

Notes for talk with Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz in Baghdad, 7:30 PM on Monday, February 3, 2003.

It seems to me that you must clearly distinguish your most important objective and then decide how you can attain it.

I imagine that you would agree that your most important current objective is to avoid a devastating American attack that could kill large numbers of your people, destroy your infrastructure and overthrow your government.

If that is correct, I suggest there are three possible ways to achieve it:

1) Continue your current path, denying the existence of weapons of mass destruction, grudgingly allowing the UNITED NATIONS personnel to careen around Iraq looking for them and awaiting events.

I do not believe this will accomplish your central objective.

2) Going into exile and hoping that the Americans will call off their invasion.

Clearly this will not save your regime even though it might halt the attack and save your people.

3) Take an aggressive approach to the situation by preempting the criticism of you in the UNITED NATIONS, the American-led alliance and in the press.

This would involve your embracing the inspection regime while setting forth your case in every forum you can reach. For example, I think you could say, "we renounce wmd for all time and are willing to prove this by institutionalizing the UNITED NATIONS inspection program. Leave it in Iraq for the foreseeable future and as soon as you allow our oil industry to restart, we will even pay the UNITED NATIONS for this service.

On Oil: Iraq will also agree to pump its oil and will enter into a multiyear contract to sell it to you at world market prices. Unless you really want just to steal our oil this should satisfy everyone.

You might also consider offering a federal status to the Kurds (America does not want them to be independent any more than you or Turkey or Iran do, anyway).

There are other things you can add to this package to sweeten it, for example, allocating a percentage of Iraq's oil income to an international program for world health. This would win you a great deal of favorable comment at little cost.

My hunch is that #3 is your best option and could both save your country and your regime. But you cannot await events. You should move before you are forced to do so.

If your government agrees, I have a draft interview with you making these various points. It is here: