

INTRODUCTION

If history is any guide, the war and subsequent occupation and reconstruction of Iraq will shape U.S. relations with the Arab world—and perhaps with the whole Muslim world—for decades, just as prior military occupations altered U.S. relations with Latin America, the Caribbean, Europe, and Asia. What happens in Iraq is also likely to profoundly affect whether and with what degree of effort and success states choose to work together to constrain the spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The war and its aftermath will affect U.S. foreign relations, influence U.S. policies regarding future armed interventions, and alter the international struggle against terrorism. It is a massive understatement, then, to say that a great deal is at stake, on the ground in Iraq, around the world, and in the lessons for the future that will be drawn here at home.

Drawing useful lessons from experience begins with an accurate record of what happened. It is not too soon to begin this inquiry into the Iraq experience, because public confusion is widespread and revisionism has already begun. Some pundits now claim that the war was never about WMD but was undertaken to bring democracy to Iraq or the entire Middle East. Others say it was a response to 9/11 or was the necessary answer to a composite threat posed by Saddam Hussein's domestic evils, past aggressions, defiance of the United Nations, and desire for WMD. The administration has adjusted

its public expectation of what Iraq will be found to have had from actual weapons and massive stockpiles of agent, to weapon programs, to “capabilities,” and even to the “capability that Iraq sought” for weapons of mass destruction.¹ U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz has called WMD merely “the one reason everyone could agree on,” chosen for “bureaucratic reasons.”

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Notwithstanding these varied views, the definitive voice of U.S. policy—the president's—was unequivocal that the reason for going to war was the present threat to U.S. security posed by Iraq's WMD. From Mr. Bush's first detailed case for the war on October 7, 2002, to the declaration of war on March 17, 2003, the purpose is always clear: “Saddam Hussein must disarm himself—or for the sake of peace, we will lead a coalition to disarm him.”² Other than warnings addressed to the Iraqi military and reassurances to the American people regarding homeland security, the declaration of war address was *only* about WMD until the closing paragraphs, which touched on human liberty and a better future for the Iraqi people.

The reasons for war made to the rest of the world through months of negotiations at the United Nations, before and after the dispatch to Iraq of a greatly strengthened WMD inspection team, were the same. The basis for international action is stated in UN Security Council Resolution 1441, paragraph 2, as “bringing to full and verified completion the disarmament process.” U.S. Secretary of State Powell’s detailed case to the Security Council on February 5, 2003, mirrored the president’s speeches: At issue was the threat from Saddam’s WMD. All other matters were at most, a minor afterthought. (Texts of these speeches can be found in the appendices in this report.)

Because the WMD threat was the reason Americans and citizens of most other countries were given for invading Iraq, the large divergence between prewar descriptions of the threat and what has been discovered in the nine months since the war is a matter of some consequence. The discrepancies raise questions whose answers should inform a full understanding of the war itself, the handling of pending proliferation crises in Iran and North Korea, and an urgently needed, broad rethinking of U.S. non-proliferation policy. These questions are:

- ▶ Did a WMD threat to U.S. and/or global security exist in Iraq, and if so, precisely what was it?
- ▶ Was there reason to believe that Saddam Hussein would turn over unconventional weapons or WMD capability to Al Qaeda or other terrorists?
- ▶ Were there errors in intelligence regarding the existence and extent of Iraqi WMD?

If so, when did they arise and were they based on faulty collection or analysis, undue politicization, or other factors? What steps could be taken to prevent a repetition?

- ▶ Did administration officials misrepresent what was known and not known based on intelligence?

If so, what were the sources and reasons for these misrepresentations? Are there precautions that could be taken against similar circumstances in the future?

- ▶ How effective was the more-than-ten-year-long UN inspection, monitoring, and sanctions effort in Iraq?

What lessons can be drawn regarding the applicability of international pressure to prevent proliferation elsewhere?

- ▶ Was Iraq deterrable, or had deterrence been superseded by a terrorist threat only fully appreciated after 9/11?
- ▶ Were alternate courses of action with an equal or more favorable risk-benefit profile available at the time war was decided upon?
- ▶ Does the war in Iraq shed any light on the wisdom of the Bush National Security Strategy of preemptive/preventive war?

Although the complete story can not yet be told, a massive amount of information is available from declassified U.S. intelligence, reports from the UN Special Commission on Iraq (UNSCOM), the UN Monitoring, Verification, and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), administration statements, corroborated press reports, and postwar findings. This study sorts through this mass of material, disentangles many of its complexities, and lays out a much clearer, if still incomplete, picture of what was known, uncertain, and unknown at each stage. From this we offer partial answers to these questions and point to issues that need fuller attention by bodies with access to the full classified record and to others that need further analysis and public debate. The aim is to clarify the record of the central reason for the Iraq war and to suggest changes in U.S. and international policies and practice that could help prevent the spread and use of weapons of mass destruction.