

Solving the Iraq Crisis

‘What would *you* do about the Iraq crisis’ is a question that advocates of war, or the genuinely confused, ask those who oppose it. This is my attempt to provide an answer.

In order to fully meet the challenge, it is necessary to establish just *why* Bush is so eager to go to war in the first place.

What this war is not about.

This war is not about Saddam Hussein’s support for Al-Qaeda. Although the Bush-Blair propaganda machine attempted to assert a link between the two at first, this proved utterly fallacious and unconvincing, and he abandoned this tactic.

After that ploy failed, Bush relied on the assertion that his war is about ‘weapons of mass destruction’ Yet no clear and present danger to the US or any of its neighbours has been even remotely established. Furthermore, valuable US allies such as Pakistan and Israel -both of whom have demonstrated a willingness to back terror against their own populations and neighbouring states- maintain actually arsenals of nuclear weapons. The US itself is the only state that has used nuclear weapons in anger, owns more than every other nation on earth put together, has made more use of chemical weapons in combat than any other state, and refuses to grant the international community full access to its weapons laboratories.

Bush’s third main tactic has been to suggest that war was necessary to assert ‘the authority of the United Nations.’ However, George Bush’s bravado declaration that he will wage war whatever, with or without the UN, reveals the contempt that he has for the body. This is also shown by his highly unprincipled efforts to scupper the UN International Criminal Court. America’s disregard of the violation of numerous and more serious UN resolutions by its allies such as Israel and Turkey clearly shows that this is not about the UN. In December 2002, the USA vetoed a Security Council Resolution calling condemning Israel for the murder of unarmed UN personnel- an event that, if it had happened in Iraq, Bush would surely have seized on as an excuse for war. Now, like a film-director calling on a previously unimportant errand-boy to play the role of Hamlet, Bush has introduced the UN as an excuse for war.

Nor is it about ‘democracy.’ The US backs Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, two of the least democratic states on earth.

Nor is it about human rights. If human rights were a guiding principle of US foreign policy, it would not have helped General Suharto seize power and then back him for thirty years as a million Indonesians died under his tyranny. Nor would it currently be backing two of Asia’s newest dictators, Presidents Karimov of Uzbekistan and Niyazov of Turkmenistan, front-line states in the ‘war against terror’ that have shocking human rights records.

Nor is about Saddam Hussein himself. In 1984 Donald Rumsfeld personally delivered a letter from Ronald Reagan to Saddam Hussein re-establishing diplomatic relations, a trip that was followed by political, military, and economic support for Hussein. The US happily helped him acquire chemical weapons, and assisted him in using them against Iran.

Finally, it is not, as George Bush would have us believe, a war to tame the might of the ‘axis of evil’ powers; Iraq, Iran and North Korea. Only someone desperately casting-around for an excuse for war could suggest that these three wretched states, two of whom spent a decade fighting each other in a bloody war, are secretly plotting to join forces and overrun the free world. It is too ludicrous a notion to be ennobled by serious refutation.

So, what then *is* this war about?

Firstly, we must acknowledge that some may genuinely believe that war is in the best interests of the Iraqi people. Yet ‘war’ is a misnomer. The 1991 conflict was a cold-blooded, one-sided, techno-frenzied slaughter of tens of thousands of virtually defenceless Iraqis, in which more Brits were killed in ‘friendly fire’ than by Iraqis, and less Americans died in combat than would have died in traffic accidents if the same number of forces had stayed at home. American tactics of high-altitude aerial bombardment and ship-launched cruise missile attacks, by design, factor in significant numbers of non-combatant fatalities- valuing American lives more than Iraqi lives by a massive calculation. Some may believe that by slaughtering Iraqis they are saving them, by killing their children in large numbers they are securing their future. We can only pray for deliverance from their Orwellian nightmare where ‘war is peace.’

Secondly, oil. At the moment, American cars do not need Iraqi oil to keep them running. But American oil is running out and Iraq has vast oil reserves that the US may need in the future. More to

the point, George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, and Condoleeza Rice were all senior executives of oil companies (hence their ditching of Kyoto agreement on climate-change), and know that control of Iraq promises major gains to their friends, colleagues, and party sponsors, in their ability to drill and export oil to third parties.

Thirdly, Saddam Hussein gives George Bush's America a secure sense of identity. The pro-war *Economist* magazine admitted recently that right-wing "American think-tanks revel in sharp ideological conflicts." The war against the 'axis of evil' or 'international terrorism', however ridiculous those terms might be, provides the US military-industrial complex and the myriad foreign policy 'experts' with a new enemy, a new Hitler, a *raison d'être*. This is extremely valuable after the disconcerting loss of the organising script and central drama that the 'Cold War' gave. Thus, rather than cut back on military spending and reduce US military deployments throughout the world, Bush has been able to massively increase them, and even begin the militarisation of space, as he jousts the windmills of an 'axis of evil' that exists primarily in his warped, apocalyptic, us-versus-them nightmare imagination. The drama of this 'war on terrorism' has also saved and legitimised Bush's presidency.

But fourthly, and most significantly, this war is primarily about asserting American control in the Middle East and beyond. Michael Klare, an American military defence analyst, has argued that the Iraq war is to keep a stranglehold on Gulf oil and is part of implementing the so-called "National Security Strategy of the United States of America", released by President Bush in September 2002. This states that militarily necessary measures must be taken to prevent any state equalling or surpassing US power. This is a doctrine of permanent military and political supremacy, one which American Professor of International Law Francis Boyle described as appalling, saying "It reads like a Nazi planning document prior to the Second World War." The comparison with Hitler is perhaps an unhelpful polemic: but this is the sort of document that normally only exists in email-scams or rabid conspiracy theories. Yet, this is real: terrifyingly real.

George Friedman, head of pro-Bush right-wing think tank and intelligence agency Stratfor, openly acknowledged that all the talk about WMD, UN resolutions, and Al-Qaeda links is a "bodyguard of lies". Because of over-reliance on Saudi Arabia, and the possible need to attack Saudi Arabia as the heartland of Al-Qaeda, and as an alternative base to launch 'pressure' the whole Middle East that borders on Syria and Iran, Friedman says that the Bush administration "has excellent strategic reasons for wanting to conquer Iraq", but is afraid of coming clean about them. He has urged Bush to admit that "invading Iraq is in the U.S. national interest regardless of whether Hussein has a single weapon of mass destruction... this is about strategy, not guilt or innocence."

That is why we oppose war; we do not think that American national interests are worth a single drop more of Iraqi blood, nor that the pursuit of these perceived interests will benefit even the US in the long run. Al-Qaeda is largely the product of American policy in the Middle East: it breeds on the hatred that American foreign policy hypocrisy creates, and can only benefit by further massacres of Muslims for the sake of US oil and empire. Peter Gomes is a Baptist minister, Harvard professor, and die-hard Republican who preached at Ronald Reagan and George Bush Senior's inauguration service. Yet in a recent sermon he said, : "I demand a better excuse than revenge or oil for the prosecution of a war that is likely to do more harm than good, that will destabilise not only the region but also the world for years to come, and that will confirm ... our country's reputation as an irrational and undisciplined bully."

So, how do we resolve the Iraq crisis?

Long-term solutions

Having identified what the current crisis is about, it is possible to suggest solutions.

Clearly, long-term US foreign policy objectives are behind this crisis; it is just as clear that those objectives must change. As long as narrow self-interest remains the guiding principle of foreign policy, enforced by ferocious wars and terrible new death-machines and backed by US support of petty tyrants and dictators, hatred of these policies by those who suffer will send recruits to Al-Qaeda and a myriad of other new anti-American fanatics, perpetuating a terrible cycle of violence. The US must heed the words of the early American Christian anti-war and anti-slavery activist John Woolman, who challenged his countrymen to "look upon our treasures... and try whether the seeds of war have any nourishment in these possessions".

Secondly, international diplomatic and legal mechanisms must be strengthened to deal with problem-tyrants like Saddam Hussein in the future. The International Criminal Court is one such example. Apart from a handful of oppressive dictatorships, the United Nations has been united in trying to establish a permanent, non-partisan International Criminal Court based in the Hague that would try war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity, and from which no state should seek impunity. It is

just this type of court that could be used to deal with men such as Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein. Yet, the US has opposed it tooth and nail, cajoling and intimidating poorer states which depend on US aid into promising not to hand over US citizens to the court. Most alarmingly, George W. Bush signed into law the American Service Members Protection Act of 2002, which authorises the use of military force to liberate any American or citizen of a U.S.-allied country being held by the Court- which is located in the Netherlands.

Why? Quite simply, Donald Rumsfeld rejected the treaty, warning that "American leadership in the world could be the first causality." In order to assert its domination, since 1945 the US has engaged in more wars and invaded more states than any other country, and its preferred military tactics of using weapons of mass destruction against third-world states inevitably cause the massive civilian casualties that would risk prosecution under the court. But not only that: if the Saddams and bin Ladens of this world were dealt with by international law rather than the fiat of powerful states, the US would lose the excuse they provide to project its power across the world. The US must contribute to the building of fair international bodies that can deal equally and justly with all, rather than be the tools of the powerful.

Thirdly, disarmament. Weapons of mass destruction are a menace to the world, and must be eliminated. The US has opposed and even withdrawn from treaties that limit its possession of them. Former Chief Weapons Inspector in Iraq Richard Butler admitted that "Amongst my toughest moments in Baghdad were when the Iraqis demanded that I explain why they should be hounded for their weapons of mass destruction when, just down the road, Israel was not, even though it was known to possess some 200 nuclear weapons." He went on to condemn Western hypocrisy, which he identified as the key problem in controlling WMD: "I confess, too, that I flinch when I hear American, British and French fulminations against weapons of mass destruction, ignoring the fact that they are the proud owners of massive quantities of those weapons, unapologetically insisting that they are essential for their national security, and will remain so." The US and the 'nuclear club' must agree a precise programme for the elimination of their weapons, and set up a body with the power to inspect all weapons laboratories and facilities around the world." This is not unrealistic: the US opposed and scuppered such a possibility when it existed after World War One, enforcing it only on Germany whilst building up its own chemical weapons stockpiles, and sewing the seeds of World War 2. We must not miss this second chance.

Fourthly, by ending the backing of tyrants. Saddam's regime, when it faced opposition at home in the 1980s, was bolstered by American economic backing at home, and defence against the international community abroad. The list of bloodthirsty dictators that the US has installed and backed in recent times is a long and melancholy one, and one that is still depressing long. Robert Martens was a member of the US embassy in Indonesia when it assisting in engineering the removal of a democratic regime and installing General Suharto, and protecting it until the 1990s. Under his tyranny, 1 million Indonesians died. The embassy even provided death-lists of union, church, youth and women's group activists for the security forces to murder. Martens said later: "They probably killed a lot of people and I probably have a lot of blood on my hands, but that's not all bad. There's a time when you have to strike hard at a decisive moment." That policy direction has not changed to this day. The US is not, of course, responsible for all the atrocities it allies commit. However, it must accept blame when the Bin Ladens and Saddams of this world turn against it, and is responsible for perpetuating and assisting them. Events like 9/11 and the current crisis will only become less likely in the long term with fundamental changes in US policy, beginning with the prosecution of those US officials implicated in massacres. Exactly the opposite tack has been adopted by the US under Bush.

Short-term steps

But what of the current crisis? In the first place, of course, it is precipitated primarily by the US's desire for influence over Iraq. The US and UK have moved massive military forces to Iraq's borders, and are threatening it with war. Iraq has not made similar preparations to initiate an attack on the United States or Britain- the very thought is ludicrous. American forces can simply go home, and the current crisis will be defused. Some people have suggested that allowing Saddam Hussein and Tariq Aziz to go into exile together would defuse the crisis: the same might as well be said of Bush and Blair!

"Regime change begins at home", read a placard at a recent US anti-war rally. Without any shadow of doubt, the world would be a safer and happier place without Saddam Hussein and George Bush at the helm of their states. Opposition to war in America has come from all quarters- the military, the churches, the academy. But Bush's political opponents, the Democrats, have not been brave enough to articulate alternatives. Pushing them to do so, or forming democratic, progressive, alternative political formations, is of prime importance for the American people, and is a task that will take time, money,

vision, and will. The outside world needs to find creative, non-violent ways to positively engage in that process.

In the same way, non-violent resistance to Saddam Hussein's regime must be encouraged and promoted at home. American scholars Peter Ackerman and Jack DuVall, drawing on examples from their mammoth study of the effectiveness of localised non-violent campaigns in Nazi Germany to massive citizens campaigns for freedom in Pinochet's Chile and Honecker's East Germany, conclude that Saddam can be toppled in the same way as Honecker. Some of those in the Iraqi opposition who oppose war have argued that, if oil workers put down their tools, Saddam would simply fall- but that US hostility to Iraq bolsters Saddam's ability to exercise tyranny (in the same way that Bush's position was bolstered by the Al-Qaeda attacks). We need to explore imaginative ways to help the oppressed of Iraq topple Saddam Hussein- for example, outside media could play an intelligent role in this process, as it did in bringing down the Communist regime of 1980s Poland. Against cruel oppressors, non-violent social movements brought change for blacks in America and South Africa, and colonial subjects in British India. No two countries are the same, but those who have most to gain from militarism and have come to rely upon it as a universal solution seek to dismiss the efficacy of non-violence: but, with the UN reckoning that America's bombing and sanctions over the past 12 years have caused the deaths of a million Iraqis, the proponents of militarism can hardly boast a proud record themselves.

In a recent article, Kamil Mahdi and other London-based exiled-opponents of the Hussein regime argued that the regime could be stripped of its power if there was a real desire in the outside world. As former weapons-inspector Scott Ritter has demonstrated, up until 1998 (when Clinton pulled the inspectors out in preparation for a bombing campaign), they had succeeded in locating and destroying the vast majority of Iraqis stocks of WMD and the infrastructure to recreate it. Mahdi argues that the continued operation of the inspections regime would address the weapons issue perfectly well, and could be done alongside lifting the 'sanctions of mass destruction' that have caused the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis in the past 12 years. They has also suggested a parallel system of human rights monitors. The US and Britain have systematically sidelined the majority of the Iraqi opposition, training their own preferred lackeys for a post-Saddam puppet regime. But, as Mahdi argued, although "we loathe the regime,, most of us are wary of the US agenda... War would be cataclysmic, and would lead to civilians being crushed between Bush's hammer and Saddam's anvil." There are alternatives to mass destruction through sanctions and bombing. These would not be perfect, and are easily dismissed by those who prefer killing, by those who are schooled in force and whose imagination extends to little else, whose knee-jerk reaction is to go for the bomb as a drunkard hits the bottle- and who benefit in multiple ways from the growth and extension of the US military-industrial complex, empire, or whatever word we chose to use. Their vision for the world is a vision that must be defeated by all those who love peace and justice.

On January 19th 2003, 3,500 people packed Washington national cathedral to hear prominent leaders from churches throughout America denounce Bush's drive for war. They had gathered to celebrate the birthday and legacy of Martin Luther King, the Baptist preacher and civil rights campaigner who urged people to seek justice through peaceful civil disobedience and reasoned protest. It was in that very church that he denounced America's disastrous Vietnam war, shortly before his murder. On another occasion, addressing a civil rights gathering at the height of the campaign, he warned Americans that "A voice, echoing through the corridors of time, says to every intemperate Peter, 'Put up thy sword!' History is cluttered with the wreckage of nations that failed to follow Christ's command." George Bush would do well not to ignore them either.

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Nick Megoran, January, 2003.