

Ugly War

Steven Greffenius

Preface

Let me tell you a little about how this book came to be. From the start I opposed the Iraq war as vehemently as I've opposed anything our government has done. My family can tell you, "When you talk to him, stay away from the war. He gets too angry and upset." That was before the war started. After the war, after the invasion, it was anger mixed with such a strong feeling of helplessness. Talking with members of my family was no way to have an effect. They already knew what I thought.

Then Abu Ghraib made the news. I just sat down one evening and wrote a 7,000 word essay on the war: what it had done to us, what it had done to our friends, and of course its misdirection vis a vis our enemies. That formed the beginning, and I'm happy to say, the end of the essay well. I sent that essay to people on my mailing list, and received some interesting responses – more about those another time, perhaps.

Someday I hope people will read *Ugly War*, as people still read other critiques of other wars. We can't change the facts or the consequences of this war now, though the time for redemption is never past. Sometime in the future, though, people can read about this war, perhaps, then draw some sound conclusions about how a great country – a state that offered hope for all humankind – soiled itself.

Chapter 1 From the World Trade Center to Abu Ghraib

People everywhere respect what is most remote and least liable to have its reputation put to the test. At the least reverse, many would look down on us, and would join our enemies against us.

Thucydides, *History of the Pelopponesian War*

How did we go from the heroism, unity and sense of purpose that marked September 11, 2001, to the degradation, shame and cruelty of Abu Ghraib? Do you remember the spirit of that painful fall three years ago? We said that we had to know our enemies, and cooperate with our friends — especially our friends in the Middle East. We could rely for assistance on people everywhere who were equally determined to destroy al Qaeda. We knew that many Muslims shared our determination to put this organization out of business. And we knew that we needed their help.

From the World Trade Center to Abu Ghraib



Onset of War

Now let me ask you a question about the image below, one of the most notorious photographs from Abu Ghraib. Do you think that man lying on the floor is an enemy of ours? I'll tell you something: I don't know who he is. I'll bet virtually no American in the whole prison knew who

he was. He was an Arab and they were going to have some fun with him. He's a scapegoat for 9/11, and that's his pay-back. Our desire for revenge makes no treatment too despicable, no act of punishment too horrendous to be hidden from the camera. But you know that even if the man on the floor actually were an enemy of ours, we could not justify his treatment. Our enemies may not follow the rules of war, but we must.



Payback

How *did* we go from the World Trade Center on September 11 to Lynndie England holding a beaten, naked man on a leash? Will anyone admit that when you engage in a war that's wrong you can expect that kind of thing to happen? If the real motive for a war is revenge, then you

can see the connection between an aggressive war and the way we have treated people who aren't even our enemies. If the real motive for the war in Iraq is revenge, America should leave Iraq. America should leave Iraq because it should not have gone there in the first place. To defeat your enemies, you have to go where your enemies are.

We react to abuse of Iraqi prisoners with indignation for a lot of reasons. It's offensive and wrong in itself. We also have a bad war on our conscience. Iraqis are not our enemies. We want them to see us as we see ourselves: champions of freedom. But we know that if an army invaded our country and then occupied it, we would stand up to them, just as they have stood up to us.

Interestingly and sadly, most of the prisoners in Abu Ghraib were there not because they were a particular threat to us. They wound up there largely out of bad luck, because somehow their path intersected with that of an occupying power. They were picked up for questioning, entered a chamber of horrors, and became a plaything for American guards — guards who made a joke out of torture and humiliation.



Plaything for Prison Guards

We'd like to attribute the guards' behavior to a failure of leadership, and of course good leadership would have prevented such wanton treatment. From another perspective, the leadership up the chain of command worked just the way people wanted it to. Our leaders in Washington indicated what they wanted — softening up of prisoners, a euphemism for torture — and the leadership at the prison allowed it to happen.

Lincoln said that we had to suffer through the Civil War as punishment for the sin of slavery. What will our punishment be for attacking Iraq? We have already heard our enemies, the ones who planned 9/11, call us war criminals. We have ceded our moral standing to some of the worst people who have ever lived, people who are clearly criminals themselves. Worse still, allies and institutions that admired us three years ago share the same point of view. The secretary general of the United Nations says that the war in Iraq is illegal. The arguments that our president offers to counter the charge sound weaker and weaker with each repetition. In just three years, we lost our moral standing, and with it our ability to lead.

We have to recall that the position of leadership we've enjoyed for so long isn't based on military power. It's based on our moral example. When people don't have a reason to follow us anymore, they won't. Without followers, the United States becomes just another contender for hegemony, scrapping for every little advantage it can get in the great game of international relations. From this armchair, it doesn't look like our chances in that game are very good.

When I lived through the Reagan years, I had an instinct, a feeling in my heart, that this was it, this was the apogee, this was like the time that Julius Caesar ruled Rome. Caesar's rule actually came pretty early in the history of Roman civilization, and Rome still had quite a few good rulers to come, including Marcus Aurelius. But after Caesar's friends betrayed him and assassinated him, things unraveled, and historians could truthfully say that Rome never shone as brightly after that astonishing act of selfishness on the steps of the Senate.

America, Reagan's shining city on a hill, will never again shine as brightly as it did during those eight brief years. I certainly didn't want my instinct to be proven correct. When Reagan said that America's best years were still to come, I agreed with the sentiment, and I wanted it to be true. I certainly liked his rhetoric, and I was not among those who charged him with false optimism. I wanted him to bolster American confidence, and Americans had lots to be hopeful about, lots to be proud of. Reagan did the right thing, as a leader, to encourage the people who followed him. We would praise a military leader for doing so, and we should praise Reagan as a political leader for doing the same.

Yet Reagan's refrain that our best years were ahead of us proved wrong. Events proved the instinct correct after all. I had no idea in the 1980s how the story might turn out. The 1990s brought exactly the kind of prosperity that Reagan predicted: technology driven and based on innovation, it was a prosperity that rewarded free enterprise and entrepreneurship. Not only that, the Soviet Union collapsed, just as Reagan said it would. As a judge of

human events and a seer of human aspirations, Reagan built an outstanding record of accurate prophecy.

As far as I could tell, no one in the 1980s thought about the significance of the Reagan years this way. I didn't see any essays from the people who liked Reagan about how America's best years were behind her. The left had long nurtured a reputation for speaking pessimistically about America's future. The conservatives who liked Reagan didn't seem to have any reason to doubt what Reagan himself said about our shining prospects.

Well, no one predicted 9/11, that's for sure. Many people in and out of government predicted that our enemies would strike us at home someday, but al Qaeda managed to surprise us nevertheless. What a turning point that unexpected event turned out to be. We could have shrugged it off, or we could have lashed out, like an animal in pain. If we had shrugged it off, Reagan would have been right: we would have been the world's shining city on a hill for many more generations. If we let fear and instinct drive our response, we would provoke the outcome that we are already coming to see. Despised, defeated, dejected and discouraged, we command no admiration or respect anywhere, least of all in the places where we need it the most.

Let me elaborate a little. How could we have wanted to shrug off something like 9/11? One commentator, an historian, told the story after 9/11 of a Roman legion that lost six hundred men a minute during a terrible battle against a powerful enemy. He said that the Romans just shrugged it off. They went ahead and coldly destroyed their opponent. That's how they maintained their power. The histo-

rian did not say that we should forget the people who died on 9/11, or that we should not honor them. He recalled Rome's realism to argue that we should not give in to hand-wringing, anger, soul-searching, and the like. We should just find our enemies, destroy them, and be done with it. Be methodical and ruthless. It's one of the things you have to do to maintain order and protect your citizens.

Well, we didn't search out our enemies, and our leaders certainly didn't search their souls. We went totally nuts, like a blinded boxer who, out of pain and frustration, swings wildly and hits anyone who might be standing by. Bush's defense of his action against Iraq sounds more strained and unconvincing each time he delivers it. If Bush's justification for going to war doesn't hold up, and it doesn't, the only explanation for our attack is the blind boxer gone nuts. Or perhaps not so blind. We found a victim we could defeat, and one where we had a score to settle. We went after a non-enemy that was available rather than the real enemy who got away.

So now we can spend the next four hundred years looking backward, wondering how we could have succumbed to anger and bloodlust in 2003. It's not going to seem so bad here in the United States. We'll still have our prosperity, some of our freedoms, our ideals and disconnected memories. We'll still have a few friends like Britain and Australia, and others who will tolerate us out of self-interest or because they have no choice. But I tell you, we won't ever command the respect that we had around the world when Eastern Europe expressed its gratitude to us for delivering them from the Soviet Union. We won't ever

know the warmth and the genuine sorrow that flowed toward us in the days and weeks after 9/11. We'll be a byword and an object of contempt through most of the world now, because we couldn't see clearly what we had to do after the twin towers fell. We'll become irrelevant, and then defeated, because we couldn't shrug it off.

Lincoln said that America's example gives "hope to mankind, future for all time." What a loss to the world that we couldn't live up to Lincoln's ideal when tested. Reagan always asked, what will people one hundred years from now say about us, when they look to the decisions we made about life and death, war and peace, freedom and slavery? Will they thank us for making the right decisions, for protecting what we had and passing it down? Until the war in Iraq, we had a good reputation. We valued it and protected it because it brought us unnamed benefits. A good reputation takes a long time to build, only a short time to ruin. That's why good nations, like individuals, try not to make a mistake that destroys something they've worked hard to create. We need a good reputation with freedom loving people, and we want to give hope to everyone who aspires to freedom. Now people around the world, though they won't admit it, would like to put *us* on a leash.

Chapter 2 Lessons from a Parable

The great enemy of the truth is very often not the lie — deliberate, contrived, and dishonest — but the myth — persistent, persuasive and realistic.

John F. Kennedy

Someone has to tell this emperor that he isn't wearing any clothes. We've heard reference to Hans Christian Andersen's parable so often, we don't easily remember the real reason people didn't warn the emperor about the awful truth. It wasn't because people didn't want to embarrass the emperor, or because they were just too shy and didn't want to stand out. The perpetrators of the hoax — two rascals who posed as weavers — secured the result they wanted when they said that only people of the most elevated taste could appreciate their fine fabrics. Those who couldn't see the fabric revealed themselves as stupid and incompetent. No one wanted to do that, and the hoax worked!

Lessons from a Parable

Bush and his advisors have been both perpetrators and victims in the hoax that has become the Iraq war. The grounds for war, used to justify the invasion, proved to be a gargantuan falsehood — a story persisting, persuasive, and realistic enough to convince people that war was necessary. A principle for the unprincipled says, if you tell a lie that's big enough, people believe it. Like the weavers, Bush added a kicker to the original lie to make sure no one would question him: "If you're not with us, you're against us." We thought he was talking to the rest of the world, but as we've learned since he made that speech, he meant to divide Americans into two groups as well. Who wants to be against the president when he announces plans to take action against the perpetrators of 9/11? Everyone wants to do what it takes to get the terrorists, and the president must know what he's doing. Otherwise he wouldn't be president.



George W. Bush

The president took on the role of the emperor as well. When the little boy in the crowd said, “But he doesn’t have anything on,” the emperor and the people realized he was right. The emperor certainly couldn’t admit that in front of all the people, so he had to continue the procession with as much dignity as he could muster. Soldier on and pretend nothing is out of the ordinary. That’s just how Bush appeared as he delivered his acceptance speech at the Republican national convention in August. His remarks about Iraq had so little to do with the truth that you had to wonder: who could construct such an artful and promising phantasm? If you observed his eyes closely, though, you saw the insecurity of a leader who hoped his people

wouldn't notice the fundamental falseness of his presentation. He couldn't help but look back and forth to see if people would buy this bill of goods. And because he spoke to a large group of true and believing admirers, he found the reassurance he sought, and he could settle into the smug smile, bordering on a smirk, that seems to come naturally to his countenance.

Lastly, Bush's advisors resemble the chief counselor and other lackeys to the emperor in Andersen's tale. The president's advisors have shown us the worst case of groupthink anyone can remember. They pride themselves on how long they have worked together, and they think that their smooth working relations protect them from mistakes. On the contrary, they have become so insulated from outside viewpoints, so sure they know best, that they can't recognize the enormity of their errors.

No one on the National Security Council wants to say what's obvious — that they failed fundamentally in their duties when they decided to invade Iraq — because that would be to admit stupidity and incompetence. Richard Clarke, former director of counter-terrorism, publicly apologized for how the administration has met the terrorist threat, and we saw how the administration dealt with him. Even a public servant of Colin Powell's integrity persuaded himself that he should invest his prestige in the big lie. If God is kind to him at all, he'll lie in his grave before he sees how historians treat him for going to the United Nations with bogus evidence dressed up to look convincing. Rumsfeld, Cheney, Wolfowitz, and Rice see him as a nuisance — so they ignore him, even though he lent his good name to their flimsy but fateful enterprise.

Not even the emperor's prime minister — who bought the big lie so he wouldn't look bad — had to suffer the public humiliation Powell has.

A procession with a naked emperor at its head counts for less than a war against the wrong enemy. The hoax in the emperor's case caused some amused embarrassment among those who witnessed the spectacle, though I don't suppose the emperor and his advisors felt much amusement after they returned to the palace. No one likes to be tricked. We'll have to see how Americans react when they discover the hoax they've participated in. It won't be easy to tell the Iraqis, "Look, we got rid of your tyrant, but golly, you know, it turns out that we attacked the wrong place, and we're really sorry for causing so many innocent people to be killed. It was an honest mistake."

So when Kofi Annan says that the war in Iraq is illegal, a lot of people get worked up about that. If the war is illegal, that means Bush could be called a war criminal, and we certainly don't want to acknowledge anything like that. When Annan said that the war is not in conformity with the United Nations charter, we can live with that, but we get a little nervous when he suggests that the war could be a crime. But it's obvious that the invasion of Iraq was a crime. The problem is, we don't have any little boys or girls in the crowd to say so. We have to rely on important people to say it, and for the most part they've been too mute to make much of a difference. Even Annan's spokespeople rose to revise what he said after they saw the reaction to it.

Chapter 3 Catastrophic Incompetence

Bush's main argument for going to war in Iraq is that we got rid of Saddam. Saddam was a bad guy. Iraq and the world are better off without him. But to say that we should have gone to war because the world is better off without Saddam misses the point. What can you say in response to that? There are bad rulers all over the world, and we're not planning to remove them. The issue isn't whether we did right by removing a bad ruler. The proper question is, how should we deal with those who threaten us? Since Saddam Hussein did not attack us on September 11, who cares whether or not we are better off without him? All of our energy should go toward waging war against the people who actually did attack us. In that case, the correct comparison is between where we are now, and where we would have been if we had waged the right war.

How can we think sensibly about this question of national security? How can we avoid making such terrible blunders? So many people trusted Bush to make the right moves. Remember how we said after the war in Afghanistan that it did not look like the Administration had a

Catastrophic Incompetence

plan? But they did have a plan. Invade Iraq! How could any of us know that they had a plan so brazenly illogical that no one would be able to criticize it? How could we know the extent of their misjudgment and incompetence?



*National Security Team:
President George W. Bush,
Vice President Dick Cheney,
Secretary of State Colin Powell,
Secretary of Defense Donald
Rumsfeld, and Assistant for
National Security Affairs
Condoleezza Rice*

Suppose (following Richard Clarke’s revealing comparison) that we attack Mexico after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. A pesky journalist asks, “How can you do that? Mexico’s not our enemy.” And the president responds, “They may not be about to attack us now, but they would like to attack us, and they may be able to attack us in the future.”

Catastrophic Incompetence

Journalist: “But that is not a reason to go to war. You can’t attack another country because they might attack us in the future.”

President: “Yes we can. Besides that, Mexico has a bad leader. Both Mexico and the rest of the world are better off because we got rid of him.”

Journalist: “We can’t knock off leaders we don’t like, just because they are bad.”

President: “Yes we can. He’s gone, and the world is safer because of it.”

Journalist: “But we didn’t find any evidence that he could attack us.”

President: “What’s the difference? He wanted to attack us. That’s what matters. After Pearl Harbor, we can’t wait for someone to attack us first. If someone wants to attack us, we have to take him out before he can do it.”

Journalist: “But by that reasoning, we would have to attack a lot more countries.”

President: “Ah, I’ve heard that one before. But it’s not true. We set an example with Mexico. Now no one else will dare to attack us. They’ve seen what we do to our enemies.”

Journalist: “No one else will dare to attack us? What do you think our enemies have been doing to us since we attacked Mexico?”

President: “They’re terrorists. They hate us for who we are. Of course they’re going to attack us.”

Journalist: “Sir, do you have a plan to win this war? Or more to the point, do you have a believable plan for the next couple of months?”

Catastrophic Incompetence

President: “Yes, everything is on track. We are making good progress toward all of our goals. Mexico will be a model of democracy when we are finished with our work there.”

Journalist: “And then?”

President: “Well, we’re going to fight for freedom in the Middle East. That’s their natural right.”

This election is a test of our democracy. It’s *our* responsibility to replace a leader who has failed. No one but we, the people can do it. Too readily since 9/11 we have given President Bush the benefit of the doubt. Because he holds great authority and great responsibility, we have on the whole been less critical of him than we should be.

The 9/11 attacks, appalling in themselves, left appalling memories, as well as anger and pain. As a consequence, we have wanted to extend our sympathy and our trust to our president. We want to follow someone who is willing to attack in these circumstances. The complex responses to 9/11 have made us suspend our democratic skepticism. The normal ethos in our history has been that the more authority and responsibility leaders hold, the more we need to hold them to account for their performance in office. Democratic skepticism doesn’t mean we distrust our leaders from the moment they take their oath of office. It does mean that we need to judge our leaders based on clear standards of performance, and dismiss them if they fail. The standards of performance are in our Constitution, and in our history. So far, we have allowed President Bush to do things that no president should have

been allowed to do. If we can escape the fear and anger of 9/11, we can correct our mistake and reclaim our responsibilities as democratic citizens.

Richard Clarke, in his book *Against All Enemies*, writes about the oath that presidents swear when they take office. The president vows to protect the Constitution against all enemies. “In this era of threat and change,” he continues, “we must all renew our pledge to protect that Constitution against the foreign enemies that would inflict terrorism against our nation and its people. That mission should be our first calling, not unnecessary wars to test personal theories or expiate guilt or revenge.”

Well, the promise to protect the Constitution against all who would threaten it establishes the presidents’s most important standard of performance. Many think that by attacking Iraq, President Bush has vigorously protected us against our enemies. The opposite is the case: by attacking Iraq, the president has failed to protect the Constitution against its enemies. His actions have made the country more vulnerable. His actions show that he must not continue in his office.

Catastrophic Incompetence



Let's take a closer look at the incompetence we have witnessed. Anthony Zinni, retired Marine Corps general, argues that history will record several mistakes we made in Iraq. We can summarize these mistakes in four groups:

#1: The overall strategy for the region was flawed.

Paul Wolfowitz's idea is that we can bring democracy to the region if we make it succeed in Iraq. I don't know that much about Iraqi politics, but I can understand what I see, and I understand history well enough to know that when democracy does come to Iraq, it won't happen as a result of this occupation.

#2: We rejected our friends. We failed to make the enterprise an international effort. Instead of listening to our friends, an essential element of leadership, we trusted the Iraqi exiles, who wanted to use our armed forces to help them take over the government in Iraq. We put them forward as legitimate rulers, when they were nothing of the sort.

#3: We relied on falsehood to justify our action. Bush used every reason for war that he thought would work. If you want to see propaganda in action, look to the Bush administration's talk about the war since 2002. Dishonesty has a price, however, and it's a predictable one: no one believes us anymore.

#4: We underestimated the task. The whole effort after the initial invasion showed poor planning. We placed insufficient forces on the ground, set up an ad hoc administrative organization, dispersed the Iraqi army, and relieved all Baath party members of their positions of responsibility.

The president and his spokesmen say that talk of withdrawal from Iraq speaks of surrender and defeat. It sends the wrong message to our allies, our soldiers, and our enemies. How dare they level a charge like that! The president and his staff have brought us defeat with their incompetence and reckless misjudgment. We were strong in our leadership of a worldwide coalition against al Qaeda — a coalition that included many Islamic nations — and he has made us weak. We were capable of standing against a formidable enemy — where our high morale, ingenuity, and willingness to use force equaled theirs — and he has reduced us to ineffectual confusion, with no plan, no goal, no hope of success.

We were ready. We were ready to go to war — all of us of one mind — and this crew of incompetent people forced a wrong choice. They truly do not know what they are doing. An important piece of wisdom applies here. No matter how far down the wrong path you've gone, when you discover your mistake — turn back! Withdrawal now doesn't send a message of defeat — it communicates that we finally recognize our mistake, and that we are ready to return to the war we should have been fighting for the last two years — the war against al Qaeda.

I heard an analyst recently cite the statistic that 42% of those polled still believe that Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden planned the 9/11 attacks together. He observed that if we are dealing with people who have that loose a grip on reality, what confidence should we have in polling data to begin with? We can ask the same kind of question of the president and his advisors: if we are dealing with a foreign policy team that has that loose a grip on reality,

how much confidence should we have in their judgment? Suppose they just used that argument — that Hussein and bin Laden were co-conspirators — because they knew it would play well with angry Americans who were eager to punish whatever enemy was at hand. Any argument in support of a just cause is defensible, yes? Look at the results of their actions and ask if their cause is defensible.

If in the fall we endorse as a body what Bush has done, we have to ask if the voters' judgment is any better than Bush's. In the 2000 election, no one predicted the 9/11 attacks, and on September 11, no one could predict how Bush would respond to the events of that day. Now we know his response. We have to be practical about it. We have to see that his response displayed gross misjudgment. And we have to act now to replace him.

Yes, it's true that our decline will take a couple of generations if we stay on our current path, and the whole process of rise and decline is bigger than one election. We'll be gone before the process set in motion on 9/11 plays out. But do we want our great-grandchildren in the latter half of the twenty-first century to say that we blundered in response to September 11, and didn't act to correct the mistake? What will our offspring think of us if we start down the path to defeat now, and don't recognize that we have to turn back? The Administration wants us to think that turning back at this point is admitting defeat. On the contrary, it's the only way to repair this mistake and put ourselves back on the path to success. More and more failure awaits us if we can't admit the wrong turn we've taken. Brave soldiers are fighting al Qaeda in the remote moun-

tains of western Pakistan right now. They need our help. We should be there.

James Fallows has written about national security affairs for much of his long career. In his latest article, he writes about the impact of the war in Iraq, and about how national security professionals see it.

“Over the past two years I have been talking with a group of people at the working level of America’s anti-terrorism efforts. Most are in the military, the intelligence agencies, and the diplomatic service; some are in think tanks and nongovernmental agencies. I have come to trust them, because most of them have no partisan ax to grind with the Administration (in the nature of things, soldiers and spies are mainly Republicans), and because they have so far been proved right. In the year before combat started in Iraq, they warned that occupying the country would be far harder than conquering it.”

Do these analysts think the Administration’s response to 9/11 has made America more or less safe? Among national security professionals, Fallows writes, “there is surprisingly little controversy.” They “tend to see America’s response to 9/11 as a catastrophe. I have sat through arguments among soldiers and scholars about whether the invasion of Iraq should be considered the worst strategic error in American history — or only the worst since Vietnam...”

“Let me tell you my gut feeling,’ a senior figure at one of America’s military-sponsored think tanks told me recently, after we had talked for twenty minutes about details of the campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq. ‘If I can be blunt, the Administration is full of shit. In my view we are much, much worse off now than when we went into Iraq. That is not a partisan position. I voted for these guys. But I think they are incompetent, and I have had a very

Catastrophic Incompetence

close perspective on what is happening. Certainly in the long run we have harmed ourselves. We are playing to the enemy's political advantage. Whatever tactical victories we may gain along the way, this will prove to be a strategic blunder.”

Chapter 4 Self-Distraction

We have fooled ourselves about the nature of this war, distracted ourselves from this question of right and wrong from the start. Before the invasion, how often did you hear these arguments? “If our leaders say it's the right thing to do, it must be the right thing to do.” Another is, “We have to get the terrorists.” Well, who are the terrorists? Anyone we don't like and anyone we're afraid of? Where is the cold, ruthless focus on the people who actually want to do us harm?

One distraction from our guilt occurred about a year ago, when it became apparent at last that we weren't going to find dangerous weapons in Iraq. We were all discussing whether the intelligence agencies were to blame for feeding bad analysis to the president and his advisors. The premise of the whole controversy was that if we had found weapons, our invasion would have been justified. As it was, we made a big mistake that hurt our credibility, and we have to find out who is to blame. But this effort to blame the CIA for bad information misses two important points.

The first one is that this war wouldn't be justified even if Hussein did have the weapons Bush said he had. We

had already conducted air operations over Iraq for a long time, and if we discovered weapons or materials we wanted to get rid of, we could have done so easily, just as the Israelis did when they bombed the Iraqi nuclear reactor a generation ago. We did not need to bomb Baghdad and send in 200,000 troops to get rid of dangerous weapons. We needed to do that to get rid of Hussein, and that was clearly our aim.

The other point we managed to miss during the intelligence controversy is that Bush clearly cooked up any argument he thought would succeed during the lead-up to war. He even said that Hussein helped to carry out the 9/11 attacks, and people believed him! For Bush, it didn't matter whether Hussein actually had any weapons. What mattered is that Hussein would like to get them. In a post-9/11 environment, Bush's doctrine of pre-emption maintained, anyone who might be dangerous in the future had to be removed.

In January I read an article about Dr. Kay's departure as head of the Iraq Survey Group, the team charged with finding Iraq's chemical and biological weapons. He said his team had not found the weapons because they are not there: Hussein and his lieutenants got rid of them after the Persian Gulf War. Jane Harman, senior Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, said Dr. Kay's finding made it clear "that there had been a massive intelligence failure." President Bush got it wrong, Harman said, and he "owes the American public and the world an explanation."

How does this president manage to elicit so much ineffective indignation from his opponents? Is it because he's

so sure of himself? During the lead-up to the war, people kept saying that we should give the UN inspectors more time to find Hussein's weapons, an argument that even its proponents didn't expect to succeed. Ms. Harman's charge of a "massive intelligence failure" likewise can't succeed because it's not true. Who can name one intelligence professional — except for those who told the president what he wanted to hear — who thought Hussein posed an imminent threat to the United States? Analysts parsed the evidence they had, presented a mixed picture, and gave Bush enough uncertainties to make his case. By and large, the Central Intelligence Agency did not endorse the claim that Hussein possessed chemical or biological weapons that he could deploy against us in a surprise attack.

On the contrary, the CIA said the evidence tended to support the conclusion that inspectors presented to the UN late in 2002. The UN report said that whatever weapons Hussein might have had at the time of the Persian Gulf War in 1992, he did not have an active chemical or biological weapons program in 2002. When someone asks President Bush to explain how he could go to war against Iraq when they didn't have actual weapons, only some evidence of a desire to obtain them, he replies, "What's the difference?"

Well I can tell you that history's judgment of President Bush will be harsh, because there's a big difference. Let's say Bush was right, though: the possession of such weapons and the desire to obtain them amount to the same thing. President Bush would still be guilty of aggression. He uses a doctrine of preemption to justify his aggression

Self-Distracted

against Iraq, but the doctrine is horribly misdirected. No matter what he does now, he has taken the United States down a path that will lead, ultimately, to its decline and disappearance.



The Middle East and South Asia

Let's step back from narrow arguments about whether or not Iraq has weapons of mass destruction and take a look at what President Bush has done. He has invaded another country not only with no support from the United Nations, but with its active opposition. In the eyes of most of the rest of the world, there's no difference in principle between the action we took in 2003 and Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1991. I can't see how they're wrong. We call the fighters in Iraq who kill our soldiers insurgents, and claim they are enemies of freedom. But if another country invaded the United States and kept an occupying army here, would it matter to you what kind of government the invaders replaced? Wouldn't you fight if you could to make the invaders leave, no matter how vicious the old regime had been?

Cathy Young, a writer I respect, commented that the jury is still out on Iraq. Still out?! Yet she could be right: you can't tell how things are going to turn out. The problem with this reasoning is that it focuses only on outcomes. It forces you to judge the rightness or wrongness of things based entirely on their consequences. By that reasoning, we don't know yet whether going to war in Iraq was the right thing or the wrong thing to do, because we don't have a full balance sheet yet on all the good and bad outcomes of the decision.

Consequentialist thinking about the war is totally mainstream. Most of the public commentary on the war fits this model: we shouldn't have invaded Iraq because so many bad things happened as a result; we should have liberated Iraq because we got Hussein and we're bringing democracy to the Iraqi people. The battle of consequences

grinds on, and as the election approaches, neither side seems to have much of an advantage. And as Ms. Young observed, the jury is still out because we're still in the middle of the war.

How about an argument that says we shouldn't have attacked Iraq because it was wrong in itself? We don't need a jury to tell us that an unprovoked attack on another country is wrong. We don't need outcomes to tell us that you don't attack a country because it might pose a threat to you in the future. If we're going to go to war on that basis, we should start preparations to march on Beijing right now.

So the moral question on the Iraqi war is easy to answer. The charges about weapons of mass destruction were trumped up, and we had sober, honest, and diligent people like Hans Blix to tell us to proceed cautiously. The charges about links between Hussein and al Qaeda were trumped up, and that charge was so laughable I still can't understand how our leaders could have made it. If they hadn't made that charge, sympathetic historians might have said the war in Iraq was an honest, understandable mistake, in light of 9/11. Having suggested the connection, having persuaded people it was true, historians will have to see the grounds for war as dishonest, the war itself as a preposterous and vicious fraud.

Of course, arguing to consequences is necessary, too. You can't make good evaluations without taking them into account. The biggest consequence of the war in Iraq is that it makes defeat in our war against al Qaeda much more likely. We cannot lose that war and survive as a civilization. This misstep in Iraq will be with us for a long

Self-Distraction

time, and if we do lose the war against al Qaeda, historians will see the attack on Baghdad on March 19, 2003, as the first step toward defeat. That's a big consequence.

In the end, we'll see a lot of analysis that centers on the war's results. That's no surprise, since the analysts are policymakers and others who evaluate policies based on costs and benefits. Cost-benefit analysis is useful for economic decisions, but it's not your tool of choice for moral questions. A decision about war or peace is above all a moral decision. Our decision to initiate war was a grave moral failure. We attacked a nation that was not capable of attacking us, and we let escape an enemy that had clearly demonstrated its ability to attack us. The only way to correct this failure is to admit the mistake, carefully extract ourselves from Iraq, then pursue our real enemy with all vigor. Are we capable of that?

Chapter 5 Paranoia and Good Will

Back in the early days of the Cold War, George Kennan or one of the other wise men saw that paranoia sanctioned as official policy could prove harmful for both the United States and the Soviet Union. “Anyone,” he wrote, “is free to think the whole world is his enemy, and if he believes it long enough, it’ll be true.” You can be so aggressive in your self-defense that everyone hates you. Even here, however, Bush and his people give themselves away. If they really believed in their own doctrine of preemption, they’d pull out of Iraq and go on to the next dangerous character on their axis of evil list. The list is pretty long, you know. In fact, they want to stick it out in Iraq, because their real motive was to get Hussein, and to make an example of Iraq to the rest of the world. See what we can do to a tyrant like that, and how we can reshape his country in our image? See what will happen to you if you mess with us?

Now a lot more people want to mess with us. And they will. They already have. We can’t pull out of Iraq for fear that it’ll become another Afghanistan, racked by civil war

and home to radical Islamists who can train and plot and organize. We can't stay unless we truly want to become an occupying, not a liberating power. The measures we must use as an occupying power are a lot harsher than the measures used in Abu Ghraib prison. Ask the families in Falluja who lost brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, what occupying powers have to do to "pacify" a defeated nation.

We have no business in Iraq, and we have already paid too much for our mistake. We've been counting the dollars spent, but who can remember now the good will that flowed toward our shores in the weeks and months after 9/11? Tony Blair's was only the most eloquent voice: he spoke for the rest of our brothers and sisters all over the world, all those people who had themselves suffered the scourge of radical Islam and other vicious movements for decades. Now the United States, the most powerful member of the international community, could lead good and brave people everywhere in a cause that was right and necessary. Positive action had been too long in coming, but now the people who lay buried under the concrete of the World Trade Center required some response. Justice required punishment, prevention, and perseverance. We had the opportunity to fight a just war, and to do much good with the help of others.

What a sad understatement it is now to say that we squandered the good will we had two and a half years ago! We wanted, needed, and had the support of good Muslims everywhere, people who recognized the totalitarian threat that al Qaeda and its sympathizers posed to their own civilization. We had allies everywhere, people who would

help us without our even asking for help. Among those who saw 9/11 not only as a tragedy but also as an opportunity, moderate Muslims would see the possibilities for reconciliation and mutual assistance most clearly. Instead, we went nuts. We killed so many people who had nothing to do with the war we were involved in. So many people who wished us no harm, and nothing but good.

* * *

I need to make a few more points here. One has to do with what we should have done in 2002 instead of planning a war with Iraq, and what we can still do in our fight against al Qaeda. Another has to do with the place criticism of this sort has in post-Vietnam America. And the last issue concerns what we have to do in Iraq right now, to keep a bad situation from spawning a much wider loss. For make no mistake, we could lose our special place in the world for good here. We could follow a course that will lead historians two centuries from now to say, “Here is where it started. Here was the beginning of the end for America's supreme position in the world.”

Chapter 6 The Big Picture and World History

The most frightful of all spectacles is the strength of civilisation without its mercy.

Winston Churchill quoting Macaulay

Before I take up these points, though, let me recall another thought that has come to mind many times since 9/11. In the days after that appalling event, we all could see our need for someone like Winston Churchill to lead us. We need someone with his eloquence, his faith, his sense of aggressive perseverance, and his defiance. He was Europe's last great defender of democracy and freedom as Hitlerism flourished across the continent. But for him, the Nazis might have established themselves in Europe for much more than four years. In the current clash of civilizations, we need someone like that, and after 9/11 I didn't see anyone able to take that role.

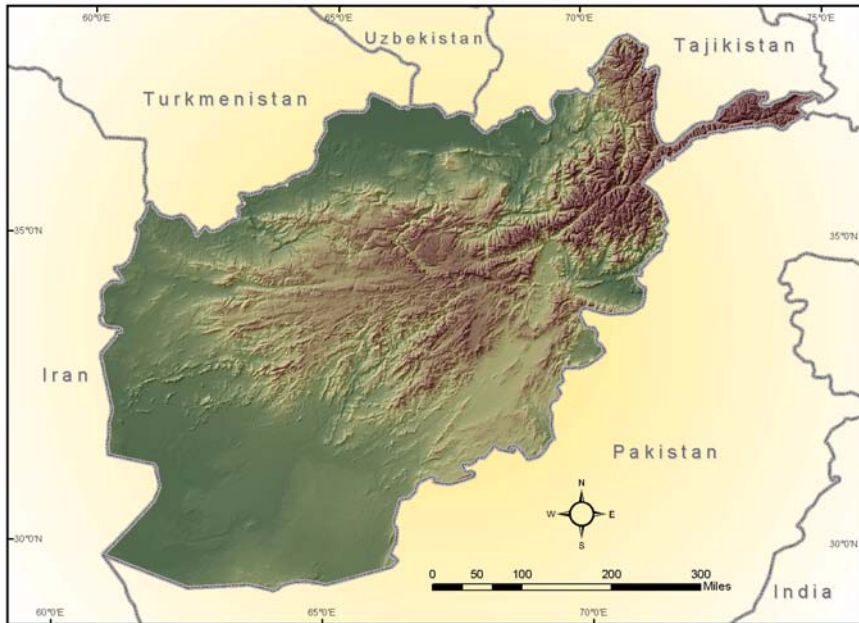
Then Bush gave his speech to the joint session of Congress, and one could feel a bit more hopeful about our leadership. The speech was well-written and well-deliv-

ered: Bush issued a resolute, decisive response to our enemies and a clear request for action to our friends. Then we went to war in Afghanistan, and for once we had allies who would actually fight. The northern alliance, as the soldiers fighting the Taliban were called, proved willing to fight hard, and the victory was theirs with our assistance from the air. Things looked better as we had the former rulers of that long-suffering country on the run.

After that war, we needed to plan what to do next. Who could have expected, during that time, that the administration had already set its military sights on Iraq, and had done so from the first days after 9/11? They even thought that Iraq could be a repeat of Afghanistan. Our agile force had succeeded so quickly in Afghanistan — we could do the same thing with our other enemy across the way, and finish off the work we had started during the Gulf War ten years ago. Richard Clarke said that Bush asked him right after 9/11 to find out if Hussein had some connection with the attack. Clarke was astonished. “But Mr. President,” he said, “It was al Qaeda.” “I know, I know,” the president responded, “But look into it anyway.” Clarke wrote later that the war against Iraq represented colossal misdirection. It was as if the United States, after the attack at Pearl Harbor, had attacked Mexico.

Well, here's what we should have done in Afghanistan. We should have put a lot more troops on the ground during the war itself. We should have made sure the victory was ours, not a victory for the warlords in the northern alliance. Most assuredly we should have allied ourselves with them, but we should have directed the war from the

ground, not primarily from the air. After the war, we should have consolidated our position there. We should have put 500,000 troops on the ground there, even if we don't have 500,000 troops on active duty right now. We should have found the people somewhere, and made Afghanistan an outpost, just as we did over the years with Germany, Japan, and South Korea. We could have achieved more progress against al Qaeda from that outpost than from any other place, and most Afghans would have welcomed us there. What an opportunity we had to bring peace and prosperity to much of south Asia, and to serve our own interests at the same time.



Afghanistan — Relief Map

What does it mean to defeat al Qaeda? We must destroy their communications, their ability to make plans, to coordinate their activities. We must choke off their resources. We must disrupt their recruitment and training programs. We must prevent the organization as a whole from functioning. Three things make these tasks difficult for our military: (1) al Qaeda's methods, goals, and ideology are franchised to many unaffiliated groups, (2) we can't fight these franchise operations with anything like conventional means, and (3) we have to fight our enemy far from our own borders, in places where people regard us with suspicion. The best place to accomplish these tasks — hard though they might be — is Afghanistan and places we can reach from Afghanistan.

* * *

Our leaders want to build an example of American democracy in Iraq. Wolfowitz has been clear enough about that. Reagan wanted to extend American democracy to the whole world, by means of our example. But when you conquer a country and use force to establish democracy, that's called building an empire. Any objective assessment of what we're doing in Iraq confirms that we're building an empire there. It'd be great if our leaders had the honesty to say that's what we're doing. Then the torture in Abu Ghraib would fit into the pattern, and Bush couldn't say on Arab television, "That's not the America I know." Because the war he started in Iraq will make America into just that sort of state, one that has to engage in torture and endless warfare to maintain its authority.

Rome is a relevant example of what a master state has to do to maintain its power. To fight and win in Iraq, we have to be like Rome was. Roman garrisons were always on the scene, fighting, crushing, intimidating, crucifying, besieging, killing, enslaving, destroying, occupying. Their destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD in a long-running war with the Jews is the example we remember. Our empire isn't like the Roman empire. We have an empire because people want to be like us. Our empire isn't based on force: it's based on freedom and the example of democracy. Bush still thinks we can bring democracy to Iraq. But the long-running urban battles all across the country in Iraq show that the use of military force is the only means to victory there. And if we use force to win, we'll be like the Romans, not Americans.

After the visible actions in the urban battlefields, we should remember the invisible activities that an occupying state engages in: imprisonment, and torture, suppression of free speech and assembly, denial of all the rights we said belong to the Iraqis. We saw it in the Russian empire, and more benign, gentlemanly forms of it in the British empire. We already did a lot of these things when we conquered native Americans in the nineteenth century. Now we're developing these well known patterns of behavior in Iraq, and we're using the same justification that empire-builders have used in the past: you'll be better off if you submit to us. In his speech at Westminster, Reagan referred to the slave revolt Spartacus led against the Romans. It was an example that should inspire freedom-loving people everywhere, he said. Reagan would understand why the Iraqis are resisting us. They might

not have freedom after we leave, but they certainly won't have it while we're there.

Here is another world historical note, one that looks to the future. China wants to succeed us as the world's pre-eminent power. They would like to acquire the military capabilities necessary to challenge us. A transition to new leadership in the world used to seem a long way off. A hundred years or more is a long time, and after our victory in the Cold War, we weren't so inclined to look that far ahead. We had a comfortable sense of well-being about our position as the only global power.

Now, after 9/11, things don't look so comfortable anymore. We need a Winston Churchill not just because we need someone who is capable and aggressive in the face of evil, but also because we need someone who knows why we're fighting. If we fight to establish an empire in the Middle East, we're going to hasten our time of weakness, and hasten the time when other powers take over from us. We have already started to lose the so-called soft power that has made American culture so attractive everywhere. We can become irrelevant faster than we think. If people perceive weakness in place of strength, corruption in place of rectitude, they will look elsewhere for their leadership.

So I understand why Bush went on television to influence people's perceptions about the torture in Iraqi prisons. The only effective way to change people's minds about us, however, is to admit our mistakes and get out of there. If we don't do that, we'll be seen for what we actually are: an occupying power. The Iraqis might have hoped for liberation from a country that would shut down Hus-

sein's torture chambers, but as Jon Stewart put it, they are "really not shut down so much as under new management." We can try to understand the organizational factors that explain how this kind of mistreatment occurred, but the people in Iraq and in other countries nearby won't be so understanding. They just want us out of there, and now. The harder we fight to stay, the worse it's going to be for us.

Journalist Cal Trillin reminded people during an interview, "This is war we're talking about." If you know your neighbor is committing terrible crimes in his house, you don't go out and shoot him. You call the police. Well, the United Nations isn't exactly the police, but we have signed on to – and we used to lead – a world order where no nation would undertake war by itself unless it faced an immediate threat. Saddam didn't offer us an immediate threat, no matter what Bush claimed. The desirability of getting rid of him, and of building a democracy in Iraq, count as persuasive reasons for starting a war, but they are not sufficient. If replacing tyrants with democratically elected governments were sufficient to justify and even require an invasion, we would have invaded Cuba, North Korea, more governments in Africa than I can name, and yes, even China under Mao.

Why not China? Well it's too strong and we don't want to start a world war. Why not North Korea? China wouldn't like it – they already fought us over that piece of territory. Why not Cuba? We tried and we blew it and we figure we better not try again. The Cold War is over anyway. So how do we pick our democracy building targets? The present war argues that we should go for friendless,

weak nations that have strategic value because of geography or natural resources, and where building a democracy will benefit the region as a whole. That fits the Iraqi case pretty well. Is that the kind of principle we want to establish in the world? Under that principle, other countries see that we have used our power aggressively, and they've reacted as you might expect: with fear, hate, and anger.

Altogether, the empire we built during World War II and the Cold War had some pretty unusual qualities. It looked like an empire, but for the most part we didn't fight aggressive wars, and the threats we responded to were pretty easy to identify. We didn't have to cook them up. Bush says Hussein supported terrorists, but by that reasoning we should conquer Syria, Libya, Iran, Pakistan, Lebanon, Gaza and the West Bank, Sudan, Yemen, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, and...I suppose many more would make the list if I pulled out an atlas. Do we want to say that out of all these candidates we picked on Iraq because it was particularly vulnerable, because Hussein was especially horrific, because our president had it in for him?

No matter how good the reasons offered for this war, they come down to: we wanted to get him, we could do it, so we did. We've gone to war on shaky, ambiguous grounds before, but this is the first time we have engaged in aggression that was in clear violation of an international order we created. No country, especially in the Middle East and South Asia, can now trust us to pursue our interests in a way that respects sovereignty. These are countries that we need to have on our side in order to win the war against al Qaeda. Our enemy bloodied us on Sep-

tember 11, and instead of organizing the world to crush the people who did it, we turned into a reckless bully. We used September 11 to justify a war that had nothing to do with September 11.

No country argued that we should not fight in Afghanistan. Most countries, including Islamic states in the Middle East, correctly hoped we would win that war. We did not have to justify the fight because al Qaeda and the Taliban constituted such an obvious threat, and force was the only way to deal with it. We had a grateful population, and every possibility of establishing Afghanistan as a strong outpost against our enemies, just as we had earlier with Japan, South Korea, and Germany. Instead we let our opportunity dribble away, and our position there today is no stronger than it was two years ago. To defeat this enemy, we need to know a great deal about it, and we have to rally our allies against it every day. Instead we forsook the place where we could learn the most about our enemy, and we engaged in a war that alienated almost every state that wanted to help us.

Chapter 7 Next Steps

In the midst of our difficulties, many have stressed the importance of looking to the future. In general, I agree that it's best to think about what we have to do next. In this case, though, I don't think we can make effective plans until we understand the mistakes we've made. Then we can connect our mistakes to what we should do in the future. That challenging conceptual work will show us how to manage the political problems in Iraq, and how we should coordinate political and military processes. Those are hard questions, and I don't see supporters or opponents of the war in Congress or the administration addressing those kinds of problems.

When one of my correspondents first challenged me to offer a plan better than the one we have now, the best answer I could give was to say that we have to change leadership. Now I've thought about the question a lot more, and my answer hasn't changed: we have to change leadership. I don't see the president or his advisors thinking seriously about what to do here. They're determined to carry on. We have to turn authority over to the Iraqis and to the United Nations, and we're not going to do that under Bush. The supposed transition scheduled for June

30 is a near fraud and everyone knows it. Yes, we'll put a transitional government in place in July, and we'll still try for elections in 2005. But this administration is discredited in the minds of Iraqis and others in the region, and these efforts are going to fail.

Most people still see withdrawal from Iraq as a failure right now. On the contrary, if we could muster the courage and practical vision to withdraw now, that would be success. The problem now is how to manage the process of withdrawal, not how to manage the occupation or how to manage a transition to democracy. No one wants to consider withdrawal now, so the proposal seems weightless and unreal. What seems unreal now, though, will seem necessary as the prospect of a discouraging and even catastrophic outcome in Iraq becomes more apparent.

The United Nations should manage the transition in Iraq. Brahimi, Annan, and countries with credibility in Iraq should take the lead. If that means we lose some access to Iraq's oil down the line, so be it. But few people in public life dare to say anything that might raise the charge of defeatism from the war party. Good leaders have to force us to look at what we've done in Iraq. We shouldn't be finding out about it from *60 Minutes*. Our leaders have to know what's going on there, and our current leaders have proven repeatedly that they do not know what they are doing. They are arrogant and self-righteous, they lack good judgment, and they must lose this election.

So we need to lay out a concrete, practical course of action for the present. The most urgent thing to do is change our leadership. Chamberlain had to go after Munich, and Bush has to go after Iraq. I won't say that

Kerry is our Churchill, but he's our only choice. We know that Bush and his advisors won't do anything constructive in this situation. They're going to keep being dishonest with themselves, which means they aren't going to admit they've made any mistakes. Without that admission, we can't begin to put things right. And if we don't put things right, we'll be amazed at how much worse things can get.

If we were to pull out of Iraq tomorrow, a lot of interesting things would happen there. Not all of them would be good. I expect that by and large, and gradually, things would get better than they are now. We probably wouldn't see a lot of unity among the three regions of the country: the Kurdish north, the Sunni center, and the Shia south. We might see more warfare than we care for, and a lot of developments that look threatening to us. Yes, it could turn into the sort of haven for our enemies that Afghanistan became under the Taliban. On the whole, though, it's hard to see that conditions in Iraq would become much worse than they are now. The Iraqis want their country back. I don't think they're going to turn over any part of it to al Qaeda, the way the Taliban did in Afghanistan. The Iraqis are too smart to do something like that, and they're too smart to start a civil war, too.

That's kind of a flip way of saying they have too much else to do. If we were to leave there, I think we'd see a lot of interesting politics, equivalent in its way to the ten years or so after the British left their American colonies in the early 1780s. You'd see a lot of conflict, and a nation trying to refashion itself. We went through a cruel civil war before we worked things out, and we'd have to be willing to see Iraq go through something like that, too. But it

Next Steps

would make a difference that the Iraqis were building a new state with a legitimate government, without an occupying army and foreign administrators around to interfere.



Saddam Hussein

Well, we're not going to leave tomorrow, so we have to ask what would happen if we leave more slowly. And we have to ask what part the UN will play as we get out of there. More than one observer, from Wesley Clark to a British official with the UN, has said that we need to pay close attention to the political process in Iraq as we try to disengage ourselves from the place. Reagan used to say that we have simple answers to our problems – they just aren't easy ones. That applies here. Experts like Richard Clarke who care about their work know that our job isn't easy. They know the chances of failure are pretty good at this point. We have sophisticated analysts out there who know Iraq and who can help us disengage. They serve in the UN and in other posts all over the region. We need their advice.

Next Steps

We are the only country in the world right now that thinks the UN shouldn't play a leading part in the political transition coming up in Iraq. We have given the UN its current advisory role only as a last resort: we couldn't see any other way out of the problems we created for ourselves. The UN is indeed our only way out now – out of our problems and out of the country. If we give real responsibility to the UN and to the Iraqis themselves, now, we could still redeem something from the situation, even if we have to admit our mistakes. I should say, *only* if we admit our mistakes. Only that admission can redeem our reputation and the Iraqis' future.

Most importantly, intelligent disengagement means we would have a real opportunity to resume the war we should be fighting. We wouldn't be distracting ourselves with blame, when the truly big mistakes go unpunished and even unnoticed. We have made a horrible mistake here, and somebody has to say so. Well into the campaign, John Kerry has begun to make a forceful case against the war. More leaders with stature have to say the same thing: this war is wrong, and we have to confess it. Then we have to seek forgiveness, atone if that's possible, and fight again. When we fight again, let's pick the right enemy.

Chapter 8 Our Armed Forces

We haven't done any of the things we should have done. Instead we started a war that roused the ghost of our first defeat: Vietnam. Now opponents of the Iraqi war have to apologize for their stand, assuring their audience that they actually do have some backbone, and that they are not one of those anti-war throwbacks from the sixties, who recall those times with a kind of warped nostalgia. Who would wish for that sort of political divisiveness again? Who would wish for a time when patriotism was dishonorable, and our military men and women received mockery and spittle in the face as they arrived home from their tours of duty in Vietnam? The memories of that time are still so vivid, that criticism of the war in Iraq comes under suspicion because the speaker is undermining our troops, not giving them the support they need.

It's not so: opponents of this war believe in the goodness, the abilities and the fortitude of our soldiers as much as ever. Now the families, the moms and dads of those soldiers are beginning to question this war and the reasons for fighting it, and I thank them for it. They've made it possible for others to speak more freely about the

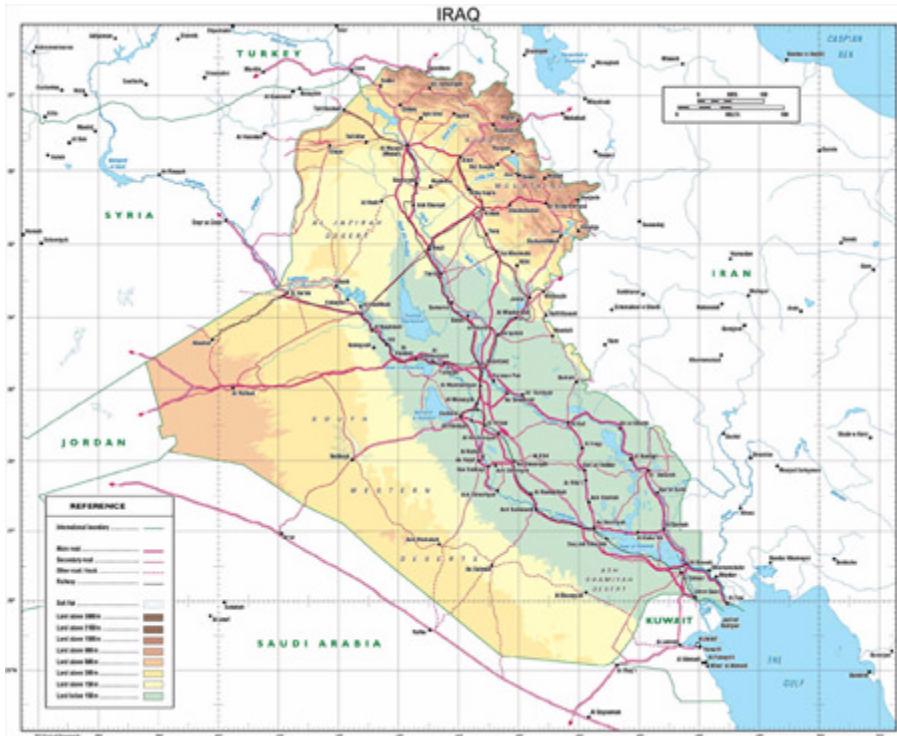
horrible thing we've done, without having to apologize because we're making our soldiers' jobs more difficult.

Opposition to this war and support of our troops easily go together. In fact, opposition to this war and support of our troops have to go together, because we have to get our fighting men and women out of there. We can't support a government that puts our young people in harm's way for bad reasons. Our young people shouldn't have to pay for other people's mistakes and poor judgment. They shouldn't have to come home in anonymous coffins, victims of a war where, for the first time in our history, we are clearly guilty of aggression. If we have to have victims, let our battlefield casualties come from the mountains in eastern Afghanistan and western Pakistan, where our real enemies are hiding, and fighting.

Nowadays you see *Support Our Troops* on cars everywhere. You can't tell whether it's a non-partisan, patriotic sentiment, or a declaration that the driver has planted a flag with Bush's team. The anti-war group says, *Support Our Troops: Bring Them Home*. The correct version, though it won't fit on a bumper sticker, is *Support Our Troops: Deploy Them to Afghanistan and Pakistan*. Right now our soldiers are bottled up, blown up, and beat up by their enemies in Iraq. And they can't do anything about it because everything they try makes matters worse. The one thing we haven't tried is leaving. That's an experiment worth a go.

* * *

Our Armed Forces



Iraq: Note the green swath, a huge oasis in the middle of a vast desert.

I joined the Navy in 1977, a year out of college, as a junior officer. This kind of thing was unthinkable among my peers. Our military defeat, loss of men and bitter humiliation in southeast Asia still hung over our culture, and especially over our youth at that time. Joining any branch of the military, especially if you were from the north and from the upper middle class, was not something you did. After the war in Vietnam, people regarded

the armed services as something like a failed cult. It didn't come back to its place of honor and respect until the Reagan years, and Reagan himself can claim credit for that restoration. Patriotism and admiration for our armed forces have burned with a steady light since then.

So that's why the reports of abuse in Iraqi prisons pose such a threat to our self-respect. We don't have to go far in our memories before we encounter My Lai and other uncomfortable legacies of Vietnam. It's not going to be enough to say that war is nasty, and that's what happens when you start one. It's not going to be enough to say that the perpetrators were following orders, that they weren't well trained or that they were poorly supervised. They're going to be made into scapegoats, and the self-righteous men and women who committed the greater crime will be self-righteous about these poor soldiers as well. And I don't say poor soldiers because I think what they did is okay, or because I think they don't deserve punishment for what they did.

I say it because at least some of those guards probably did what they did to go along with their buddies. Sadistic leaders wanted to soften the prisoners up for interrogation, or to punish them for getting out of line. They already regarded their prisoners as animals, and they would prove it. Now the only way for an underling soldier to do the right thing is to stand out from the group, to refuse to go along, to make yourself conspicuous for your disobedience. And that's about the hardest thing for anyone to do, because refusal to go along means ostracism, and when you're far away from home, away from your family and other anchors, and the only friends you have

Our Armed Forces

are the ones you work with every day, you are not going to stand out, you are not going to refuse to go along. You are going to do what the others are doing.

Take the case of Jay Darby, the hero from Pennsylvania who first reported the abuse at Abu Ghraib to his superior officer. He slipped an anonymous note under his commanding officer's door, knowing, in the close environment of the prison, that his identity might well come out at some point. A veteran of Vietnam here in the States said that Darby was nothing but a snitch, and in Vietnam, the veteran said, we made sure snitches didn't come home again.

Chapter 9 Concluding Thoughts

You have to give President Bush and his administration this much credit: they took care to make the case for war, even if they patched their case together from falsehoods, distortions, partial truths, and fear mongering. They tried to persuade American citizens that the war was necessary and good, and to quite an extent they succeeded. They succeeded because, as so many said at the time, September 11 changed everything. The administration closely tied its justification for war to the September 11 attacks. The connection was explicit, and the logic of war led directly from the fall of the twin towers to the occupation of Baghdad.

Bush maintains that the war against Iraq and the war against al Qaeda are one, but they are not. The war against Iraq makes the war against al Qaeda so much more difficult to win. We must focus on the primary enemy, al Qaeda, with the help of the rest of the world; instead we have focused on a secondary enemy, Iraq, with very little help from anyone.

Concluding Thoughts

Will al Qaeda win this war? It's hard to see how they can, in the short or medium term. A better question is, will they lose it? That one is easier to answer. The war against Iraq makes it much more likely that al Qaeda will not lose the war. And not losing, from their point of view, is just as good as winning. If they can instill fear, constrain liberty, and foster a sense of helplessness and inefficacy, that is as much success as they can hope for. If they can achieve these things, it doesn't matter so much whether they win, or not lose. It looks the same to them.



Osama bin Laden

Here is a closing thought to stress what a serious battle we are in. Let's not call our enemies terrorists any more. Barbara Ehrenreich points out that terrorism is a method, not an enemy. We think of terrorists the way we used to think of anarchists: bearded, bomb-throwing misfits

Concluding Thoughts

eager to kill themselves for the cause. Let's recognize our enemies for who they are: clever, determined, dangerous, resourceful, organized, courageous individuals who are completely sure of what they are doing. These are people who think the Taliban did not go far enough, but they are not crazy maniacs. They want to destroy our civilization, and if we make too many mistakes, over time they will. If we call them what they are, fighters for a totalitarian vision of their faith, we'll perceive that the harm they want to inflict extends far beyond blowing up buildings. Despite their obnoxious ideology and debased religious faith, and notwithstanding their evil acts, they deserve more of a warrior's respect than we have been willing to give. We have to respect them if we want to destroy them.

