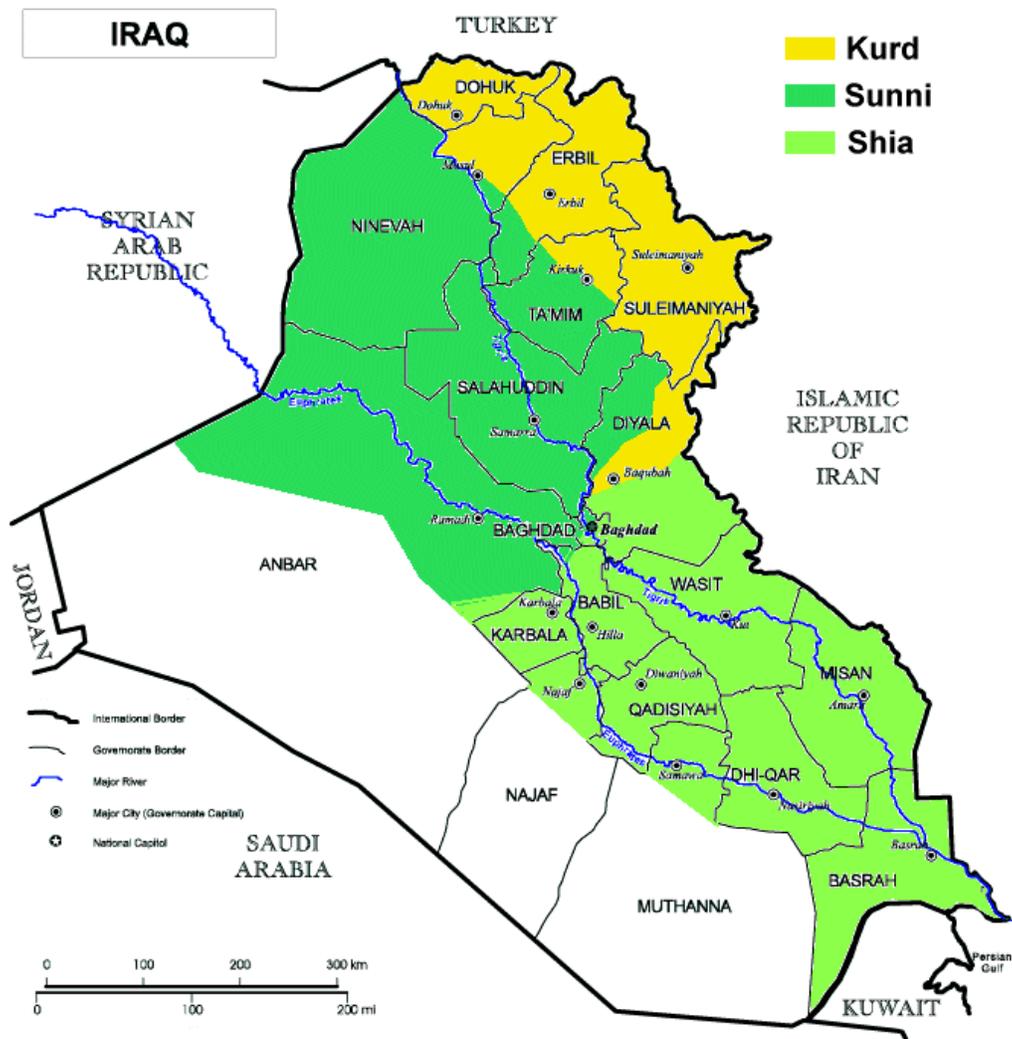


# SWISS TONY



## SPEAKS TO THE NATION

A fanzine opposed to war against Iraq

Hello. By the time you read this fanzine, it will almost certainly be Too Late. The West, the United States and its allies, some enthusiastic, some less so, will have become engaged in a war, the official causes of which seem spurious, the consequences of which have not been properly considered. Indeed, even as I write, air attacks in the no-fly zone have intensified – to all intents and purposes the war has already begun. But at least I will have had my fanzine editor's say, and feel that somehow I've done something, futile though it may be.

This was originally intended to collect various posts about the war from my LiveJournal (if you don't know what LiveJournal is ask the next manically depressed American teenage goth you meet), together with comments on other people's journals. But some of those were done as many as four or five weeks ago (some are included as an appendix, with up-to-date annotations); this is an eternity in the rapidly developing political situation we find ourselves in. So I decided in the end to just go with one long rant. Don't worry – I should get all of the points I made covered. I make no claim to originality in any of the arguments that follow.

Let me make one thing clear from the outset: I am not a complete peacenik, opposed to war in all circumstances. I thought military force was justified in the Gulf in 1991, in the Falklands in 1982, and in Europe in 1939. The pro-war camp is very keen to characterize its opponents as weaklings opposed to war on principle. But whilst there no doubt were some conscientious objectors amongst the millions who marched on February 15<sup>th</sup>, many simply object to this particular war in these particular circumstances. This seems especially true of political leaders opposed to war.

Colin Powell has insisted to the United Nations Security Council that military force must remain an option against Saddam Hussein. Well, I doubt that anyone in the UNSC disagrees with that point of view in the broadest terms; indeed, many might argue, and I'd tend to agree, that the existence of the option of military force has brought us as far down the road to inspections as we have got. The disagreement lies in the feeling that the moment of last resort has not yet been reached, and suspicion of the motives for the US position that it has been reached.

Let's look at the reasons proffered for going to war. Ostensibly, Iraq will be attacked because it has failed to comply with UN Resolution 1441, which calls on the Iraqi regime to disarm and destroy its weapons of mass destruction. The West knows that he has these, because they supplied many of them to him in the 1980s, when Saddam was the West's ally against Iran, which had committed the cardinal sin of making the Americans look stupid.

Well, fair enough; I too would like to see Saddam disarmed. But I have to ask the question, why did Saddam's arsenal suddenly become such a critical matter? After all, he was originally required to disarm after the Gulf War in 1991. Why suddenly, after twelve years, is it now absolutely necessary to disarm him by military force? Why have time-scales that have been dragging out over years suddenly contracted to months and weeks? This is a question proponents of war never really get round to answering. The best they can usually do is to state that America's patience is suddenly exhausted. But why should we go to war just because the US is having a hissy fit? In any case, part of the reason why the process has dragged out so long is that the US has stuck to an ineffective sanctions-and-bombing policy, one that contrived to hurt the Iraqi people and boost, rather than undermine, support for Saddam. It looks like Iraq is being made to pay for American policy failures. And one suspects that the timetable of war has more to do with the needs of the Bush Administration.

Who, in any case, should decide that there has been a material breach of Resolution

1441, and that military action is necessary? You might have thought that would be the responsibility of the UN Security Council. But apparently not: if the UNSC fails to pass a second resolution (and at the moment, despite all the cajoling and bullying the US is indulging in, it seems an uphill struggle to get it passed in the face of vetoes from France and Russia), the US reserves the right to act unilaterally. In other words, they will go to war with or without UN approval. We are told that the UN must be firm on Saddam, otherwise it will never be taken seriously again. But the biggest threat to the UN's credibility is the Bush Administration's willingness to disregard the UN if it fails to produce the result it wants. In different circumstances, this would be called taking the law into one's own hands, and would be frowned upon. We are told the UN must stand firm if it is not to go the way of the League of Nations – but the League failed because economically powerful states decided to ignore it, as the US (which never joined the League in the first place) is now doing to the UN. Tony Blair says 'unreasonable' vetoes will be ignored. Are all decisions of the United Nations or other international bodies to be ignored if they are not 'reasonable'? That way lies international chaos.

How great a crime is Saddam's failure to disarm anyway? Other nations have been allowed to cheerfully disregard UN resolutions, most notably Israel, which has been in illegal occupation of territory taken from other states since 1967. Far from demanding Israel's abiding by resolutions demanding its withdrawal, the US has allowed the occupations to continue. The pro-war response is that Saddam's Iraq is much more dangerous to his neighbours than Israel. I wonder if the citizens of the Gaza strip and South Lebanon would agree. Whatever, the US has created the impression that it does not hold Israel up to the same standards it expects of other regimes.

In truth, the UN's actions against Saddam have not been ineffective. Large amounts of Saddam's WMD were destroyed by UN weapons inspectors, until they left in 1998, as a result of a crisis partially arising out of an Iraqi belief that the inspectors were spying for the US – a belief that turned out to be entirely justified.

Since the inspectors went back, they have found very little in the way of WMD. Now, one might surmise from this that there is little to find. The Bush Administration's argument, however, is that Saddam is hiding them.

This, of course, is a self-fulfilling prophecy. The argument seems to be that you cannot prove an absence, and therefore, since Saddam cannot prove that he has no WMD, so military action is necessary just to make sure. This rather throws out the concept of "innocent until proven guilty." So the Iraqi regime cannot account for all the WMD it once had; well, it has been under military attack since 1991 – paperwork can get destroyed in those circumstances. Are we really going to go to war just because someone can't find the paperwork? Moreover, this sort of attitude is hardly an incentive to co-operation. If Saddam knows that war will come, pretty much whatever he does, then it's hardly surprising that he is trying to avoid giving up more of his arsenal than he has to – he might be needing it.

It is argued that it is only through the threat of force that anything has been achieved at all. As I said above, I go along with that. But I would argue that the fact that the threat of war is having some effect means that this is not the moment to make good on that threat. Hans Blix's report of February 14<sup>th</sup> was upbeat, suggesting that progress, however slowly, was being made. If Colin Powell and George Bush are as committed as they claim to the use of force only as a last resort, then they should have been pleased by this. Instead, Powell was visibly disappointed.

But what about the al-Samoud missiles, you may ask. The UN identified those as illegal, and at first Saddam refused to destroy them. But then Iraq did offer to dismantle

them, and is now destroying them. This has been dismissed by Washington and London as further evidence of Saddam's trickery and time-wasting activities. To which the answer is, of course Saddam is playing fast-and-loose with the UN. But ultimately he is disarming. The UN's own assessment is that Iraq was 90% disarmed by the end of the 1990s. The Bush Administration's view is that this is simply taking too long. But it is cutting off your nose to spite your own face to go to war simply because a peaceful process isn't producing results as fast as you want it to.

We are told of Tony Blair's marvellous achievement in persuading George Bush to go through the United Nations rather than acting unilaterally. But if Bush at the final point disregards the UN, then Blair has failed, and if Blair then continues to support Bush, as he will, he is a hypocrite. One suspects that the only reason Bush went the way of the UN to start with was to give his war some semblance of international approval. He probably expected Saddam to refuse to let the weapons inspectors back, thus justifying immediate war, and was somewhat flummoxed by Saddam's giving way. This suggests that Saddam Hussein is probably a cleverer politician than George W. Bush – but we could almost certainly guess that already.

A further argument is that the US is justified in its actions because of the direct threat Saddam poses to the United States. To this end, since it is difficult to argue, as in 1962 with the Russian missiles on Cuba, that Saddam has any weapons himself with which he can strike the continental United States, it has been stated that Saddam has strong links with al-Qaeda, and could supply some of his chemical and biological stockpiles to terrorists, who would use them against the US. Thus attack on Iraq is justified as preventing another 9/11.

The only problem with this approach is that it is utter nonsense. After months of asserting the presence of links between Iraq and al-Qaeda, Bush and Blair have singularly failed to come up with any solid evidence. Most sources in the intelligence community rubbish the idea. The strongest case can be made for mutual links with Ansar al-Islam, a group operating in Kurdistan and supposed to have links with both Saddam and al-Qaeda, though they deny the latter; but since they are conducting a turf war with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, one of the major Kurdish parties, it seems likely that any Iraqi links with this organization have to do with a desire to get rid of the nascent Kurdish state rather than any wider conspiracy of evil. The famous Osama tape supporting the Iraqi people did not show Bin Laden's support for the Iraqi regime, however much Bush and Powell and Blair want to say it does (the pro-war camp has a record of trying to make evidence say more than it does – the notes from within the Iraqi military, which suggest preparations are being taken in case chemical weapons are used, but not necessarily that Iraq has them and will use them, is another instance). In fact, though not widely reported, Osama's message actually calls for the overthrow of Saddam, as well as America. Even Blair, who remarked that this tape shows a potentially dangerous combination, is by those remarks tacitly admitting that no such link actually exists.

Moreover, the whole idea that Bin Laden would be interested in Saddam's chemical and biological weapons seems to me misguided, despite the anthrax attacks (which have never been linked to Bin Laden) and ricin discoveries. The possibility of 'dirty bombs' sounds frightening, but like most terrorists, Bin Laden has a liking for the dramatic. Massive explosions are his style.

One of the great tragedies of the forthcoming war is that, far from preventing another 9/11, it makes one more likely. The prime beneficiary of a war on Iraq will, in fact, be al-Qaeda. As Britain has failed to learn in Ireland, and Israel not understood in Palestine, the chief effect of a heavy-handed military response to terrorism, one that ends up getting a

lot of civilians in the firing line, is to increase recruitment to terrorist organizations, as people who were previously committed to the cause of peace end up so outraged that they take up arms. Bloody Sunday probably kept the IRA in recruits for a decade.

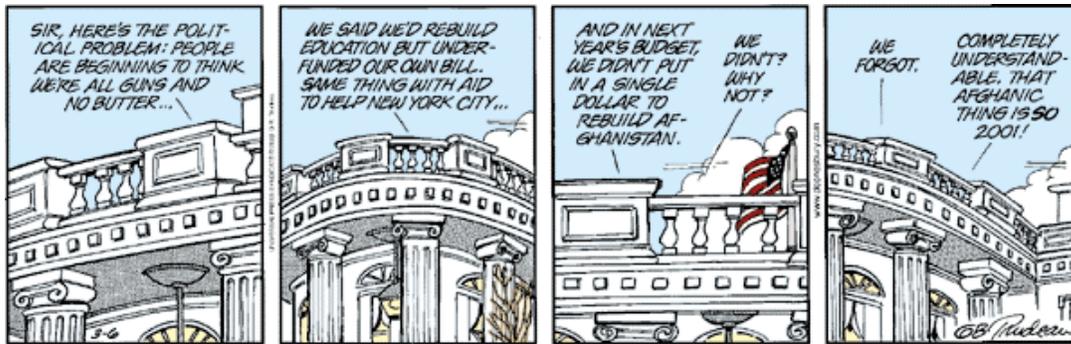
But if Saddam poses no threat to the US directly, what of the threat to his neighbours? America says that it is protecting states like Saudi Arabia from being attacked. But it is not necessary to have a war to achieve this. Divorced from the issue of economic sanctions, it is clear that military containment has worked over the past twelve years. Saddam's military has not recovered from the damage done to it in 1991, and the US forces in the area are such that any offensive action by Saddam would meet with such an overwhelming response that it would be suicidal.

The same logic governs the deployment of chemical and biological weapons; the will not be used except as a very last resort. Even at the height of the first Gulf War, Saddam did not deploy these weapons, not even in the Scuds fired at Israel. Why should we now be afraid he will lob a couple at Riyadh or Amman? Given the general opposition to the war voiced by states in the region, including Saudi Arabia, hardly one of Iraq's friends, it would appear that they do not feel threatened.

Moreover, this exposes the US once again to the charge of double standards. It is prepared to launch a war against a state that is no danger to its neighbours, yet does nothing to reign in a state which has nuclear weapons, a history of invading its neighbours, and still occupies some of their territory; Israel.

Certainly, there is not enough evidence of an imminent threat to issue an ultimatum, as Bush and Blair now want to do. An ultimatum is issued, and a pre-emptive strike is launched, when there is actual danger, or, as in 1939, the enemy power has already launched its military offensive. Suddenly setting arbitrary dates when there is no immediate threat of being attacked is, as the French have noted, merely a pretext for war. Pre-emptive strikes are, in any case, a very dodgy idea in terms of international law.

Then there is the 'moral argument', much touted in recent weeks by Tony Blair. According to this, we should attack Iraq in order to liberate the Iraqi people from Saddam's cruel dictatorship. Let's make it clear, in case it wasn't already; I don't like Saddam Hussein. I would be very happy to see him deposed and a democratic regime established in Iraq. But I'm not sure quite so many Iraqis need to be liberated from their lives in order to achieve this, nor that is necessary to precipitate what Oxfam believe will be a humanitarian disaster. And quite frankly, I don't believe the Bush Administration or the American military actually give a damn about Iraqi civilians. They are far too ready to file civilian deaths away as 'collateral damage', as they did in Kosovo and Afghanistan. If you genuinely want to minimize civilian deaths, it is necessary to press home precision attacks; but, though the US military is always happy to show off its 'smart' bombs, in Kosovo the USAF showed some reluctance in getting too close to the targets, in case they might get shot at in return. Instead, the B-52s are arriving in the UK, prior to launching carpet bombing raids on Iraq. Area bombing is not the way to minimize civilian casualties. Nor is the use of Depleted Uranium shells, which are almost certain to be employed (the Pentagon has yet to admit that they have any side-effects). And the Bush Administration will not even rule out the use of nuclear weapons. It's no surprise that Clare Short found it hard to interest the American military in taking humanitarian concerns into account. Meanwhile Bush says that Iraq will herald the start of a new era of democracy in the Middle East. I wonder if he cleared that speech with Saudi Arabia? I also wonder how soon it will be before 'US taxpayers' complain about spending tax dollars on reconstructing Iraq. There hasn't exactly been a lot spent on reconstructing Afghanistan.



On the face of it, Blair appears more sincere, and his Cabinet colleagues tell us how committed he is to his beliefs. He appears in front of television audiences to express his sincere views (but I'd like to see him debate with a professional who wasn't being deliberately even-handed – Jeremy Hardy, perhaps). He seems very committed and moral. But I don't believe him.

For one thing, Blair's conversion to the moral high ground has come on a bit suddenly. He has only fallen back on this once it became obvious all the other arguments had failed to persuade the British public. He moralizes about how sanctions are resulting in the deaths of civilians. Well, yes, any sane observer had noticed that some time ago – why has it only just come to Blair's attention? It's obvious that the whole sanctions approach needs a rethink. But war is not the rethink needed; war is more like an absence of thinking, and again, one has to ask if the best way if saving people from the effects of sanctions is to kill large numbers of them outright.

Nor is Blair's moralizing consistent with his policies. The UN resolution he is so concerned about calls on Saddam to disarm. What would happen if he actually did that? Blair has said that we are morally justified in removing him, so wouldn't the West still have to attack, even though Saddam had fully complied with UN resolutions? (Of course, it won't come to that, as Bush evidently will never accept evidence of Iraqi disarmament.) What actually *are* Blair's war aims? Disarmament, or deposing Saddam?

Blair's commitment to the Iraqi people's welfare also sits uneasily with his wish to get Britain out of its commitments under human rights legislation not to send refugees back to countries where they might be tortured and killed. In fact, I don't think Blair has realized that once he has employed the moral card, it is perfectly legitimate for it to be played back on him. After Iraq, what about Pakistan, where a military dictatorship has overthrown democracy? What about Palestine? In the end, the "moral argument" is as false as much of the other rhetoric bandied about, such as repeating the adage that "for evil to flourish, it only requires good people to do nothing" as if two million people marching in the streets constitutes nothing, or stating that it is a choice between war or doing nothing to stop Saddam, whereas the choice is actually between stopping him by weapons inspections or by war.

So, if the West is not going to war to assert the legitimacy of the UN, or because of the threat Saddam poses, why is it going to war? Many say oil; that US oil companies want control of Iraq's reserves. The pro-war lobby dismisses this; if they just wanted cheap oil, they could have done away with sanctions years ago. This overlooks the fact that only since 2001 has there been a President so wholly in the pocket of the oil companies, but nevertheless, I don't think oil is the prime motivation for this war, merely a subsidiary benefit.

The prime motivation for this war is war. The Bush Administration clearly believes that popular foreign wars will increase its chances of re-election, and legitimize its domes-

tic policies (it has already rolled back progressive measures on the environmental and social fronts). The first nine months of Bush's presidency were characterized by sabre-rattling in the direction of China. 9/11 meant that the focus was changed, and a war could be justified in Afghanistan. Once this degenerated into slow and non-newsworthy cave clearing, another war was needed. Iraq suited, because Saddam was openly anti-American and was widely perceived as a bogeyman figure, because as a Muslim nation a spurious link with al-Qaeda could be advanced, because of the oil, because of the significant US forces already in the region, and above all, because the destruction of Iraq's military machine in 1991 means that it is still almost defenceless, and therefore minimal US casualties can be expected. This is very important. The first Gulf War, Kosovo and Afghanistan have created the dangerous idea that wars can be fought and won largely from the air, with minimal casualties. Though since 9/11 Americans have been readier to accept casualties in war, there is still pressure to keep as low as possible the number of body-bags sent back to the US. This generally means devastating and indiscriminate aerial and artillery bombardments before ground forces are deployed, with resulting higher levels of civilian death.

The Bush Administration is itching to get on with the war. War has become practically the first, rather than the last resort. Anything or anyone that might delay or avert war is greeted with the irritated impatience of a child that wants to play with its toys now. When Hans Blix suggested that Iraq was making progress towards disarming, if dragging its feet in some respects, Colin Powell went off in a sulk, rather than accept it as a move towards the UN's objective. In the end we will have war because George Bush and Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld want it.

The consequences will be appalling. Iraq will be rid of Saddam; but thousands will die in the initial assault, and thousands more as a result of disrupting humanitarian programmes. Iraq's infrastructure will once again be razed to the ground. The country will not be stabilized, but thrown into chaos, as the western powers try to preserve artificial borders created by imperial powers in 1919 against the nationalist ambitions in the south and north. In Kurdistan, the people there will be liberated from Saddam only to be crushed by Turkey, who have made it pretty clear that part of the price for their co-operation will be a free hand against the Kurds.

The consequences for the world are equally bad. The Bush Administration has made it clear through this crisis that they have no interest in international alliances unless they act as rubber stamps for American policy. So the UN and NATO could be torn up. The US has alienated its friends in Europe, through the lack of respect granted to France and Germany's dissenting opinions, and gratuitous accusations of cowardice, as if standing up to the most powerful nation in the world takes no courage at all. The economic warfare being considered in some quarters to punish this dissent will only alienate Europe further.

In the Muslim world, America will only become hated more; already the moves towards war have increased this. Pro-American governments in the Middle East, such as Saudi Arabia or Pakistan, risk unrest or overthrow by Islamic fundamentalists. More idealistic young Muslims will join al-Qaeda or similar organizations, convinced that only the destruction of the United States will preserve the Islamic world. I am not saying that the Bush Administration is anti-Islamic, though the Christian fundamentalists that support it are by nature intolerant of other ways of looking at the world. But this is very much how it is perceived.

However, the Bush Administration seems not to care about how many enemies the US has. Let them hate us, they seem to say, as long as they do what we want; the litany of tyrants everywhere. They will continue to act as they have done, ignoring international

law and the will of the international community as it suits them. They can do this because they are the most economically and militarily powerful nation on earth, and can force or bribe others into doing their will. All that will change is that the US will do less to conceal that their policies are driven by the principle of 'might means right'. They are unable or unwilling to see the contribution this arrogance, the attitude that treats American civilian deaths as an outrage (as they are) but Afghan or Albanian or Iraqi deaths as collateral damage, made to the 9/11 attacks.

So, having got their way on Iraq, the Bush/Rumsfeld axis will look for a new target. North Korea looks the likely next objective – in fact, the DPRK is more of a threat than Iraq, as they have WMD and the means to deploy them, and have threatened their use against the continental United States. Korea is a prime example of how badly-run American foreign policy is. Having placed a fuel embargo, thus forcing North Korea to restart its nuclear programme as the only way of heating its people through the winter, the US government made some ill-judged and provocative remarks, undoing years of careful South Korean diplomacy, and then left the whole mess to fester whilst pursuing single-mindedly war in Iraq.

Other candidates will follow Korea. Iran, Vietnam, Cuba, Somalia are all unsettled scores. And the anti-communists who believe the west 'won' the Cold War will not be satisfied until China is no longer a communist state (and no doubt reduced to the same economic chaos as the former USSR).

But the US, in the long run, cannot afford this, and in these actions lie the seeds of Bush's and America's destruction. Even the most powerful empires have limits, as a little study of the history of the American Revolution would point out. The financial cost of war in Iraq, particularly if followed by a prolonged occupation, will deal a severe blow to the American economy, which the Bush programme of tax-cuts for the rich combined with increased military spending has already driven back into deficit from the balanced budget of Clinton's presidency. A US economy in crisis means a world economy in crisis. It also means Bush could be caught like his father, voted out despite a foreign war.

It is plain also that Blair has made a serious mistake in his unshakeable linking himself to Bush's cause. He has had to largely ignore growing opposition in his country, his party and now his government, showing that the quality he admires most in Margaret Thatcher was her inability to ever admit, even to herself, that she might be wrong. "History will prove me right," he says, the mantra of all those who feel popular support slipping away from them. Unfortunately, history is an awkward bugger, and very rarely settles on an ultimate judgement on a matter of controversy – look how some misguided right-wing historians can argue that Britain should not have gone to war with Germany in 1939.

There has been much use and misuse of history in the run-up to war. The pro-war lobby has likened those who oppose war against to those who appeased Hitler in the 1930s. This overlooks the fact that Hitler posed an actual, not an imaginary threat to his neighbours, and that those who opposed Hitler in the 1930s were broadly the political left, those who oppose the war now, while the political right, those now in favour of war, were at the front of appeasement. And it seems a bit of a liberty given that America joined the fight against Hitler two years after everyone else, and that up to that point, as is well-documented (e.g. John Loftus and Mark Aarons, *The Secret War Against the Jews: How Western Espionage Betrayed the Jewish People*), George Bush's grandfather Prescott Bush and great-grandfather George Herbert Walker (after whom both Presidents Bush were named) helped finance the Nazi party and the German war machine at least up until Germany's declaration of war on the US in December 1941. In October 1942 the US Government took over Brown Brothers Harriman, of which Prescott Bush was a di-

rector, under the terms of the Trading with the Enemy Act.

Similar contempt should be given to the notion that France should do what America wants now because of the sacrifices made by America to free France from Germany in World War II. But while 292,100 American military personnel died in WWII, 210,671 French military personnel died, plus 173,260 civilians. Given the relative difference in the size of populations, it is clear that France's sacrifice was the greater (and let's not mention the 21 million or so citizens of the USSR that died). In any case, one is not unbreakably bound by the sacrifices of the past – if someone saves me from a fire, I am under no obligation to join him in jumping over a cliff. (This attitude, in any case, derives from the double myth that only the Americans fought WWII, and that they got nothing for it, as if economic and military leadership of the west were not a direct consequence of America's contribution to the war.)

Others have compared America to Rome, moving from a democracy to an autocracy. If this is true, then George Bush is a Caligula or Nero, one who does not bother to conceal his autocracy in the cloak of constitutionality. And we all know what happened to them.

But I'd like to compare America to Athens of the fifth-century BC. Like America, Athens became leader of an alliance against a perceived external threat (Persia), which later seemed to dissipate. Like America, Athens turned this into an empire. Like America, Athens became led by demagogues, who appealed to the baser instincts of the population. Like America, Athens came to treat its allies with contempt, and practiced economic or actual warfare above them. It attacked defenceless states who would not automatically do what they wanted. It got involved in disastrous foreign expeditions, partially launched to control precious resources (in this case, grain). And Athens fell.

*March 10<sup>th</sup> 2003*

#### APPENDIX: THE ORIGINAL LIVEJOURNAL POSTS

##### **February 4<sup>th</sup> 2003: Why not have a war?**

Because it's a stupid idea

So, we now have "unmistakable" evidence that Saddam isn't disarming. Well, to judge from the government's dossier released over the weekend, we don't. As pointed out on the *Today* programme, the dossier's assertions about what Saddam is doing to frustrate the UN weapons inspectors are just that, assertions. There doesn't appear to be a shred of actual evidence. It looks as if some civil servant was asked to draw up a list of ways the Iraqi government **might** block weapons inspections, and the report has then been written up as if the possible was the actual. At one point, the suggestion that Saddam has teams arrange car crashes just to delay the inspectors, it verges on the absurd.<sup>1</sup>

In any case, even if it's all true, the worst Saddam is doing is backsliding on his commitment to disarm. This is not exactly surprising; given the apparent US attitude that war will come whatever the UN inspectors achieve (if they find weapons, Saddam's in breach because the weapons are there – if they don't, he's in breach because he's obviously hidden them), it might be considered foolish for him to give up any of his armaments. Nor is it actually justification for war – there are plenty of diplomatic avenues to pursue, and war should only be resorted to in the face of an actual threat. The threat posed by Saddam is no greater now than it has been at any point over the last twelve years; this is not comparable to Cuba in 1962, where there was clear evidence of missile sites suddenly appearing. Yes, the process has been drawn out longer than necessary, but that has a lot to do with American inflexibility and their refusal to deviate from a diplomatic and military strategy that, far

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<sup>1</sup> It wasn't exactly a surprise to me when it transpired most of this had been cobbled together out of irrelevant or outdated reports.

from helping to unseat Saddam, was only making him politically stronger. All that has changed is the Bush Administration's gung-ho need for a war – hence their refusal to brook any delays.

What about the humanitarian argument? Well, yes, Saddam is a brutal dictator, who tortures and kills his own people. But again, he's not suddenly killing larger numbers than he has been in the past decade (unlike Milosevic in Yugoslavia). And I remain unconvinced that the best way of helping free the Iraqi people from Saddam's terror is to kill large numbers of them through massive air strikes and artillery bombardments (especially given the US/UK axis' reluctance to rule out nuclear weapons).

But, Blair tells us, if we are weak now, how will anyone believe us when we are strong in the future? Well, actually, history tells us that resorting to violence unnecessarily is the act of the weak, not the strong. What will really affect how people perceive the US-led international community is whether future defiance of UN resolutions and brutal dictatorships are treated in the same way. Given the Bush government's current indulgence of Sharon's Israel, and the general record of the US (especially the administrations his father was involved in) of toleration of brutal dictators as long as they serve US interests, I'm not optimistic about this.

And now we are told to expect a three-year occupation of Iraq. Well, at least someone's talking about what happens after the war, but I suspect the commitment will prove far harder to get out of than that.<sup>2</sup> A long-term occupation, particularly if American troops treat the locals with the sort of arrogance they have displayed elsewhere, will be deeply unpopular with the Iraqis, and far from lessening the threat of global terrorism, will give those who get their kicks from blowing up buildings and aircraft another excuse to justify their actions. The cost will have serious implications for the US economy, and will leave America so tied-up militarily that she may be unable to respond effectively to more serious threats. Unless, of course, it's the UK that will be taking over the occupation – which would not be an untypical reaction; shit all over the place and then leave others to clear the mess up. In the end, this is a nineteenth-century colonialist solution. It should have no place in the 21st century.

### **February 11<sup>th</sup> 2003: A tale of two Petes**

There were two people called Peter this morning on the *Today* programme. First up, Republican Congressman Pete Hill, commenting on France's veto of further US military build-up in Turkey. In line with the responsible standards for debate set by the United States administration on Iraq (viz. the redefining of the word "irrefutable" to mean "I say it's true, therefore it must be, despite my inability to provide convincing evidence"), Congressman Hill indulged in a series of petty insults. You can't take France seriously as a power because they don't have an aircraft carrier (actually, they do, the *Charles de Gaulle*, but perhaps the fact that it's only 40,000 tons as compared with a 90,000 ton US supercarrier means it doesn't count). You can't take Germany seriously because they started two world wars (and they say we can't let go of the war! – you might just as well say you can't take the US seriously, because they tried very hard to stay out of said wars). All the French could do would show the Iraqis how to surrender (perhaps Congressman Hill has his French and Italian jokes confused). And the French are just trying to maintain Saddam in power for trading purposes (whilst it is fair to say that the French policy towards Iraq has sometimes been dictated by the desire to sell a few more Mirages, it's not as if America wasn't quite happy to support Saddam when Iran was The Big Bad). You could hear the disbelief in James Naughtie's voice as Hill treated the two leaders of the European Union as if they were on the level of Liechtenstein and Moldova.

There is much dishonesty over the blocking of sending US missiles to Turkey. Bush and his associates trumpet NATO as a mutual defensive alliance, and that France and Germany are deserting their responsibilities. But these weapons are not being sent to bolster the defence of Turkey against imminent unprovoked attack from Iraq – they are being sent to make Turkey a more secure base

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<sup>2</sup> The main reason for not going on to Baghdad to overthrow Saddam in 1991 was not, as Dubya says, that that was not the mission then (and when did it become the mission?), but because Bush Sr. listened to his military commanders, who advised against an occupation.

from which to attack Iraq. To me, this falls outside the bounds of mutual defence.<sup>3</sup>

Nor is the accusation that France and Germany are ignoring the threat of international terrorism fair; Germany, in particular, knows a lot more about terrorism than the Americans.<sup>4</sup> What France and Germany feel is that creating hundreds, if not thousands, of Iraqi martyrs, and then occupying Iraq, are not actually the best ways of dealing with the problem. This, after all, is the policy Israel pursued for many years in Lebanon, and is still pursuing in Palestine. Far from eliminating the threat of terrorism, suicide bombings have got worse.

And then there's Peter Mandelson. He trotted out the standard government line, that all the British public need is sufficient evidence to convince them that the war is all right (a line also trotted out on "Thought for the day"). Wrong: the British public is not looking to be convinced of the rightness of the war – it is already sure that the war is wrong (and six months of persuasion has changed no-one's minds), and wants the government to listen. Mandelson said (and I'm paraphrasing), "What sort of leader do you want? One who plays politics like Chirac or Schroeder, or one who takes a stand, like Blair?" As if, somehow, saying "No" to the most powerful nation on earth wasn't taking a stand of some sort. Blair is not taking a moral stand – he is simply following Bush's lead. I don't care that he may have persuaded Bush to go down the UN path when he was reluctant to do so – if the US and UK attempt to pre-empt, distort and subsequently ignore the reports of the weapons inspectors and the decisions of the Security Council, then all this becomes empty rhetoric. No, give me Chirac or Schroeder anytime; their policies may not be wholly above question,<sup>5</sup> but they'll fill the body bags slower.

#### **After the war: Who will rule Iraq?**

You do wonder what sort of government the Americans will leave in place once Saddam has been ousted. I'm sure Blair would like to present the idea that it will be a nice fluffy democratic government, but America's record in other countries does not fill one with hope. Military dictators, as long as they remember who is their master, have been fine in Central and South America, and in south-east Asia. Human rights abuses are something that only America's enemies perpetrate. One can't help but feel that if Tariq Aziz led a palace coup to overthrow Saddam, and then promised cooperation with America, Bush would be on the TV immediately telling us how trustworthy the man was.

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<sup>3</sup> Of course, Turkey then decided that they didn't want to allow the Americans to attack from Turkish soil after all, or at least that the bribes being offered at this point aren't enough to make it worth risking a resurgence of Kurdish violence and massive unpopularity in the largely Muslim country.

<sup>4</sup> Some Americans act as if they are the only people ever to have suffered a terrorist attack. This is patronising towards nations that have lived with terrorism for years (and moreover had their civilian populations attacked in open warfare in living memory, which the US has been spared).

<sup>5</sup> I'd certainly be happier if, having seized the moral high ground, Chirac didn't invite Robert Mugabe up there.

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