

## WHY IRAQ?

Norman Balabanian

Veterans for Peace

Winter Solstice Peace Concert

December 18, 2002 Gainesville, FL|

Many responses have been repeated by US administrations:

1. Saddam Hussein poison-gassed his own people (Kurds);
2. Saddam invaded and occupied Kuwait in 1990;
3. He ignores UN Security Council Resolutions;
4. He is a brutal dictator;
5. He has "weapons of mass destruction": WMD.

The first four are even true! But these charges cannot be real reasons for threatening, and preparing for, an imminent US invasion of Iraq -- with or without UN acquiescence. Let's examine each one.

1. From 1983 to August 1, 1990 - when Bush I was VP, then President -- the US (and its NATO allies) had been supplying Saddam's Iraq with all kinds of weapons and other material - such as high-strength aluminum tubes that Bush II declared less than 2 weeks ago to be of use in nuclear-weapons development! (Not so, says a British Parliament report.) The US even sold Saddam the helicopters that the Iraqis used in the chemical attack on Kurds in northern Iraq. It even provided the funds for Iraq to buy these weapons. Obviously, the US did not then disapprove of such actions.

2. Early in 1990 - the year of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait -- Bush I had signed a presidential order stating that it was in the national interest to expand trade with Iraq! Furthermore, Saddam had been complaining to the US about Iraqi disputes with Kuwait. On July 25, just 8 days before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the US Ambassador to Iraq, April Glaspie - in response to a complaint from Saddam about Kuwaiti actions against Iraq - told him:

". . . we have no opinion on Arab-Arab conflicts, like your border disagreement with Kuwait. If we are unable to find a solution, then it will be natural that Iraq will not accept death."

Could diplomatic language be any clearer that the US was acquiescing in some kind of Iraqi action against Kuwait? Indeed, just 4 days before our ambassador's meeting with Saddam, Bush I's administration issued a press release reminding the world that the US had no treaty with the Kuwaiti Government. One might be curious as to why Saddam Hussein - just after he had moved his troops up close to the Kuwaiti border - had to be reminded of that!

With that kind of encouragement from the US, Iraq invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990. In response to a reporter's question, after the US-led attack on Iraq in early 1991, the ex-ambassador said:

". . . we never expected them to take all of Kuwait."

In other words, the administration did expect Iraq to take some of Kuwait - in which it acquiesced!

Later on the day of the Iraqi invasion, the UNSC passed a resolution condemning Iraq and calling on it to withdraw. Iraq did not do so but -- starting in that same month -- made several proposals for withdrawing. US State Department officials labeled these proposals "serious pre-negotiating positions". But Bush I replied: "Aggression will not be rewarded. There will be no negotiations." Is it true that aggressors will not be rewarded?

Under the command of Bush I, the US invaded Panama in 1989, the year before Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. That aggression was indeed rewarded: a "regime change" was brought about; Panama's Head of State (a former CIA asset was brought in chains to the US and jailed. The reality is that some aggressors will be rewarded and less powerful others will not.

3. Yes, Iraq has ignored some UN Security Council resolutions - 12 or so since Saddam Hussein came to power. But Iraq is not unique in this respect. Israel has ignored 32 UNSC resolutions over the same period! Turkey -- a NATO ally of the US -- has ignored 24, twice as many as Iraq! All these UNSC resolutions have required the affirmative vote of the US. Many of the resolutions against Israel concern

the demand to stop its policy of Israeli settlements on Palestinian land. Since the US grants Israel several billions of dollars annually, it could easily obtain Israeli compliance with these UNSC resolutions - should it so desire.

4. Saddam Hussein is a brutal dictator - there is no doubt about that. But many tyrants aided and abetted by the US have been equally brutal dictators; among them: Marcos of the Philippines, Suharto of Indonesia, Somoza of Nicaragua, Shah Reza Pahlavi of Iran, Pinochet of Chile, and many more in Central and South America. Without US support, not one of them even could have reached power. So, "brutal dictator" can be only a tongue-in-cheek charge.

5. "Weapons of Mass Destruction" is a red herring! Former UN Weapons Inspector Scott Ritter (1992-1998) has asserted repeatedly that 98% of all Iraq's WMD had been found and destroyed by 1998. The US position on this matter -- especially as to nuclear WMD - has been unprincipled.

\* \* \* \* \*

In April 1990, less than four months before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, Saddam Hussein offered Bush I a deal to destroy his biological and chemical WMD - Iraq did not then, nor now, have nuclear weapons. Bush I agreed, but with a caveat: that this matter not be linked to other issues or other weapons. What has to be understood - without acknowledgement -- is that Israel must keep its nuclear arsenal. Though the world is well aware that Israel possesses nuclear weapons, it is curious why the US cannot acknowledge it. Why not? We . . .ll:

In 1977 Congress passed, and President Carter signed, legislation prohibiting US aid to countries developing nuclear weapons. So, if the US admits that Israel has long ago developed and now possesses nuclear weapons, not only will all future aid to Israel have to be cancelled, but also past aid since about 1981 would have been illegal. It is clear, then, that the US has not been interested in a diplomatic settlement of the problem of WMD, in general. Instead, it is prepared to go to war. It did so in 1990 and is preparing to do so again.

One other thing the US has not wanted for over 25 years is a diplomatic settlement of the Israel-Palestine conflict -- although there has been interminable chatter about "the peace process". The US has a veto in the UN Security Council but not in the UN General Assembly (GA). In December 1989, just eight months before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, there was a proposal in the GA calling for an international conference on the Israel-Palestine problem that would take up a settlement on the basis of the 1967 UNSC Resolution 242 on territorial guarantees and security that - to this day - Israel has not adhered to. The vote was 151 in support to 3 against (with only Dominica joining the US and Israel in opposition). The yes vote included all the NATO allies! Why doesn't the US want an international conference on the question? The reason is clear: if a conference is held, it will call for a diplomatic settlement -- and the US opposes that!

For the preservation of international law, it is imperative that the US forego unilateral actions and adhere to civilized norms of international conduct -- even in the face of wounds inflicted by fanatics. Otherwise, since the US would be mimicking them, these fanatics could feel vindicated in their actions -- even permitted to expand them.