

13 MYTHS ABOUT THE CASE FOR WAR IN IRAQ

The Internet has certainly played a major role in the current debate over war in Iraq. A group of online "mythbusters" recently went one step further. They posted a summary of key claims made by the proponents of war and then invited hundreds of people to offer suggestions on how to respond. The following is the result of this exchange. (The complete document, with over 120 footnotes from mainstream and primary sources, is online at <http://13myths.org>.)

1) MYTH: Removing Saddam Hussein from power would eliminate a key backer of the Al Qaeda terrorist networks responsible for the 9/11 attacks.

RESPONSE: Just four days after the September 11th attacks, the *Wall St. Journal* doubted any Iraqi involvement in an article titled "U.S. Officials Discount Any Role by Iraq in Terrorist Attacks: Secularist Saddam Hussein and Suspect bin Laden Have Divergent Goals."

The CIA and the FBI remain skeptical of a link between al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein, despite continued political pressure to find one, according to a front page article in the *NY Times* on Feb. 2, 2003.

None of the hijackers came from Iraq; 15 of the hijackers came from the same country as Osama bin Laden: Saudi Arabia.

2) MYTH: In his 2-hour presentation at the UN, Secretary of State Colin Powell provided a "careful and powerful presentation of the facts. The information in the Secretary's briefing ... was obtained through great skill, and often at personal risk. Uncovering secret information in a totalitarian society is one of the most difficult intelligence challenges. The Iraqi regime's violations [are] in direct defiance of Security Council 1441." -- President Bush, Press Briefing, February 6, 2003.

RESPONSE: Many of Powell's assertions were quickly refuted. For example, Powell said, "By 1998, UN experts agreed that the Iraqis had perfected drying techniques for their biological weapons programs." Actually, the UN's 1/99 report on this matter said only that Iraq had performed drying experiments prior to the Gulf War, in 1989 - not that it had perfected them.

A journalist for *The Observer* toured Ansar al-Islam's alleged chemical weapons factory and found it to be a bakery with outhouses. Powell's claims that ricin found in Britain came from Iraq were rejected by European intelligence agencies, who said it was crude and "homemade" in Europe.

Even more appalling was the revelation in the British press about the one of the key documents Powell used in his UN speech, the "dossier" on terrorism prepared by the staff of UK Prime Minister Tony Blair. Powell praised the document as a "fine paper."

However, much of it was plagiarized from source material written before the current round of inspections, primarily from a published article written by Ibrahim al-Marashi, a graduate student in California. The al-Marashi article, published nearly a year ago, focused largely on the evidence of Iraq's weapons programs as they existed in 1990, prior to the first Gulf War.

3) MYTH: Saddam Hussein cannot be contained. To prevent a repeat of the situation with Nazi Germany, we must act immediately and preemptively before he acquires weapons with which to threaten us.

Iraq's programs to create weapons of mass destruction "are real and present dangers to the region and to the world." -- Colin Powell, speech to the UN, Feb. 5, 2002.

RESPONSE: The comparison to Nazi Germany is a bit of a stretch. Germany, by 1938, was number one in military spending, and had recovered from the Great Depression well before the other leading nations. It formed a real military alliance -- the Axis -- with two other powerful industrial nations, Italy and Japan.

By contrast, Iraq's military capability was largely destroyed in the 1991 Gulf War, and the "Axis of Evil" that Iraq is supposedly part of (Iran-Iraq-N. Korea) does not really exist as an alliance. In fact, Iran and Iraq fought each other in a 9-year war from 1980-1989.

The \$399 billion US military budget proposed at the end of January 2003 is almost 300 times the size of Iraq's!

4) MYTH: A discovery on Feb. 12 by UN weapons inspectors revealed, for the first time, that Iraq possessed missiles, the Al-Samoud and Al-Fatah, with a range exceeding the limits imposed by the 1991 UN Resolution 687.

RESPONSE: Though the Feb. 12 UN finding made the headlines, it was not new; it was based on information volunteered by Iraq over a month ago.

According to the 2/13 *NY Times* and numerous other sources, "The inspectors learned of the range of the missiles from test results that were provided in the 12,000-page arms declaration Iraq delivered at the start of the inspections."

The missiles in question are short range models that, all sides agree, can travel less than half of the distance from the western tip of Iraq to the eastern tip of Israel. (By comparison, the CIA reported on the same day that North Korea's Taepo Dong 2 missile is designed to travel 50 to 100 times as far.)

At last word Iraq has agreed to destroy these missiles. This agreement came after UN Weapons Inspection head Hans Blix reported the results of Al Samoud missile tests on 2/27/03. He reported that in a test firing of 40 missiles, 27 of the missiles landed within the legal limit of 150 km. About one-third of the missiles exceeded the limit.

5) MYTH: Bin Laden's tape released on Feb. 11 proves that Bush's accusations of an Osama bin Laden - Saddam Hussein collusion have been right all along.

RESPONSE: According to the transcript of the 16-min. Al Jazeera tape, bin Laden called Hussein a "Muslim apostate," i.e., a turncoat against Islam. Bin Laden has long called for the secular Baathist Party in Baghdad to be replaced with an Islamic fundamentalist, cleric-led government. The new words were intended to rally support for radical Islam, including factions within Iraq that are more anti-US than Saddam Hussein.

According to Gen. Hamid Gul, the former chief of Pakistan's spy agency InterServices Intelligence, bin Laden and Saddam cannot work closely together because "Bin Laden and his men considered Saddam the killer of hundreds of Islamic militants" within Iraq.

It is true that Saddam Hussein has expressed support for suicide bombings against Israel, and that the bin Laden tape refers to the suicide operations "that cause so much harm" in the U.S. and Israel. However, the existence of such terrorism is quite independent of Hussein.

6) MYTH: "Saddam Hussein has held numerous meetings with Iraqi nuclear scientists, a group he calls his 'nuclear mujahedeen' -- his nuclear holy warriors." - George Bush, televised speech, October 7, 2002 in Cincinnati

Dr. Khidhir Hamza, from 1987 to 1994, served as the head of Saddam Hussein's nuclear weapons program" and has said that "Iraq runs its nuclear program under the very nose of the international community." -- Quotes by Larry Elder, Worldnetdaily.com, and Hamza

RESPONSE: Saddam did refer to a nuclear energy program in a speech he made on 9/10/00. British expert Glen Rangwala wrote that Bush is taking advantage of a mistranslation of this speech that left out the word 'energy,' among other problems.

Although it would make sense to also forbid nuclear energy programs in Iraq, the U.S. and the U.N. have not called for that. There is no credible evidence that Saddam Hussein's scientists are now working on nuclear weapons, even though Hussein has wanted them in the past.

In his Jan. 27 report to the UN Security Council, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director Mohamed ElBaradei concluded, "we have to date found no evidence that Iraq has revived its nuclear weapons programme since the elimination of the programme in the 1990s."

In an article for the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, Dr. Khidhir A. A. Hamza states that he was "for a brief period in 1987--director of weaponization" of Iraq's nuclear weapons program Hamza also states, in his book "Saddam's Bombmaker" and in his 'Curriculum Vitae', that he was not employed in the Iraqi nuclear weapons program after 1989. He left Iraq in 1994. So it is clear that he has no personal knowledge of the status of the Iraqi nuclear program after 1994, and the extent of his personal knowledge after 1989 is open to question. Other Iraqi defectors with more inside knowledge than Hamza have disputed his claims.

7) MYTH: "If the United States marches 200,000 troops into the region and then marches them back out . . . the credibility of American power . . . will be gravely, perhaps irreparably impaired." -- Henry Kissinger, quoted in NY Times, Feb. 15, 2003.

RESPONSE: Top US officials have repeatedly stated they want to avoid war:

"I will tell my friend Silvio [President of Italy] that the use of military troops is my last choice, not my first." -- President Bush, quoted in White House News Release, January 30, 2003.

"We still hope that force may not be necessary to disarm Saddam Hussein... Let me be clear: no one wants war." - Donald Rumsfeld, In Munich, Germany, Feb. 8, 2003.

If the U.S. can disarm Saddam without war -- the administration's stated objective -- how is our credibility hurt? Even French President Chirac, a critic of war, has credited the presence of U.S. troops with increasing Iraqi compliance.

Kissinger and top Bush administration officials are not satisfied with this progress. However these individuals have conflicts of interest. They have strong ties with companies that produce weapons, drill oil, and build military bases.

The President's father and his 2000 recount advisor James Baker are, respectively, 'Asian Advisor' and Partner of Carlyle Group. According to Fortune magazine, Carlyle makes much of its profits by buying smaller "defense" companies, assisting them in winning huge taxpayer-funded contracts, and then selling them at a large profit.

Dick Cheney's wife, until January 2001, was on the board of Lockheed, the largest U.S. military contractor. Eight other administration officials had Lockheed ties before they were appointed. Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz were involved in a think-tank advocating for "global military dominance" funded by family foundations whose fortunes came from military contracting and whose founders included a Lockheed executive. These ties must be taken into account when evaluating the legitimacy of 'fears' about a peaceful outcome.

8) MYTH: War in Iraq will involve 150,000-200,000 troops and only cost \$50 billion -- less than it did in 1991.

RESPONSE: Bush's former economic advisor Laurence Lindsey estimated to the *Wall Street Journal* last summer that the war would cost \$100-\$200 Billion. A veteran ABC News reporter revealed on 1/13/03 that the actual deployment planned was 350,000 troops.

One reason the proposed war would cost so much more than the Gulf War is that the administration plans to occupy Baghdad, a city of 5 million people. Another is that other countries have declined to pay the costs of the war as they did in 1991; instead, the U.S. has offered to pay Turkey \$30 billion in grants and loans, an offer Turkey has thus far refused.

As Colin Powell wrote in *Foreign Affairs* in 1992, "The Gulf War was a limited-objective war. If it had not been, we would be ruling Baghdad today at unpardonable expense in terms of money, lives lost and ruined regional relationships."

Credible estimates of cost of a "short" Iraq war start at \$120 billion. This is on top of a 2003 military budget that is already expanded dramatically. The numbers tell the story: the military budget in 2001 was \$304 billion after 9/11 expenses were added. The military budget in 2003 is already \$407 including homeland security and military construction. Adding the cost of the war, it could reach \$527 billion or more. The cost of the increase from 2001-3 comes out to \$2000 for every family in the U.S.

The Bush administration does not seem concerned with the fact that their own budget projections two years ago anticipated a surplus of \$262 billion in 2004, but their projections now anticipate a 2004 deficit of over \$307 billion, *before* the costs of an Iraq war are factored in.

9) MYTH: Freedom of the Press in the U.S. exists even in times of war. The U.S. news media has been extremely skeptical of the official stories put out by the government, in order to uphold the truth.

RESPONSE: The last 20 years have seen a trend towards "management" of the press by the government: restricted access press pools, fabricated stories, fake letters to the editor, and even violence against U.S. war reporters.

According to the Winter 2002 *Navy War College Review*, citing the book *America's Team: Media and the Military*, the military had assigned reporters to a pool to cover the U.S. invasion of Panama in 1989, but the Defense Secretary at the time, Dick Cheney, "delayed calling out the pool."

During the 1991 Gulf War, according to Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Patrick J. Sloyan, "The Associated Press... sent photographer Scott Applewhite to cover victims of a Scud missile attack near Dahrhan. The warhead had hit an American tent, killing 25 army reservists and wounding 70... Applewhite, an accredited pool member, was stopped by US Army military police. When he objected, they punched and handcuffed him while ripping the film from his cameras."

Dick Cheney, quoted in *America's Team*, was honest after the the Gulf War about his treatment of the media. "Frankly, I looked on it as a problem to be managed," he said after the war. "The information function was extraordinarily important. I did not have a lot of confidence that I could leave that to the press."

The most famous Gulf War media fiasco occurred right here at home. Employees of the large PR firm Hill & Knowlton arranged for a speech to be made by a 15-year-old girl, "Nayirah," to an unofficial "Congressional Human Rights" group in October 1990. Her so-called eyewitness story about Iraqi soldiers removing babies from hospital incubators was publicized by the entire news media and even by Amnesty International. But Nayirah was actually the daughter of Kuwait's Ambassador to

the United States; the other eyewitness recanted his story, and other eyewitnesses have said that the story was fabricated. Amnesty was forced to issue a rare retraction.

10) MYTH: "We can give the Iraqi people their chance to live in freedom and choose their own Government." -- President Bush, Feb. 6, 2003 press statement.

"Iraq's oil and other natural resources belong to all the Iraqi people - and the United States will respect this fact." -- Stephen Hadley, US Deputy National Security Advisor, 1/11/03.

RESPONSE: The U.S. government has made statements elsewhere asserting that we will control both Iraq's government and its oil, for quite some time.

Excerpt from the *Oil and Gas International*, an Industry Trade Publication, 1/27/03: "France and Russia have been warned they must support the US military invasion and occupation of Iraq if they want access to Iraqi oilfields in a post-Saddam Hussein Iraq."

Excerpt from the *Globe and Mail*, quoting US Congressional Testimony on 2/12/03: "The United States intends to rule postwar Iraq through an American military governor, supported by an Iraqi consultative council appointed by Washington, Iraqi opposition leaders gathered in this northern Kurdish city said yesterday. 'While we are listening to what the Iraqis are telling us, the United States government will make its decisions based on what is in the national interest of the United States,' said Mark Grossman." Grossman, the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, was testifying to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

11) MYTH: War will reduce energy prices and make the U.S. more independent, because oil from Iraq would reduce the current U.S. dependence on Saudi Arabian oil (and prevent the Saudis from pushing us around).

RESPONSE: It is true if someone handed us unfettered control of all Iraq's oil, Saudi Arabia would have less influence than it does now as the lead oil exporter in the world.

But acquiring that control through war has enormous costs, and these costs have to be factored in to assess the true cost of energy.

The Rocky Mountain Institute, an independent research organization in Colorado, points out: "Since 1970, oil imports have been responsible for nearly 75 percent of the U.S. trade deficit and have resulted in a net outflow of \$1 trillion to the OPEC nations - much of which is spent on armaments... the peacetime readiness cost of U.S. military forces earmarked for Persian Gulf intervention is around \$50 billion a year, raising the effective cost of Gulf oil to around \$100 per barrel." This was before the post-9/11 buildup (see myth #8).

If the government charged the oil companies a larger portion of the taxpayer cost of obtaining the oil, and used this money to subsidize use of renewable energy, it would be possible within 5-10 years to completely eliminate the need for U.S. oil imports from the Persian Gulf.

RMI calculated that raising average automobile fuel economy from 20mpg to 33 mpg would accomplish this goal. Or, this goal could be accomplished with a smaller fuel economy increase, combined with other wind, solar, and energy efficiency initiatives that can be implemented with today's technology.

12) MYTH: "The course of this nation does not depend on the decisions of others" -- George Bush, State of the Union Address, 1/28/03. "[UN Resolution] 1441 gives us the authority to move without any second resolution." -- George Bush, Press Conference with Tony Blair, January 31, 2003.

RESPONSE: When the U.S. was achieving independence from Britain, we did not do it alone. France helped!

In the wake of World War II, the US took a leading role in establishing the UN to prevent future world wars. The recent unilateral position of the Bush administration runs counter to decades of US policy, the language in resolution 1441, and international law. To ignore the usefulness of the United Nations at this time would strengthen the hand of those who want global war, including anti-U.S. terrorist groups.

As President Bush himself said during one of the 2000 presidential debates, "If we are an arrogant nation, they will resent us, If we're a humble nation, but strong, they'll welcome us." He went on to add, It's important to be friends with people when you don't need each other so that when you do, there's a strong bond of friendship. And that's going to be particularly important in dealing not only with situations such as now occurring in Israel, but with Saddam Hussein."

The text of 1441 concludes, "[The Security Council] Decides to remain seized of the matter," meaning that it retains jurisdiction, and has not given anyone else the power to act. The US Senate ratified US agreement to the UN Charter by a vote 89 to 2 on July 28, 1945. Under Article 2 of the Charter, the use of military force is prohibited without explicit authorization (under Article 42).

13) MYTH: "'Anti-war' protesters ... are giving, at the very least, comfort to Saddam Hussein." Therefore they can be accused of committing treason according to the Constitution. -- NY Sun Editorial, February 7, 2003

RESPONSE: Since the American Revolution, democracies have steadily replaced dictatorships, in part because open debate produces a more responsive and accountable government. Punishing dissenters is the hallmark of totalitarianism; it throws away one of democracy's greatest strengths.

After John McCain -- the Senator from Arizona -- was released from captivity as a POW in Vietnam, he was asked, "How did it feel when you heard Americans were protesting the war?" He said, "I thought that's what we were fighting for -- the right to protest."

It is true that courts have not always fully supported the rights to dissent. But in 1964, thanks to Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement, the US Supreme Court issued a landmark decision on the matter. They ruled that the New York Times could not be sued for an ad critical of the actions of Montgomery, Alabama police against civil rights protesters. According to one account, the court "made explicit the principle that seditious libel -- criticism of government -- cannot be made a crime in America and spoke in this connection of `the central meaning of the First Amendment.'"

The Sun's editors also missed the fact that Osama bin Laden's terrorist group attacked New York, and that this group wants to end the rule of Saddam Hussein. By calling for the overthrow of Hussein, the Sun is actually supporting the position of the terrorists who attacked Manhattan.

CREDITS

Editors: Rich Cowan, Paul Rosenberg, Abigail Caplovitz, and Dan Schueler, webmaster
Research and proofreading team: Deborah Conner, Bonnie Britt, Brit Eckhart, Marc Schuler, Jules Siegel, Rodger Payne

Email: info@13myths.org
13myths.org is a project of Organizers' Collaborative; see <http://organizenow.net> for more information. Mailing list: <http://rightwatch.org>. Also available: Free database software for nonprofits and organizing campaigns; see <http://organizersdb.org>.