



11350 Random Hills Road, Suite 800, Fairfax, Virginia 22030 Phone (703) 934-6101 Fax (703) 352-3678

fff@fff.org www.fff.org

Let's Look within Ourselves for Iraq's WMD

by Jacob G. Hornberger

Last Wednesday, some two months after the U.S. presidential election, U.S. officials formally ended their two-year search for Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Perhaps this will finally put an end to the hopes of many supporters of the Iraq War that a modern, air-conditioned facility would be found buried deep within the Iraqi desert where the infamous WMD have been stored.

The human psyche is such that oftentimes it blocks out of the conscious mind events and experiences that are deeply traumatic and painful. The national experience over Saddam Hussein's WMD is a good example of this psychological phenomenon. It is impossible to overstate the level of fear that U.S. officials, from the president on down, engendered within the American people during the months preceding the Iraqi invasion. Both men and women were quaking with deep, fearful, foreboding thoughts that Saddam Hussein was about to "push the button," sending mushroom clouds over U.S. cities, or about to send armies of terrorists to spray chemical and biological weapons into the faces of millions of American people. Remember the duct tape? Remember the gas masks? Saddam was coming to get us. And that's why we needed to get him first — to "disarm him" of his WMD. We couldn't wait for hapless UN inspectors to finish their job. It would be too late. Something had to be done *now*.

Why were U.S. officials so certain that Saddam had WMD? Because they knew that the United States was one of the nations that had supplied them to him. The entire experience will ultimately go down as one of the biggest setups in history. Give a dictator WMD, encourage him to use them against others, and then invade his country for possessing them.

Certain that U.S. soldiers would find the infamous WMD (a "slam dunk" as CIA director George Tenet told the president), the United States invaded Iraq for the purpose of saving America and the world from an imminent attack by Saddam Hussein. As soon as the WMD were found, U.S. officials would make dramatic announcements, with the WMD in the background, stating that they had saved America and the world from an imminent WMD attack by Saddam

Hussein. Budgets for the CIA and the military-industrial complex would know no bounds. Medals of Freedom would be pinned on the chests of countless governmental officials.

But something went wrong along the way. What all the brilliant and calculating U.S. politicians and bureaucrats never figured on was that Saddam Hussein had already “disarmed” some time after the Persian Gulf War, possibly as early as 1991. They never dreamed that he could be telling the truth when he repeatedly told the world that he had, in fact, destroyed his WMD. They never believed that he might in fact have complied with the UN resolutions requiring him to disarm. They never thought for a minute that Saddam Hussein had in fact rid Iraq of the WMD that the United States and other Western nations had [delivered to him](#) during the 1980s.

And so the principal justification for the invasion and war of aggression had to be shifted in the minds of the American people — to a supposed love for the Iraqi people, manifested by a need to “liberate” them, and to a purported devotion to “spreading democracy” in the Middle East, both of which could be achieved with a brutal war and military occupation that would kill upwards of a 100,000 Iraqi citizens, not to mention the tyranny and chaos that the war and occupation have produced.

And many of those who had feared for their lives from an imminent attack by Saddam Hussein’s WMD quickly shifted gears without missing a hitch. “Yes, that was the reason I supported the invasion of Iraq — because ‘we’ love the Iraqi people and the people of the Middle East and want to see them ‘free’ and ‘democratic.’”

To do otherwise — to admit that tens of thousands of innocent people had been killed, maimed, tortured, sexually abused, and murdered as a result of a mistake or a lie is simply too painful, psychologically.

But the problem is that the “liberation” and “spreading democracy” rationales for the war are lies too.

After all, if love for the Iraqi people was the principal rationale for the war, then why the imposition and continuation of the [brutal sanctions](#) against the Iraqi people for some 11 years preceding the invasion? When it became increasingly clear that the sanctions were contributing to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children, wouldn’t people who were concerned about the well-being of the Iraqi people have called for the sanctions to be lifted? But they didn’t.

When high UN officials [resigned their positions](#) in public protest over the sanctions, how many lovers of the Iraqi people demanded that the sanctions be terminated? Instead, as the brutal effect of the sanctions imposed against Iraq increasingly became clear, year after brutal year, the U.S. response was to implement a deadly and corrupt new government policy on top of the old deadly and corrupt policy. That was when the the infamous “oil-for-food” program came into existence, a program that actually entrusted money to Saddam Hussein — the brutal dictator who we were told was refusing to disarm his WMD — in the supposed hope that he would use the money for the well-being of the Iraqi people. What a cruel joke.

And today, where is the focus of those who say that they just wanted to “liberate” the Iraqi people with their invasion and war of aggression? Their focus is on the corruption within the “oil-for-food” governmental program rather than on a policy that brutalized the Iraqi populace as a way to persuade Saddam Hussein to “disarm” his WMD.

Why is there no focus on [where Saddam Hussein got those WMD](#), which were first used as the excuse to impose the brutal sanctions regime on the Iraqi people and later used as the excuse to initiate a war that has killed or maimed tens of thousands of innocent people?

Why is there no focus on the deaths, misery, and corruption produced by the original policy of sanctions and its steadfast continuation, year after year for more than a decade, despite such deaths, misery, and corruption?

Why is there no focus on why the solution to the brutal consequences of the sanctions was a [partnership with Saddam Hussein](#), knowing that he was one of the most corrupt, brutal dictators in history, a partnership that relied on Saddam’s good faith to administer the oil-for-food program fairly and honestly and in the best interests of the Iraqi citizenry? What another cruel joke.

Why is there no focus on why the original policy of sanctions wasn’t terminated rather than imposing a new “oil-for-food” policy on top of the old policy that did nothing more than produce even more death, misery, and corruption?

Indeed, why is there no focus on the fact that hundreds of thousands of children died throughout the 1990’s because of the false belief that Saddam Hussein had not gotten rid of those infamous WMD?

And if “spreading democracy” was the actual rationale for the war, then why the current close alliance with the unelected military dictator of Pakistan who took power in a coup? Indeed, why not simply prevail upon friendly authoritarian regimes in the Middle East, such as Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, to lead the Middle East peacefully in the establishment of democracy? Wouldn’t such peaceful “leadership in democracy” have been much less costly in terms of money, lives, maiming, and misery?

Today, given the increasing chaos in Iraq and the growing number of deaths of U.S. servicemen, American officials are now trying to figure out a way to end their military adventure in Iraq. As they try to figure out how to do that, what we, the American people, must do is confront the truth, as painful as it is, not only about the long war against Iraq, including the decade of brutal sanctions, but about U.S. foreign policy in general.

That examination must include a focus on the truthful reason for invading Iraq — which was neither WMD nor liberation nor spreading democracy but rather “regime change” — the ouster of a regime that refuses to do the bidding of U.S. officials and its replacement with a regime that will do their bidding. It is this rationale — “regime change” — that formed the basis for the CIA’s ouster of the democratically elected prime minister of Iran in 1953 (which engendered the tremendous hatred of Iranians toward the United States), the CIA’s ouster of the democratically

elected president of Guatemala in 1954 (which engendered a civil war that killed some 200,000 people), the CIA's attempt to oust Fidel Castro from power in Cuba (which almost threw the world into a nuclear war), and the CIA's ouster of the democratically elected president of Chile (which resulted in a 17-year reign of terror by Chilean dictator Gen. Augusto Pinochet that killed or tortured thousands), not to mention the Vietnam War and who knows what else, given the secret activities and secret budget of the CIA.

It is impossible to overstate the horrific consequences of an imperial foreign policy based on "regime change" that U.S. officials, especially those in the CIA, State Department, and the Pentagon, have wrought for the American people.

When U.S. troops leave Iraq, which they will do, let us hope that the American people seize the occasion to do what we should have done at the fall of the Berlin Wall: to reflect and reevaluate where we are as a country and where we want to go. As part of that reevaluation, we should focus on whether the time has come to reject, fully and completely, the socialist and interventionist direction our nation has taken in domestic affairs and the imperial direction it has taken in foreign affairs. The focus must be on whether the time has come to restore our heritage of individual freedom, free markets, and republic by dismantling, not reforming, such programs and agencies as Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, welfare, the IRS, the CIA, and the military-industrial complex.

Mr. Hornberger is founder and president of The Future of Freedom Foundation.

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