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## Bush on the Warpath Without Proof

by Andrew Greeley

Early next month the war with Iraq apparently will begin. There's nothing like a good war to stir up patriotic fervor. Moreover, the so-called chicken hawks at the Defense Department have wanted to invade Iraq for years because they think that will bring an end to the conflict in Israel. The administration decided long ago that there would be a war. The so-called war on terror has provided a cover for starting it. The men around the president are persuaded that the American people will overwhelmingly support the war.

However, recent surveys call into question that assumption. Only 52 percent of Americans support a war, according to Gallup. Moreover, two-thirds of Americans insist that they want to see proof--either from the report of the United Nations inspectors or from American intelligence evidence--of the "weapons of mass destruction" that Iraq is alleged to possess.

Thus, it seems clear that the public is not convinced yet that a war is necessary. The administration has yet to provide clear and convincing proof that Iraq has these "weapons of mass destruction" and is prepared to use them. I wonder if our leaders really do have anything more than their absolute conviction that such weapons exist and that the president's popularity is so great that the public would go along with the war if he says it is necessary.

Is there any stronger evidence, and if there is, why haven't we seen it yet?

Yet last week's issue of Time--which celebrates the Bush-Cheney team like it is Michael and Gabriel--provides data that runs against the notion that Americans are enthusiastic supporters of the administration. The president's approval rating has dropped to 55 percent. The country is split between those who say they trust the president (50 percent) and those who don't (48 percent). No one seems to have noticed that the 60 percent approval rating the media have celebrated all these months is about the same as President Bill Clinton's at the time of the Lewinsky scandal.

Moreover, 42 percent trust the vice president as opposed to 51 percent who have their doubts. It sounds very much like November 2000--too close to call. Maybe, in the absence of proof, the Supreme Court can be called in to resolve the doubt about attacking Iraq.

That's not much support for a war. If it turns out to be a short war and quick and

"inexpensive" (which means a lot of Iraqi casualties but not many American), the public won't mind. But what if it's much longer, and the invading American divisions are badly chewed up, and the National Guard must be called into action, and the war drags on to the summer, and there's talk of a military draft? The country will be on the edge of another Vietnam.

Or what if the UN teams can't find very strong evidence of Iraqi weapons and throw up their hands in uncertainty? What proportion of Americans will nonetheless support a war, the proof of the necessity of which is problematic? More than a third, surely, but a lot less than half.

The administration seems bent on a gamble--a reckless gamble at best.

Saddam Hussein is a nasty, vile man. If he has atomic weapons ready to go, if he has large supplies of nerve gas and anthrax and smallpox germs and intends to use them soon, then there can be no serious objection to a war. One prays that it be short so not too many lives--American and Iraqi--will be lost.

Messrs. Cheney, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, Perle, Safire and the Wall Street Journal are all convinced that the situation is urgent. We must strike at Iraq while there is still time. I do not question the sincerity of their convictions. Yet it does not seem unreasonable to ask--as do two out of three Americans--that they show us better proof than they already have.

And one wonders if the hapless leaders of the Democratic Party will continue to stand idle and silent as the country plunges into a war that, absent better evidence, might be senseless folly.

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