

## **Iraq--One Year Later**

### **Loyola Teach In 3/31/04**

#### I. Two teach-ins on Iraq

A. Oct 7, 2002, at a teach-in in Centennial Forum, I claimed:

1. It's about politics--so Karl Rove is on board
2. It's about oil--so Bush's oil buddies are on board
3. It's about empire--so the neocon contingent who had taken over the Department of Defense is happy

"Can we stop this war?" I asked. "Probably not--but we are morally obligated to try. The killing will be done in our names."

B. All of these claims have been confirmed by subsequent events

1. The war took attention away from the Enron and other corporate scandals that were getting too close to home. The media beat the drum, and Americans cheered. (75% approved of the war in the days after it had begun). Karl Rove even engineered a dramatic shot of our young commander-in-chief, decked out in a flight suit, landing a jet on an aircraft carrier. The Democrats were done for--or so it seemed.

2. It's still about oil, which is why Iraq isn't going to see democracy anytime soon (more on this later).

3. My empire claim received dramatic confirmation recently--from insider Karen Kwiatkowski, who has recently been speaking out:

"In the spring of 2002, I was a cynical but willing staff officer, almost two years into my three-year tour at the office of secretary of defense. . . [At that point I was "volunteered" to work with the Pentagon's Office of Special Plans.] The education I would receive there was like an M. Night Shyamalan movie--intense, fascinating and frightening. While the people were very much alive, I saw a dead philosophy--Cold War anti-communism and neo-imperialism--walking the corridors of the Pentagon. It wore the clothing of counterterrorism and spoke the language of a holy war between good and evil. The evil was recognized by the leadership to be resident mainly in the Middle East . . . but there were other enemies within, anyone who dared voice any scepticism about their grand plans, including Sec. of State Colin Powell and Gen. Anthony Zinni." [She goes on for eight pages, naming names and providing fascinating detail. The article was posted on Salon.com three weeks ago.]

4. And of course I was right that we wouldn't be able to stop the war. We know now, again thanks to insider testimony, that planning for war with Iraq began immediately after 9/11, and that the Administration never had any intention of being sidetracked by empty-handed weapons inspectors or a recalcitrant U.N.

C. On March 26, 2003, a week into the war, I joined the other members of this panel in Simpson. There I said:

1. There exists no evidence at this time that Iraq even has weapons of mass destruction, or that even if it has, it has any intention of using them for reasons apart from self-defense.

2. There exists no evidence at this time that Iraq had anything whatsoever to do with the terrorist attack of 9/11.

3. There exists no evidence, nor is anyone claiming any, that the Iraqi regime, brutal and oppressive as it is, is currently engaged in mass slaughter of its own people or any form of ethnic cleansing that would warrant immediate outside intervention.

D. These claims, too, have all been confirmed over the past year.

E. Contrast these claims to those of the Bush Administration:

1. "Simply stated, there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction." Dick Cheney, August 26, 2002.

2. "We know for a fact that there are weapons there." Ari Fleischer, January 9, 2003.

3. "We know that Saddam Hussein is determined to keep his weapons of mass destruction, is determined to make more." Colin Powell, February 5, 2003.

4. "We know where [the weapons of mass destruction] are. They are in the area around Tikrit and Baghdad." Donald Rumsfeld, March 30, 2003.

5. "We have sources that tell us that Saddam Hussein recently authorized Iraqi field commanders to use chemical weapons." George W. Bush, February 8, 2003.

6. "Intelligence gathered by this and other governments leaves no doubt that the Iraqi regime continues to possess and conceal some of the most lethal weapons ever devised." George W. Bush, March 17, 2003

## II. But the problem, really, is not the lies. It's the death and destruction

A. At the October teach in, I predicted that "many, many innocent people will die," thousands, tens of thousands, some of these Americans, ten times as many Iraqis.

B. Was I right? We know that more than 500 American military personnel have been killed in combat (and that doesn't count the accidental deaths or suicides--the exact numbers of which have been suppressed). Plausible estimates put the total Iraqi casualties in excess of 10,000. Some are as high as 50,000.

C. Think for a moment about what that means, even the smaller figure. There's an eloquent display in Mundelein Hall right now--500+ pairs of combat boots, extending up the railings of the center staircase. If you haven't seen it, you should. The boots of 500+ dead soldiers. Each one of them a human being. But when you look at those boots, you should imagine something more. For each pair of boots that you see, image twenty more pairs of footwear sitting next to it. Some of them will be combat boots also, those of dead Iraqi soldiers, many will be civilian footwear, many of them women's shoes. Many will be quite small--those of the children. Ten thousand or more pairs in all. The shoes of human beings now dead who would otherwise be alive. (Three times more than the dead of Sept 11.)

D. There's also the immediate destruction--the buildings, infrastructure, looted museums, destroyed water purification plants, etc.

E. Perhaps even worse--almost surely even worse--there's all that depleted uranium now lying around, from which so many metal-piercing shells were manufactured. Tons and tons of this stuff are now in the air and water and soil of Iraq, which will continue to emit low-level radiation for 4.5 billion years.

1. "DU is no more dangerous than dirt," says the director of Army munitions.
2. "This is a war crime beyond comprehension," says Helen Caldicott, a pediatrician who has campaigned against nuclear weapons for years. "This is creating radioactive battlefields to the end of time." [Rolling Stone, October 2, 2003]

## IV. This is what we have done. This is what the Bush Administration has done, but it has done it in our name, and with the approval--at least initially--of 75 percent of our countrymen. What do we do now?

A. At the teach-in a year ago, I asked the question, "What are we going to say if there are no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq? Are we going to say, 'Whoops, our mistake. We thought you were lying when you said you didn't have any. I guess you weren't. Sorry about all the death and destruction. Sorry so many of your children are now dead or

crippled or traumatized."

B. That was a rhetorical response, of course. We all know that being the world's greatest superpower means never having to say you're sorry.

V. But what should we do now? What should those of us who were right from the beginning, or those of us who have come to understand this horrible war was based on lies and deception, be pushing for now.

A. Consider the ideal case. If we were a truly moral people with a truly moral president, what would we do?

1. Apologize, of course, sincerely and abjectly. Yes, a brutal dictator is gone, and many of you are grateful for that, but it should not have happened this way.

2. Beyond apologizing, well, there's a basic rule of ethics: "If you broke it, fix it."

- a. Notice, it doesn't matter that it was an accident (which it wasn't, but even if it was). If you can afford to repair the damage done, you are obligated to do so--even at serious cost to yourself.

- b. Of course there's much that cannot be repaired. The dead cannot be brought back to life. But there's much we could do. It would be a good lesson for all the world, to see how much it would cost to repair the physical destruction, and rehabilitate the wounded minds and bodies that two weeks of "shock and awe" occasioned.

- c. The costs would surely be in the hundreds of billions, and, needless to say (we are talking about an ethical administration), they are not to be paid for with revenues from Iraqi oil. We would have to raise taxes to cover this--and perhaps cut some of that Defense Department budget.

B. Obviously, I am speaking of Never-Never-Land. Not even the most progressive of Democrats would support such a proposal. They couldn't. It would be political suicide. I don't know that Americans, collectively, are less moral than the citizens of any other country, but we certainly aren't more moral. We would never, ever go for that.

VI. Okay, politics is the art of the possible. What is possible?

A. One possibility would be to simply pull out, "cut and run." I suspect that Bush will be increasingly tempted by that option as his own grand plan comes ever more undone. Hand power over to the Iraqis, declare victory and go home.

I don't think this should be done. It has been said that there is one thing worse than a brutal, despotic government, and that is no government. Anarchy and civil war can be unspeakably horrific.

B. Another possibility is to follow the Bush plan, which involves turning power over to the Iraqis by June 30. That may sound reasonable, until you look at the details.

1. Here's Naomi Klein's account (Toronto Globe and Mail, Jan 22, 2004):

Mr. Bremer wants his Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) to appoint the members of 18 regional organizing committees. The committees will then select delegates to form 18 selection caucuses. These selected delegates will then further select representatives to a transitional national assembly. The assembly will have an internal vote to select an executive and ministers who will form the new government of Iraq. That, Bush said in his [State of the Union] address, constitutes a "transition to full Iraqi sovereignty."

Got that? Iraqi sovereignty will be established by appointees appointing appointees to select appointees to select appointees. Add to that the fact that Mr. Bremer was appointed to his post by President Bush and that Mr. Bush was appointed by the U.S. Supreme Court, and you have the glorious new democratic tradition of the appointocracy: rule by appointee's appointee's appointee's appointee's appointee's selectees.

2. The point:

Under the current U.S. plan for Iraq, the transitional national assembly would hold onto power from June 30 until general elections are held no later than December 31, 2005. That's 17 leisurely months for a non-elected government to do what the CPA could not legally do on its own: invite U.S. troops to stay indefinitely and turn Mr. Bremer's capitalist dream [the Economist's term for Bremer's package of economic reforms] into binding law. Only after these key decisions have been made will Iraqis be invited to have their say.

3. That is to say, it's still about oil and empire: the U.S. determination to have a secure military base in the Middle East to protect "our interests" (i.e., "our" oil) from irresponsible governments that might have different priorities from our own.

C. The only feasible alternative, as I see it, is the one often discussed. Authority must be handed over to the U.N. Full authority. Control over troops, the contracts, the electoral process. This is an imperfect process. The UN is itself discredited in the eyes of many Iraqis. It did, after all, endorse twelve years of sanctions that claimed so many lives. And it did not condemn the US for its unilateral war.

Still, I see no other option.

VII. Let me conclude with one final observation.

A. I've mentioned that we have only estimates of Iraqi casualties. I find this utterly obscene--stark testimony to the deep immorality of this war.

B. The only morally plausible justification for this war, given what we now know, is that a brutal dictator was ousted. It was a "humanitarian intervention." This, of course, is the administration's current spin.

C. But a genuinely humanitarian intervention must be undertaken very, very cautiously with careful consideration given to the costs. A humanitarian intervention is not the same as targeting a single vile individual and his criminal associates. Human lives will be lost. Under the best of circumstances, innocent people will be killed.

D. I think humanitarian interventions are indeed justified on certain occasions. But a morally justified intervention must be undertaken with a heavy heart, with full acknowledgment that innocents will die. And these dead must be treated with respect.

E. This has not been the case. The US has announced that "we don't do body counts." And the Iraqi authorities responsible to the Coalition Provisional Authority have also been ordered to stop counting.

F. Here's what this means in human terms. This is from the LA Times, Feb 16, 2004.

1. Baghdad--Every few weeks, Najeeba Jaafar defies logic and braves the eight-hour round-trip bus ride to the northern Iraqi city of Mosul, where her youngest son was stationed when the U.S. invaded last year. She makes the trip even though villagers told her that American bombs "minced" all the soldiers, and the remains were hastily buried.

If he had survived, her son would have called by now, but Jaafar keeps looking, even after holding his funeral. "I've lost hope," she said, "but I can't help it. I have to go, in case I find something."

When her son first went to his post in the north, Jaafar would bring him food and cigarettes every weekend. The day Baghdad fell, he called and said he would call back in a couple of hours to say where she could send supplies.

Jaafar never heard from him again. Though she knows he is probably dead, she will not believe it until she sees the body.

I'm like a crazy woman in the house," she said through sobs, clutching the folds of her chador. "I have a portrait of him at home that I talk to. . . He's my son. I always worried about him. . . It's only natural a mother worries about her son."

2. Elheer Diwan Shihab, his 62-year-old father Fadhel, and a 72-year-old relative by marriage all disappeared in April. They had driven to Baghdad to pick up supplies for the rest of the family, which had fled the capital when bombs began to fall. None of the three civilians has been heard from since.

Naseer Fadliel Diwan, the 27-year-old surviving brother, spent months digging through roadside graves before giving up. "My hands stunk from the smell of corpses," he said.

Then, one day in September, a stranger came to the family's house and told them their relatives were being held by Americans at a military base at the Baghdad airport. The hint of hope made the family's situation even worse.

Naseer Diwan and his mother could get no answers. The names of most Iraqis who have been detained are kept by occupation forces in Baghdad; the family members were not in the database. The Red Crescent could not find out what happened. Diwan pleaded with the translator for an American general for help, but said he was brushed off. . . .

"I've thought about committing suicide three times in the past month because of the impotence I feel," Diwan said. "I'm standing on the edge here."

G. A twenty-seven-year-old man thinking about committing suicide. Things are not going to get better in Iraq anytime soon.