

dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons. . . . History has called America and our allies to action. . . ."¹¹ According to the State Department Director of Policy and Planning, Richard Haas, by the summer of 2002, Bush had already made up his mind that war with Iraq was inevitable (barring capitulation by Saddam Hussein): "The president made a decision in the summer of 2002. We all saluted at that point. That is the way it works."¹² Haas said that he raised the issue of war with Iraq with Condoleezza Rice: "I raised this issue about were we really sure that we wanted to put Iraq front and center at this point, given the war on terrorism and other issues. And she said, essentially, that decision's been made, don't waste your breath."¹³ The president may have made up his mind even earlier. In March 2002, the president told Rice, when she was in a meeting with several senators, "F--- Saddam. We're taking him out."¹⁴

By spring 2002, military planning for Iraq had begun, and the administration started talking publicly about "regime change" in Iraq. The next major public pronouncement by the president on national security and Iraq came in the 2002 commencement address at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York. The president asserted, "Containment is not possible when unbalanced dictators with weapons of mass destruction can deliver those weapons on missiles or secretly provide them to terrorist allies."¹⁵

Over the next three months, some professional military officers voiced reservations about U.S. plans to attack Iraq. Although it was not unusual for military professionals to disagree with White House decisions, it was unusual for their concerns to be voiced so openly to the press. *Washington Post* articles noted that "senior U.S. military officers" and "some top generals and admirals in the military establishment, including members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff," had argued for a cautious approach to Iraq. They were not convinced that Iraq had any connection to the 9/11 terrorist attacks; they felt that containment had worked up until then; they thought a military invasion would be costly; and they thought that a likely U.S. victory would entail a lengthy occupation of Iraq.¹⁶ By August, members of President Bush's father's administration came out publicly against war with Iraq. Brent Scowcroft, George H.W. Bush's National Security Advisor and Rice's mentor, wrote in an op-ed piece entitled "Don't Attack Saddam" that "there is scant evidence to tie Saddam to terrorist organizations, and even less to the Sept. 11 attacks. . . . An attack on

Iraq at this time would seriously jeopardize, if not destroy, the global counterterrorist campaign we have undertaken. . . . Worse, there is a virtual consensus in the world against an attack on Iraq at this time."¹⁷

James Baker, Secretary of State for Bush Senior, also expressed reservations about an attack on Iraq: "If we are to change the regime in Iraq, we will have to occupy the country militarily. The costs of doing so, politically, economically and in terms of casualties, could be great."¹⁸ General Wesley Clark, former NATO Supreme Allied Commander, said, "We have not gone far enough in the war on terror. . . . No evidence supports the Bush administration's assertion that the United States may need to invade Iraq soon, or else suffer terrorism at the hands of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein."¹⁹ Combat veterans also expressed reservations about the wisdom of war with Iraq.²⁰ Vietnam veteran Chuck Hagel (R-NE) said, "It is interesting to me that many of those who want to rush this country into war don't know anything about war."²¹ Retired General Anthony Zinni, senior advisor to Secretary of State Powell and former Chief of the U.S. Central Command (which includes the Middle East), stated: "We need to quit making enemies that we don't need to make enemies out of. . . . It's pretty interesting that all the generals see it the same way and all the others who have never fired a shot and are not to go to war see it another way."²² James Webb, Vietnam Veteran and former Assistant Secretary of Defense and Secretary of the Navy in the Reagan Administration, argued that war with Iraq was ill-considered. Webb wrote:

American military leaders have been trying to bring a wider focus to the band of neoconservatives that began beating the war drums on Iraq before the dust had even settled on the World Trade Center. Despite the efforts of the neocons to shut them up or dismiss them as unqualified to deal in policy issues, these leaders, both active-duty and retired, have been nearly unanimous in their concerns. Is there an absolutely vital national interest that should lead us from containment to unilateral war and a long-term occupation of Iraq?²³

General Norman Schwarzkopf, Commander of U.S. forces in the 1991 Gulf War, also expressed reservations about attacking Iraq in early 2003: "I don't know what intelligence the U.S. government has. . . . I guess I would like to have better information. . . . I think it is

very important to wait and see what the inspectors come up with, and hopefully they come up with something conclusive."²⁴

The Lead-up to War

On August 5, 2002, at Colin Powell's initiative, Condoleezza Rice arranged for him to spend two hours with the president in order to explain his own reservations about war with Iraq. He argued that it would destabilize the whole Middle East, that an American occupation would be seen as hostile by the Muslim world, and that war should not be undertaken unilaterally. If the president wanted to pursue a military attack, Powell urged him to recruit allies, preferably through the United Nations.²⁵ Although Bush was not persuaded by Powell's reservations about war with Iraq, by mid-August the administration decided that the President's scheduled speech of September 12 to the United Nations should be about Iraq.

Meanwhile, the Bush administration felt that opposition to war with Iraq was building and had to be countered. So after close consultation with President Bush and without informing Secretary of State Powell, Vice President Cheney took the occasion of an address to the Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention on August 26, 2002, to bluntly lay out the administration's case:²⁶ "Deliverable weapons of mass destruction in the hands of a terror network or a murderous dictator, or the two working together, constitutes as grave a threat as can be imagined. . . . The risks of inaction are far greater than the risk of action."²⁷ Cheney's public argument that a preemptive strike against Iraq was justified and that further U.N. inspections were useless undercut Powell's argument to seek further U.N. inspections and approval of U.S. action against Iraq.

At a meeting on September 7, the president reaffirmed his decision to go to the United Nations in early September, though Cheney and Rumsfeld pressed their argument that the United States should move against Saddam Hussein and that a new U.N. resolution to do it was not necessary. In his September 12 speech to the United Nations, the president framed the issue as one of credibility for the United Nations and stressed the urgent need for its many resolutions to be enforced. Citing Saddam's "flagrant violations" of U.N. resolutions, Bush declared that "we have been more than patient. . . . The conduct of the Iraqi regime is a threat to the authority of the United Nations and a threat to peace."²⁸ Shortly after Bush's U.N. speech,

the administration released a new national security doctrine for the United States that echoed the earlier neocon arguments and justified preemptive military strikes by the United States.²⁹

Anticipating the congressional vote on a resolution authorizing war with Iraq, the president gave a speech to the nation from Cincinnati on October 7, 2002, in which he explained the need for authorizing military action:

Some citizens wonder, "After 11 years of living with this problem, why do we need to confront it now?" And there's a reason. We have experienced the horror of September the 11th. We have seen that those who hate Americans are willing to crash airplanes into buildings full of innocent people. Our enemies would be no less willing, in fact they would be eager, to use biological or chemical or a nuclear weapon. Knowing these realities, America must not ignore the threat gathering against us. Facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof, the smoking gun that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud.³⁰

The president forcefully argued that America was vulnerable to terrorist attacks and that a hostile regime in Iraq might be willing to share its weapons of mass destruction (WMD: chemical, biological, nuclear) technology with terrorists. Thus, the United States had to act preemptively to prevent such a nightmare.

Although there was a debate in Congress and statements by those supporting and opposing the resolution to go to war with Iraq, there was never much doubt about the outcome. The deliberations lacked the drama of those in 1991 over the Gulf War Resolution. A number of Democrats voted for the resolution from fear that a negative vote could be used against them in the upcoming elections, and Majority Leader of the Senate Tom Daschle and House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt both voted for the measure. The resolution passed in the House by 296 to 133, with 6 Republicans and 126 Democrats (and 1 independent) voting against it. In the Senate, the resolution passed 77 to 23, with 21 Democrats, 1 Republican, and 1 independent voting against it. The final resolution, passed by the House on October 10 and by the Senate on October 11, stated: "The president is authorized to use the armed forces of the United States as he determines to be necessary and appropriate, in order to: (1) defend the national security of the United States against the continuing threat posed by Iraq; and