said would produce

such a collapse of confidence in the president that it would set back the war on terrorism."

Mr. Perle added, "I think it is naïve to believe that we can produce results in the 50-year-old dispute between the Israelis and the Arabs, and therefore this is an excuse for not taking action."

Senator Hagel, who was among the earliest voices to question Mr. Bush's approach to Iraq, said today that the Central Intelligence Agency had "absolutely no evidence" that Iraq possesses or will soon possess nuclear weapons.

He said he shared Mr. Kissinger's concern that Mr. Bush's policy of pre-emptive strikes at governments armed with weapons of mass destruction could induce India to attack Pakistan and could create the political cover for Israel to expel Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza.

"You can take the country into a war pretty fast," Mr. Hagel said, "but you can't get out as quickly, and the public needs to know what the risks are."

He added, "Maybe Mr. Perle would like to be in the first wave of those who go into Baghdad."

For months, the State Department's approach has been to focus on how to build a government in Iraq.

After meetings here last week involving Iraqi opposition groups and administration officials, one official said today that there was now consensus in the State Department that if more discussion was focused on the challenge of creating a post-Hussein government, "that would start broaching the question of what kind of assistance you are going to need from the international community to assure this structure endures -- read between the lines, how long the occupation will have to be."

Such discussions, the official added, would have a sobering effect on the war-planners.

Editors' Note: *September 4, 2002, Wednesday A front-page article on Aug. 16 and one on Aug. 17 reported on divisions among Republicans over President Bush's high-profile planning for a possible war with Iraq. The articles cited comments by former Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger and by Brent Scowcroft, the first President Bush's national security adviser, among others. The Aug. 16 article described Mr. Kissinger's expressed concerns about the need for building an international coalition before waging war and his doubts about the Bush administration's plan to make "regime change" the center pole of its policy. But it should have made a clearer distinction between his views and those of Mr. Scowcroft and other Republicans with more categorical objections to a military attack. The second article listed Mr. Kissinger incorrectly among Republicans who were warning outright against a war.*

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