

← Back (/search?)

text=War%20deemed%20unlikely%20to%20lead%20to%20Iraqi%20democracy&pub%5B0%5D=MLCP&date_from=2003&date_to=2003&content_added=&pub%255B0%255D=MLCP)

War deemed unlikely to lead to Iraqi democracy

April 23, 2003 Publication: Lansing City Pulse (MI) Word Count: 1211

War deemed unlikely to lead to Iraqi democracy

Why did the United States really invade Iraq? And how has this invasion changed the face of world politics and security? Stephen Zunes, chairman of peace and justice studies at the University of San Francisco and author of "Tinderbox: U.S. Middle East Policy and the Roots of Terrorism," will provide a forum for these and other questions at the MSU International Center at 5:30 p.m. Friday, April 25. Daniel Sturm interviewed Zunes.

Q: Why do you believe the United States invaded Iraq?

A: Most of us who are knowledgeable of arms control issues believe Iraq had very little if any weapons of mass destruction. As you've seen, the U.S. has been unable to find any. Similarly there didn't seem to be any ties to Al-Qaida. Moreover, Iraq's support to international terrorist groups was minimal, when compared with the past, and with other Arab regimes, including U.S. allies such as Saudi Arabia. And there are other countries in the region, like Israel, Turkey and Morocco, which are violating more U.N. Security Council resolutions than Iraq. So, the official reasons seem not to carry much weight. It's really about a kind of U.S. hegemony towards the Middle East, and about controlling this very important country.

Q: If this is the case, why is it so easy to convince public opinion otherwise in the United States

A: I think the Bush administration is able to take advantage of the fear, anger, and sense of nationalism that the American public has had since 9/11. Even though Iraq had nothing to do with 9/11, there is still a kind of fear of "the other," which can be directed particularly toward a Muslim Middle Eastern country.

Q: After 9/11, Bush used the term "crusade." Do you think religious conflict is a factor in U.S. actions toward the Middle East, or is this discourse a cover-up for other interests?

A: There's definitely a quasi-religious fervor, and some people in the Bush administration do use a kind of righteous morality. The way Bush frequently mentions the name of God in blessing the troops, but never for instance in blessing of the civilians killed in Iraq, seems to create a message that "God is on our side." This is old-fashioned power politics, and it plays into the hands of Bin Laden and others. If there's any logic behind the madness of 9/11 it was the hope that the United States would overreact like this, creating resentment toward the U.S. throughout the whole world.

Q: What role does Israel play in the Iraqi conflict? Is Sharon a key adviser for the Bush administration?

A: I think the United States sees Israel as an important junior partner in its reshaping of the map of the Middle East. And the Israeli government is certainly willing to play this role. But I think the Iraqi initiative is exclusively American. I don't think Israel is behind it.

Q: Will there be democracy in Iraq as a result of the invasion?

A: I doubt it. The United States has never supported democracy in the Arab world before. What I've heard regarding plans to rebuild Iraq and about the names circulated of potential leaders the U.S. wants to bring raises serious question about a sincere interest in democracy.

Q: There were no weapons of mass destruction found in Iraq, but some hawks in the Bush administration are now looking toward Syria. Do you think they're a serious threat that another mission might occur?

A: It's possible, but I doubt they'd get away with it, because there is even less of a case for invading Syria. The United States simply wants to eliminate any regime that challenges its prerogatives in the Middle East. And Syria is a nationalist regime that won't simply go along about what the United States wants. That makes them the enemy in the Bush administration's eyes. Challenging Syria is now easier, because their military strength has declined since the 1980s, when they had Soviet support.

Q: During the war, Saddam Hussein was attacked and possibly killed by American and British armed forces at least five times. Some sources say Saddam is still not gone, but that he's broken his army down into very small groups hidden within the civilian population. Do you think he might come back?

A: I don't think so. But there could be continued warfare either through underground remnants of the Baath Party, or by other nationalist or Islamist forces, who resent American occupation.

Q: The judges in the Nuremberg trial of Nazi leadership after WW II came to the conclusion that initiating a war of aggression was "the supreme international crime." Do you believe the U.N. Security Council should hold the United States accountable for its pre-emptive attack against another country?

A: The United States has veto power over the Security Council. So realistically the U.N. cannot really hope to hold the U.S. accountable for waging a pre-emptive attack against another country. Similarly we wouldn't be able to hold the former Soviet Union accountable for its acts of aggression. This is part of the United Nations' limitations. At the same time, the U.N. may have some other leverage, such as refusing to recognize any Iraqi government the United States puts together as legitimate.

Q: What can be done now to support peace in the Middle East?

A: The United Nations is really no more powerful than the sum of its parts. I think it's up to the world community and the American people to demand that the U.S. allow the United Nations to determine the political future of Iraq. When the Indonesians turned over East Timor, the United Nations took control for a period of a transient democracy. I think a similar role for the United Nations would be appropriate here as well, but the United States has refused to allow this. Basically the U.S. is saying, "We paid for it, therefore the spoils of war should belong to us."

Q: Back in 1983, Rumsfeld met Hussein allegedly to discuss the war between Iran and Iraq, but as it turns out he was trying to win Hussein's approval for a \$2-billion oil pipeline. Is oil at the base of U.S. foreign policy toward the Middle East?

A: I don't think it's simply a matter of controlling Iraqi oil. The United States is not nearly as dependent on Gulf oil as are Japan and Europe. And the costs and risks of going to war wouldn't be worth the profits American companies could make. One should see the invasion in a broader political context. If the United States controls Gulf oil in Iraq, this could give it an enormous amount of leverage on Europe, Japan and China, which could mean a rivalry over economic powers in the world.

Q: What has been your impression of the anti-war movement, and what should be its agenda now?

A: I think the movement has been very impressive, especially in its diversity. Where it should go now should be to demand that the United States end its occupation and turn Iraq over to the United Nations. The more the United

States militarizes the Middle East, the more unstable it will become. A foreign policy based on support for democracy, human rights, and sustainable development would be a lot safer than our current policy of military invasions and supporting dictatorships.

Care to respond? Send letters to letters@lansingcitypulse.com. View our Letters policy.

Lansing City Pulse (MI)

Date: April 23, 2003

Copyright (c) 2003 Lansing City Pulse. All rights reserved.