

An Analysis of the War (March 25, 2003)
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The United States has entered into an undeclared war in Iraq. While I believe there are many good reasons to enter into the war, I think there are at least as many reasons not to have entered. In many ways this writing is too late (and probably too little), but I want to make my view clear (at least to myself) and be able to point back to this writing at later times when supporters of the war are “surprised” by the events which unfold. Not to say “I told you so”, but rather to point out that they should not have been surprised, that the events were at least in principle, foreseeable.

I do not advocate peace at any cost. I am a firm believer in a strong military and the willingness to use it when circumstances dictate. Once we engage in war, however, our choices are significantly limited. We have no choice but to pursue the war, with unrestrained commitment. There are only two possible outcomes to a war: Victory or Defeat. Regardless of your views on our entry into the war, it is quite clear that for any American at least, Victory is preferable to defeat. When war is pursued, it cannot be pursued in half measures. This is unfair to the men and women we ask to fight the war, and it is a decidedly worse policy than any other.

Now, let us turn to the reasons why I oppose the war. To fairly examine this one must fairly consider the reasons why there is support for the war. First, and foremost, Saddam Hussein is a terrible despot. Make no mistake about it, *ceteris paribus*, the world will be a better place without him. He has pursued two aggressive wars (invading Iran and Kuwait) committed myriad human rights violations against his own people and against Iranian civilians during the Iran-Iraq war. I have no doubt that he does have chemical weapons and some methods of deployment. He has used them before during the Iran-Iraq war, and later against Kurdish rebels. It is certainly true that he has pursued the development of biological and nuclear weapons. It is likely that some development has taken place. I also agree that he was in violation of UN resolutions and that he was not fully cooperative with the UN inspectors.

However, the Hussein regime is not as big a threat as proponents of the war would like to believe. His regime can be broken into two halves. Pre 1991 and post 1991. All of his invasions and use of chemical weapons predate 1991. Since 1991 he has been contained militarily. While there have been times when Iraqi forces have fired at US and other planes enforcing the “no-fly zone,” that has been the extent of his military action. Additionally, the majority of his military hardware was destroyed during Gulf War I. While some repairs and growth have surely occurred, the UN imposed sanctions have largely been effective.

Some would argue that he might supply weapons of mass destruction to terrorists. Two important arguments make this unlikely (note, still possible). First, most of the Arab terrorists are Shiite Muslims. Hussein, a Sunni himself, is largely hated by the Shiite sect, and indeed for good reason: most of his campaign of terror was directed at

the Shiites in Iraq. Supplying weapons to Shiite extremist groups is clearly not in his best interests. Whatever you may say about Saddam Hussein, staying in power is his only goal. In general, dictators do not like to supply their most destructive weapons even to their allies (read the history of WWII where the Nazi's held much of the new technology within SS units, not even sharing with regular army units, much less Italian, Japanese, Rumanian or Austrian military). In general, he would be reluctant to supply weapons to any terrorist sect, fearing that these weapons would be used against him.

More importantly, do the terrorist really need him? The answer is clearly no. And in fact, given his war against Iran and invasion of Kuwait, they largely don't like him. Chemical, biological and nuclear weapons are available from many other countries. Indeed, the biggest threat now is the republics of the former Soviet Union. Cash starved, facing their own economic problem, these republics are in need of hard cash and are willing to sell weapons to anyone with hard cash. Indeed, last night on CNN, we learned that Bush has asked Russia to stop selling anti-tank and other weapons to Iraq. Who else are they selling them to? Will removing Saddam Hussein even slow down the funnel of arms? Likely not.

Some have claimed that we have an obligation to the UN to enforce it's resolutions. Clearly this is patently absurd since the UN wasn't ready to use force, and indeed most countries, including some of our most important allies (Germany, Canada, Japan).

Next let us examine the costs of war. Clearly all human life has value (it's harder to see for some). War results in death and atrocities. This should be clearly foreseen. I'm very proud of the US military. It has one of the cleanest records, concerning atrocities, in the history of the world. It is one of the most well disciplined and moral of all militaries. Our soldiers are the best in the world. War brings death. Our own soldiers will suffer casualties. I hope that is minimized. As Patton once said, "the object of war is not to die for your country but to make the other guy die for his." The civilian population of Iraq will suffer casualties. I hope that is minimized as well, but our first obligation is to our soldiers. Finally, Iraqi soldiers will die too. Again, our first obligation is to our own soldiers, but the men fighting for Iraq are people too. Indeed, I pray for a quick victory for our troops, since this will minimize casualties on all three groups.

Atrocities will be committed. Largely, I'm sure, by the Iraqis, but some will be committed by our troops as well. As we saw in Vietnam, fighting an enemy which uses the local civilian population as camouflage and shields is extremely frustrating. This frustration can boil over and may result in US troops committing some atrocities. I forgive them already. When you place people in those positions, one has to expect these things to happen. It is a part of the cost of war and MUST be a part of the decision to go to war. What is saddest about this possibility, is that some of these men who commit these atrocities, will have to live with their actions for the rest of their lives. As we have seen with other veterans (not just Vietnam) they carry the guilt with them for the rest of their lives. This is another, very human, cost of war.

One of the main goals of this war is to capture chemical and other weapons. Hussein may use them against our troops. However, it is my belief that he will retain at least some of these weapons. In exile, the possession of these weapons will give him power. They will make him a player in the international terrorist world. While in power, holding these weapons is important, when he is out of power holding them is even more important. My expectation is that he, and his family and closest associates, will slip out of the country carrying as many of these weapons as possible. The US military is not, and should not be, designed as a force to capture a single person or small group of people. Indeed, that mission is at odds, from a military standpoint, from the mission of gaining and holding territory while minimizing US casualties. As in Afghanistan, and many other instances going back to the second world war, it is difficult to capture specific individuals in the confusion of war. Hence, many of the weapons we fear the most will slip out of Iraq as well (as demonstrated by Colin Powell in his UN briefing, it only takes a small vial of Anthrax to kill thousands).

As the Iraqi forces fall apart, many of the competing factions in Iraq will move to take control of local areas. We currently don't really know where all of the chemical, biological and nuclear weapons are currently located. I suspect that there are many in Iraq who do know. Because these weapons are power, they will make moves to capture these weapons once US victory is clear (perhaps even now). While some of these groups will allie themselves with the US, others will not. Thus our actions have almost certainly ensured that some of the weapons of mass destruction will fall into the wrong hands.

Many have argued that this will be a quick war. In some ways, I expect they are right. Indeed, I have been surprised by how slow it is going. My prediction prior to the outbreak was that it would take less than 2 days to have forces attacking Baghdad. However, we make quite good progress and I trust that our Military is taking actions to ensure the minimization of US casualties while maximizing the ground we capture and hold. I am reasonably sure that we will depose Saddam Hussein reasonably quickly and move to secure the country in a relatively short period of time. I suspect that phase will take less than 2 months total. I may be wrong, it might take longer (I fear), or shorter (I hope). However, that is only the first phase. Then we must install some kind of new government. We will occupy Iraq, using military forces, during the interim period.

The length of the interim period is a good question. Many people point to Japan and Germany as examples. If those are examples, then we should examine those examples. World War II ended in 1945. Control of the German Government was turned over to the German Parliament in 1951. Control of the Japanese Government was turned over to the Japanese Parliament in 1949. So we should expect, if this is the template, about 4-6 years of occupation. Assuming that goes well, it is a large monetary cost.

Are the examples of Germany and Japan good parallels? They certainly have some parallel. However, both Germany and Japan were long standing unified countries prior to the beginning of the war. Iraq is a relatively new, and indeed "contrived" country. It was created by British colonial governors. Indeed, it was created containing

three historically opposed groups: Kurds in the North, Sunni Muslims in the center, and Shiite Muslims in the south (these divisions actually extend back to tribal times). This was done purposefully to ensure that no large coalition could rise to overthrow colonial rule. This has resulted in deep divisions through the short history. Civil war is common in Iraq, and only strong military dictators have united the country. Indeed, in Japan, the emperor was retained and continued to unite the country (he died in 1989, and was replaced by his son, who continues as the emperor of Japan).

Both Germany and Japan had experience with democracy prior to WWII. Hence, the imposition of democracy was not something new, but rather something well established. Iraq has never known democracy. Historically it is difficult to impose democracy on people. In fact, to the best of my historic knowledge, there is NO example of an “imposed” democracy lasting very long. There are many examples of imposed democracy being overthrown by despots: the Phillipenes in post WWII, Haiti more recently, many African countries in recent times as well.

More likely, what will arise in Iraq, at least at first, is a simmering civil war between the three major factions in Iraq. During the occupation period, our troops are vulnerable targets. A great historic example of this is our involvement in trying to quell the civil war in Lebanon in the 1980s. As many recall, we finally withdrew, having not achieved much, because our troops were dying. Here, though, withdraw would leave a huge power vacuum. Indeed, failure to see this through to a complete conclusion, which may take many more years, would leave Iraq a potential threat for years to come. Warring factions in the middle east have always led to destabilization and terrorism (for example Lebanon). Hence, we must now stay in Iraq and ensure that the country is stabilized. As noted above, we may pay a heavy price in casualties during this period.

One of my biggest concerns is that we will not see this war and subsequent occupation through to a final satisfactory conclusion. If the war turns out to be long and costly in casualties (I hope not, and it is unlikely) there may be political pressure to withdraw. More importantly, since the occupation is likely to be long and result in casualties (consider the Lebanon experience), support will begin to wane. We really must see this through to a final conclusion, a victory, that includes a stable regime. Anything short of that is failure and defeat, since in the long run it would likely lead to another despotic ruler who would pose a threat to the US. I am concerned that there are many who now support the war, who will not support a lengthy occupation. A portion of the American Public is rather fickle. Many of my friends who support the war understand and support the need for a long term occupation. While I disagree with their support of the war, I respect them. They understand the long term commitment we have entered. However, I think that there is a group of people who currently support the war because they think it will be quick and painless (like Gulf War I). They are, I’m afraid, mistaken and more seriously will change their minds in the coming months. This group is very dangerous. If it is only 20% of the population, they will swing the polls from 65% in favor of the war to only 45%. That is enough of a swing to pose a serious political threat to Bush’s re-election in 2004. Then, either Bush will withdraw, or the president who defeats him will withdraw. This will result in a far less stable Iraq.

The final cost is what we have lost in international politics and what we have lost in our own government. We have now spent all of the goodwill that followed the 9/11 attacks. Many countries see us as a rogue state, bent on furthering our own goals at the expense of world peace. It doesn't matter if our interests are pure at heart or not, the rest of the world doesn't see it that way. We will find it hard to obtain cooperation from other countries in the future because of this. I seriously doubt that we can pursue a war on terrorism without global cooperation. Many countries who might have allowed small, cooperative operations in their country to root out terrorist cells will no longer allow that. Moreover, individuals who were "on the fence" may slip over in favor of terrorism. The supply of young men (and women) to terrorist organization will increase. More importantly the supply of money and the availability of weapons to these organization may be increased as well. We have, I'm afraid, simply ensured yet another generation of people who view the US as an evil country. I don't think we are evil. In fact I do think that many in our administration are good, honest people. But even many in the US don't trust them.

It will be hard, now, for the Bush administration to require other countries to operation with the umbrella of the United Nations, or in conjunction with us and other countries. The tip of that iceberg has been revealed with Turkey who now wants to place troops into Northern Iraq. They claim that the destabilization from the war threatens their security and they must act to prevent an attack. I can't predict which country will use that argument next, but I can make some guesses: India or Pakistan (both of which have nuclear weapons); Israel (they have used it before to much success, now there's an even bigger precedent); Russia; and even China (Taiwan poses a threat...). I am deeply concerned that many countries will use our precedent to attack neighbors, and we will be drawn into these conflicts again and again.

Hence, I argue that this war was a very big mistake, the costs of which we will bare far into the future. It is, however, too late to undo this mistake. Withdrawal now will simply compound the mistake and further erode our position in international affairs. Indeed the fact that war traps us and removes other choices is one of the biggest costs of war. Unfortunately I must conclude that we have left before us no other course of action. That was not true two weeks ago. There were many courses at that point, and even more six months ago.

I'm afraid this is a grim picture. What can we do? It is too late to stop the war. As I've argued above, at this point we really need to pursue this action until we finally establish a stable regime in Iraq. Anything short of that is failure. What I hope is that we can learn from this mistake. We must renew our commitment to the United Nations. We must begin to act in concert with countries around the world. We must take a much longer term view of the world situation. Our country, and many others, has not done this very well at all. That's not a criticism of a particular political party, but rather a criticism of the policies pursued by both parties.

It is my opinion that the first step to democracy is economic stability. Freedom and Democracy often follow economic development. When your stomach is full, it's much easier to worry about how your country is run than when you are scrambling to feed people. Poor and starving people flock to despotic rulers because in they can often provide quick fixes to starvation. Once in power, they use the threat of starvation very effectively.

The cornerstone of economic development and capitalism is free trade. We must pursue international cooperation in economic markets, and be leaders: we are currently not. Indeed, the current administration has begun dismantling the work of 3 three previous administrations toward more free trade.

A second and important step toward promoting democracy is to practice it ourselves in world politics. The UN is an organization founded on the same principles as our country was founded. Indeed, the charter of the UN was patterned after our own constitution (it even begins with "We the People"). To have abdicated our responsibility to the democratic organization that we founded simply undermines our work for democracy through the rest of the world. It is difficult to argue that we support democracy when we ignore the wishes of the vast majority of the rest of the world. Many have argued that "it is not a popularity contest." That's an interesting criticism since the same people turn around and argue in support of the war by telling me that 65% of the people in our country support the war.

Many are rightfully concerned about terrorism. I agree that this is the biggest threat to our country. There are two key components to terrorism: money and people. Our thrust on the war against terrorism should be to stem the flow of money to these organizations. Without money, it is difficult to wage any kind of war. The people who are attracted to such organizations are poor and disenfranchised. Again, by aiding economic development, we can stem the flow of people into these organizations. Indeed, we instinctively understood this in post WWII reconstruction. Somehow we have forgotten this important fact.

Only by a long and concerted effort to support Democracy, Freedom and Free Trade throughout the world can we hope to ever live in peace. We need to carefully consider the long term aspects of our actions, and be sure that they promote these ideals. We need to carefully rebuild our relations with other countries. We need to carefully rebuild Iraq after the war.