

The State of Our Union

2/4/2003

Bush Says Saddam Plans to Dominate, Intimidate or Attack

Lead Front Page Headline: USA Today (January 29, 2003)

Bush: Saddam Showing Utter Contempt for UN

Lead Front Page Headline: Chicago Tribune (January 29, 2003)

Bush Says US Will Not Defer to Allies on Iraq

Lead Front Page Headline: Chicago Sun Times (January 29, 2003)

Power tends to corrupt.

Absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Lord Acton (1887)

Funny quoting Acton, who was the figure conservatives most loved to quote during the Cold War, backing for their view that totalitarian communism was an absolute menace--to be opposed by any means necessary, fair or foul.

But now the United States is an absolute power--led by a "president" who would not be sitting in the Oval Office, had not his brother illegally disenfranchised thousands of minority voters in Florida, and had not the Supreme Court, split along ideological lines, endorsed the fix. Even apart from the corporate accounting scandals haunting the "President" and many of his top advisors, even apart from tax cut paybacks to all his wealthy backers, even apart from the criminal records of various administration officials, the degree of corruption in this administration is breathtaking. (Press Secretary Ari Fleischer declined to answer a reporter's question the other day, "Ari, other than Elliott Abrams, how many convicted criminals are on the White House staff?")

Consider that first headline. Obviously the "President's" top advisors (if not the "President" himself) know that Saddam Hussein poses not the slightest military threat to his neighbors, let alone us. They know that Iraq was destroyed as a modern country by the Six Week War of 1991 and the ensuing sanctions. None of Iraq's neighbors is worried. One has to go back to the paranoia of the Reagan 80s, with administration officials claiming that tiny little Grenada posed a threat to our national security (spreading the disease of communism over to Nicaragua, then up through Honduras, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, through Mexico, right to the Texas border), to see such flagrantly fallacious claims emanating from the White House. (It so happens that John Negroponte, current US Ambassador to the UN, was ambassador to Honduras during those days, winking at the right-wing, death-squad terror that saved us from those communists.) They know it's a lie, but they have the "President" say it anyway. It's a good line. It'll get applause. What's truth got to do with it?

Consider the second and third headline, set side by side. It's Saddam Hussein who is showing contempt for the UN? It is our "president," who is saying that the US "will not defer to allies on Iraq." Translation: "Fuck the UN. We're the world's only superpower. We'll do what we want."

(This, by the way, is how our leaders talk behind closed doors. If you doubt this, listen to the Nixon tapes.)

It is hard not to rant. I find this all so sickening. But let me make, more calmly, three simple points.

1) When the US makes war on Iraq, hundreds, thousands, maybe tens or hundreds of thousands of people will have their bodies torn apart by our bombs and bullets, or crushed beneath collapsing buildings. Many will be women and children. So far as we know, not one of these people has ever inflicted any harm on a U.S. citizen, nor has any intention of ever doing so. Yet we will kill them.

2) It doesn't matter whether or not Iraq has "weapons of mass destruction." So do we. So do dozens of other countries, including all members of the UN Security Council. Iraq should get rid of those weapons. So should we. So should all those other countries. But no country has the right to kill thousands of another country's citizens, just because that country happens to possess such weapons. It matters not at all whether the UN Security Council gives its blessing to mass murder--certainly not when member states have been subjected to relentless "carrot and stick" diplomacy, (i.e., bribed and threatened) by "the world's only superpower."

3) It is inconceivable that the conquest and occupation of Iraq--with its honey pot of oil--will reduce the threat of terrorism directed at U.S. citizens at home and abroad. If it is clear from here, it is clearer still from outside our borders that the United States is killing because it can do so with impunity and because it wants to control those oil fields. It is hard to imagine anything more likely to inflame hatred of America than so cynical a war. "Weapons of mass destruction" are easily enough to obtain, and unnecessary anyway. Have we all forgotten that the World Trade Center was brought down by men armed with box cutters?

Let me add a further point. This is perhaps the hardest one to set down on paper, since it is so painful to admit--even to myself. I don't think anyone can doubt the previous point: war with Iraq will not reduce the threat of terrorism. Not even Bush administration officials. This isn't, as they say, "rocket science." Donald Rumsfeld graduated from Princeton, and Condoleezza Rice was Provost at Stanford. They're not stupid. Why then would they support something that is so obviously counterproductive?

The answer, I think, is simple--if horrifying. The point of this war is not to deter terrorism. The point is politics--politics and power. Politically, the Bush team can't lose. It's a win-win situation. If there's a lull in the terrorism, then this proves them right. And if there is not, or when the lull ends--well, that proves them right also--shows just how dangerous the world is, how much bigger our "defense" budget must be, how many more restrictions need to be placed on civil liberties, how misguided (and unpatriotic) those bleeding-heart liberals really are.

You don't have to look far to see this scenario already playing itself out. Ariel Sharon's party just racked up a large electoral victory in Israel. The tougher you are in your "war on terrorism," (i.e., the more innocent people you kill), the more terrorists you spawn. The more terrorists you

spawn, the tougher still you have to be--and the more support your terrified electorate will give you. Look at Israel today. That's us tomorrow. Unless somehow, somehow, somehow we can stop the death train.

It's perhaps appropriate to end this depressing reflection with a Nazi quote:

"Of course the people don't want war. But after all, it's the leaders of the country who determine the policy, and it's always a simple matter to drag the people along whether it's a democracy, a fascist dictatorship, or a parliament, or a communist dictatorship. Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism, and exposing the country to greater danger."

-- Herman Goering at the Nuremberg trials, before being executed for crimes against humanity