

An Annotated Overview of the Foreign Policy Segments of President George W. Bush's State of the Union Address

By Stephen Zunes

"This threat is new; America's duty is familiar. Throughout the 20th century, small groups of men seized control of great nations, built armies and arsenals, and set out to dominate the weak and intimidate the world. In each case, their ambitions of cruelty and murder had no limit. In each case, the ambitions of Hitlerism, militarism, and communism were defeated by the will of free peoples, by the strength of great alliances, and by the might of the United States of America.... Once again, we are called to defend the safety of our people, and the hopes of all mankind. And we accept this responsibility."

The attempt to put Baathist Iraq on par with Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia is ludicrous. Hitler's Germany was the most powerful industrialized nation in the world when it began its conquests in the late 1930s and Soviet Russia at its height had the world's largest armed forces and enough nuclear weapons to destroy humankind. Iraq, by contrast, is a poor Third World country that has been under the strictest military and economic embargo in world history for more than a dozen years after having had much of its civilian and military infrastructure destroyed in the heaviest bombing in world history. Virtually all that remained of its offensive military capability was subsequently dismantled under the strictest unilateral disarmament initiative ever, an inspection and verification process that has been resumed under an even more rigorous mandate. It is true that the inspectors have reported that Iraq can not account for large amounts of biological and chemical agents that can be used as weapons of mass destruction, yet that does not necessarily justify going to war. By contrast, back in the 1980s, when Iraq really was a major regional power

and had advanced programs in weapons of mass destruction, the United States did not consider Iraq a threat at all; in fact, the U.S. provided extensive military, economic, and technological support to Saddam Hussein's regime.

"America is making a broad and determined effort to confront these dangers. We have called on the United Nations to fulfill its charter and stand by its demand that Iraq disarm."

There is nothing in the UN Charter about the unilateral disarmament of a member state. By contrast, articles 41 and 42 of the Charter—reiterated in the final article of UN Security Council resolution 1441—make clear that the UN Security Council alone has the authority to authorize the use of force to enforce its resolutions. It should also be noted that there are over ninety UN Security Council resolutions currently being violated by governments other than Iraq, most of them by such U.S. allies as Morocco, Israel, and Turkey. However, the United States has blocked the United Nations from enforcing these other resolutions.

"We're strongly supporting the International Atomic Energy Agency in its mission to track and control nuclear materials around the world."

The IAEA has received very little support from the Bush administration. For example, the U.S. has blocked the United Nations from enforcing UN Security Council resolution 487, which calls on Israel to place its nuclear facilities under the safeguard of the IAEA. In addition, administration spokespeople have repeatedly belittled the organization and its effectiveness.

"We're working with other governments to secure nuclear materials in the former Soviet

Union, and to strengthen global treaties banning the production and shipment of missile technologies and weapons of mass destruction.”

The Bush administration has actually blocked efforts to strengthen international treaties preventing the spread of biological and chemical weapons and successfully instigated and led an effort to remove the highly effective director of an international program overseeing the destruction of chemical weapons stockpiles around the world. In addition, the Bush administration has cut funding for programs to remove nuclear materials from the former Soviet Union and rejected a proposed treaty by Russia that would have destroyed thousands of nuclear weapons, insisting that they instead simply be put into storage. Finally, the Bush administration has rejected calls for a nuclear-free zone for all the Middle East.

“We also see Iranian citizens risking intimidation and death as they speak out for liberty and human rights and democracy. Iranians, like all people, have a right to choose their own government and determine their own destiny—and the United States supports their aspirations to live in freedom.”

It was the United States, through its Central Intelligence Agency, that overthrew Iran’s last democratic government, ousting Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh in 1953. As his replacement, the U.S. brought in from exile the tyrannical Shah, who embarked upon a 26-year reign of terror. The United States armed and trained his brutal secret police—known as the SAVAK—which jailed, tortured, and murdered tens of thousands of Iranians struggling for their freedom. The Islamic revolution was a direct consequence of this U.S.-backed repression since the Shah suc-

cessfully destroyed much of the democratic opposition. In addition, the repressive theocratic rulers who gained power following the Islamic Revolution that ousted the Shah were clandestinely given military support by the U.S. government during the height of their repression during the 1980s. As a result, there are serious questions regarding the United States’ support for the freedom of the Iranian people.

“Throughout the 1990s, the United States relied on a negotiated framework to keep North Korea from gaining nuclear weapons. We now know that that regime was deceiving the world, and developing those weapons all along. And today the North Korean regime is using its nuclear program to incite fear and seek concessions. America and the world will not be blackmailed.”

Indications are that North Korea kept its commitment during part of 1990s but re-started its uranium enrichment program when the Republican-controlled Congress failed to appropriate funds in a timely fashion for the energy projects that were supposed to be funded under the framework. It is widely believed that North Korea deepened these efforts as a direct result of last year’s State of the Union address, when President Bush declared North Korea to be part of an “axis of evil” along with Iraq and Iran. Seeing the United States prepare to invade Iraq and increase its bellicose rhetoric against Iran and themselves, the North Koreans apparently decided that they needed to create a credible deterrent in case they were next. They have offered to end their nuclear program in return for a guarantee that the United States will not invade them.

“America is working with the countries of the region—South Korea, Japan, China, and Russia—to find

a peaceful solution, and to show the North Korean government that nuclear weapons will bring only isolation, economic stagnation, and continued hardship. The North Korean regime will find respect in the world and revival for its people only when it turns away from its nuclear ambitions.”

Actually, the United States has been at odds with North Korea’s neighbors, taking a far more hard-line position toward the communist regime than those who have far greater grounds for concern about any potential threat. Perhaps more significantly, given that the United States has good relations with other countries that have developed nuclear weapons in recent years—such as India, Pakistan, and Israel—and has demonstrated hostility toward North Korea well prior to the start of its nuclear program, the North Koreans may have reason to doubt that curbing their nuclear ambitions will make much of a difference.

“Our nation and the world must learn the lessons of the Korean Peninsula and not allow an even greater threat to rise up in Iraq. A brutal dictator, with a history of reckless aggression, with ties to terrorism, with great potential wealth, will not be permitted to dominate a vital region and threaten the United States.”

There was a very real threat of Iraq dominating the region in the 1980s. During this period, however, the United States provided Saddam Hussein’s regime with military, economic, and technological assistance, even as it invaded Iran and its internal repression and support of terrorism was at its height. Now that the country has only a fraction of its once formidable military prowess and it has little direct access to its oil wealth, it

is hard to imagine how it could realistically dominate the region again, much less threaten the United States.

“Almost three months ago, the United Nations Security Council gave Saddam Hussein his final chance to disarm. He has shown instead utter contempt for the United Nations, and for the opinion of the world. The 108 UN inspectors were not sent to conduct a scavenger hunt for hidden materials across a country the size of California. The job of the inspectors is to verify that Iraq’s regime is disarming. It is up to Iraq to show exactly where it is hiding its banned weapons, lay those weapons out for the world to see, and destroy them as directed.”

UNMOVIC director Hans Blix and IAEA director Mohamed El-Baradei have expressed concerns that Iraq was not sufficiently forthcoming in some potentially key areas, though they also noted where there had been a high level of cooperation in other areas. This is far short of “utter contempt.” Similarly, their mission is far from being a scavenger hunt, given the extensive records from the eight years of UN inspections during the 1990s. It is noteworthy that the UNSCOM inspectors did not find any more hidden materials during their last four years of operations despite expanding the scope of their searches. Though these inspectors were withdrawn under pressure from President Bill Clinton in late 1998 before they could complete their job, satellite surveillance and other intelligence gathering since then has given this new round of inspections—which have an even tougher mandate regarding the timing and extent of their searches—a good idea of where to look and what to look for. Furthermore, they have equipment that can detect radioactive isotopes

and other telltale signs of WMD development at a great distance from their source. It is noteworthy that after insisting that Iraq’s four-year refusal to allow UN weapons inspectors to return was cited as grounds for an invasion, the Bush administration has suddenly challenged the inspectors’ effectiveness since they resumed inspections. Furthermore, the United States has yet to put forward any proof that Iraq currently has any banned weapons.

“The United Nations concluded in 1999 that Saddam Hussein had biological weapons sufficient to produce over 25,000 liters of anthrax—enough doses to kill several million people. He hasn’t accounted for that material. He’s given no evidence that he has destroyed it.

The United Nations concluded that Saddam Hussein had materials sufficient to produce more than 38,000 liters of botulinum toxin—enough to subject millions of people to death by respiratory failure.”

This is like saying that a man has enough sperm to impregnate several million women. Theoretically true, but if you don’t have sufficient delivery systems, it simply cannot be done. There is no evidence that Iraq has any delivery systems that can effectively disseminate biological weapons in a way that could endanger large populations.

“Our intelligence officials estimate that Saddam Hussein had the materials to produce as much as 500 tons of sarin, mustard, and VX nerve agent. In such quantities, these chemical agents could also kill untold thousands. He’s not accounted for these materials. He has given no evidence that he has destroyed them.”

This figure is far higher than most independent estimates. The former chief weapons inspector for

UNSCOM stated that at least 95% of Iraq’s chemical weapons had been accounted for and destroyed by 1998. With the embargo preventing the import of new materials, satellites eyeing possible sites for new production, and the return of UN inspectors, it is highly dubious that Iraq could develop an offensive chemical weapons arsenal, particularly since virtually all of their ballistic missiles capable of carrying such weapons have also been accounted for and destroyed. In addition, if Saddam Hussein’s possession of chemical weapons is really such a major concern for the U.S. government, why did the United States send Iraq tons of toxic chemicals during the 1980s, even when it became apparent that they were being used for weapons?

“The International Atomic Energy Agency confirmed in the 1990s that Saddam Hussein had an advanced nuclear weapons development program, had a design for a nuclear weapon, and was working on five different methods of enriching uranium for a bomb.”

True. What the president failed to mention is that in 1998 the International Atomic Energy Agency also reported that Iraq’s nuclear capability had been completely dismantled. More importantly, IAEA director El-Baradei, in his January 27 report to the UN Security Council, reported there was no evidence to suggest that Iraq had resumed its nuclear program.

“Our intelligence sources tell us that he has attempted to purchase high-strength aluminum tubes suitable for nuclear weapons production.”

As “60 Minutes” and other independent investigations have revealed, these aluminum tubes also have commercial applications. The IAEA has investigated the matter and has reported that there is no evidence to

suggest they were intended for a nuclear program.

“Year after year, Saddam Hussein has gone to elaborate lengths, spent enormous sums, taken great risks to build and keep weapons of mass destruction. But why? The only possible explanation, the only possible use he could have for those weapons, is to dominate, intimidate, or attack.”

This is hardly the “only possible explanation.” The most likely reason for a country in a heavily armed region within missile range of two nuclear powers to pursue weapons of mass destruction is for deterrence. Even the CIA has reported that there is little chance that Iraq would use WMDs for offensive purposes in the foreseeable future. By contrast, so says this CIA analysis, there is a far greater risk that Saddam Hussein would use whatever WMDs he may possess in the event of a U.S. invasion, when deterrence has clearly failed and he no longer has anything to lose.

“And this Congress and the America people must recognize another threat. Evidence from intelligence sources, secret communications, and statements by people now in custody reveal that Saddam Hussein aids and protects terrorists, including members of al Qaeda. Secretly, and without fingerprints, he could provide one of his hidden weapons to terrorists, or help them develop their own.”

Reports from the State Department, the CIA, and other intelligence agencies have found no credible proof of any links between the Islamist al Qaeda movement and the secular Iraqi government. In fact, they have been at odds with each other for many years. Saddam Hussein’s support for terrorism peaked in the 1980s, when the U.S. dropped Iraq from its list of states sponsoring terrorism in order to make the regime

eligible to receive U.S. military and technological assistance. Furthermore, most biological weapons—the only WMDs threat that Iraq realistically might possess at this point—do leave fingerprints and could easily be traced to Iraq.

“Before September the 11th, many in the world believed that Saddam Hussein could be contained. But chemical agents, lethal viruses, and shadowy terrorist networks are not easily contained. Imagine those 19 hijackers with other weapons and other plans—this time armed by Saddam Hussein. It would take one vial, one canister, one crate slipped into this country to bring a day of horror like none we have ever known. We will do everything in our power to make sure that that day never comes.”

Again, there is no evidence of any connection between Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden, who has called the Iraqi dictator “an apostate, an infidel, and a traitor to Islam.” Iraq has never threatened nor been implicated in any attack against U.S. territory and the CIA has reported no Iraqi-sponsored attacks against American interests since 1991. It is always easy to think of worst case scenarios, but no country has the right to invade another on the grounds that the other country might some day possess weapons that they might decide to pass on to someone else who might use these weapons against them.

“The dictator who is assembling the world’s most dangerous weapons has already used them on whole villages—leaving thousands of his own citizens dead, blind, or disfigured. Iraqi refugees tell us how forced confessions are obtained—by torturing children while their parents are made to watch. International

human rights groups have catalogued other methods used in the torture chambers of Iraq: electric shock, burning with hot irons, dripping acid on the skin, mutilation with electric drills, cutting out tongues, and rape. If this is not evil, then evil has no meaning.”

The use of chemical weapons by the Iraqi armed forces against Kurdish villages took place in the 1980s when the U.S. was backing Saddam Hussein’s government. The U.S. even covered up for the Halabja massacres and similar atrocities by falsely claiming it was the Iranians—then the preferred enemy—who were responsible. Human rights organizations have indeed reported torture and other human rights abuses by the Iraqi regime and did so back in the 1980s when the U.S. was supporting it. As a result, one can only assume that this professed concern about human rights abuses is insincere, particularly since the Bush administration is currently sending military and police aid to repressive regimes such as Indonesia, Uzbekistan, Colombia, Egypt, and others that are guilty of similar human rights abuses. If President Bush really thinks that this constitutes evil, why does he support governments that engage in such crimes?

“We will consult. But let there be no misunderstanding: If Saddam Hussein does not fully disarm, for the safety of our people and for the peace of the world, we will lead a coalition to disarm him.”

To invade Iraq without the authorization of the United Nations Security Council would be a direct violation of fundamental legal norms and would make the United States an international outlaw. A unilateral U.S. invasion and the repercussions of such an act of aggression would be a far greater threat to the safety of

Americans and the peace of the world than maintaining the current UN strategy of rigorous inspections, military sanctions, and deterrence.

“Tonight I have a message for the men and women who will keep the peace, members of the American Armed Forces: Many of you are assembling in or near the Middle East, and some crucial hours may lay ahead. In those hours, the success of our cause will depend on you. Your training has prepared you. Your honor will guide you. You believe in America, and America believes in you.”

No doubt the thousands of armed forces personnel currently assembling in that region do believe in America. One hopes America will believe in them enough not to abandon them as they did the veterans of the previous war against Iraq who suffer the debilitating effects of Gulf War Syndrome without the support and recognition of the government that sent them into combat. It is also ironic to hear such high praise of the men and women readying for combat from a man who—despite his support for the Vietnam War—refused to fight in it, instead using family connections to get into a National Guard unit from which he was AWOL for much of his time of service. In addition, it is Orwellian to claim that an army poised to bomb and invade a sovereign nation is there to “keep the peace.” The best way American servicemen and servicewomen can keep the peace would be to refuse to obey any illegal orders of their commander-in-chief that command them to fight in an illegitimate war.

“We seek peace. We strive for peace... If war is forced upon us, we will fight in a just cause and by just means—sparing, in every way we can, the innocent. And if war is

forced upon us, we will fight with the full force and might of the United States military—and we will prevail.”

The palpable eagerness of the Bush administration to go to war belies any claims of seeking peace. Iraq has neither attacked nor threatened the United States, so it cannot be said that war is being forced upon the country. Virtually all of America’s allies oppose this threat of war. In the United States, the Catholic bishops and every mainline Protestant denomination have gone on record declaring that a U.S. invasion would not constitute a just war, a sentiment echoed by religious leaders around the world. The U.S. record of sparing the innocent in its recent wars has been quite poor, with upwards of 5,000 civilians killed in the first Gulf War, an estimated 500 civilians in Yugoslavia and approximately 3,000 civilians in Afghanistan. Most scenarios predict a far higher level of civilian casualties in a U.S. invasion of Iraq, particularly should American troops have to seize Baghdad—a city of five million—by force.

“And as we and our coalition partners are doing in Afghanistan, we will bring to the Iraqi people food and medicines and supplies—and freedom.”

The United States has spent only a miserly amount of money for food, medicine, and other humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan relative to the billions of dollars spent to bomb that country. Despite greater political pluralism in Afghanistan under the post-Taliban regime, most of the country is not enjoying freedom, but is subjected to the abuse of war lords, opium magnates, and ethnic militias that have gained in power since the U.S. intervention.

“Americans are a resolute people who have risen to every test of our time. Adversity has revealed the character

of our country, to the world and to ourselves. America is a strong nation, and honorable in the use of our strength. We exercise power without conquest, and we sacrifice for the liberty of strangers.”

The character and resoluteness of the American people is worthy of praise. Unfortunately, the United States government has frequently used its military and economic power to suppress liberty, such as supporting the overthrow of democratically elected governments in countries like Guatemala and Chile while backing scores of dictatorial regimes throughout the world. The United States has also used powerful international financial institutions to force poor countries to weaken environmental and labor laws to enhance the profits of U.S.-based multinational corporations.

“Americans are a free people, who know that freedom is the right of every person and the future of every nation. The liberty we prize is not America’s gift to the world, it is God’s gift to humanity.”

What would God think of a government that supplies more weapons, training, and logistical support to more dictatorships and other human rights abusers than any other? If freedom and liberty are indeed the will of God, the foreign policy of the Bush administration is nothing short of blasphemy.

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