

Published on Friday, February 7, 2003 by CommonDreams.org

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity

Secretary Powell's presentation at the UN today requires context. We give him an "A" for assembling and listing the charges against Iraq, but only a "C-" in providing context and perspective.

What seems clear to us is that you need an intelligence briefing, not grand jury testimony. Secretary Powell effectively showed that Iraq is guilty beyond reasonable doubt for not cooperating fully with UN Security Council Resolution 1441. That had already been demonstrated by the chief UN inspectors. For Powell, it was what the Pentagon calls a "cakewalk."

The narrow focus on Resolution 1441 has diverted attention from the wider picture. It is crucial that we not lose sight of that. Intelligence community analysts are finding it hard to make themselves heard above the drumbeat for war. Speaking both for ourselves, as veteran intelligence officers on the VIPS Steering Group with over a hundred years of professional experience, and for colleagues within the community who are increasingly distressed at the politicization of intelligence, we feel a responsibility to help you frame the issues. For they are far more far-reaching-and complicated-than "UN v. Saddam Hussein." And they need to be discussed dispassionately, in a setting in which sobriquets like "sinister nexus," "evil genius," and "web of lies" can be more hindrance than help.

Flouting UN Resolutions

The key question is whether Iraq's flouting of a UN resolution justifies war. This is the question the world is asking. Secretary Powell's presentation does not come close to answering it.

One might well come away from his briefing thinking that the Iraqis are the only ones in flagrant violation of UN resolutions. Or one might argue that there is more urgency to the need to punish the violator of Resolution 1441 than, say, of Resolution 242 of 1967 requiring Israel to withdraw from the Arab territories it occupied that year. More urgency? You will not find many Palestinians, Arabs, Muslims who would agree.

It is widely known that you have a uniquely close relationship with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. This presents a strong disincentive to those who might otherwise warn you that Israel's continuing encroachment on Arab territories, its oppression of the Palestinian people, and its pre-emptive attack

on Iraq in 1981 are among the root causes not only of terrorism, but of Saddam Hussein's felt need to develop the means to deter further Israeli attacks. Secretary Powell dismisses this factor far too lightly with his summary judgment that Iraq's weapons of mass destruction are "not for self-defense."

Containment

You have dismissed containment as being irrelevant in a post 9/11 world. You should know that no one was particularly fond of containment, but that it has been effective for the last 55 years. And the concept of "material breach" is hardly anything new.

Material Breach

In the summer of 1983 we detected a huge early warning radar installation at Krasnoyarsk in Siberia. In 1984 President Reagan declared it an outright violation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. At an ABM Treaty review in 1988, the US spoke of this continuing violation as a "material breach" of the treaty. In the fall of 1989, the Soviet Union agreed to eliminate the radar at Krasnoyarsk without preconditions.

We adduce this example simply to show that, with patient, persistent diplomacy, the worst situations can change over time.

You have said that Iraq is a "grave threat to the United States," and many Americans think you believe it to be an imminent threat. Otherwise why would you be sending hundreds of thousands of troops to the Gulf area? In your major speech in Cincinnati on October 7, 2002, you warned that "the risk is simply too great that Saddam Hussein will use instruments of mass death and destruction, or provide them to a terror network."

Terrorism

Your intelligence agencies see it differently. On the same day you spoke in Cincinnati, a letter from the CIA to the Senate Intelligence Committee asserted that the probability is low that Iraq would initiate an attack with such weapons or give them to terrorists..UNLESS:

"Should Saddam conclude that a US-led attack could no longer be deterred, he probably would become much less constrained in adopting terrorist actions."

For now, continued the CIA letter, "Baghdad appears to be drawing a line short of conducting terrorist attacks with conventional or chemical/biological warfare against the United States." With his back against the wall, however, "Saddam might decide that the extreme step of assisting Islamist terrorists in conducting a weapons-of-mass-destruction attack against the United States would be his last chance to exact vengeance by taking a large number of victims with him."

Your Pentagon advisers draw a connection between war with Iraq and terrorism, but for the wrong reasons. The connection takes on much more reality in a post-US invasion scenario.

Indeed, it is our view that an invasion of Iraq would ensure overflowing recruitment centers for terrorists into the indefinite future. Far from eliminating the threat it would enhance it exponentially.

As recent events around the world attest, terrorism is like malaria. You don't eliminate malaria by killing the flies. Rather you must drain the swamp. With an invasion of Iraq, the world can expect to be inundated with swamps breeding terrorists. In human terms, your daughters are unlikely to be able to travel abroad in future years without a large phalanx of security personnel.

We recommend you re-read the CIA assessment of last fall that pointed out that "the forces fueling hatred of the US and fueling al Qaeda recruiting are not being addressed," and that "the underlying causes that drive terrorists will persist." That CIA report cited a Gallup poll last year of almost 10,000 Muslims in nine countries in which respondents described the United States as "ruthless, aggressive, conceited, arrogant, easily provoked and biased."

Chemical Weapons

With respect to possible Iraqi use of chemical weapons, it has been the judgment of the US intelligence community for over 12 years that the likelihood of such use would greatly increase during an offensive aimed at getting rid of Saddam Hussein.

Listing the indictment particulars, Secretary Powell said, in an oh-by-the-way tone, that sources had reported that Saddam Hussein recently authorized his field commanders to use such weapons. We find this truly alarming. We do not share the Defense Department's optimism that radio broadcasts and leaflets would induce Iraqi commanders not to obey orders to use such weapons, or that Iraqi generals would remove Saddam Hussein as soon as the first US soldier sets foot in Iraq. Clearly, an invasion would be no cakewalk for American troops, ill equipped as they are to operate in a chemical environment.

Casualties

Reminder: The last time we sent troops to the Gulf, over 600,000 of them, one out of three came back ill-many with unexplained disorders of the nervous system. Your Secretary of Veterans Affairs recently closed the VA healthcare system to nearly 200,000 eligible veterans by administrative fiat. Thus, casualties of further war will inevitably displace other veterans who need VA services.

In his second inaugural, Abraham Lincoln appealed to his fellow citizens to care for those who "have borne the battle." Years before you took office, our country was doing a very poor job of that for the over 200,000 servicemen and women stricken with various Gulf War illnesses. Today's battlefield is likely to be even more sodden with chemicals and is altogether likely to yield tens of thousands more casualties. On October 1, 2002 Congress' General Accounting Office reported "serious problems still persist" with the Pentagon's efforts to protect servicemen and women, including shortfalls in clothing, equipment, and training. Our troops deserve more effective support than broadcasts, leaflets, and faulty equipment for protection against chemical and biological agents.

No one has a corner on the truth; nor do we harbor illusions that our analysis is irrefutable or undeniable. But after watching Secretary Powell today, we are convinced that you would be well served if you widened the discussion beyond violations of Resolution 1441, and beyond the circle of those advisers clearly bent on a war for which we see no compelling reason and from which we believe the unintended consequences are likely to be catastrophic.

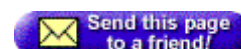
/s/

Richard Beske, San Diego
Kathleen McGrath Christison, Santa Fe
William Christison, Santa Fe
Patrick Eddington, Alexandria
Raymond McGovern, Arlington

Steering Group
Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity

Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS) is a coast-to-coast enterprise; mostly intelligence officers from analysis side of CIA, but Operations side also represented.

###



FAIR USE NOTICE

This site contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available in our efforts to advance understanding of environmental, political, human rights, economic, democracy, scientific, and social justice issues, etc. We believe this constitutes a 'fair use' of any such copyrighted material as provided for in section 107 of the US Copyright Law. In accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107, the material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving the included information for research and educational purposes. For more information go to: <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml>. If you wish to use copyrighted material from this site for purposes of your own that go beyond 'fair use', you must obtain permission from the copyright owner.

Common Dreams [NewsCenter](#)

A non-profit news service providing breaking news & views for the progressive community.

[Home](#) | [Newswire](#) | [About Us](#) | [Donate](#) | [Sign-Up](#) | [Archives](#)

© Copyrighted 1997-2003
www.commondreams.org