

Iraq:

The Wrong Place, the Wrong Time, the Wrong War

by Gene Healy

Invading and occupying Iraq will likely undermine American national security, perhaps catastrophically so.

War with Iraq appears to be all but a foregone conclusion. President Bush reads the Republican takeover of the Senate as a vindication of his regime-change policy; the UN Security Council will no longer stand in his way, and any intransigence the weapons inspectors encounter upon their return to Iraq may provide the administration with the *casus belli* it seeks. Indeed, as this issue goes to press, laser-guided bombs may already be falling on Baghdad, clearing the way for ground troops.

Nonetheless, it's worth examining how we got here, not only because the administration's case for war is so weak, but because many in our "movement," for lack of a better term, have signed on.

The administration has framed its case for war in terms of American national security. That's the case I'll address. I won't argue with their assessment that Hussein is an evil and murderous tyrant; clearly he is. I won't argue that venal or frivolous motives lie behind the administration's push for war — such as a desire to control Iraqi oil fields or a personal vendetta on the part of President Bush. I don't think such motivations are what drive the administration. Finally, I won't even spill much ink on the moral case against war in Iraq, even though I think that case is quite strong. Simply put, it's wrong for us to kill (at a minimum) hundreds of innocent Iraqi civilians based on an entirely speculative possibility of future harm. But as it happens, the pragmatic case against invasion is strong enough to suffice by itself. Iraq does not represent a threat to American national security. In fact, invading and occupying Iraq will likely undermine American national security, perhaps catastrophically so.

The administration argues that Saddam Hussein may not be deterrable. But it has provided no reason to believe that

deterrence — which sufficed to contain nuclear-armed Mao and Stalin, the gold and silver medallists in the 20th-century's genocidal Olympics — will not work. And it ignores the fact that Hussein has demonstrably and repeatedly been deterred from using weapons of mass destruction against enemies capable, like the U.S., of massive retaliation. The administration argues that Hussein has links to al Qaeda and may have had a hand in Sept. 11. But its evidence on those counts amounts to a plea of "trust us." Finally, the administration argues that forcible regime-change can lead to a free, prosperous, and democratic Iraq, which will serve as a beacon to surrounding nations. But it ignores the much greater risk that an invasion will increase the risk of terrorist attacks in both the short term by making Hussein undeterrable and the long term by leading to a newly empowered al Qaeda.

A Demonstrably Deterrable Dictator

In "Tales of the Tyrant," in May's *Atlantic Monthly*, Mark Bowden, the investigative reporter who wrote *Black Hawk Down*, profiles Hussein's rise to power and bloody reign. Anyone who doubts Hussein's brutality should read the piece. In it, Bowden recounts Hussein's fascination with Josef Stalin. He writes of a meeting in 1979 between Saddam and the Kurdish politician Mahmoud Othman:

It was an early-morning meeting, and Saddam received

Othman in a small office in one of his palaces. It looked to Othman as if Saddam had slept in the office the night before. There was a small cot in the corner, and the President received him wearing a bathrobe.

Next to the bed, Othman recalled, were "over twelve pairs of expensive shoes. And the rest of the office was nothing but a small library of books about one man, Stalin. One could say he went to bed with the Russian dictator."

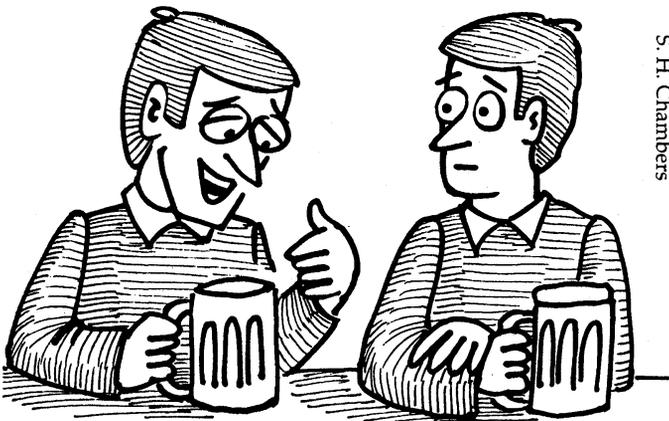
But like his hero Stalin, Hussein is a survivor. As Bowden notes, Hussein "never sleeps in his palaces. He moves from secret bed to secret bed. Sleep and a fixed routine are among the few luxuries denied him. It is too dangerous to be predictable." He employs body doubles. In fact, so concerned is Hussein with his own safety, that he's adopted a modern-day equivalent of royal food-tasters. Hussein

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imports all his food, and has the shipments "sent first to his nuclear scientists, who x-ray them and test them for radiation and poison. The food is then prepared for him by European-trained chefs, who work under the supervision of al Himaya, Saddam's personal bodyguards." It's hard to imagine that someone so intensely focused on self-preservation would take action that's clearly suicidal, such as attacking America with chemical or biological weapons.

It's fairly certain that Hussein retains some chemical munitions, some biological agents, and that he's made efforts to develop nuclear weapons. It's also true that he's used chemical weapons in the past, both against the Iranian army and Kurdish civilians. But one thing he has never done is use those weapons against any enemy capable of massive retaliation.

This is well-covered ground, but again, Hussein had chemical weapons during the Gulf War. However, in



S. H. Chambers

"There's nothing like an ice-cold beer to take your mind off the evil-doers."

response to a thinly veiled American threat of nuclear retaliation, he chose not to use them. None of the 42 scuds launched at Israel were tipped with chemical weapons. He didn't even use them against American forces driving him out of Kuwait, and possibly marching on to Baghdad: none of the 40-some scuds shot at allied forces during the war had chemical payloads.

Those who favor preventive war are not moved by this argument. A scud delivery comes with a return address, they argue; delivery by terrorist intermediaries may not. But if Hussein ever considered this strategy, the evidence suggests that deterrence worked here as well. Hussein first got nerve gas over 20 years ago. His hatred of Israel predates his hatred of the U.S. (Israel launched a preventive airstrike on the Osirik nuclear reactor in 1981, after all). Hussein has had longstanding links with anti-Israel terror groups like the Palestine Liberation Front and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Thus, he has long had the means, the motive, and the requisite links with people who would carry out a sneak chemical attack on Israel. If using terrorists to deliver weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) is such a foolproof scheme, then why hasn't Hussein tried at least once over the years to use them against (militarily dominant and nuclear armed) Israel? Hint: the answer's in the parentheses.

Proponents of preventive war argue that weapons of mass destruction change the deterrence equation fundamentally. Why that should be so, given that neither such weapons nor terrorist groups are new developments, isn't obvious. First, as I argue below, it's not entirely clear that chemical and most biological weapons make the grade as "weapons of mass destruction." Second, common sense and CIA intelligence assessments argue that a war undertaken to eliminate the Hussein regime is likely to increase our exposure to attack with chemical and biological weapons by leaving Hussein with nothing left to lose.

Surely, though, nuclear weapons qualify as WMD. Regime-change proponents argue that, even if there's no evidence that Hussein plans to attack us, we should hit him now, before he's capable of nuking an American city. As President Bush put it, "we cannot wait for the final proof — the smoking gun — that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud." But the issue of nuclear weapons deserves a more sober assessment than it's currently getting. As Brookings Institution defense policy analyst Michael O'Hanlon has noted:

Saddam probably could not hurt the United States directly with a bomb even if he had one. Even if he overcomes his most serious obstacle by obtaining fissile material on the black market, he would probably be able to build only a few nuclear weapons, and they would be big. That would make it hard to transport such weapons to give to terrorists or his own foreign-based operatives for use against a U.S. city. He might be able to sneak a bomb into Kuwait or another neighboring state with a low-flying aircraft, but the plane might well also get shot down. He probably does not have a missile big enough to carry what would be a fairly primitive and thus large nuclear warhead.

Thus, even if, contrary to everything we know about his

behavior, Hussein were to develop a death wish, it would be quite difficult for him to strike an American city with nuclear weapons. Of course, a nuclear-armed Hussein would limit our freedom of action in the Middle East, making a war for regime-change far riskier. But that's not an argument that Hussein represents a threat to American security, and, as the administration surely recognizes, it's not as compelling a talking point as the horrifying if implausible spectre of a nuclear Sept. 11.

The Missing Link

Hussein's pursuit of chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons isn't the only justification administration officials have offered for war. They've also intermittently relied on the argument that the Iraqis have ties to al Qaeda, and may even have helped plan Sept. 11.

Such cooperation isn't impossible, but it would be surprising. Bin Laden and Hussein are natural enemies. Bin Laden believes that even the decrepit theocracies of Saudi Arabia and Egypt are godless, Western regimes. Hussein took power as a member of the Baathist pan-Arab socialist movement. Sad to say, he's what passes for a secular ruler in the Middle East.

When CNN purchased a cache of al Qaeda training tapes last August, they were surprised that the collection included a documentary — not meant for public consumption — that was highly critical of Saddam Hussein. But that came as no surprise to those like terrorism expert Peter Bergen who have studied al Qaeda for years and are familiar with bin

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Laden's distaste for the Iraqi regime, which does not govern according to sharia and in which women are allowed to drive and (gasp!) bare their heads.

None of that proves that tactical cooperation between Hussein and al Qaeda hasn't happened. After all, Hussein has cooperated with Islamic radicals seeking to destabilize the autonomous Kurdish sector in Northern Iraq. But the evidence that he's cooperated with al Qaeda is vanishingly thin.

The key piece of evidence for the Hussein-al Qaeda connection is a meeting that allegedly took place in Prague in April 2001 between hijacker Mohammed Atta and Ahmed al-Ani, an official with the Iraqi embassy who was later expelled on suspicion of espionage. Czech Prime Minister Milos Zeman and President Vaclav Havel have both asserted that the meeting took place. However, the CIA, the FBI, and the chief of Czech foreign intelligence have all cast doubt on the story. U.S. intelligence officials — despite an

exhaustive investigation and evident pressure from the administration to say otherwise — have said they can't establish that Atta was in Prague in April 2001. At a press conference last April, Columnist Robert Novak asked Rumsfeld point-blank whether Atta met with al-Ani; Rumsfeld: "I don't know whether he did or didn't."

Clearly, if Rumsfeld doesn't know whether the meeting happened, it can't serve as a justification for war. Neither can Rumsfeld's repeated — and unsubstantiated — charges that Hussein is "harboring" al Qaeda operatives.

Skepticism in Defense of Liberty Is No Vice

War skeptics tend to feel uneasy when Secretary Rumsfeld asserts without offering evidence that Iraq is "harboring" al Qaeda, or when the Turkish government

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reported in September that it had intercepted a shipment of 33 pounds of weapons-grade uranium en route to parts unknown (it turned out to be five ounces of harmless, non-radioactive powder). The administration has its sights set on regime change, and one fears that one *casus belli* is as good as another in its view. Other commentators have invoked the sinking of the battleship *Maine* in Havana Harbor, and the Gulf of Tonkin incident to remind us that when it wants to go to war, the executive branch tends not to be scrupulous with the facts. But we don't need to go that far back if we're looking for cause for concern. Gulf War I had its own set of war-justifying myths, propagated by some of the same people who now urge us to launch Gulf War II.

In the run-up to Gulf War I, Dick Cheney's Pentagon warned that a quarter of a million Iraqi troops and 1,500 tanks were massed at the Saudi border, ready to invade. As the *Christian Science Monitor* noted this September, contemporaneous commercial satellite photos of the region show nothing but desert in the areas that the Iraqi buildup was supposedly taking place.

The Bush I administration also took advantage of Kuwaiti propaganda about Kuwaiti babies being ripped from incubators by Iraqi soldiers. In the fall of 1990 a 15-year-old girl known only as "Nayirah" testified before Congress about this alleged atrocity. It emerged some time later that "Nayirah" was the daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador to Washington, and had not been anywhere near the hospital where these events supposedly took place. Instead, she'd been coached by a D.C. PR firm that had a \$10 million contract with the Kuwaiti government to push public opinion toward war. The incubator story was referred to repeatedly during congressional debates of authorization for the war. The truth emerged only after the lie had served its purposes.

Refusal to take administration officials at their word when they allege that Iraq had a role in Sept. 11 or that the

regime harbors al Qaeda isn't paranoia: it's hard-headed realism, borne of experience. When you're listening to our leaders make their case for war, remember that — despite what they told you in civics class — the citizen's first duty is skepticism.

Worst-Case Scenario

It's also incumbent on the informed citizen to assess carefully the risks attendant to the proposed war. The ground war phase of Gulf War I lasted less than a week. But this time around, if they fight, the Iraqis are not going to get caught in suicidal set-piece battles. It's more likely that the Republican Guard will remain holed up in Baghdad, fighting a house-to-house war of attrition in which Iraqi civilians serve as human shields.

If that happens, there will be substantial civilian casualties. The Israeli Defense Forces took a lot of criticism for their tactics — bulldozing buildings that had not been evacuated, using Palestinians as human shields — last spring in the West Bank town of Jenin. (It soon emerged that reports of a "massacre" had been greatly exaggerated.) But should it come to close-quarters urban combat, it's safe to expect American tactics to be more brutal than those employed by the IDF. Unlike the Israelis, we're not willing to accept heavy battlefield casualties. Rather than fight house-to-house — and take the losses that would entail — we'll likely blow up whole city blocks. And the Qatar-based Arab news channel Al Jazeera will have reporters on the ground to film it. Sure, we'll win, but there will be significant costs: hundreds of American casualties and thousands of dead Iraqi civilians. In the process of winning the war, we'll provide al Qaeda with propaganda footage sufficient to recruit the next generation of jihadis.

Add to this the possibility that Hussein again launches scuds at Israel, this time tipped with chemical warheads. In Gulf War I, the threat of massive retaliation deterred Hussein from using his chemical arsenal. But, to state the obvious, it's hard to deter someone who knows you're coming to kill him. As soon as the scuds are in the air, an Israeli reprisal is a given: Ariel Sharon is on record that Israel will respond if attacked. Bin Laden's depiction of American intervention in the Middle East as a "crusader alliance" between the United States and Israel will gain further credibility for the Muslim "man in the street."

There's little question that Israeli reprisals would weaken King Abdullah's government in Jordan, a moderate regime that has made peace with Israel. Abdullah presides uneasily over a population that is 50% Palestinian, and is said to be terrified by the impact Gulf War II could have on Jordan. But more disturbing still is the impact these events could have on the Musharraf regime in nuclear-armed Pakistan. A protracted war that includes Israeli participation would strengthen the hand of the pro-Taliban Islamists in the Interservice Intelligence agency, thus greatly exacerbating the WMD problem. Given that Islamic parties recently won 59 of the 342 seats in Pakistan's parliament, a fundamentalist takeover is a real possibility.

In the process, the Bush administration will also make a self-fulfilling prophecy out of its nightmare scenario in

which Hussein passes off chemical and biological weapons to terrorists. With his death warrant signed, sealed, and in the process of delivery, Hussein will have no reason not to pass off substantial chunks of the Iraqi biochemical arsenal to Islamic radicals. In fact, this is exactly what the president's own CIA director has concluded. In a letter read before a joint hearing of the House and Senate intelligence committees in early October, CIA director George Tenet noted that "Baghdad for now appears to be drawing a line short of conducting terrorist attacks with conventional or chemical or biological weapons." However, Tenet went on to say that should Hussein conclude that a U.S. attack on Iraq could not be deterred, "he probably would become much less constrained in adopting terrorist action."

Terrorist action with conventional weapons is disruptive enough. Consider the case of John Muhammed and John Lee Malvo, the Washington D.C.-area snipers. Despite hav-

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ing little or no formal training in long-range shooting, this none-too-bright pair repeatedly shut down the D.C. Beltway and terrorized greater Washington for close to a month. What could a couple of dozen well-trained agents achieve with similar tactics?

Terrorist action with chemical or biological weapons could be more disruptive still. War on Iraq substantially increases the likelihood of that scenario. Indeed, another CIA report given to the senators in the run-up to the congressional vote on use of force stated that Hussein might "decide that the extreme step of assisting Islamist terrorists in conducting a WMD attack against the United States would be his last chance to exact vengeance by taking a large number of victims with him." It's not clear that such a strategy would succeed; even under ideal battlefield conditions, chemical and biological weapons have never been as devastating as those wielding them have hoped (See Gregg Easterbrook's article, "The Meaninglessness of 'WMD,'" in Oct. 7's *The New Republic* for more information). But certain agents, such as smallpox, are more threatening than others. The CIA's Weapons Intelligence, Nonproliferation and Arms Control Center (WINPAC) has concluded with "high confidence" that Iraq retains stockpiles of smallpox. It may well be that modern public health facilities, coupled with military quarantines and forced vaccinations, could keep death tolls below Sept. 11 levels. But that's an experiment I'd rather not undertake.

You know we've reached an odd pass in political discourse when a humor magazine best sums up the administration's rationale for a preventive attack: in its "man on the street" interviews, the Sept. 25 edition of *The Onion* quotes "John Englund, Software Developer," who says, "It's clear to me that nothing short of war will stop Iraq from using its weapons."

Best-Case Scenario

I don't think the worst-case scenario is the most likely. That doesn't mean it should be discounted entirely. The worst case — Hussein passing off chemical and biological weapons to terrorists, a generation of new al Qaeda recruits, as well as loose nukes in Pakistan — is sufficiently awful to caution against another invasion of Iraq, if we can possibly avoid it. Since the downside scenario I've described is substantially more likely than Hussein's attacking the United States if left unmolested in Baghdad, that alone should be dispositive, in my view.

But the worst-case scenario may never happen. Perhaps Hussein will not be able to pass off WMD to terrorists, and perhaps his regime will collapse rather quickly instead of mounting protracted resistance to a U.S.-led invasion. We should keep in mind that there were quite a few self-styled experts who waxed apocalyptic in 1991 about "the fourth largest army in the world" and "the elite Republican Guard." If professional pundits were capable of humility, they'd have been humbled after the war turned out to be the biggest turkey-shoot in American military history.

This time around, the war may go just as easily as it did in 1991. I've got no special insight into the psychology of Iraqi Republican Guard soldiers, but I wouldn't be a bit surprised if they'd rather switch than fight. Where's the percentage in fighting a losing battle against the most powerful military in human history? I wouldn't stake my life on an easy victory, but I would put a substantial amount of money on it.

In the best-case scenario, Hussein doesn't pass WMD off to terrorists and he never gets to launch the scuds. Shortly after the air war begins, he's deposed by a Republican Guard coup. We take Baghdad without a single U.S. battlefield casualty. Triumphalism is in the air, and the chorus of self-congratulatory I-told-you-so's rings out in op-ed pages and TV talk shows across the land.

But our troubles are just beginning.

Welcome to the Occupation

At this point, we've conquered Iraq. Now what do we do with it? One plan being floated, according to the *New York Times*, uses the postwar occupation of Japan as a model. In this version of the MacArthur Regency, Iraq will be governed by an American military commander such as General Tommy R. Franks, commander of United States forces in the Persian Gulf.

The MacArthur Regency worked in Japan because the U.S. occupiers entered a country sick to death of war, with a tradition of deference to authority (encouraged by the Emperor's call to cooperate with U.S. authorities) and a monocultural middle class that could form the basis of a democracy. As historian John Dower puts it, "the ideals of peace and democracy took root in Japan — not as a borrowed ideology of imposed vision, but as a lived experience and a seized opportunity. It was an extraordinary, and extraordinarily fluid moment — never seen before in history and, as it turned out, never to be repeated." That process is particularly unlikely to be repeated in Iraq, a fissiparous amalgam of Sunnis, separatist Shi'ites, and Kurds. Keeping

the country together will require a strong hand and threatens to make U.S. servicemen walking targets for discontented radicals.

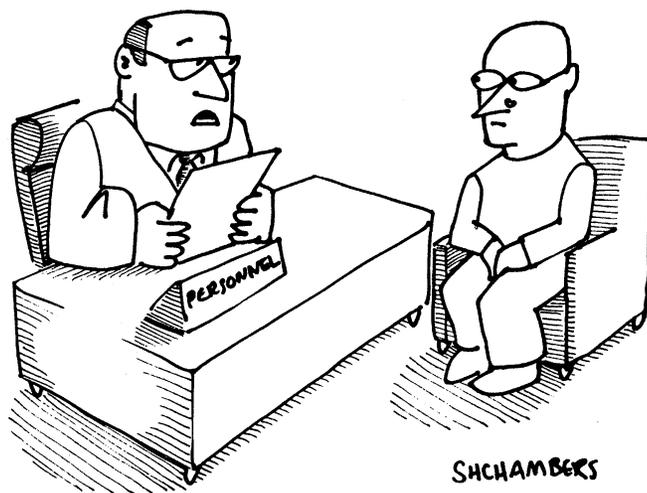
Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger — no dove, he — noted that he was "viscerally opposed to a prolonged occupation of a Muslim country at the heart of the Muslim world by Western nations who proclaim the right to re-educate that country." As well he should be. Such a policy would be the most generous gift imaginable to the al Qaeda recruitment drive. It makes bin Laden's ravings about a

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Crusader-Zionist alliance to de-Islamicize the Middle East look half-plausible to the angry young men of that hate-filled, backward region.

Indeed, it's hard to think of a foreign policy initiative that could do more to empower al Qaeda than invasion, occupation, and reconstruction of Iraq. To see why this is so, it's necessary to examine what motivates bin Laden's murderous band. Some commentators on the right have offered a theory of "why they fight" that amounts to "they hate us just because we're beautiful." The cover of the first post-Sept. 11 edition of *National Review* declared that al Qaeda attacked us "because we are rich, and powerful, and good." On July 4, 2002, libertarian Brink Lindsey, on his popular weblog brinklindsey.com, titled an entry "Why They Hate Us," and quoted the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal."

Those who have made a career of studying al Qaeda do not agree that the primary motivation behind the bin Ladenists' anti-American jihad is hatred of the West's political and cultural freedom. Peter Bergen, bin Laden's biographer, and one of the few Westerners to have interviewed



"I see that under 'hobbies' you've indicated 'watching television.' Could you be more specific?"

him, writes in his book *Holy War, Inc.* that:

In all the tens of thousands of words that bin Laden has uttered on the public record there are some significant omissions: he does not rail against the pernicious effects of Hollywood movies, or against Madonna's midriff, or against the pornography protected by the U.S. Constitution. Nor does he inveigh against the drug and alcohol culture of the West, or its tolerance for homosexuals. . . .

Judging by his silence, bin Laden cares little about such cultural issues. What he condemns the United States for is simple: its policies in the Middle East. Those are, to recap briefly: the continued American military presence in Arabia, U.S. support for Israel, its continued campaign against Iraq, and its support for regimes such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia that bin Laden regards as apostates from Islam.

A few obligatory caveats: first, examining al Qaeda's accusations against the United States does not in any way imply endorsement of those alleged grievances. A particularly ugly feature of the year-long debate over prosecution of the war on terror has been a readiness on the part of anti-terror hawks to fling the charge of "blame-America-first"

The goals of early American foreign policy were expressed succinctly in the Gadsden Flag: "Don't tread on me." The Bush Doctrine might fairly be formulated as "You may perhaps be thinking somewhere down the road about treading on me, and you're also treading on your own people, so I'll tread on you."

when one proposes to scrutinize al Qaeda's motivations. That charge reflects a hostility to debate and a fundamental lack of seriousness. We are at war with al Qaeda, and in war it is necessary to understand the enemy, as any military strategist from Sun Tzu onward could tell you.

Second, acknowledging that al Qaeda is in the main motivated by hostility to American foreign policy doesn't require one to deny that radical Islamists also resent America's prosperity and freedom. It's doubtless true that most bin Laden acolytes and sympathizers conceive of themselves as members of a once-proud civilization now characterized by backwardness and incompetence. No small part of their rage is fueled by envy. But it's also true that very few fanatics are willing to strap on a suicide belt simply to protest American prosperity. When al Qaeda leaders speak to the Muslim "street" in an attempt to garner new recruits, they focus on American foreign policy because they believe that the "street" resents American foreign policy. And they're right, as the most comprehensive recent public opinion research in the Muslim world indicates. A Zogby poll released in April 2002 surveyed respondents from ten Islamic nations on their attitudes toward American culture, capitalism, and foreign policy. The results show broad appreciation for America's economic system and culture. But when asked whether they approve of U.S. government policy toward the Palestinians, just one percent of Kuwaitis,

two percent of Lebanese, three percent of Egyptians and Iranians, five percent of Saudis and Indonesians, and nine percent of Pakistanis say yes. "It's not our values, it's not our democracy, it's not our freedom . . . it's the policy they don't like," said James Zogby.

Finally, to acknowledge that al Qaeda is motivated by hostility to American intervention in the Middle East is not to argue that we have but to pull our troops out of Saudi Arabia, end aid to Israel, and stop the Iraqi embargo, and al Qaeda will lay down its arms. It's reasonable to surmise that many of those already committed to the struggle will remain committed to the struggle, and will not quit if the U.S. disengages from the Middle East. Similarly, reasonable people can disagree about how much freedom of action we have to disentangle ourselves from the Middle Eastern tar baby in the foreseeable future.

What's utterly unreasonable is to assume, as the administration and its fellow travelers seem to, that the number of recruits to al Qaeda's murderous jihad is relatively fixed, and will not increase dramatically if the U.S. begins a policy of conquering and occupying Middle Eastern Muslim countries with the avowed purpose of making them secular and free.

"A Doctrine of Armed Evangelism"

But that is the policy we've embarked upon. Key administration officials, such as Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, top Pentagon consultant Richard Perle and perhaps Vice President Cheney view regime change in Iraq as a stepping stone to regional transformation. As the *New York Times Magazine* noted in a recent profile of the influential deputy defense secretary:

The striking thing about Wolfowitz is an optimism about America's ability to build a better world. He has an almost missionary sense of America's role. In the current case, that means a vision of an Iraq not merely purged of cataclysmic weaponry, not merely a threat disarmed, but an Iraq that becomes a democratic cornerstone of an altogether new Middle East.

It's odd to find this sort of vision appealing to folks on the political Right. Why would the sort of people who think government is too ham-handed even to promote modest social engineering goals like safe-sex among teenagers, think we can promote a revolution in Islamic theology via AC-130 gunship or create a bourgeois society where no preconditions for it exist?

But clearly something broader than a pedestrian concern for American national security is at work here. Neoconservative Michael Kelly identified it when he described the Bush policy as "a doctrine of armed evangelism" in the service of freedom. Kelly writes:

Unlike the European powers, America has never sought to own the world. In its peculiarly American fashion, it has sought to make the world behave better — indeed be better. In modern times, this evangelism has focused not on the need for "Christianizing" and civilizing the heathen populations (President McKinley's justification for taking the Philippines), but on the defense of what President Kennedy called "the freedom of men."

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and bondholders. When government agencies lie, every taxpayer must contribute to the loss.

Second, corporate shenanigans are self-correcting: companies must eventually admit their losses or go bankrupt. But congressional appropriators reward gov-

The Forest Service even argued that many road costs didn't have to be counted at all because the roads would last forever. The agency amortized these costs over eternity — something even WorldCom didn't dare to do.

ernment bureaucracies for wasting money by throwing good money after bad year after year, decade after decade. Although Forest Service timber sales have fallen more than 80% since 1990, Congress actually gave the Forest Service more money for timber sales this year than in 1990.

Certainly, accounting standards need improvement, and the private sector is already moving in that direction. Arthur Andersen is practically out of business, and companies on various stock exchanges are all hastily reviewing their books to ensure they aren't guilty of Enron- or WorldCom-like practices. Meanwhile, hardly anyone looks at the books of government agencies.

The Forest Service and transit agencies maintain their credibility because special interest groups, such as timber purchasers and rail construction firms, lobby Congress to look the other way. Attempts by Congress to set corporate accounting standards give interest groups new opportunities to lobby for special loopholes for their deceptive plans. When caught, they just say, "We only did what the federal government told us to do."

Before trying to dictate accounting standards to the private sector, Congress should get its own house in order. If it can't, it has no business telling others how to run their businesses. □

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This vision appears increasingly central to the way the Bush administration views its war aims. I fear it also appeals, consciously or unconsciously, to many libertarians who support the war. And in some ways that's understandable. Human rights are universal. Why then should they be denied anyone because of an accident of birth? Who didn't thrill to the sight of merchants offering VCRs for sale in Kabul, or women uncovering their faces in public for the first time in years?

But libertarianism is more than just a dedication to "the freedom of men." It entails a particular theory of the state. It recognizes that government is, at best, a necessary evil; as Washington put it, "like fire, [government] is a dangerous servant and a fearsome master." Recognizing this, we entrust to it only limited goals: securing the liberty of Americans from enemies foreign and domestic. Armed evangelism goes far beyond the limited, constitutional goal of securing "the common Defense" of the United States. In this theory, the state has gone from a necessary evil with a limited task, to a necessary good with considerably broader aims.

The modest, liberty-securing goals of early American foreign policy were expressed succinctly in the Gadsden Flag: "Don't tread on me." The Bush Doctrine goes far beyond those modest goals. In its narrowest formulation it reads: "don't get strong enough to be able to tread on me." But it might fairly be formulated as "You may perhaps be thinking somewhere down the road about treading on me, and you're also treading on your own people, so I'll tread on you."

Will this new formulation make us safer or freer? I fear we're about to find out. □
