

# WAR IN IRAQ?

Over the past year and a half the Bush administration has put forth a variety of arguments for prosecuting a war on Iraq to unseat Saddam Hussein. Keeping up with these arguments can be confusing—partly because they keep changing. At the same time, both here and abroad, challenges to the administration's reasoning continue to mount. What follows is an attempt to break down the major areas of debate.

## FOR WAR

- ***Iraq is a threat to the United States and the world.***

The Bush administration argues that Iraq under Saddam Hussein is a rogue state capable of developing and deploying weapons of mass destruction (WMD); if left unchecked, this capability would make Saddam a menace to the peace in the Middle East, if not the world at large. An even greater danger is that he could supply terrorist networks such as Al-Qaeda with WMD. Once WMD are in the hands of terrorists, argues President Bush, they "could not easily be contained." Likening this moment to Munich in 1938, administration officials have argued that Saddam Hussein must be stopped before this threat is realized, just as the Allies should have stopped Hitler.

- ***Iraq suffers under a brutal dictatorship.***

Hussein's government has inflicted countless atrocities on its own people and numbers among the world's worst abusers of human rights. He employs torture and surveillance to keep the Iraqi people in a continual state of fear, while diverting Iraq's resources toward the enrichment and consolidation of his regime. He must be removed on humanitarian grounds alone.

- ***Regime change in Iraq will benefit the Middle East.***

Democracy in Iraq would lead to growing liberalization of governments all over the region by offering an alternative template to Islamic fundamentalism and authoritarian rule. The benefits of this process could also include an eventual resolution to the Israel-Palestine conflict.

- ***The credibility of international rule must be maintained.***

Iraq has flouted several United Nations resolutions and must be held to account. If not, the UN will lose all credibility in its attempt to preserve an international rule of law that applies equally to all its members.

- ***Advances in communications and warfare technology, together with the time the U.S. has had to prepare for this war, will result in a quick and decisive conflict with minimal U.S. and civilian casualties.***

Military technology since the first Gulf War has improved significantly, with a tenfold increase in the use of "smart" satellite-guided bombs, and the introduction of unmanned reconnaissance vehicles, high-powered microwave weapons and a thoroughly digitized communications network.

## AGAINST WAR

- ***The military threat from Iraq remains unproven, while North Korea, among other nations, openly flouts international agreements.***

Credible analysts, including former chief UN weapons inspector Scott Ritter, argue that Iraq has been largely disarmed and that it is now effectively restrained through the UN inspections process. Hussein knows that a deployment of WMD traced to his regime would bring swift and decisive response. Connections between Hussein and Al Qaeda remain speculative at best. Meanwhile, the presence of WMD in the hands of other unstable or totalitarian regimes around the globe—in North Korea (with a missile capable of reaching the United States),

Pakistan, and China, not to mention the neighboring Middle East states of Syria, Egypt, and Israel—argues for a general plan of disarmament to rid the world of these deadly weapons, of which the United States is now the leading manufacturer and supplier.

- ***"Nation building," in Iraq as well as elsewhere, is a long and arduous task, for which the United States has shown neither capability nor commitment.***

Since the post-WWII reconstructions in Europe, the U.S. has largely restricted its leadership in the world to military matters, leaving the real work (and costs) of humanitarian aid, peace-keeping, and "cleaning up" to the international community. If the U.S. acts unilaterally, this time, it will have to face the consequences alone. The still-precarious situation in Afghanistan, together with the equally uncertain state of the U.S. economy, offer little support to the confident assertions in Washington that we can manage a post-war crisis in Iraq. Iraq's political terrain, rooted in its colonial history, is complex: Hussein's despotic regime masks a feudal power structure, itself undermined by diverse revolutionary movements, including substantial numbers of Kurds, as well as Shiite Muslims and a Sunni minority, opposed to one another and divided among themselves. Such difficulties argue against any smooth transition to democratic governance. Furthermore, the past history of U.S. support for Hussein's regime at its bloodiest, during the 1980s—which entailed active collaboration in his war against Iran, even in the face of evidence that he used chemical weapons against his own people—does not, in many Arabs' eyes, qualify the U.S. for its professed role as "liberator."

• **Justice in the Israel-Palestine conflict is a better route to peace in the Middle East than imperial invasion.**

A U.S. invasion of a sovereign Middle East nation is likely to further inflame Arab feeling against the United States and against its client state Israel (a state also equipped with undeclared WMD). Neighboring countries would suspect, justifiably, that a puppet regime in Iraq is simply a means of extending U.S. control over an oil-rich region. The chances that an invasion would further undermine security both in the Middle East and abroad are too great to justify war. Instead, they point to the overwhelming need for a just and peaceful solution to the conflict in Palestine—where a less than fully democratic Israel continues to occupy Palestinian territories and subject their inhabitants to oppressive control, in tandem with a less than fully democratic Palestinian Authority that cynically ignores the demands of its constituents for reform. Aggressively promoting democratic solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would do much to ease tensions in the Middle East generally, as well as take away one of the few propaganda points in Hussein's attempt to ally himself with his Arab neighbors.

• **The credibility of UN rule is best maintained through the compliance of its most powerful member.**

The U.S. needs to abide by the rulings of the UN in its determinations over the best way to deal with a noncompliant Iraq. A "preemptive" invasion of Iraq, without a second UN resolution authorizing force, is illegal and contravenes the very basis of the charter of the United Nations, the principle of nation-state sovereignty. The UN inspections process has produced results, and may be expected to produce more in the future. A U.S. rush to war can only further shred the fabric of international agreements, already weakened by the current administration's cavalier dismissal of those it finds uncongenial.

• **Make no mistake: civilians are always the first victims of modern warfare.**

Even in Afghanistan, where the U.S. went to some lengths to minimize so-called collateral damage (and which has been touted as a success), as many as 8,000 civilians were killed by U.S. bombs and many more maimed. In Iraq the U.S. has demonstrated its willingness to exact the "price" of significant civilian casualties—in the past, through bombing of water and sewage treatment infrastructure which, in combination with long-term sanctions limiting access to basic medicines and chemicals like chlorine, has led to the deaths of as many as 500,000 children. Faced with invasion, Hussein will be far more likely to use whatever chemical and biological stockpiles he does harbor, whether on his own people or on U.S. troops. Finally, for all its reliance on high-technology and high-precision weaponry, the number-one priority of current U.S. military strategy—minimizing the deaths of U.S. soldiers through massively concentrated bombing from the air—can only translate into a corresponding increase of civilian deaths on the ground. We are told repeatedly that the Iraqi people are not our enemy. But Pentagon blueprints suggest otherwise.

#### **SOME LINKS FOR FURTHER INFORMATION**

**Institute for Policy Studies:**  
<http://www.ips-dc.org/iraq/primer.htm>

**Middle East Research and Information Project:**  
<http://www.merip.org/>

**MoveOn:**[http://www.moveon.org/iraq\\_meetings/talkingpoints.html](http://www.moveon.org/iraq_meetings/talkingpoints.html)

**Voices in the Wilderness:**  
<http://www.nonviolence.org/vitw>

**Shape Your World:**  
<http://www.shapeyourworld.info/bib.html>

**Historians Against the War:**  
<http://chnm.gmu.edu/rhr/haw>

**Veterans for Common Sense:**  
<http://www.veteransforcommonsense.org/>

**War Times:**  
<http://www.war-times.org>

**Washington Post Opinion, The Debate about Iraq:**  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/world/mideast/gulf/iraq/commentary/>

**Guardian UK Antiwar Links:**  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/antiwar/subsection/0,12809,884056,00.html>

**WHAT IN THE WORLD ARE OTHERS THINKING? FIND OUT! FOREIGN NEWSPAPERS (IN ENGLISH)**

**Guardian UK:**  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/>

**Mail and Guardian (South Africa):** <http://www.mg.co.za/>

**International Herald Tribune:**  
<http://www.ihf.com/>

**Rheinische Post:** <http://www.rp-online.de/german-news/>

**Moscow Times:**  
<http://www.moscowtimes.ru>

**Buenos Aires Herald:**  
<http://www.buenosairesherald.com>

**China People's Daily:**  
<http://www.peopledaily.com.cn/english/>

**Times of India:**  
<http://www.timesofindia.com/>

**Al-Ahram Weekly:**  
<http://www.ahram.org.eg/weekly/>

**Jerusalem Post:**  
<http://www.jpost.com/>

#### **PROTESTS**

<http://www.internationalanswer.org>

<http://www.unitedforpeace.org>

<http://www.notinourname.net/>

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