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What This War Is Not About

by Rick Salutin

Four things the coming war against Iraq is not about:

It is not about terror. Proof A: No connection has ever been shown between Iraq and al-Qaeda; in fact, there is long enmity between their leaders. Proof B: U.S. leaders have clearly *used* Sept. 11 as a pretext to attack Iraq. Bob Woodward says in his new book that Donald Rumsfeld was already calling for Iraq's inclusion in the war on terror on "the day after"; national security adviser Condoleezza Rice told *The New Yorker* she asked her staff "to think seriously about 'how do you capitalize on these *opportunities* [my emphasis].'" This is the way that power thinks. Proof C (a deduction, but I find it the most persuasive argument): Attacking Iraq will *increase* the danger of terror attacks in the future. The misery of Iraqi civilians, especially kids, due to sanctions is already closely watched in the Arab and Muslim world. Casualties from bombing in the "no fly" zones are widely reported, though scarcely noted here. New, far greater death and destruction will raise further anger, and lead to more recruits for terror; it's elementary. Besides, even the CIA says Saddam Hussein is most likely to use biological or chemical weapons once he is attacked and cornered. You don't eradicate terror by creating more of it. Surely the American leadership knows this.

It is not about weapons of mass destruction. Proof A: North Korea, whose nuclear program is far more advanced than Iraq's, and which has the crucial delivery systems. Yet the U.S. has declared it will *not* attack North Korea. Evidently, having a real and credible WMD program *exempts* you from American attack. Proof B: Israel, which has had a large nuclear arsenal for 40 years that scares hell out of its neighbors. Security Council Resolution 687, paragraph 14, calls for removing *all* WMDs from the Mideast. The U.S. has never volunteered to enforce that clause.

It is not about democracy. Proof A: Saddam Hussein, whose tyranny the U.S. supported with military aid, including WMDs, as detailed in Iraq's report to the UN, up to the time at which he defied not his own people but the U.S. Former UN relief co-ordinator Dennis Halliday says that, even after the Persian Gulf war, U.S.-backed sanctions continued to prop up the regime and "weakened the very people who think about democracy" there. Proof B, C, D: Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, where the U.S. has far greater political and economic clout to press for democratic reform but has never done so. Proof E: Iran, which has limited but real democratic processes, and which made the "axis of evil" list nonetheless. Proof F, G: Turkey and Indonesia, Muslim countries with some level of democracy that got there on

their own or, in Indonesia's case, despite U.S. support for its dictator. One could go on but one would run out of letters. The general point? Democracy is not something likely to be *imposed* by an *invasion*. Isn't that kind of obvious?

It is not about preventing damage to the U.S. economy, as George W. Bush suggested this week. This one defies rebuttal. He posits a nuclear, chemical or biological attack by unproven weapons through non-existent delivery systems, then worries about the effects on the economy rather than on human beings. (People lying in the wreckage screaming, *Omigod, I lost my job!*) It's the same sensibility he showed in cheerily approving 152 executions during six years as Texas governor.

So what *is* it about? Hard to choose: oil, domination, revenge, punishing an insubordinate client? Whew. At least we know what it isn't.

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