

## **So tell us (again), Why are we going to war with Iraq?**

Jim Fetzer

In an article in *The Guardian* (10 September 2002), Mike Hertsgaard has offered the impeccable observations that, even though Americans are told "the world hates us", everyone living outside of the United States recognizes it is not the American people that the world resents but rather our government, our military, and our corporations ([www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)). Consequently, by failing to draw the relevant difference, we tend to miss the big picture regarding the world's perceptions.

Hertsgaard astutely explains that the principal reason for our cognitive dissonance is "because most of what we're told about it is little more than semi-official propaganda. Our political leaders portray the acts of our government, military and corporations in the best possible light", while the news media rarely undertake a significant challenge to the government's self-serving declarations.

He appears to be completely correct, even when the stakes are as high as they could possibly be. The government's position on Iraq, for example, allegedly depends upon intelligence available to the President, the Vice-President, and the Secretary of Defense that is not available to ordinary Americans. They have asserted that Saddam Hussein already has biological and chemical "weapons of mass destruction" and that he is not far from acquiring nuclear weapons as well.

A recent piece by Elisabeth Bumiller and David E. Sanger in *The New York Times* (11 September 2002), subtly reinforces the impression, which The White House is keen to convey, that George W. Bush is on top of intelligence. "He is the first president to be

presented daily with [the threat assessment] an extensive, detailed catalogue of the susceptibilities of the United States to terrorist attacks. His advisors say it has both sobered and sharpened him".

So we should take for granted that Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, and George Bush know what they are talking about when it comes to Iraq, right? Wrong! Another piece by Eric Schmitt and Alison Mitchell in the same issue of the same newspaper reports that senior intelligence officials have acknowledged that our government-- the United States government--does not possess a current cross-agency assessment of Iraq's biological, chemical, and nuclear capabilities!

It boggles the mind. "Senior intelligence officials acknowledged today that the government had not compiled an updated, cross-agency assessment of Iraq's nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons capacities, even though the Bush administration is pushing for a quick statement of support for military action against Saddam Hussein."

"Intelligence officials, responding to repeated complains from Senate Democrats, said today that they were working on the authoritative document. The last such thorough assessment on Iraq's clandestine weapons was produced about two years ago, Senate and administration officials said today." Bob Graham, D-FL, who heads the Senate Intelligence Committee, initially requested the government's analysis on 22 July 2002.

Think about it. The last comprehensive analysis was conducted about two years ago. But the Bush administration has been in office less than two years. Which means that the Bush administration has never conducted an authoritative analysis

of Iraq's nuclear, chemical, and biological capabilities. Never! Yet we are being told by Bush, Cheney, and Rumsfeld, among others, that Iraq's nuclear, chemical, and biological capabilities are the reason we must attack.

To the extent to which the world has enjoyed a period of relative peace during the past fifty years, it has depended upon the policy of only striking back if we are struck first. That applied at Pearl Harbor, in Korea, and even in Vietnam, where Lyndon Johnson appreciated the need for at least the pretense of having been attacked. The Cold War was predicated upon it and kept the war from getting hot.

The policy of mutually assured destruction (MAD) meant that we would not attack you unless you attacked us. That was a pretty good reason not to attack. Our declaration of the right to attack any country that threatens us, by contrast, is a recipe for disaster. Certainly, any country that perceives itself under threat of attack can use "The Bush Doctrine" to justify its own first strike.

China, for example, could perceive Taiwan as a threat to its national security and strike first. Pakistan could perceive India as a threat to its national security and strike first. Even more interestingly, Iraq could perceive the United States as a threat to its own national security and strike first! What could be a more obvious application of the very principle that is supposed to justify our own attack upon Iraq?

Even our own experts acknowledge there is no evidence that Iraq has engaged in terrorist activities for at least the past ten years. The attempt to shift attention from Osama bin Laden to Saddam Hussein appears to be an all-too-transparent effort to change the subject from an unconventional war with obscure boundaries

to a conventional war with a defined objective.

In a column that appeared in *The Washington Post* (5 September 2002), President Jimmy Carter has said "there is no current danger to the United States from Bagdad", an opinion that happens to be shared by foreign allies and responsible figures from past administrations, including Brent Scowcroft, James Baker, and Larry Eagleburger, not to mention Secretary of State Colin Powell.

But Bush has always been clever at changing the subject. His appearance before the United Nations on Thursday, 12 September 2002, was a rhetorical masterpiece in its emphasis upon the extent to which Saddam Hussein has defied UN resolutions some sixteen times. But repeated defiance of UN resolutions does not necessarily translate into state terrorism or an imminent threat to the United States or to other nations.

These are not the same things.

This fallacy of equivocation now appears to lie at the foundation of United States' efforts to convince the world UN and the Congress that the United States should be given the authority to take whatever steps are necessary to force Iraq's compliance with United Nation's resolutions, parallel to the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution granting LBJ the authority to whatever steps were necessary to respond to North Vietnamese aggression. This is a parallel to ponder.

Students of the Vietnam Era have long questioned whether the attack upon the US destroyers Maddox and Turner Joy, which Johnson used to justify the resolution, had actually occurred. An article in the *Duluth News Tribune* (4 August 2002), reported, "Recently released tapes of White House conversations indicate the attack probably never happened". Even Johnson admitted in 1965 that, for all he knew, the Navy was

"shooting at whales" out there.

But the stakes were enormous then and they are enormous now. More than 50,000 US service men and women and over 2,000,000 Vietnamese were killed. The cost of invading Iraq, alas, is all too likely to be comparable. The administration assures us that this will be a nice, neat war, but their rosy predictions are based on conjecture, not knowledge, just as their assertions about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction are not based upon current assessments. Our previous experience with Iraq may even be more misleading than enlightening.

On "Face the Nation" on Sunday, 15 September 2002, Senator John McCain, R-AZ, suggested that taking out Saddam would be a piece of cake, given the results of the Gulf War of 1991. But comparisons are probably unjustified. In a brilliant column in *Reader Weekly* (12 September 2002), Philip M. Kern reminds us that Saddam was caught off-guard when the United States reversed its position on his entitlement to invade Kuwait.

Having misread our permission to act to stop slant drilling into Iraqi oilfields, Saddam sought to arrange for an orderly retreat, which would have taken him three weeks. But the Bush administration gave him only one. As Kern states, "This was just enough time for a frantic Saddam to string his troops out along the roadway leaving them defenseless for the upcoming American slaughter. No wonder he calls us Satan"! And there is no reason to suppose a similar scenario would play out again.

A rather sobering column by Nicholas Kristof appeared in *The New York Times* (6

September 2002) reported how the US Navy steamed off to war in the Persian Gulf and was promptly creamed! This was a simulation, not the real thing, but it was a moment of reckoning. A general who participated told him that the war game was contrived and changed in ways that raise serious questions about how prepared we are for taking on this adventure.

Saddam's best options were not permitted: Iraq was not allowed to attack Israel, use its chemical or biological weapons, engaged in urban fighting, or coordinate terrorist attacks in the United States. When the fleet was sunk, the Pentagon simply reconstituted it and attacked again. The Iraqis were even required to disclose some of their troop locations so the US forces could find them! Even control of chemical weapons was given to the US in order to destroy them.

The administration is dealing with real lives here, but it is playing games with the American people. Violations of UN resolutions are not terrorist attacks upon the United States. It can be true that Iraq has violated UN resolutions dozens of times and also be true that Bagdad poses no threat to the United States. Indeed, Israel has violated UN resolutions more than one hundred times. Does that mean we should be attacking Israel as well?

The timing is disturbing. On Sunday night, 8 September, during "The McLaughlin Group" television broadcast, John McLaughlin, a former Jesuit and a conservative thinker, raised the question of what we would be reading in the newspapers and discussing on television were it not dominated by talk of war in Iraq. He replied to his own question with a dozen topics that make Republican politicians shudder.

They included the feeble economy, the shaky stock market, corporate corruption

and criminal CEOs, the \$5.5 trillion reversal in the federal budget (from massive surpluses to massive deficits), the creation of a secret government (so secret that even the Congress was not consulted), keeping official records and documents out of students and scholars hands, trashing the environment, withdrawing from the Kyoto Accords, and opposing the creation of a World Criminal Court.

What we are seeing before our very eyes is the corruption of the non-partisan conduct of foreign policy. Karl Rove, who really runs the government, has been calculating the domestic political effects of foreign policy decisions in relation to the next election, which falls this November. Sometimes he makes mistakes, as in the steel tariff fiasco, which has led to adverse judgments against the US by the World Trade Organization to the tune of \$8 billion.

Win, lose, or draw, matters of life and death--for Americans and the populations of other nations--are being treated as pawns on the chessboard of politics. Let there be no doubt. This is a man who plays to win and has no scruples over who may be hurt in the process, as long as it benefits Republican candidates. And he is being aided and abetted by others who really should know better, but whose conduct has become equally corrupt.

Last week, CBS NEWS ran an expose about the origins of the plan to attack Iraq. CBS discovered that, within *fifteen minutes* of the hit on the Pentagon, Donald Rumsfeld was instructing his subordinates to plan for a massive attack on Iraq. *Fifteen minutes!* That hardly qualifies as enough time for an investigation into the matter to ascertain whether or not Iraq had anything at all to do with the events of 9/11.

Bumiller and Sanger have confirmed, "the president's most hawkish advisors in fact urged him to move against Mr. Hussein in the first days after the Sept. 11 attacks, even absent any evidence that he was involved". What kind of a foreign policy is that? Richard Pearle, also known as "The Prince of Darkness", has claimed that the war on terrorism will be set back if we do not attack, simply because the President has said that is what we are going to do. Ugh!

When you stop to think about it, who in the world would be less disposed to take on the United States (again) than Saddam Hussein? He has already been thrashed rather thoroughly. In fact, that his military forces are substantially *weaker* than they were in the past is supposed to be a reason why this war will be so nice and tidy. But if that is the case, then why is Iraq not actually *less* of a threat than it has been in the past?

But when he is trapped with nothing to lose, then I have no doubt at all he will fight with every weapon at his disposal. We have already told him we are coming. We are massing our troops in nearby countries even now. There is no point in waiting for the US to destroy him. He should use chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons, if he has them, to best effect. And he has already told us that, if we attack Iraq, we are in for a surprise.

Our government is lying to us about Iraq and the threat that it poses. Virtually every other nation takes exception to our assessment. There is no evidence that Iraq has engaged in terrorist acts for at least the past ten years. Violating a UN resolution is not a terrorist act. Politics appears to be driving the administration

to embrace an ill-conceived and tragic undertaking. And Bush is even pushing for a vote by the Congress during October!

Iraq poses no imminent threat. If Bush wants a vote, let it occur after the November elections. A war is would be fantastically expensive and might require over 250,000 troops in Iraq to maintain control. Is Bush willing to rescind his tax breaks for the rich to pay for this or is the country going to be allowed to decay and decline while he turns the Middle East to rubble and ruin? Maybe there are some pretty good reasons why the world hates us, after all.

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Jim Fetzer, a professor of philosophy at UMD, has long been convinced that this is the most corrupt administration in American history. The question is whether the damage it inflicts upon the nation and the world is something that we can survive.