

Why Invading Iraq is a Bad Plan

Gene Marshall

I do not approach this subject as one who is opposed to all warfare. I believe that military action is a governmental role that can sometimes be responsible. Each case is different, and each case is ambiguous. War is always costly; nevertheless, it is sometimes true that the costs of not going to war are more costly than going to war. It is also true that a nation always goes to war for many reasons, some of which are responsible and some of which are not. We need to examine carefully all the reasons being given for invading Iraq and decide whether these reasons are valid and whether they outweigh the reasons for not going to war.

The reasons now being woven for a preemptive strike against Iraq are among the most curious I have ever heard. I want to raise some serious questions and explore some important truths that are being downplayed by the current U.S. administration and the mainstream media. Furthermore, we are being given the impression by some elements of the current U.S. administration that dissent with regard to this war is unpatriotic. Quite the contrary, dissent is a crucial part of a vital democracy. Without the possibility and vitality of dissent, democracy drifts into fascism.

Here are my key questions:

- Is the danger of Saddam Hussein to the United States being exaggerated?
- Are the costs of this invasion being underestimated?
- Are the long-range impacts of this proposed action being fully evaluated?
- Are the deeper reasons of those who are proposing this attack being hidden?
- In the light of all of this, is a military campaign against Iraq the only and best answer?

In summary, is it actually true that a regime change in Baghdad is worth the lives of even one and perhaps a thousand U.S. military personnel and many times that number of Iraqis? Indeed do we even have enough reason to spend 60 billion (and perhaps 200 billion dollars) on this campaign? Do we not have more pressing needs for the expenditure of our national wealth--such as homeland security, education, and ecological restoration?

Is the danger of Saddam Hussein to the United States being exaggerated?

As I listen to Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld and others on the Sunday morning talk shows, I am given the impression that war with Saddam is inevitable and urgent because of his great threat to the safety of the U.S. and other nations. I hear this mantra repeated over and over: "Saddam is a brutal dictator. He has weapons of mass destruction. He has been willing to use these weapons against his own people and his neighbors. He may not have nuclear weapons yet, but he is certainly seeking them and may have them soon. He may use these weapons against the U.S. or pass them along to terrorist groups who will use them. Nothing less than a regime change in Baghdad will make us safe. We need to strike now before he strikes us."

Are these statements true, and even if they are somewhat true do they constitute valid reasons for this war?

Saddam is a brutal dictator. Everyone agrees that Saddam is a brutal dictator, but there are many brutal dictators operating in the world today. Why replace Saddam rather than all these others? Some of the most brutal dictators of all time, the United States has supported; we have

even assisted some of them to come to power. Pinochet of Chile is a prime example. Our excuse for assisting him to power was that the Allende government was too left wing. It did not seem to matter to our governmental wizards that Allende had been elected by a vast majority of the people. It did not seem to concern most U.S. citizens deeply that Pinochet murdered tens of thousands of people to establish his power. Pinochet was finally convicted of crimes against humanity. Other stories are similar to this. Suharto of Indonesia came to power with U.S. support. Our government expressed gratitude for his anti-communist vigor as he wiped out 500,000 supposedly leftist citizens, mostly rural peasants. So why Saddam?

Saddam has weapons of mass destruction Again, many nations have weapons of mass destruction.

Saddam is willing to use his weapons of mass destruction Saddam has indeed used chemical (and perhaps biological) weapons against Iraqi minorities and against the Iranians. This is certainly a horrible violation of an international consensus that has been in place since the end of World War I. But in fairness, we should note that Saddam has not yet wiped out entire cities. In the late stages of World War II, U.S. fire bombing of Tokyo killed over a 100,000 people. And let us never forget the 78,000 killed in Hiroshima and the 74,000 killed in Nagasaki. Whatever our justification for these actions may have been, they are overwhelmingly larger actions than Saddam's gassings.

Saddam may soon have nuclear weapons Let us notice that the U.S. administration is not proposing war against every nation that has developed or is developing nuclear weapons. There are people in Iran and Korea as well as Iraq who feel that they need nuclear weapons in order to keep someone from attacking them. I am opposed to nuclear proliferation, but let us be fair. A number of nations have come to the conclusion that having nuclear weapons is imperative: India, Pakistan, China, Great Britain, France, Israel. Are we going to propose forcing regime changes in these places if any of them get out of line? Pakistan is currently headed by a relatively effective anti-Al Qaeda dictator, but Pakistan remains a volatile place. If Pakistan became a radical Islamic state, would we be willing to go to war for a regime change there? Israel is currently viewed as our friend, but suppose some future U.S. government had the gall to fully oppose the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands. Would Israel use its nuclear capacities against the U.S? They might if attacked by the U.S. Otherwise, probably not. Israel would fear U.S. nuclear retaliation. If and when Iraq had nuclear weapons, would Iraq not fear U.S. nuclear retaliation? Would this not restrain their use of such weapons? Certainly the implication that Iraq would use nuclear weapons in any other context than self defense is stretching what we actually know. Indeed, it seems to me that those who are proposing this invasion are selectively demonizing an enemy they have already decided to attack.

Saddam may pass along his weapons of mass destruction to groups like Al Qaeda who will use them against the U.S. This statement does sound scary, but is such a thing likely? Unlike Al Qaeda, Iraq is a secular state, not a movement of angry suicidal fanatics. Iraq has to honor the modern world somewhat, because Iraq wants a place, a bigger place, in that world. Al Qaeda wants to destroy the modern world at any cost because it sees that world as evil. Saddam might become suicidal if sufficiently pushed, but I believe that a nuclear threat from Saddam is being highly exaggerated. And why would Saddam provide nuclear weapons to the likes of Al Qaeda? There is no evidence that Saddam has any great fondness for these religious fanatics. General Brent Scowcroft has suggested that Saddam may be one of the leaders on the Al Qaeda hit list. No link between Iraq and the September 11th attacks has been established. Al Qaeda is more likely to get its nuclear weapons from several other places such as from some Russian black marketeer. The only thing that makes Saddam and Al Qaeda similar is that they both resist U.S. oil policies in the middle east. To group Saddam and Al Qaeda together under one heading, "terrorism," is muddy thinking.

As a nation, we have been seduced by the slogan "The War on Terrorism." This slogan is even more murky than "The War on Drugs" or "The War on Poverty." What is terrorism? Does it include everything in the world that the United States finds threatening? It certainly does not include Pakistani terrorism against India or Tamil terrorism against the government of Sri Lanka. It does not include all the oppressive governments who practice what some call "state terrorism." "The War on Terrorism" might better have been named "The Police Action against Al Qaeda." That would have been a clear and specific response to the September 11th events. And such a title would have avoided giving permission to ourselves and other nations to dub any aggravating groups as terrorists and thereby justifying excessive actions against them. Apparently, pursuing a "Police Action against Al Qaeda" was not glamorous enough for President Bush and most of his advisors. Instead Bush has asked U.S. citizens to picture ourselves leaping onto our silver stallions and riding off to rid the world of evil. But the actual world is not like an adventure comic book. Realism requires us to think more deeply than seeing ourselves as innocent glamorous heroes in a world of obvious evils. Iraq is not Al Qaeda, and there is no all purpose category like "terrorism" into which we can sweep them both. Also the U.S. is not an innocent cop or a noble super hero. And surely it is not unpatriotic to assess the extent to which we, the U.S., are part of the problem in today's world as well as a potential part of its solution.

The ex-U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark in a letter to the United Nations has this to say about the Iraqi threat: "Eighty percent of Iraq's military capacity was destroyed in 1991 according to the Pentagon. Ninety percent of materials and equipment required to manufacture weapons of mass destruction was destroyed by UN inspectors during more than eight years of inspections. Iraq was powerful, compared to most of its neighbors, in 1990. Today it is weak. One infant out of four born live in Iraq weighs less than 2 kilos, promising short lives, illness and impaired development. In 1989, fewer than one in twenty infants born live weighed less than 2 kilos. Any threat to peace Iraq might become is remote, far less than that of many other nations and groups and cannot justify a violent assault. An attack on Iraq will make attacks in retaliation against the U.S. and governments which support its actions far more probable for years to come." (To read Clark's entire article go to: http://www.iacenter.org/rc_letter0902.htm)

For these and other reasons, I have concluded that seeing Saddam as a huge thorn in our flesh that must be immediately removed is a gross exaggeration of the facts. Furthermore, total safety is an illusory goal in today's world. I feel it is disgraceful for our politicians to use the September 11th attacks and our fear of further attacks as the motive for this questionable war. Surely "the land of the brave" is capable of living with a measure of unsafety.

Are the costs of this invasion being underestimated?

In the Gulf War against Iraq, we were able to obliterate many thousands of the Iraqi military with the loss of only a few hundred U.S. soldiers. This was possible partly because the limited goal of getting Saddam out of Kuwait was the stated aim. We were able to make a sort of deal with Saddam that we would allow him to retain his position of power if he would grant us this stated objective and not use his weapons of mass destruction against U.S. forces. As it turned out, he did not even use his most well-trained troops.

But in an all out invasion whose aim is to remove Saddam from power, these easy conditions will not exist. This time Saddam will surely use every means at his disposal: his chemical and biological weapons, his nuclear weapons if he has any, his best and most loyal troops. Also he will not expose his forces to warfare in the open desert, but will use them in house to house combat in the city streets where losses to the attacking forces can be maximized. It is true that Saddam is not strong. It may be true that many of his military personnel will bolt. But this does

not mean that this campaign will be easily achieved with a minimum loss of life. Clearly these are guesses. We do not know how extensive the costs will be. But I am convinced that we should not trust those who are minimizing these costs.

We also need to weigh in our considerations the loss of Iraqi life. This kind of a war will surely entail a large loss of life to an already oppressed civilian population. If removing Saddam is not entirely necessary, why should we sacrifice these lives?

Is this war even worth the **60 billion dollars** which it will surely cost? And let us keep in mind that at least one Bush advisor in the Pentagon estimates that this war may cost as much as **200 billion dollars**. What does this do to the U.S. economy? Many thoughtful people have noted that instead of expanding our military budget, we need to be reducing it by about 60 billion dollars so that we can do what needs to be done in education and environmental restoration as well as in homeland safety precautions. It is strange thinking indeed to suggest that we always have money to go to war, but that we don't have money for the things that have to do with the basic interior strength of this country.

Let us also consider some of the other more complicated costs of going to war with Iraq. How fully have we considered the money and personnel we would have to tie up for many years in a **post-war Iraqi reconstruction**? We do not have a good estimate of how many years such a transition would take. Iraq is richer and more well trained than Afghanistan, but it will still have horrendous issues and conflicts to work through. Furthermore, this U.S. administration, in fact most U.S. administrations, have not proved themselves very good at nation building. Bush even campaigned against doing nation building. He seems to be saying that we can walk away from our nation-building responsibilities in Iraq rather quickly because Iraq is not a backward or poor country. This plan for an early exit, if carried out, could make the situation in Iraq worse than it is now.

What will be the effect of an Iraqi war and reconstruction on finishing the somewhat promising governmental transition still being established in **Afghanistan**? Many of us feel that we are not now putting enough money and people into the Afghanistan project. Are we going to put less?

What will be the effect of an Iraqi war on holding together the **Muslim coalition** and the **European coalition** assembled for the Afghanistan reconstruction and for the policing of Al Qaeda?

It has become my conclusion that the costs of going to war against Iraq are far greater than the costs of not going to war. Even if Iraq wanted to or managed to attack a U.S. city, the cost in lives and resources of that unlikely outcome might be less than the almost certain costs of going to war. The truth is we have no way of fully estimating how extensive the costs of going to war might become. The minimization of these possible costs amounts to a form of lying.

Are the long-range impacts of this proposed action being fully evaluated?

Have we considered as strongly as we need to consider that a war with Iraq might end up proving to the masses of the Islamic people that Osama Ben Laden has been basically correct? "The U.S. is indeed the real enemy of the Muslim world." I believe that the promoters of this war are minimizing this risk of further inflaming the entire Muslim world. Certainly we do not want to fight wars with Muslim states for the next several generations.

Finally, there are unsettling ramifications to the statements now being made by the current U.S. administration that we have the right to defend ourselves with **unilateral preemptive strikes** against any nation we feel is a threat. Russia, China, Israel, Pakistan, India, could all use that rationale for preemptive strikes against nations or groups they feel are thorns in their flesh. We have quite correctly advised India and Pakistan against war, especially nuclear war. What sort of example would we be setting by a preemptive strike against Iraq? Eleanor Roosevelt, Jimmy Carter, and many others worked for decades to establish a sense of international lawfulness and multilateral approaches to serious crimes against humanity. Surely we do not want to act in such a way as to degrade those achievements. What sort of nation do we want to be? Do we want to be a nation who exempts itself from international consensus, a nation for whom might makes right? Do we want to be a nation who is so arrogant in its powerfulness that it operates beyond the bounds of meaningful international discussion and restraints?

Are the deeper reasons of those who are proposing this attack being hidden?

Obviously, we need to ask: **Is this war being proposed because Saddam is sitting on huge oil reserves and proposing to use them in ways that do not please U.S conservatives?** Is oil the real reason why regime change in Iraq is so important to many of the promoters of this proposed war? Is this why some feel that Saddam is a more deadly threat than all the other brutal dictators that rule middle eastern states? This much is certainly true: Saddam is willing to oppose U.S. control of the middle eastern oil economy while the other middle eastern oil dictators are willing to go along with U.S. control to an “acceptable” extent. Even though war promoters are vigorously denying that oil considerations are the prime motive for proposing this war, it remains part of the background thinking that it is crucial to supply cheap oil to the world economy and thus assist conservative forces everywhere to keep things moving along in their status-quo fashion. If Saddam lived in Africa, would the U.S. government be this concerned about him? We must not underestimate the probability that the supporters of this proposed war are downplaying their oil concerns. We must not underestimate the possibility that much of the concern about Saddam getting nuclear weapons is because he would then be more able to maintain his stubborn attitudes toward the U.S. control of oil.

Oil as a reason for this war raises a very important question: is U.S. control of middle eastern oil a good enough reason to sacrifice the lives of thousands of people and spend many billions of dollars of our national wealth? I suppose this reason might make sense if you are an oil executive or a believer that the oil economy is an unavoidable necessity. But if you are not invested in making your fortune from the oil trade and don't mind considering an economy in which fossil fuel burning is minimized and eventually phased out, then you could have a different perspective on the importance of U.S. control of middle eastern oil.

I am not going to accuse the U.S. Republican administration of promoting this war merely in order to improve their chances in the November 2002 and 2004 elections, but their timing for this war is suspicious. And I am quite sure that it has occurred to every Republican political adviser that Bush is a stronger war-time president than he is a champion of domestic wellbeing. “The War on Terrorism” has clearly given his presidency its focus. Nevertheless, I am willing to assume that these advocates of war really do believe that this war will solve something besides improving their electability. Apparently, the prospect of removing this serious opponent to the U.S. control of the oil economy seems rational in the minds of these oil-anxious, world-trade-promoting conservatives. But it does not seem rational to me.

Ramsey Clark in his letter the United Nations questions Bush's motives for this war even more strongly than I have: “His motives may include to save a failing Presidency which has converted a healthy economy and treasury surplus into multi-trillion dollar losses; to fulfill the

dream, which will become a nightmare, of a new world order to serve special interests in the U.S.; to settle a family grudge against Iraq; to weaken the Arab nation, one people at a time; to strike a Muslim nation to weaken Islam; to protect Israel, or make its position more dominant in the region; to secure control of Iraq's oil to enrich U.S. interests, further dominate oil in the region and control oil prices. Aggression against Iraq for any of these purposes is criminal and a violation of a great many international conventions and laws including the General Assembly Resolution on the Definition of Aggression of December 14, 1974."

**In the light of all of this, is a military campaign against Iraq
the only and best answer?**

Are there alternatives to going to war against Iraq? Yes, there are. Keeping Saddam bottled up until he dies is not a weak response to his ambitions. And doing so is not as dangerous as we are being told. Also, the overall conditions of the middle east could over time improve, especially if we put our money into improving those conditions. Instead of threatening everyone with our big stick, we might become a truly big helping hand. We might try showing those millions of pained Muslim people who are wavering on the verge of becoming violent terrorists that we are actually for democracy and justice and equitable development in their part of the world. This requires more imagination than sending our super equipped military forces against some weakened petty dictator.

So in conclusion, I am hoping that the citizenry of the U.S. who are going to have to pay for this invasion in both hard cash and in the lives of their sons and daughters will join me in deciding to oppose this war.

Perhaps the regime change that is most needed at this time is located in Washington D.C. That regime change will require more than voting out the Bush administration in November 2004. It will require a massive educational campaign in the next two years. I hope some of the thinking in this article may be useful to you in your devotion to this task.