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GEERT VAN KESTEREN PHOTO

Arguing Iraq

PRIME MINISTER CHRÉTIEN'S ANNOUNCEMENT IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS ON MARCH 17 that Canada would not join the U.S.-led "Coalition of the Willing" seeking to depose Saddam Hussein by military force was a defining moment. To some, it was proof that Chrétien valued short-term political calculation over Canada's long-term interests. To others, it was a courageous display of Canadian independence. To Inroads, it was a signal to delve into the controversy surrounding the war – which we have done in unusual depth and breadth.

University of Alberta political scientists Larry Pratt and Leon Craig argue the case for the war, situating it in a tradition of realist political thinking stretching back to Thucydides. For Pratt and Craig, the key is hegemony – the dominance in a system of states by one power that thereby gives stability to the system as a whole. The case against the war is argued by Vancouver lawyer Gareth Morley, who sees it as a violation of the "Westphalian" system based on state territorial sovereignty. Despite its flaws, Morley maintains, Westphalianism is better than the alternative represented by the new American doctrine of pre-emption.

In Canada, opposition to the war was most intense in Quebec. This has been widely viewed as reflecting a Quebec pacifist tradition. Montreal journalist Antoine Robitaille asks whether Quebec really does have a "cultural peace gene," and looks closely at the evidence on which this idea is based. Half a world away, both geographically and politically, Australian political scientist David Tucker takes us inside the debate that led to his country's participation in the Coalition of the Willing. The factors weighing on Australian Prime Minister John Howard and Opposition Leader Simon Crean – such as the bombing in Bali – are interesting in themselves and also cast light on the very different factors operating in Canada.

We are fortunate to have available, as a complement to the prose, the powerful photographs of Dutch photojournalist Geert van Kesteren. His compelling photos allow a glimpse at how Iraqis themselves have experienced the events of this year.

— Bob Chodos

Iraq and hegemony

by Larry Pratt and Leon H. Craig

We

REGARD OURSELVES AS “REALISTS” IN A TRADITION OF POLITICAL analysis that extends from Thucydides, Machiavelli and Hobbes to the likes of Raymond Aron and John Mearsheimer. Thus, in arguing for the rightness of the war in Iraq, we base our argument on what we perceive to be contemporary political reality. That is, we do not assign priority to either abstract moral ideals or current standards of international “legality.”

This does not mean, of course, that either is irrelevant. International legality is a constituent of political reality, but (like political opinion) of secondary importance – as we believe the event has clearly shown. The Coalition partners, primarily Britain and the United States, believed it could be useful to seek legitimation for the war in the United Nations Security Council. But the case they could make there was limited to whatever legal grounds were antecedently acknowledged as valid by that body, and these excluded some of the most important

political considerations.

Similarly, both the moral principles that people actually hold and the ideals they publicly profess, and especially those of relevant decision-makers and executives, are part of political reality, whether or not they reflect a transcendent reality (as we believe valid ones do – some practices really are unjust, some people and regimes really are evil). Moreover, all political actions are undertaken with a particular desired end in view. Hence, the radical separation between what “is” and what people think “ought to



A mobile soft drink shop on a Baghdad street as normal life resumes after the U.S.-U.K. invasion, May 2003. GEERT VAN KESTEREN PHOTO

be” is not merely *unrealistic*: it is impossible to put into practice. Many a present “is” began as an “ought.” But when ideals, principles, aspirations and expectations are divorced from what is realistically possible, they can be positive obstacles to achieving some good result. And in our opinion, much of the critical analysis of the war, both before and since it was fought, suffers profoundly from a lack of realism about international politics generally.

The single most important feature of global political reality today, and for the foreseeable future, is the hegemony of the United States. And while there are several dimensions to its dominant status, several

kinds of power that together constitute its supremacy, it is its military superiority over that of any conceivable aggregation of other states that is the most important. The Iraq problem provides an ideal illustration of hegemony in action. Since realistic political thinking about contemporary world affairs must always bear in mind the hegemonic position of the American regime, it is essential to have some understanding of this peculiar status: what a hegemon is, what responsibilities attend it, what can reasonably be expected of it, what the advantages are of supporting it, how it is influenced by lesser powers, and so on.

Larry Pratt and Leon H. Craig are both political scientists. Dr. Craig is professor of political science at the University of Alberta, where he specializes in political philosophy, and Dr. Pratt is professor emeritus in the same department.



A Shia woman kisses an American soldier in Baghdad, May 2003. GEERT VAN KESTEREN PHOTO

The demand for and nature of hegemony

A fully adequate analysis of hegemony, complete with a variety of historical illustrations, is obviously beyond the scope of this brief essay. However, some understanding of this distinct political relationship is essential for assessing not merely the Iraq problem, but the contemporary global situation in general. Now, the classic statement of the need for hegemony in the ordering of states is in Thucydides, and the very fact that he treats a world that is so much simpler than ours has the advantage of requiring one to confront matters truly basic to political life, largely obscured by the complexity of the modern world.

In the opening passages of *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides looks back to the remote past of Greece and finds

that people then were uprooted, insecure and incapable of engaging in great collective actions. In “the weakness of ancient times,” there was little commerce or freedom of naval communication because of the fear of bandits and pirates. People moved around and were “prevented by their want of strength and the absence of mutual intercourse from displaying any collective action.” Lacking collective power – *dynamis* – they were the objects of predators and they were always in a state of fear of malefactors. Security precedes settlement and development:

Without commerce, without freedom of communication either by land or by sea, cultivating no more of their territory than the exigencies of life required, destitute of any surplus of wealth, never planting their land (for they could not tell when

an invader might come and take it all away, and when he did come they had no walls to stop him), thinking that the necessities of daily sustenance could be supplied at one place as well as another, they cared little for shifting their habitation, and consequently neither built great cities nor attained to any other form of greatness.¹

In the general insecurity there was no accumulation of wealth, piracy thrived (men being forced into it) and people carried arms for their personal safety. And this backwardness and insecurity began to change only when the legendary tyrant of Crete, Minos, formed his own navy and began to clear the sea of pirates, “a necessary step to secure the revenues for his own use.” The expulsion of the pirates was essential as it allowed the colonization of many islands and the growth of seaborne commerce. Coastal settlements grew in wealth, and self-interest divided the new towns into ruler and ruled: “For the love of gain would reconcile the weaker to the dominion of the stronger, and the possession of surplus resources enabled the more powerful to reduce the smaller towns to subjection.”

This law of the stronger allowed the Greeks to organize themselves into hierarchies that benefited both the strong and the weak: the strong ruled the weak for their mutual advantage. Collective action, typically involving expeditions at sea, required leadership, or hegemony: “going first”, “guiding”, “leading” and a common apprehension. Thus, the Greeks followed Agamemnon to Troy more out of fear than love – because he had the greatest fleet, not because of the oaths sworn to Helen’s suitors. In Thucydides’ unromantic account, it is the interests of and demands for he-

gemony that explain the great expeditions and the development of material and cultural progress throughout the Hellenic world.

As Thucydides himself exemplifies, politically knowledgeable Greeks thought of their international relations as a succession of hegemonies; in each era, the supremacy of one or perhaps two leading states, “President of Hellas,” was acknowledged by the other states in the system. The idea of a leading power in the system, a power of acknowledged primacy and wide-ranging powers of initiative to look after the general welfare, can be traced to the foundation of Sparta’s Peloponnesian League in the sixth century BCE. For Spartans “at a very early time obtained good laws, and have always been free of tyrants, . . . enjoying the same regime for 400 years. Thus they became powerful and arranged the affairs of other states” (1.18).

A hegemonic power won the primacy in war and was acknowledged to be capable of looking after the general interests of the Hellenic system as well as its own particular interests. Claiming the supremacy after the defeat of the Persian Empire about 478 BCE, the Athenians told the Spartans that they were building a wall; Sparta should now proceed on the assumption that “the people to whom they were going was able to distinguish both its own and the general interest” (1.91). Athens was in effect claiming the right to organize and lead the Hellenic system of several hundred city-states. Wishing to be rid of the Aegean war, Sparta conceded the supremacy in that area to Athens.

A hegemonic power had a primary obligation to protect its allies, or, as Corinth defined the obligation, “to show a special

care for the common welfare in return for the special honours accorded to them by all in other ways.” The offer of protection was central to the obligation: a hegemon that abandoned its allies, or exploited them – as Athens did, creating its detested empire – lost the right to the support of its followers. Sparta went to war in 431 BCE because of its fear of the growing power of Athens, but only after its allies, led by Corinth, urgently reminded Sparta of its obligations to defend the alliance: “For the true author of the subjugation of a people is not so much he who subjugates as it is he who has the power to prevent it and yet looks carelessly on” (1.69); “let your procrastination end” (1.71).

In hegemony, then, there is a great asymmetry of power, there is no balance of power, there is no formal colonial empire, and control is usually exercised with an economy of force. A hegemon is a state that is so powerful that it dominates all the other states in the system – global or regional. The idea was captured in a U.S. Pentagon document of 1992, which argued that America’s goal should be to prevent the emergence of any advanced industrial and military power that could challenge the United States; and the concept of hegemony informed the National Security Strategy, issued by the White House in September 2002, which promises to maintain whatever military capability is required to defeat America’s adversaries and to discourage (via preventive war, if necessary) potential foes from building up their own forces to equal or surpass those of the United States. These statements amount to an assertion of a doctrine of global hegemony. America’s economy is larger than the next three national economies combined; its military is greater than the next

15 combined, and only it could have afforded the costs of removing Saddam Hussein from power.

The reality of power

There is a striking passage near the opening of *The History* in which Thucydides speaks of the difficulty involved in assessing the relative power of states and in distinguishing between the *appearance* of power and the *reality* of power. Suppose the city of Sparta became desolate and only the remains of a few buildings were left. As time passed, future generations would find it hard to believe that this unimpressive place had been as powerful as its fame reputed it to be, whereas the same observer, distracted by the magnificent temples and buildings of ancient Athens, would conclude that its power was twice as great as it really had been. We are admonished to take a state’s armaments and its reputation for war into account when making assessments of power. Political and military actions are the *erga*, deeds, by which we judge human greatness and assess the power of cities such as Athens and Sparta and their capacity to rule over others, a capacity which the Greeks equated with freedom.

At the G8 talks held in May 2003, after the end of the war in Iraq, French President Jacques Chirac argued that most people shared his “vision” of a multipolar world, one in which there is no single dominant power but several – at least five – competing great powers. He was seeking a concession from the victorious Americans that, post-Iraq, decisions in the Middle East and elsewhere should be made on the basis that power in the international system is effectively distributed among several leading



An Iraqi child plays with a machine gun while an American soldier sleeps, Baghdad, May 2003.
GEERT VAN KESTEREN PHOTO

states – that is, on the principle of multipolarity. But there is no multipolar system, the G8 and the UN notwithstanding; and if there were, there would be no need for the Europeans to conjure one into existence. Multipolarity is not a vision but a state of affairs that either exists or does not; it is created by the relative distribution of national power – the assets or material capabilities and reputation that states bring to the table or can mobilize in peace and war. The gap between the United States and its putative rivals is simply too great. As was the case with Athens’s allies after the war with Persia “because of their aversion to military service” (1.99), the inability or unwillingness of states such as France, Germany, Canada and Japan to create and maintain military forces that command respect abroad was one of the elements that fostered the American hegemony after the Cold

War. Disarmament, a noble-sounding concept, can have costly consequences; indeed, it can even be a cause of war.

In the international anarchy, there is no substitute for military power. Military power, somebody’s military power, is always the most effective complement (and often the indispensable backstop) of other forms of power: economic, legal, cultural, ideological. This does not mean that the other forms are not real power, or that all power is materially based. Various kinds of knowledge are powerful, including various kinds of political knowledge. But as Hobbes reminds us, “Nor when the wise in their own conceit, contend by force, with them who distrust their own wisdom, do they always, or often, or almost at any time, get the Victory.”² And like knowledge, sound moral and political principles, especially ones proven to be guiding actual practice, can

be very powerful. Those of the liberal democracies (ensuring civil rights and liberties, equality before the law, tolerance, popular participation, economic freedom and so forth) are clearly a source of strength for such regimes. Being principles that most people regard as naturally just or otherwise attractive, they are basic to generating the subjective “legitimacy” of these regimes. However, the principles alone are not powerful; what makes them effectively so is the fact that people regard them as sufficiently valuable as to be willing to fight and sacri-

There is no multipolar system, the G8 and the UN notwithstanding; and if there were, there would be no need for the Europeans to conjure one into existence. The gap between the U.S. and its putative rivals is simply too great.

fice to protect and sustain them, and even to aid and abet others similarly willing.

Thus it is with all forms of power: a lawyer’s power rests ultimately on sufficient and reliable coercive means dedicated to enforcing the law. This, of course, implicitly accounts for why “international law” is such a weak reed, amounting to little more than a body of compromises that nations, especially the more powerful ones, find convenient to honour for now and the foreseeable future. But when a particular nation declines to do so, as North Korea’s recent repudiation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty reminds us, the “law” becomes moot – unless there is a hegemon that can and will take it upon itself to enforce compliance.

This need not, in the first instance, be by overt military action. For example, the hegemon may take the lead in imposing a

more or less strict regimen of economic sanctions. But if the rogue state can find ways to evade or penetrate the means of isolation, either on its own or with the other states that see advantage in colluding – as was so clearly the case with Iraq during the 12 years of sanctions following the Gulf War – what then is to be done? And so it is with economic power generally. Without a military power to protect resources, productive and research facilities, lines and means of communication and transport, accumulations of wealth and capital – along with all the skilled people who carry out these various functions – vast economic means are simply tempting targets of aggrandizement, not effective power.

In short, we agree with Machiavelli: “The principal foundation which all states have, new ones as well as old or mixed, are good laws and good arms. And because there cannot be good laws where there are not good arms, and where there are good arms there must be good laws, I shall leave out the reasoning on laws and shall speak of arms.”³ We need add nothing but to emphasize what is implicit in Machiavelli’s principle: whatever else, a state should keep at least one eye on the military implication of every law, every national budget, every policy debate. The validity of this advice for all states today is in no way obviated by the massive military power of the United States. A state’s ability to at least *contribute* to the defence of its own interests is important in maintaining the hegemon’s respect for those interests, and the respect of other states, especially those that are adjacent, for its sovereignty.

No hegemon is going to involve itself in attempting to settle, much less intervene militarily, in every dispute that arises. Each

state continues to have a multitude of dealings with other states that are of little interest to a hegemon, and hence not mediated by it. And as we believe the Iraq war has once again proved, a state’s diplomatic efforts are apt to be a good deal more effective when backed by credible force, including that of its allies. Here, too, we believe Machiavelli is right: with respect to “external powers, ...one is defended with good arms and good friends; and if one has good arms, one will always have good friends.”⁴ After all, who wishes to ally themselves with a mere liability? A friendly state’s influence with a hegemon is bound to be roughly proportional to its own power. And while (to repeat) there are several forms of power, that of military might commands special respect. That one can make a significant contribution to military operations that are mutually advantageous, or even just important to the hegemon’s maintaining its hegemony, gives a state leverage, especially with other states that do not similarly contribute. Australia, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Poland, the Czech Republic and others that actively participated in the “Coalition of the Willing,” and most especially Britain, have cards to play that Canada, for example, does not.

Pretexts and true causes

Thucydides is concerned throughout *The History* with making sharp distinctions between the “professed objects” or pretexts of states and politicians and the real (though often concealed) motives and interests that underlie their foreign policy actions. Concealment is especially required in democratic polities. His approach to causation emphasizes the opposition of stated, superficial pretexts (believed by the credulous

many) and the deeper, truer causes (discernible only to “exact observers” such as himself).

The pretexts might be expressed in religious, ideological or ethnic terms, while the true causes are formulated in terms of motives inspired by relationships of power, as in Thucydides’ statement that the real reason for the Peloponnesian War (though the reason least often given) was the fear aroused in Sparta by the growth in Athenian power (1.23). He writes in Book Six that the stated Athenian pretext for invading Sicily in 415 BCE was to assist a “kindred” (Ionian Greek) city on the island and to acquire some treasure, but “being ambitious in real truth of conquering the whole, although they also had the specious design of succouring their kindred and other allies in the island.” Said Alcibiades, the most interventionist of the Athenian generals who invaded Sicily, “We sailed to Sicily to conquer, if possible, the Siceliot, and after them the Italiots also, and finally to assail the empire and city of Carthage. In the event of all or most of these schemes succeeding, we were then to attack the Peloponnesians” (6.90). These far-reaching goals of imperial strategy, leading to a final victory over Sparta, were the “truest cause” of the Sicilian intervention.

By “pretexts” for the war in Iraq, we do not mean to imply that they had no validity whatsoever, and thus were no part of the real rationale for the war. After all, for a pretext to serve its purpose, it must be plausible, and utterly false claims seldom are. We mean, rather, that the pretexts’ actual significance was markedly less than the spokespeople of the hegemon and its Coalition partners professed them to be.

Heading the list of pretexts was that Iraq

possessed Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) that posed an imminent threat to other nations, either through its own employment of them, or indirectly through its willingness to supply such weapons to terrorist networks, Al Qaeda in particular. It seems unlikely to us that this was a major determining factor, much less *the* determining factor, in the decision to wage war on the Iraqi regime. This is not to say that the Coalition's political and military leaders, especially the Americans, were not seriously concerned about such weapons. The heavy investment in protective equipment and intensive training of Coalition personnel to fend off and fight through chemical and biological attacks is persuasive evidence that they believed their forces might be subjected to weapons of this kind.

Nor was this unlikely, given Iraq's history of using such weapons; its ejection of the UN weapons inspectors in 1998, allowing it a half decade of complete freedom from international surveillance to reconstitute its WMD arsenal; intelligence showing it had imported various materials to do so; a massive amount of defector testimony that it had in fact done so; its belated readmission of the UN inspectorate only after the Security Council had unanimously warned that it would otherwise face grave consequences; and even with an invasion army poised on its border, its giving only grudging, partial and insincere cooperation with the Hans Blix-led inspection effort (which, among other frightening calculations, concluded that there was "a 'strong presumption' that around 10,000 litres of Iraqi anthrax might still exist"⁷⁵). But since Iraqi forces did not employ WMD during the war (despite the distribution of stashes of protective equipment for their doing so), and

at the time of this writing no indisputable proof of the existence of such weapons has been found (which certainly does not preclude their still being hidden, or their having been smuggled to a neighbouring state), questions have naturally arisen about the publicly stated rationale for this preventive war.

While it is possible that Coalition leaders were operating on the basis of partially mistaken intelligence, we presume that the professed urgent concern over Iraq's WMD was from the beginning exaggerated and something of a pretext. Again, this does not mean that Saddam Hussein posed no WMD threat, either directly or indirectly. Of course he did – probably both. There is no real question that he wished to have a variety of WMD (especially nuclear weapons), both to use and to threaten with; or that he had no compunction about using them in circumstances where he believed doing so would be advantageous to him; or that he would happily supply certain kinds of WMD to terrorist groups, as well as aid them in other ways. That all this is indeed true is one of the reasons why his removal is justifiable.

But did he pose an *immediate* WMD threat? We do not believe he did, or that the coalition leaders believed he did. However, claiming that he did was useful for coalition-building and gaining public support for a war whose primary aim was regime change, and claiming it was virtually required if there was to be any prospect of obtaining Security Council sanction for such a war. Since regime change *per se* is not a sanctionable justification under the UN Charter, even other members favouring such action must be supplied justifiable grounds for approval. Similar remarks ap-



American soldiers enter a house in Tikrit looking for terrorists and arms, August 2003. This woman tried to give them a key but was not understood as there was no translator. GEERT VAN KESTEREN PHOTO

ply to Iraq's alleged support of Al Qaeda, and its complicity in the 9/11 horror. Whatever the actual facts of any Iraqi involvement in that *particular* terrorist atrocity, this was a pretext made plausible by its indisputable support of terrorism generally, and America's announced policy to go after all states that have a hand in sponsoring terrorism.

Another pretext was that of liberating the Iraqi people and replacing one of the world's worst tyrants with a pluralist democracy that would in turn set a shining example for (or warning to) other states in the region. And again, there should be no question that replacing the Ba'athist regime was a desired consequence of the war, the only possible

way of doing a dirty job that needed to be done. The reign of Saddam Hussein and his party henchmen was an abomination – even more so than most of us imagined, as revelations since his fall are making increasingly clear. Moreover, there was otherwise no end of it in sight, since if Saddam was left to die of natural causes, he would almost surely be succeeded by one of his equally brutal and despicable sons or cousins. Hence, the vast majority of Iraqis had no more future under Saddam’s Ba’athist regime than did the majority of Russians under Stalin, on whom Saddam modelled himself.

So was the month of war “worth” the civilian casualties, at latest count something over 3,000 killed? Yes, given the alternative. Who knows how many *per annum* Saddam’s henchmen routinely executed; reportedly, the number of Iraqis who “disappeared” during his reign (and are now

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being dug up) is in the hundreds of thousands. But in addition, according to the UN’s figures, 3,000 was about the monthly average of deaths from malnutrition and poor medical care during the 12 years of its mandated economic sanctions, despite the “Oil for Food” relaxation (most of which billions went straight to Saddam who, we now know, did *not* spend it mainly on food and medicine). It was right that all of this should end, and thanks to the war, it has.

Still, the hegemon-led Coalition did not go to war primarily for the sake of promot-

ing democracy in Iraq, which (in our opinion) remains at best a long-term quasi-possibility. Nor, we suspect, is it immediately desirable. Given the current cultural and material condition of the majority of Iraqis – some indication of which we saw in the irresponsible and antiliberal behaviour of some Iraqis in the immediate wake of their liberation – God only knows what they might elect. The better-educated, more secularly inclined sector of the population needs time to get its act together, which includes weeding out prominent Ba’athists.

Our view of democracy, hence of democratization, is that it – like any other form of government – is a *means*, not an *end* in itself (as if something were right and good merely because it was done “democratically”). This too is simply being realistic about political life: with respect to regimes, as with everything else, they can be justified only by the results they actually produce. In felicitous circumstances, well-established liberal democracies produce many desirable results: liberty, less corruption, more justice, tolerance, economic progress and so forth. But the requisite circumstances (a) are *not* the world-historical norm, and (b) in every case require considerable time to become solidly established. Suffice it to say, we do not expect a model democracy in Iraq any time soon. But we do believe – and believe that the Coalition leaders believed – that a regime can be put into place that (a) may help cultivate the requisite circumstances, especially with respect to reforming the character of the citizenry, and (b) will, despite all the postwar turmoil, be a vast improvement over Saddam’s tyranny, and hence better all around for both the Iraqis and the rest of us.



Bodies of people executed during the 1991 Shi’ite and Kurdish uprising against the Saddam regime, dug up from a mass grave near Faluja, May 2003. Most bodies were reburied without identification; those with identification cards were wrapped in white sheets and taken to nearby Musayyib to be claimed by relatives. GEERT VAN KESTEREN PHOTO

We believe that the real justification for the war included three related but distinct practical goals that, thankfully, were and are fully consistent with the moral desirability of Saddam’s removal:

- to achieve regime change, mainly for the sake of Coalition interests, which in this case happen to coincide with those of most states whose prosperity we ought

to care about, Iraq included, for the regime, including the personal status Saddam enjoyed in the region, was politically cancerous;

- to provide a badly needed boost to the authority and influence of America, so that it can more effectively carry out its hegemonic responsibilities in the Mideast and elsewhere;

- to secure Iraqi oil – not so that Big Oil can make even bigger profits, but to take this basic resource so vital to the economies of virtually the entire world out of the hands of a ruthlessly ambitious, reckless, amoral tyrant bent on gaining control over still more of it (as his Kuwait gambit showed).

In our view, any one of these reasons provides an adequate justification for the war. Taken together, the case for it is overwhelming.

War and international order

The use of force is not always the most effective way of settling conflicts. Yet war is not an aberration, a disease of the body politic. It remains an accepted though rarely used instrument for the protection or extension of power. War is an act of policy, a continuation of politics by other means, and it may be rational or very irrational, depending on the circumstances. War is never an isolated act that breaks out spontaneously or unexpectedly in a political vacuum. The political object – the original motive for the war – is what determines the military plans and the degree of force to be used. The view that war “never solves anything,” that it is a pointless, stupid exercise, is simply wrong and unhistorical: many wars have been fought to topple tyrants and to liberate oppressed peoples, and others have been fought to preserve cherished values and to protect a way of life. A few wars have been fought to determine which state shall be hegemonic and look after the common welfare; many more have been affairs in which the hegemonic power goes to war, as Minos did, to put down freelance malefactors – pirates or terrorists – and uphold the inter-

national order. Finally, there are wars that belong in the category of unfinished business: the recent war in Iraq was undertaken, in part, because the United States and its coalition partners stopped fighting in 1991 before Saddam Hussein was overthrown. All wars have unexpected consequences, but this is in itself an insufficient reason not to fight.

Undoubtedly, Iraq is already a better place with Saddam Hussein’s neo-Stalinist Ba’athist regime in ruins. Some might argue, however, that the world is not necessarily a better place, because of the “dangerous precedent” set by this forceful removal of a legally recognized regime (especially without explicit UN approval), because it reinforced the already dangerous “unilateralist” tendency of the United States at the expense of the “multilateralism” and international legality centred in the UN, because accepting this sort of thing declares in effect that “might makes right,” or because it will inflame even more animosity toward the West among Muslims.

Our view is quite the contrary. The U.S.-led action is, on balance, a healthy precedent, as a clear signal to the rest of the world, and in particular to other states in the Middle East, indicating what this hegemon can *and will* do if more peaceful ways of dealing with international problems fail. We believe there have already been indications that those states having cosy relationships with terrorist organizations are rethinking their policies, and that other states are showing a new willingness to tackle some of the tough domestic political work entailed in combating international terrorism: not only rounding up more of the usual suspects, but undertaking structural changes that will diminish the sources and

support for this kind of nihilistic activity. However, since what is most required is a wholesale reformation of the educational systems and religious institutions that nurture Muslims on hate and bigotry, it may be generations before the breeding grounds of suicidal fanatics have been neutralized.

Moreover, the war was certainly *not* an instance of mere might defining itself as right; our whole argument is that what was right (indeed, several times over) preceded and guided the application of might. And the care with which that might was applied is clear evidence of this hegemon’s sense of moral responsibility in the use of its power: is there in all of history an example of greater scrupulousness in waging war – an activity not to be confused with social work? The war is a useful reminder of a basic truth about international political reality: lacking sufficient might to effect it, what is right is often moot. For the most part, this means justice will prevail only in those cases where it coincides closely enough with the other interests of a state or alliance of states willing and able to expend the necessary resources to bring it about. Thankfully, this sometimes happens, as in the case of Iraq, though the costs were high – the United States spent about \$100 billion on the war.

Is it not the mission of the United Nations, and of its Security Council in particular, to ensure that justice and humanity regularly prevail? Unhappily, we jest. As with the League of Nations over the 1935 Italian invasion of Ethiopia, the UN’s authority essentially disintegrated over the coming of the war in Iraq. Both Iraq and Ethiopia were small regional conflicts that had very large negative consequences for international bodies and the concept of collective security. One of the collateral ben-

efits of the Iraq crisis was the exposure of the impotence, the mendacity, the hypocrisy, the pomposity, the pettiness, the cynical posturing, the talk-but-do-nothingness of the UN in “action.”

The indefatigable critics of America, both domestic and foreign, insist that it confine the use of its power within the auspices of the UN. Why so? So that others may join with it in working out common policies to cope with serious problems in the world? Apparently not. Rather, so that if the United States can be cajoled into working within that arena, other states resentful of its power,

One of the collateral benefits of the Iraq crisis was the exposure of the impotence, the mendacity, the hypocrisy, the pomposity, the pettiness, the cynical posturing, the talk-but-do-nothingness of the UN in “action.”

or simply with their own fish to fry, can exploit the procedures and protocols of the UN to obstruct whatever action the U.S. wishes to undertake itself or have undertaken with or by others. To be sure, the world is not always treated to such entertaining spectacles of bull-baiting as was recently orchestrated by France, a state vying for leadership of a counter-hegemonic unified Europe. But as a rule, obstructing action seems to be what the UN does best.

Notice, however, that it has even this negative effectiveness only if the hegemon cooperates. When it does not, the reality of political power shows itself. The U.S. matters much, the UN little – and other states behave accordingly. Those that see it as in their interest to cooperate with the U.S. will



A portrait of the caliph Ali, Muhammad's son-in-law and one of the holiest figures in Shia Islam, overlooks Al Rasheed Street in Baghdad, June 2003. GEERT VAN KESTEREN PHOTO

join in a “Coalition of the Willing” established outside the UN and in indifference to, if not tacit repudiation of, its bogus authority, while others, finding it convenient to withhold their support, will do so under the mantra of supporting instead the UN and legality. The commitment to legality is highly selective: in the case of Iraq, the selectivity focused on UN resolution 1441, which aimed to bring to book a serial violator of both international law and UN resolutions, and which clearly implied a case for war in the event of Iraq’s noncompliance.

Thus, the very people who criticize the United States for “undermining” the UN (and thereby international law) by acting without regard for its approval are tacitly conceding the political reality: that the UN

is something of a charade except as it is supported by the U.S. But they resent having the charade so cruelly exposed, and cry “foul” accordingly. Being unwilling or unable to come to terms with the reality of American hegemony, or to admit that it is the best thing the world has going for it, they carp and decry whatever the U.S. does: for “interfering” in situation A, for not doing so in situation B.

Some of the habitual complainants, mainly those in governments, are cynical opportunists who know they can enjoy the benefits of American hegemony while disavowing, often with sanctimonious pronouncements (Canada comes to mind), any responsibility for the often distasteful things it must do – dealing with Saddam being a perfect case in point. Moreover, as

Machiavelli so truly observed, “hatred is acquired through good deeds as well bad ones,” and “because of the envious nature of men ... [they] are more ready to blame than to praise the actions of others.”⁶ But there is also a cohort of constant critics, mainly of the intelligentsia, who subscribe to some utopian fantasy of a world without war, peacefully governed by a “democracy of nations.” Realism here would begin with recognition that many UN delegations “represent” what are called governments and nations only as a political courtesy, and that these nations continue to wage wars, both among and within themselves, with indiscriminate brutality.

Because realistic thinking about international politics will never be within the competence of more than a small minority of people, public opinions on international issues will always be of limited value, and often more of a hindrance than a help to sound policy. Some measure of how little understanding most people – including those who observe and study politics for a living – have of political reality was revealed in the opinions of the professional journalists and experts trotted out to comment on the war. We have in mind especially all the public hand-wringing about the quasi-anarchy in Baghdad and Basra in the immediate aftermath of the regime’s collapse, as the experts assured anyone who would listen that it was because of a “failure of planning” on the Coalition’s part that they (allegedly) “were not prepared” for this. (And we wonder, incidentally, how many critics, given all the time in the world to think about it, would have imagined that Iraqis would loot their own hospitals.) Even ignoring the virtual impossibility of having 20,000 military police (complete with detention facilities)

on the streets of Baghdad within hours of American forces occupying the centre of the city, we are unaware of a single pundit who observed what should be obvious to anyone who has ever read Hobbes: it was a practical *necessity* that the Iraqi population experience a brief exposure to the anarchic “State of Nature” in order that *the Iraqis themselves* demand that Coalition forces restore “law and order.”

Doing so, even with a majority of the people cooperating, will take some time (more than months). And there are bound to be some rough patches ahead before governing the country can be turned over entirely to the Iraqis. The Ba’athists will not all go quietly into the night. The theocracy in Iran will stir up as much trouble among the Shi’ite population as it can (unless it finds its hands full at home, as there are encouraging signs it may, even without active American instigation). But despite these and likely other troublesome complications, it was a good war. ■

Notes

- ¹ References to Thucydides are by book and chapter. Translation based on *The Landmark Thucydides*, ed. Robert Strasser (New York: Free Press 1996). Occasional departures in light of the authors’ own reading of the Greek text are not explicitly identified.
- ² Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 15, par. 21.
- ³ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ed. and trans. Harvey Mansfield (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), ch. 12, par. 1.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, ch. 19, par. 2.
- ⁵ *The Economist*, May 31–June 6, 2003, p. 22.
- ⁶ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ch. 19, par. 7; *Discourses on Livy*, ed. and trans. Harvey Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), book 1, preface.

What does realism mean anyway?

A RESPONSE TO LARRY PRATT AND LEON H. CRAIG

LARRY PRATT AND LEON CRAIG, TO THEIR credit, concede that the Ba'ath government of Iraq represented no undeterrable threat to the United States and that the United States cannot, and will not, bring democracy to Iraq (something they don't regard as desirable in any event). Unfortunately, that leaves them with little to justify the war.

Two thirds of the way through their article, after much discussion of Thucydides, the illusory nature of law without force and other generalities, Pratt and Craig finally provide three reasons which, they say, were individually sufficient and collectively overwhelming justifications for war: regime change, the allegedly increased authority of the United States as a result of the war and the importance of control of Iraq's oil. Each of these justifications is factually and morally flawed.

The first "justification" is just a restatement of the issue. The second reason – increased authority – is based on a mistaken factual premise: the Iraq war did not add to the U.S.'s authority, but has represented an immense expenditure of diplomatic capital. As we write, the U.S. is sinking money and troops into Iraq to the barely concealed *schadenfreude* of the non-anglophone world. The political authority of Tony Blair and Jacques Chirac, both internationally and

domestically, have virtually reversed in position because of their stances on the war.

Even if their factual premise were true, Pratt and Craig do not explain why building authority for a state is a legitimate reason to kill people. Pratt and Craig assume that it is in the interests of the West in general, and the United States in particular, to project an image of power. But the chief threat to western interests in the world, especially in the Middle East, may be an exaggerated belief in American omnipotence. If, as too many believe, the United States is all-powerful, then the inevitable question of theodicy arises: how can it tolerate our suffering unless it is malevolent? The 96 per cent of the world with no emotional investment in American patriotism cannot be expected to come up with a pious answer to this question: the United States must either convince suffering humanity of the limits of its power, or be blamed for everything. The idea – implicit in the doctrine of "shock and awe" – that it is a good idea to convince Muslims and Arabs that they are impotent against the United States ignores the fact that what we have to fear is rage and desperation.

The third reason, oil, raises the suspicion that Pratt and Craig are more interested in provoking conventional leftist opponents of



The U.S. Army found these farmers hiding some AK-47s, ammunition, a field telephone and small explosives, Tikrit, August 2003. Taken to an improvised prison on an army base, they were forced to do the "elephant walk." GEERT VAN KESTEREN PHOTO

the war than persuading anyone. Again, there are factual problems. Saddam has not really controlled Iraq's oil exports since 1991. As Norman Angell pointed out a century ago, the cheapest way to get resources is to buy them. Militarily occupying countries is a terribly inefficient way to obtain energy. And again, as the protesters point out, it would be morally wrong to trade blood for oil, if that is what Pratt and Craig are proposing. In this respect, the protesters are surely on the safe ground of conventional morality. A war for oil, no matter how scrupulously conducted, would be felony murder in furtherance of armed robbery. We should be prepared to give the Bush and Blair administrations the benefit of the doubt when they say they intended no such thing.

Elsewhere in their text is a more likely reason: the prospect of social revolution imposed by U.S.-U.K. military power in Iraq and perhaps throughout the Muslim world. Pratt and Craig propose to "reform the character" of the people of Iraq through a wholesale transformation of their "educational systems and religious institutions." They hypothesize that these "structural changes" will diminish the sources and support for terrorism. They concede this reformation will take "generations" and cannot be accomplished by a government accountable to the "antiliberal" and "irresponsible" *demos*. It seems reasonable to infer that they therefore contemplate an occupation lasting decades, until the hegemon is able finally to certify the Iraqi people pure and free of atavistic nationalism and irrationalist fundamentalism, and ready for democracy.

I don't doubt that Iraq's educational systems and even religious institutions could use improvement. But I do question the effectiveness of the instrument Pratt and Craig have nominated for the task. Indefinite foreign occupation, particularly of the kind that dictates the content of elementary school texts and religious sermons, has never, before this, led to a decline in xenophobic attitudes and desperate violence. For realists, Pratt and Craig have a remarkable faith in the effects of educational reform. Their project is remarkably similar not only to the attempts of French colonialism to

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instruct Algerian children in the ways of "our ancestors, the Gauls," but also of the Soviet empire's attempt to forge a socialist man no longer attached to particularist identities. Both had generations of human material to work with; neither was conspicuously successful in educating its subjects out of their national and religious loyalties.

Pratt and Craig do not count the costs of the permanent revolution they propose, nor do they estimate the American people's willingness to bear them. But the softwood lumber tariff would be a small price indeed for Canada to avoid participation in such a foolish adventure in remote social engineering.

Most of Pratt and Craig's piece is devoted not to concrete justifications of this specific

war but to a generalized celebration of "realism", "hegemony" and other tough-sounding concepts of international relations theory. They announce proudly, at the beginning of their piece, that they regard themselves as standing in the tradition of Realism that extends from Thucydides to Raymond Aron (although they neglect Aron's very relevant observations on France's war to retain Algeria). But Realism turns out to be a very slippery concept. I was able to track the following meanings Pratt and Craig assigned to Realism:

R1: In determining the correctness of a course of conduct, one should acknowledge reality as it is, not as one would like it to be.

R2: Contrary to the reasoning of David Hume, one can derive an "ought" from an "is."

R3: An international order of states requires the existence of a hegemonic state so powerful that it dominates all other states in the system.

R4: The most important dimension of power is military power. It is always the most effective complement to other forms of power.

R5: The world system today, and for the foreseeable future, is not multipolar but unipolar, with the United States as the hegemonic power.

R6: Political and military actions are the basis of human greatness.

R7: Less powerful states are smart to do what the hegemon wants.

R8: There should be no moral or legal presumption against war. War, like peace, should be judged on its consequences. That these consequences are unforeseeable is not a reason for a moral or legal presumption against war.

R9: Smart politicians make claims they do not believe to be true.

R10: Often what is right fails to happen because no one with the might to make it happen does so.

R11: The United Nations is a hypocritical institution, best at obstructing action, but not always capable even of that.

R12: The positions states take on the legality of wars is, in fact, based on considerations of their own convenience.

R13: Citizens of weaker states, especially those with university educations, resent the power of hegemons, no matter what they do, so there is no point trying to please them.

Some of these propositions are platitudes: if the test of Realism is agreement with R1, R10 or R12, we are all Realists. The rest are debatable: it is possible to be perfectly sane and believe the contrary "naive" propositions:

N2: It is logically invalid to derive a normative proposition from a factual one.

N3: The most stable international order is one with a balance of power.

N4: While military force is *ultimately* necessary to secure a legal order, it is not always, or even usually, the most effective form of power.

N5: The world system today, and for the foreseeable future, is multipolar. This is not a demand of petulant French politicians, but a fact which the United States has to adapt to. The United States, while *primus inter pares*, can only act against the consensus of other states at a heavy price. The relative decline of the power of the United States in the next generation is probable.

N6: Cultural, scientific and commercial achievements are more significant than military power. The tourists he imagines at Sparta's ruins were more right than Thucydides about the relative importance of Sparta and Athens in world history.

N7: Nonhegemonic states can be just as effective at advancing their interests as more powerful ones. What they lack in total resources, they may make up in focus.

N8: There should be a heavy presumption against war, both for moral and for prudential reasons. War is intentional killing, and its consequences cannot be predicted or controlled.

N9: Smart politicians avoid making claims that are later proven false.

N11: The United Nations, although imperfect, has a better claim to represent global opinion than the U.S. administration.

N13: R13 is true. However, it is one reason why a reputation for power is not the un-mixed blessing realists claim.

Leaving aside the three philosophical propositions, the difference between the "realist" positions put forward by Pratt and Craig and their "naive" counterparts is really the difference between a vision of global affairs as involving primarily zero-sum interactions and one involving potential gains from cooperation (gains which may not be realized because of ideological passions and bargaining failures). Ultimately, the difficulty for Pratt and Craig is that the goals variously stated by the U.S. and U.K. governments – nonproliferation, suppression of terrorist activity, democracy and human rights in the Middle East – clearly do require cooperation for their realization.

— Gareth Morley

Geert van Kesteren

PHOTOJOURNALIST ABROAD

GEERT VAN KESTEREN IS AN AWARD-winning Dutch photojournalist based in Amsterdam. He and his wife Conny Luhulima – whose family comes from Maluka in Indonesia – have two children. “I work abroad,” he says. “That way I keep my private and professional life separate.”

He has photographed the lives of ordinary people – ordinary people living, however, in some of the world’s most troubled countries. He spent two and a half years in Zambia, working on a project on AIDS in Africa with writer Arthur van Amerongen. Their book *Mwenda jangula! AIDS in Zambia* was published by Transaction in 2000. Geert has worked on a UNICEF project about child trafficking in India, Nepal, Ivory Coast and Haiti, and has photographed in the slums of Dhaka. Since 1994, he has visited the Middle East more than 40 times, and his first visit to Iraq was in 1998. In a project for Stern magazine, he and his colleagues interviewed and photographed Uday Saddam Hussein, Saddam’s sadistic playboy son.

Here are some of Geert’s own comments about the war in Iraq:

The politics of repression are harsh. People in such situations become assertive, aggressive or depressed. The lack of respect for human rights gives people the feeling they have nothing to lose. For some, this makes the step toward radicalism, fundamentalism or violence an easy one. Others are able to stay calm and search for peaceful solutions.

I visited Iraq this year in May and June with the help of UNICEF and in August for Newsweek magazine. “Oil brought us nothing but misery” is an oft-heard complaint. Another is “Iraq needs a ruler like Saddam.” These two quotes tell you something about Iraqis’ mood. Under Saddam, Iraq was a tough place to live. Sanctions made the country very poor. Shi’ites and Kurds suffered badly.

Iraqis did not much trust America before the war. The U.S. encouraged the Shi’ites and Kurds to rise against Saddam during the first Gulf war in 1991. But when they did rise up, U.S. troops stayed in Kuwait and did not help them. Saddam remained in power and killed hundreds of thousands. (An eyewitness told me he saw U.S. helicopters flying overhead while Saddam’s troops were arresting all boys and men in the city of Hilla. Subsequently, all were killed.)

While the U.S. insisted Saddam obey UN resolutions, the U.S. did not do the same for Israel. Many Iraqis feel this is a great injustice. The U.S. freed the Iraqis from Saddam, but what did they give them in return? So far, most feel the situation in their country has worsened. People hope – one day – that things will take a turn for the better, but they are sceptical and pessimistic. Most people do not care who is ruling the country, but they demand security: no more terror attacks, no more Coalition soldiers who point their guns at you, and a police force that arrests criminals and puts them in jail.



The family of Theddah Hafed searched different mass grave sites for 10 days for the remains of her two sons, Fasal and Naim, both executed in 1991, and finally found them in the mass grave at Al Mahawil, May 2003. Three days earlier, Fasal’s son was killed by the U.S. Army. GEERT VAN KESTEREN PHOTO

Iraq, state sovereignty and human rights

by Gareth Morley

UNLIKE LARRY PRATT AND LEON CRAIG, WHEN THE WAR IN IRAQ was still a future prospect, I supported the government of Canada's decision (inconsistently applied and incoherently defended as it was) to stay out of the U.S.-led "coalition of the willing" aimed at deposing the Iraqi regime. My reasons were typical enough. I accepted that Iraq's regime was a totalitarian gangster state, but doubted it posed a serious undeterrable threat to any other country, let alone the United States. I expected Iraqi popular reaction to military occupation would be mixed at first, and get more hostile over time. I worried that Islamist and nationalist militants would use the invasion and occupation of an Arab country to recruit assassins to kill the western nationals whose security was ostensibly the point of the exercise. I believed the Bush administration's cynical use of the proliferation issue and bad

faith in the Security Council would make a genuinely multilateral antiproliferation regime impossible. I resented Ambassador Cellucci's presumption in threatening us with protectionist measures if we did not accept his government's view of security and was disheartened by the craven response of our business class and conservative ideologues to this threat. In all, I thought the war neither just nor prudent and felt we were well out of it.

I now write during the summer of 2003, a few months after the fall of Baghdad. Not



Live ammunition stacked by the Iraqi army in Aisha primary school in the Adhamie area of Baghdad, May 2003. The uncollected bullets are a serious threat to the neighbourhood and the children who play there. GEERT VAN KESTEREN PHOTO

enough time has elapsed since the invasion for historical perspective, but it is already too late for reactions uncontaminated by hindsight. We now know that the evidence for the *casus belli* – that Iraq was developing chemical, biological and nuclear weapons – was deliberately exaggerated by the U.S. and U.K. governments, and it seems unlikely that any such weapons will be found.¹ It is also now beyond dispute that the occupying powers face considerable popular resistance from both Shi'ites and Sunnis and, more unexpectedly, are not even equipped to deal with the logistical problems of restoring power and water to the Iraqi people.

In addition to those missing "weapons of mass destruction," there are a number of other rationales few sophisticated proponents of war bother with any more. The U.S. and U.K. maintained that Iraq was "linked" to Al Qaeda, and when the fighting began a majority of the American people believed Saddam Hussein was responsible for the attacks of September 11, 2001: these allegations have been discredited and quietly abandoned.² The Bush administration also put forward a pompous and dangerous "doctrine" of pre-emption of potential threats that would justify every war ever fought and that it is surely unwilling to see invoked by others.³

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I have no objection to trying to hold Bush and Blair accountable for their misstatements, whether intentional or negligent. But I agree with the proponents of the war that focusing on these misstatements misses the point. Bad reasons have been given for just wars before this. In truth, we knew all along that Bush and Blair were “sexing” up the case for war. Some of the justifications were *supposed* to be disbelieved: given the hostility to the United Nations on the American right, Bush could make his famous statement that he was going to war so that the UN would remain “relevant” only because no one believed him for a second.⁴

Iraq and international law

The difficult question is whether the invasion and occupation of Iraq could have been justified without these misstatements. Trying to answer this question in a systematic way, it is natural to turn to the only generally accepted normative system we have for judging the justice of war, international law. Based as it is on the inviolability of national sovereignty, international law cannot justify the Iraq invasion. If the Iraqi government had been complicit in the September 11 attacks, as the Bush administration alleged, and as the Taliban regime in Afghanistan clearly was, this would satisfy anyone’s definition of aggression against the United States. However, once it is admitted that no such link was ever plausible, let alone proven, the case against Iraq was based entirely on possible future threats and the tyrannical nature of the regime, neither of which counts as aggression.

True, the Ba’ath regime had committed indisputable acts of aggression against Iran and (more relevantly) Kuwait in the past.

The U.S. and U.K. alleged violations of the 1991 peace terms; however, their refusal to allow independent adjudication of their claims, which now appear to be false, deprives them of any justification on this basis. Nor does their legalistic claim that the invasion was authorized by UN Security Council Resolution 1441 hold any water. Resolution 1441 was only obtained by an explicit promise that the Security Council itself would determine noncompliance. U.S. Ambassador Negroponte stated:

*As we have said on numerous occasions to Council members, this Resolution contains no “hidden triggers” and no “automaticity” with respect to the use of force. If there is a further Iraqi breach, reported to the Council by UNMOVIC [the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission headed by Hans Blix], the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency], or a member state, the matter will return to the Council for discussions.*⁵

Since the invasion had no authorization by the appropriate UN body and could not plausibly be described as collective or individual self-defence by any of the Coalition members, it was, strictly speaking, aggression as that term is understood in the UN Charter and in international law more generally. The atrociousness of the Ba’ath regime, and its internal and external record of violence, are completely irrelevant to this judgement.

We cannot assume, without argument, that respect for positive international law is either right or in Canada’s interest. What we can conclude is that the wisdom and morality of ignoring the sovereignty of undemocratic states in the developing world was precisely what gave the Iraq conflict its significance for both its opponents and sup-



A UN World Food Programme truck overturned on the Basra-Baghdad road, June 2003. The driver keeps looters away from the bags of flour scattered on the ground. GEERT VAN KESTEREN PHOTO

porters. It is also fair to regard the consequences of the Iraq war – for global stability, western interests and the welfare of the Iraqi people – as a test of the broader principle.

The challenge to state sovereignty

One of the interesting, and alarming, consequences of the war in Iraq has been the emergence of a self-conscious group, with influence in Washington and London, that is explicitly hostile to the principle of noninterference in the affairs of other countries. Those interventionists who pride themselves on realism argue that respecting the sovereignty of hostile countries poses unacceptable security risks in the post–September 11 era. Those of a more progressive cast (most notably Tony Blair himself, but among

the punditry Michael Ignatieff and the New Republic) want the West to use its military power to rescue the victims of tyranny and chaos from the malevolence and failure of their governments, whether international lawyers approve or not.

The emergence of foreign policy elites, with real influence, prepared to argue for the self-conscious assertion of an imperial supersovereignty is not an entirely new event, but it is not exactly familiar either. Certainly, the United States intervened far and wide during the Cold War, and the administrations of the elder Bush and Bill Clinton engaged in a number of interventions that could not be justified as responses to interstate aggression. But only under the second Bush – who ran as the candidate of a “humbler” foreign policy and eschewed “nation building” – has there been a seri-



A woman goes to work early in the morning past a wall pockmarked with bullet holes, Baghdad, May 2003. GEERT VAN KESTEREN PHOTO

ous attempt to generalize an interventionist ideology, explicitly counterposed to the understanding that each state is juridically equal and sovereign within its territory and can only be attacked in response to actual or imminent aggression.

We cannot evaluate the doctrine put forward by this new “war party,” of which the Iraq war was the testing case, without considering the benefits of the normative system it proposes to displace, which I call “Westphalianism” after the 1648 treaty that ended Europe’s Thirty Years War between Catholic and Protestant powers by establishing the right of each prince to dictate the religion of his subjects. In its most defensible form, Westphalianism is a limit on the authority of states to exercise coercive power outside their own borders to proportionate responses to imminent or actual acts

of aggression against those states and their allies. Initial aggression is defined as violation of the equal sovereign rights of a member of the state system: primarily invasion, blockade and flouting of treaty obligations. If universally respected, Westphalianism would make international war impossible. When violated, Westphalianism provides an objective referent to the term *aggression*, which any workable and limited concept of just war requires.

Westphalianism is consistent with democratic theories of legitimacy: since no government is accountable to populations outside its borders, no government has a mandate to act coercively with respect to them. Therefore, a government that is domestically democratic has no right (in the absence of aggression against itself or its allies) to overthrow the regime of another state because

it is authoritarian. This does not mean Westphalians are committed to the legitimacy of any undemocratic regime as against the people living in it, but only as against foreign states. Thus, the remedy for tyranny is revolution, not invasion.

It is a mistake to reject Westphalianism as a naive doctrine: its most notable expositions, the Charter of the United Nations and the Treaty of Westphalia itself, were produced by hardheaded realists reflecting on decades of bloody international conflict. After World War II, sovereignty, as understood in the Westphalian system, became the lodestar of all anticolonial movements. Those who wish to transcend it now need to recognize the threat international conflict and colonialism represent to the values they espouse.

Still, it is difficult for a thinking person to be completely happy with the Westphalian solution. First, the security threats most people face, in both rich and poor countries, are no longer mainly invasion by foreign states. In the rich countries, we need to worry about the proliferation of terrorist groups whose capacity to create mass death without any overt state support has been enhanced by contemporary information and weapons technology. The rest of the world faces the additional threats of civil war and breakdown of order. As members of the war party have pointed out, respect for national sovereignty does not assist in addressing these sovereign externalities.

But the assertion of greater willingness to use what Joseph Nye calls U.S. hard power does not address these threats either.⁶ Any effective antiproliferation regime requires the cooperation of all state actors, along with verification by credibly inde-

pendent agencies. It is true that we cannot really let this regime be optional, as required by the Westphalian doctrine that each state’s armaments are its own business. Ultimately, military action by the United States and its allies may be needed against demonstrated noncompliance with agreed-to antiproliferation treaties, or even against refusal to sign on to them. However, credible threats need to be conditional threats. A state considering whether to develop weapons forbidden by international treaty needs to know not only that if it builds prohibited weapons it will be punished, but also that if it complies with international antiproliferation conventions it will be safe. And it needs to know that noncompliance will be judged objectively, and not used as a pretext.

A state considering whether to develop weapons forbidden by international treaty needs to know not only that if it builds prohibited weapons it will be punished, but also that if it complies with international antiproliferation conventions it will be safe.

By refusing to allow any independent verification of its accusations of illegal development of weapons against Iraq, the Bush administration completely undermined the logic of deterrence necessary to make such a comprehensive antiproliferation regime workable. If the absence of WMDs failed to save Iraq’s government, similarly situated tyrannies in the future can only reason that they may as well be hung for a sheep as for a lamb, and go all out to develop nuclear weapons. Indeed, the North Korean regime seems to have reasoned in precisely this way.

Similarly, disrupting terrorist groups is necessarily a multilateral activity with a very limited role for American hard power. States that undermine such efforts can be confronted on traditional Westphalian principles. But states that do participate must have their own security interests recognized, whether they are democracies or not.

Abandoning deterrence in favour of removing every unfriendly and undemocratic regime cannot make the United States or its allies safer. It can only have the effect of globalizing every local conflict, as the occupier necessarily takes sides in the ethnic and political divisions endemic to the human condition. The Iraq experience is already demonstrating this melancholy truth.

U.S.-U.K. military occupation will never be as brutal as the Ba'ath regime, but what comes next, particularly if it is based on an Islamist ideology, may be.

At the time of writing, polls indicate that the most popular party in Iraq is al-Dawa, an anti-American Shi'ite group with ties to the Iranian government. Will the occupying authority allow elections that would bring al-Dawa to power, or will it try to prop up local clients whose accountability is to Washington? The early indications are that it will do the latter: the toothless and hand-picked Iraqi Governing Council's first official act was to ban the celebration of Iraq's existing state holidays, which are to be collectively replaced by April 9, the anniversary of the fall of Baghdad to the U.S. military. The occupiers had to enforce the ban against mass protests on July 14, the anniversary of the fall of the Hashemite dynasty in Iraq.

The difficulty is that occupying powers, even those initially greeted as liberators, inevitably have to choose between local clients who are loyal to them and genuine representatives of the people. Virtually without exception, occupiers choose the former. As a result, the enemies of those local clients become the enemies of the occupying power, whose nationals then become targets. This, rather than military defeat, is why France left Algeria and the United States left Vietnam, at a time when the development of technology and international mobility was far less advanced than it is today.

Moreover, the natural leaders of an anti-occupation *intifada* in Iraq represent a far greater security threat to western nationals than the cynical and degenerate party-state the Coalition has removed. Ba'ath ideology, with its Arab nationalism and socialist phraseology, has long since lost any ability to motivate self-sacrifice: it survived through fear and corruption. But Islamic fundamentalism – the ideology best placed to lead the anti-occupation struggle – is demonstrably capable of mobilizing adolescent idealism in the cause of murdering westerners.

Westphalianism and human rights

If interventionism will not make us safe, will it bring justice to those oppressed by the tyranny and lawlessness so common in postcolonial states? Those who reject right-wing interventionism need to address the moral argument, usually associated with the left, that it is wrong to leave the victims of tyranny and ethnic cleansing to an illusory right of revolution. Stated most directly, if war and occupation reduce the sum of in-



In Saddam City, Baghdad, where 2 million Shia Muslims live, in June 2003 there was no running water and no electricity, and garbage remained uncollected in 50 Celsius temperatures. GEERT VAN KESTEREN PHOTO

nocent death and suffering, are they not therefore justified?

The moral issues are not as simple as the left interventionists sometimes pretend. Their arguments are based on the questionable consequentialism whose implications undergraduate philosophy instructors love to discuss: while self-defence is thought (by nonpacifists) to sometimes justify killing, even of the innocent, is it permissible to kill because we expect fewer total deaths? To put the problem another way, the war-making power is responsible for the deaths of all those killed by the war it starts; it is not responsible for the deaths of those killed by a foreign tyranny. If the war was really

started by a specific act of aggression, then the defending power can legitimately disclaim responsibility for innocent deaths it causes, so long as it tries to minimize them. But the same cannot be said by a state that starts a war because it estimates it will thereby minimize total death and misery: such a state is responsible for the deaths its war causes, and has used those people as a means to promote aggregate well-being.

Personally, I would not want to rest the argument entirely on a philosophical asymmetry between acts and omissions. More pragmatically, we should recognize our lack of knowledge of, or power to control, the unintended consequences of our actions.



Carrying the remains of Theddah Hafed's sons, found in the mass grave at Al Mahawil, May 2003. GEERT VAN KESTEREN PHOTO

The assumption that we can calculate precisely the sums of misery and death involved in overthrowing a foreign tyranny and “rebuilding” an entire country through armed occupation is perhaps the latest incarnation of the rationalistic hubris that caused so much trouble in the last century. True, we can estimate the number of victims of the Ba’ath regime and of the war to displace it.⁷ But we do not know what would have happened to the Ba’ath if indigenous sources of resistance had been allowed to operate, particularly if they had not been crippled by the sanctions regime that had the unintended effect of making the Iraqi population more dependent on the state.

Nor do we know what future suffering awaits the Iraqi people. Human rights do not flourish in conditions of instability and war, or under occupation. Soldiers, particularly in the American military tradition, are not trained to be either culturally or politically sensitive. Occupation, including oc-

cupation justified on humanitarian grounds, generates cultural miscommunication at best and racist dehumanization of the occupied people at worst. These conditions are fertile ground for atrocities and repression. U.S.-U.K. military occupation will never be as brutal as the Ba’ath regime, but what comes next, particularly if it is based on an Islamist ideology, may be. After all, the displaced Ba’ath regime was itself the product of a historical process set in motion by forgotten bureaucrats in the British Colonial Office with far broader minds and more sympathy for Arab culture than Bremer and Rumsfeld.

More generally, the idea of using invasion and occupation as a vehicle to spread democratic self-rule (as opposed to a stop-gap against genocide) is an illusion, since home rule is a necessary, if clearly not sufficient, condition of popular self-rule. Moreover, a Wilsonian crusade by western countries to transform the undemocratic South

cannot escape the legacy of colonialism. As a relatively recent acquisition, national sovereignty remains popular in developing countries, even among those who are unable to wield sovereign power themselves. If the United States were to overthrow Castro or Mugabe, no doubt some émigré groups would applaud, but it cannot seriously be contended that average Latin Americans or Africans would, however little sympathy they had for the dictators. To the extent that democracy can be exported at all, it can only be through the traditional liberal means of encouraging the exchange of people, ideas and goods.

Again, though, Westphalianism should not be absolute. In the case of an imminent or ongoing wholesale massacre of a subpopulation of a state, if another state can intervene without contributing too much to international insecurity, it should. I would not want to say that the Vietnamese government was wrong to overthrow the Khmer Rouge, for example. Respect for sovereignty, important as it is to the stability and peace of the world, cannot be so absolute that it requires us to remain passive when whole populations are slated for elimination.

However, a limited right to prevent genocide, while contrary to Westphalian orthodoxy, maintains the normative symmetry and juridical equality of states that the aggressive Wilsonian left would abandon. Any state, including Communist Vietnam, should be able to prevent genocide. In addition, a limited right of humanitarian intervention need not abandon deterrence and proportionality: even a tyranny should be permitted to escape invasion and regime change if it will stop its genocidal program.

Ba’athist Iraq was as guilty of attempted genocide against its Kurdish population as

it was of aggression against its neighbours. However, as the leftist protestors never tire of pointing out, the U.S.’s action was *not* precipitated by the mass slaughters of the Iraqi regime. Genocidal intention justified the Coalition’s 1992 willingness to carve out a *de facto* Kurdish state from Iraqi territory, and justified the assistance the U.S. and U.K. gave to the Kurds after that time. But it did not justify the 2003 war: no conditional threats were made to protect a targeted population. Rather, the issue of genocide was taken up as opportunistically as the issue of proliferation.

Even with respect to genocide, it is important, as policy wonk cocktail parties celebrate the merits of clever revisionist arguments for imperialism, to recall that the colonial empires, without exception, engaged in mass enslavement, dispossession and death. The psychology of occupation generates the projection of a not-quite-human Other, itself precisely the psychological basis for genocide. *Primum non nocere* should not be forgotten, even here.

Limiting American power

The most interesting thing about the year and a half since the “Axis of Evil” speech is that it has revealed that the United States is not quite the all-powerful hegemon it thinks, and its enemies fear. It has played out its hand of hard power, imagining it can force other countries to follow its lead through threats and bribes. Canada received a mild dose of this self-defeating hardball; Turkey and Chile can show bruises. And yet, the United States failed to secure any of its interests in this manner; the Bush administration is easily the most globally unpopular government in American history and it

has bought itself a sinkhole of blood and treasure in Iraq.

Canada cannot look on the immediate future with equanimity. For the most part, our tedious bilateral conflicts with the United States aside, our substantive interests are those of our neighbour. We want stability and democracy and trade. As a middle power, we know that these things can be secured only through a global system of law and mutual accommodation. We also know that no such system can exist unless the United States is a part of it, and it will not be unless it perceives that its interests will thereby be advanced. Most optimistically, the experience of the last year may cause the United States to return to the “humbler” policy advocated by Candidate Bush, with his sensible distrust of Wilsonian hubris. For Iraq, this would mean inviting genuine multilateral involvement in the transition to a new regime, something a sensible U.S. administration would welcome as reducing the burden of occupation on itself. Any such multilateral occupying regime would face many of the same problems that the U.S.-U.K. occupation faces, with the additional difficulties inherent in multilateral decision-making. But it would enjoy greater legitimacy from Iraqis and, with luck, could reproduce the undisastrous if imperfect circumstances of the former Yugoslavia.

More generally, however, multilateralists and noninterventionists need to find ways of addressing some of the problems the trendy proponents of empire point out are not dealt with satisfactorily either by a Westphalian system of sovereign states or by our existing multilateral institutions. The multilateralists need to accept a presumption in favour of state sovereignty, the

Westphalians that there are genuine externalities that only global institutions can address. Both, however, are right to think that the only state system that is likely to be either legitimate or enduring is one that accepts the normative equality of all states, and concedes to none the sole prerogative of making war. Canada is reasonably well positioned to help the world take the first necessary steps in that direction: for that reason, it was wise to stay out of Iraq. ■

Notes

¹ See, for example, W. Pincus, “Bush faced dwindling data on Iraq nuclear bid,” *Washington Post*, July 16, 2003, p. A1, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A61622-2003Jul15.html?nav=hptop_tb

² See J. Burke, “Ghost of al-Qaeda left out of story,” *London Observer*, July 27, 2003, for the statements and the subsequent evidence.

³ National Security Council, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (September 17, 2002), available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html>

⁴ “President’s Remarks at the United Nations General Assembly” (September 12, 2002), available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/09/20020912-1.html>

⁵ U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Wants Peaceful Disarmament of Iraq, Says Negroponte” (November 8, 2002), available at <http://usinfo.state.gov/topical/pol/terror/02110807.htm>

⁶ See Nye’s insightful *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World’s Only Superpower Can’t Go It Alone* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁷ Associated Press estimates the civilian deaths between March 20 and April 20, 2003 at a minimum of 3,240. As of July 28, 2003, Iraq Body Count, an unofficial group of researchers, stated that between 6,076 and 7,787 civilian deaths had been reported in reliable media outlets in 2003: see <http://www.iraqbodycount.net/>

The requirements of morality and politics

A RESPONSE TO GARETH MORLEY

IT IS WELL KNOWN THAT CANADIANS dislike the idea and practice of power politics. Like pious puritans who prefer not to acknowledge the realities of sex, Canadians avoid the subjects of power, national security and war. Instead, they place their bets on international institutions, champion “soft power,” and believe a new age of “human security” is upon us.

Above all, Canadians believe in the international legal order of independent sovereign states, which Gareth Morley calls Westphalianism. Canadian scholars like Morley don’t just deny the realities of international relations – a world of intervention, terrorism, war and fierce transnational doctrinal disputes. They are also, in many ways, fervid advocates of 19th- and early-20th-century American views of international politics. From the Monroe Doctrine to Republican isolationism in the 1930s, many Americans thought the appropriate response to the world’s problems was to assert moral superiority and avoid engagement. Having lost their empire and disliking much about the European Union, many in England did something analogous in recent decades. They trumpeted British virtues, and appropriately came to be known as “Little Englanders.” In effect, Morley is a good advocate for what we might label the “little Canadian” syndrome.

The entire gamut of problems posed by “failed states” in sub-Saharan Africa, by “rogue states” such as North Korea and Saddam’s Iraq, by viciously corrupt states such as Uzbekistan and Bangladesh, can allegedly be resolved within the framework of national sovereignty, generous foreign aid and eloquent rhetoric on human rights. Tyranny, for Morley, is a problem for internal revolution, not intervention. He writes in the tradition of Immanuel Kant, Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill and Tom Paine. Let us, then, think of Morley as Canada’s Bentham.

The unwillingness to face ugly facts – for example, that war is a permanent human institution – is characteristic of the Canadian approach to international affairs, and it helps explain why we have never produced a first-rank scholar of international politics. Our international scholars are, like Captain Ahab, too obsessed with their noble chase of the white whales of peace, international institutions and disarmament to give much attention to the realities of power politics. While Morley thinks of himself as a multilateralist, as a supporter of institutions such as the UN, his refusal to address the failures of these institutions makes him effectively an isolationist. He condemns realist approaches to world politics, even though policy rooted in the national interest of the

world's superpower may offer solutions to some of the complex conflicts we face.

A great power is by definition one that intervenes in the affairs of other states. Whether a particular intervention succeeds and can be justified depends on the merits of the case. In 1941, Britain intervened with force in Iraq because the Iraqi government was aligning itself with Hitler's forces. The intervention was a success. In 1942, as Rommel's armies approached Cairo, the British surrounded the king's palace and forced a change in Egypt's government. Count this intervention as a failure. It helped create a powerful nationalist myth among Egyptians, which later strengthened Nasser's hand during the 1956 Suez fiasco. As a third example, consider the Spanish Civil War from 1936 to 1939. France and Britain officially

The unwillingness to face ugly facts – for example, that war is a permanent human institution – is characteristic of the Canadian approach to international affairs.

supported nonintervention. Such nonintervention was actually a form of unofficial intervention on the side of the Fascists.

What of Canada's role in the recent war in Iraq?

Morley says that because the war "was neither just nor prudent," the Chrétien government "was wise to stay out of Iraq." We do not agree, and have argued at length why the removal of Saddam Hussein's murderous Ba'athist regime was both moral and necessary. Despite the postwar reconstruction frustrations – including the low-level combat casualties and the terrorist atrocities aimed at subverting the stability of postwar

Iraq – we see no reason to revise our view of the war or the elimination of Saddam's tyranny. Accordingly, we are critical of the cringing Canadian position on the war.

Morality first – that is, the moral obligations attendant upon a traditional ally, duties all the more exacting when matters are not going smoothly, and false friends reveal themselves for what they are. Machiavelli observed that anyone can be a "good friend" when assistance is not required. To be sure, given the abject state of the once-credible Canadian military, Canada could not offer much beyond moral support to the "Coalition of the Willing." But precisely because Canada is so heavily dependent on the United States for its defence, it has an obligation to stand by its superpower ally when the chips are down.

If Ottawa wanted to opt out of the Coalition of the Willing, it had an obligation – both to Americans and to Canadians – to conduct a serious parliamentary debate on the reasons why. This Chrétien was not prepared to do. Nothing remotely analogous to the British parliamentary debate took place in Ottawa. Chrétien's artful equivocations in the months before the war were reminiscent of Mackenzie King at his worst. Over Iraq, as over Hitler in the 1930s, Quebec public opinion was far more uniformly pacifist than elsewhere in Canada. Intent on assuring defeat of the PQ in the Quebec provincial election this spring, the PMO was resolved to give no hostages to the sovereigntists by conducting an open debate on the pros and cons of participating in the Iraq war. The conclusion may be harsh, but we suspect deliberations in the PMO turned far more on interpretation of domestic focus group results than on interpretation of Saddam's tyranny.



A skull is exposed to the people of Al Mahawil as the first mass grave in Iraq is discovered, May 2003. GEERT VAN KESTEREN PHOTO

U.S. and U.K. to overfly Iraq indefinitely. These were the Americans' problems. Our concern was to minimize domestic political discord and assure Jean Charest's victory. Canadians have become simultaneously dependent on American military strength and self-righteous in their reflexive anti-Americanism. In short, we failed to do the right thing; the Canadian "No" was morally deplorable.

But morality is not the only consideration. Politically, the Chrétien government was probably unwise to align itself with states such as France and Germany against the war. Canadian-American relations,

too many Canadians have come to see their highly privileged geopolitical status as a natural right. They think themselves exempt from any moral obligations to their U.S. protector. So what if Saddam had flouted a dozen UN resolutions, if he was running a police state, if he was diverting oil revenues to his military, if he was subsidizing Palestinian suicide bombers. So what if maintenance of a semblance of civil rights for Kurds and Shi'ites in Iraq required the

troubled by the 9/11 horror and its aftermath, were needlessly damaged by Canada's decision to hide behind UN equivocations. When we do have practical reasons to confront the Americans – as, for example, our diplomatic attempts to counter U.S. lumber protectionism – our cringing foreign policy decisions may well come back to haunt us. ■

— Larry Pratt and Leon H. Craig

Quebecers: a pacifist people?

by Antoine Robitaille

ARE QUEBECERS A FUNDAMENTALLY PEACEFUL, EVEN PACIFIST, PEOPLE? At the height of last winter's mobilization against the impending war in Iraq, when despite frigid temperatures the streets of a number of Quebec cities were filled for several weekends with people demonstrating against the war, many observers suggested that they are. On February 15, 150,000 to 200,000 people marched in downtown Montreal. As a proportion of the population, this was one of the world's largest antiwar marches, and New Democratic MP Svend Robinson hailed Montreal as the "peace capital."¹ Bernard Landry, then Premier of Quebec, made a bold suggestion: "This means that there really are two nations in Canada. Those who didn't know that can [now] see it clearly ... With all due respect, this shows that Quebecers are a nation and that this nation should have international status."²

Few accepted the Parti Québécois leader's link between the success of the demonstrations and the pressing need for independence. But on a strictly sociological plane, many shared his view that there is a great difference between the two solitudes, which the demonstrations made clear and the polls confirmed. In March 2003, surveys showed that even if the United Nations should approve of the invasion of Iraq, Quebecers favoured peace by a two-to-one margin. The rest of Canada favoured war, if it were supported by the UN, by the same



In May 2003, these students at Medina el Muddun school in Baghdad were among the fortunate ones, as only 30 per cent of children were attending school. GEERT VAN KESTEREN PHOTO

margin. Shortly after the U.S.-U.K. invasion of Iraq began, an Ipsos-Reid poll found that only 33 per cent of Quebecers supported the invasion, compared with 60 per cent of Albertans.³ This explains why all three party leaders in the Quebec provincial election campaign in progress at the time came out against the war. As journalist Raymond Giroux noted in the Quebec City daily *Le Soleil*, "All the polling firms from Léger Marketing through Ekos to Ipsos confirm this major difference of opinion between the two societies."

Conjectures

How can we explain this difference? Many of the explanations are in the realm of conjecture. After taking the pulse of Quebec's intellectuals, Josée Boileau still found herself faced with a real puzzle. "There is not one, but ten reasons" for the pacifist position of a majority of Quebecers in the winter of 2003, she wrote in *Le Devoir*.

A distinction needs to be made between the deep historic sources of Quebec resistance to the invasion of Iraq and factors that

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Prisoners at the improvised prison on a U.S. Army base near Tikrit, August 2003. The prison smelled badly of sweat and urine in the summer heat. GEERT VAN KESTEREN PHOTO

appear more superficial and circumstantial. Among the latter, Christian Boucher of Ekos points out that the image of Americans has become somewhat tarnished in Quebecers' eyes in recent years, particularly because of the softwood lumber dispute and the Bush administration's refusal to ratify the Kyoto Accord. The American national anthem was booed several times at the Bell Centre in Montreal in March 2003.

Historian Jocelyn Létourneau explains the success of the demonstrations in terms of a "cumulative mobilization effect" brought on by the success of the first marches: "Montreal appeared on screens

around the world as one of the cities most open to the cause of pacifism or to a negotiated solution to the Iraq problem. This would have been enough to make many Quebecers excited about participating in a great worldwide progressive movement." José Boileau, in *Le Devoir*, along with Professor Michel Despland of Concordia University, invoked an "immigration effect." New Quebecers, especially in the Arab and Latino communities, were used to suffering the effects of war in their countries of origin: hence their strong presence in the streets. However, Boileau noted, while this is valid for Montreal, it is less so for other

Quebec cities where demonstrations were proportionally just as large.

The French connection

Some explain the Quebec position on Iraq through a strong media connection with France. Political scientist Louis Balthazar of Laval University has said for years that Quebec's perception of the United States in international matters is filtered through the prism of media based in France. Quebec dailies depend heavily on French agencies (such as Agence France-Presse) and publications for their international coverage: *Le Devoir* reprints articles from *Le Monde* and *Libération*, while *La Presse* turns to *Le Figaro*. As well, papers such as *Le Monde Diplomatique* and anti-American books such as those by Emmanuel Todd (*Après l'empire*⁴) and Éric Laurent (*La guerre des Bush*⁵) attract considerable attention among Quebec opinion-makers. In addition, American television networks are less influential in Quebec than in the rest of Canada. The CRTC noted in the fall of 2002 that 27 per cent of Canadians outside Quebec, but only 6 per cent of Quebecers, watched American television.⁶ As well, because of the language constraint, commentators on public affairs programs often rely more on French-language sources; those who are anglophone are often francophile and thus more sensitive to French positions (John MacArthur, the left-wing publisher of Harper's who is interviewed regularly on Radio-Canada on American questions, is an example). Given the position of France (the government and the people) in the latest Iraq conflict, it is reasonable to think that the French media connection was an important factor in the intensity of Quebec's opposition.

A pacifist tradition?

But let us look a bit deeper. Is there something in the Quebec soul that would predispose people to resist going to war?

There is evidence for the idea that Quebec has a peaceful, even pacifist, tradition. Take one highly symbolic fact: while many national anthems talk about military victories or call citizens to arms to defend the homeland, in Quebec the song foreseen as a national anthem in case of eventual independence tells the "people of the land" that it is our turn to allow ourselves to "speak of love." The composer of this unofficial anthem – the national bard, Gilles Vigneault – is also the author of several other highly

Given the position of France in the latest Iraq conflict, it is reasonable to think that the French media connection was an important factor in the intensity of Quebec's opposition.

pacifist refrains, including the song "Les beaux métiers" (the fine, noble or worthy occupations):

*But don't be a soldier...
For it's not a worthy occupation
To go and kill carpenters⁷
From the other side of the world.
It's better to lose the war
Than to march in step
With the poor soldier ...
For the soldier's fate
Is to become his rifle
To become his own tool
It's the saddest thing on earth
The fate of the soldiers...
Who march in step
To kill soldiers.*

Of course, these are only songs, but they echo a number of occasions in the past when Quebec has rejected military solutions. According to many, in some four centuries of existence, Quebec has almost always chosen peace and renounced war. Thus the February 2003 demonstrations were only the latest episode in a longstanding tradition, the product of a kind of cultural peace gene.

The existence of this tradition, an idea that surfaced in Bernard Landry's widely noted speech, has been little studied. Serge Mongeau, physician, publisher, ecological philosopher and promoter of "voluntary

According to many, the February 2003 demonstrations were only the latest episode in a longstanding tradition, the product of a kind of cultural peace gene.

simplicity," deplored this lack in a short text in which he gave his own interpretation.⁸ Several experts, including Jocelyn Coulon and Béatrice Richard, found this interpretation one-sided and erroneous, but it illustrates the basis of the thesis of Quebec pacifism so well that we should have a look at it. Mongeau prefers the term *antimilitarism*, rather than *pacifism*, for the alleged national character trait. In every age, he argues, Quebecers refuse to choose arms. He cites six different historical moments:

- *The campaign against the American Revolution (1775–77)*: Mongeau holds that the Canadiens did little to help the British in Canada defend against American attacks. He goes on to say that there were numerous demonstrations against the mobilization decreed by the British, notably at Terrebonne, Verchères and

Berthier. The conscripted militias of Trois-Rivières, Île d'Orléans and the Lower St. Lawrence refused to confront the Americans, and there were illegal public meetings against the war.⁹

- *The Patriote rebellion (1837–38)*: Despite the call to arms by Papineau and other members of the petty bourgeoisie, Mongeau says, the bulk of the population didn't go along, rejecting a violent solution.
- *The Boer War (1899–1902)*: English Canadians "wanted to support the British Empire, while the Canadiens [French Canadians] were opposed," notes Mongeau. This posed a dilemma for Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier: whichever way he turned, he would lose half his support. Mongeau cites historian Michel Brunet, who says that Laurier's opponent, Henri Bourassa, who was against any "external war," had understood the masses.
- *The opposition to the establishment of a navy in Canada (1910)*: In its fight to rule the seas, Britain called for reinforcements from its colonies, recalls Mongeau. Acting against Laurier, who wanted to create a Canadian navy, Henri Bourassa's Parti Nationaliste passed a resolution on July 17, 1910, which blamed the federal government for "throwing the country into a military torment, jeopardizing Canada's peace, and diverting millions destined for the development of our agriculture and transportation to build murderous arms and prepare for bloody wars."
- *World War I (1914–18)*: This was the notorious conscription crisis. Mongeau recalls that the 1917 Military Service Act



A woman searches for her missing son in the mass grave at Al Mahawil, May 2003. There was no forensic research and the U.S. Army did not secure the site to ensure that all victims' remains were treated with dignity and as many as possible could be identified and reburied. GEERT VAN KESTEREN PHOTO

was rejected by French Canadians and met with repeated and violent demonstrations in many Quebec cities. “There was even talk of secession in the Quebec Legislative Assembly,” writes Mongeau.

- *World War II (1939–45)*: To settle this new conscription crisis, the federal government organized a plebiscite. Serge Mongeau sees in its results a very clear illustration of the antimilitarist movement: English Canada accepted the principle of conscription with a 79 per cent majority, while 72 per cent of Quebecers rejected it. “Many young Quebecers took refuge in the woods or hid elsewhere, with the sympathetic support of the population,” writes Mongeau.

These six episodes were not the only times Quebec pacifism manifested itself. Mongeau claims that anything to do with the army arouses very little enthusiasm in Quebec. In 1992, for example, when asked, “Should the Canadian military budget be cut by 50 per cent, 25 per cent, 10 per cent, frozen or increased?”, Quebecers were Canada’s strongest partisans of draconian cuts (table 1). In the same study, when asked

whether they would be “inclined to fight for their country,” Quebecers again showed their distinctness with their strong negative response to this question.

In Mongeau’s eyes, episodes such as the conscription crises cannot be put down solely to Quebecers’ refusal to submit to the will of their British masters. He sees these episodes as being related more to a peace culture inherited from a rural past in which Quebecers had to concentrate on tilling the soil; to go to war was to risk the next winter’s food supply. From this starting point, having known little of war, Quebecers simply developed a “habit” of peace, Mongeau concludes.¹⁰

Jocelyn Coulon, director of communications and director of the Montreal campus of the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre and a commentator on military questions, is very sceptical of theories like Mongeau’s. He believes that Quebecers’ relationship with war and violence is more complex than we might think. Coulon notes, for example, that the Canadiens of New France were recognized as formidable warriors, having adopted military techniques from the First Nations, and in 1812 the Canadiens helped the British repulse the Americans. In the 20th century, the conscription crises were no doubt real, but he reminds us that Desmond Morton and other historians demonstrated that the two conscription episodes also engendered much tension in English Canada. As for Quebecers who “took to the woods,” Coulon believes that this is getting

into the realm of myth: “Desertion was not exclusively French Canadian.”

Exceptions

As well, there are a few episodes in Quebec’s history that are exceptions: times when Quebecers chose a military or violent solution, as in the rebellions of 1837–38 and the October Crisis of 1970. As against the proponents of the thesis of Quebec pacifism, some argue that for a while during these episodes, violent acts attracted majority support in Quebec. Another largely forgotten episode occurred in the 19th century: the formation of battalions of French Canadian Papal Zouaves. “In all, between 1868 and the surrender of Pope Pius IX in 1870, slightly over 500 Canadians went to Rome to defend the pope’s territory,” journalist André Pratte notes.¹¹ Very few of them actually saw combat, as historian Diane Audy points out, but this was not the end of the story. An association of Zouaves was established in their memory in Quebec City in 1899, and the movement “grew elsewhere in the province, even to the point that an actual regiment of Canadian Papal Zouaves was formed in the early 20th century.” In the 1950s it had some 2,000 members. But according to Pratte, this was more of a social club than an army. The Zouaves, more often than not, maintained order or formed honour guards on great occasions, the most recent being the pope’s visit to Quebec in 1984.

In sum, apart from these episodes and a few others,¹² Quebec’s history does seem to be marked by a rejection of violence and military solutions. More broadly, Quebecers have remained cool toward violent solutions of any kind. Today, for example, they uphold the principle of gun control more pas-

sionately than other Canadians. In fact, since the gun control law was adopted in 1995, support for this measure has always been strongest in Quebec, where it has remained steady at around 90 per cent.¹³ “We are not a people with arms in our mythology,” says University of Sherbrooke political scientist Jean-Herman Guay. Jocelyn Létourneau also notes that there is little in the way of a violent or extremist tradition in Quebec society. The Warrior, Force, Aggression, the Soldier: these are not models in which Quebecers typically recognize themselves, or that they value personally or see valued publicly.

Overall explanations

But how are we to explain Quebec’s apparent pacifist leaning, this “national character,” which Tocqueville defined as the sum of “prejudices, habits, dominant passions” of a people?¹⁴ Some historians and sociologists have hazarded explanations. Jocelyn Létourneau, while warning that in the absence of empirical studies “any explanation is an exercise in conjecture,” evokes the figure of the rebel who has trouble accepting recruitment into someone else’s cause. This figure, he notes, occupies a valued place in Quebec’s “pantheon of identity,” where it is “one of the central themes.” Létourneau sees this figure especially in those young men who in the 20th century went off to hide to avoid conscription, with family approval.

Another national figure might also play a role here: the martyr. Jacques Godbout pointed out in *L’Actualité* that Quebec has fewer heroes than martyrs; it particularly likes to remember those who have suffered and lost. From Jean de Brébeuf to René Lévesque, by way of Pierre Laporte, the

Table 1: Responses to polling question about Canadian military budget, Quebec and rest of Canada, 1992 (%)

Military budget should be:	Canada outside Quebec	Quebec
cut by 50%	16.8	43.7
cut by 25%	28.2	26.2
cut by 10%	12.4	8
frozen	27.3	16.7
increased	8.5	0.7
undecided/ refused to answer	7	4.8

memories of these martyrs are perpetuated in an impressive number of places. The effect of Catholicism, which teaches us to turn the other cheek, is clearly visible here. For Jacques Beauchemin, this propensity is also closely linked with the political and cultural situation of Quebecers, who draw from the “depths of minority culture” a natural sympathy for the downtrodden: “Since the Act of Union [1840], Quebecers have become used to dealing with unfavourable power relationships; they are particularly sensitive to those who find themselves in the same position.”

Sociologist and historian Stéphane Kelly recalls that Quebecers have been on the losing side in several military conflicts (1760,

In the new “West versus West” confrontation, at the centre of the deepening “Atlantic rift,” Canada and Quebec are converging and coming more and more to resemble the Old World.

1837–38). He adds that they do not feel a need to take a collective political position on a foreign war, since their state really has no international relations. This would lead them to be pacifists because – among other reasons – they feel that they on the margins of history. Toronto essayist Robert Fulford notes that “wars are made by national governments, and Quebec does not entirely recognize the legitimacy of the national government of Canada.” From a Quebecer’s point of view, it is clearly easier to adopt a radically idealist position¹⁵ (post-historical, American researcher Robert Kagan would say¹⁶).

We must be careful not to “essentialize Quebecers’ peaceful choices,” warns Profes-

sor Béatrice Richard of the Royal Military College of Canada, author of a notable book on the myth of Dieppe.¹⁷ Like others (Jacques Godbout in particular), she prefers the term *peaceful* to *pacifist* to describe Quebecers and their French Canadian ancestors. She notes that it was “historical circumstances” and a particular power relationship, not a prevailing peace ideology, that led French Canadians to opt for peace. In both 1914 and 1942, French Canadians rebelled, according to Richard, not so much against the war as against being coerced. They would have preferred having the choice of going or not. Nor was their reaction only a refusal to follow the wishes of their English masters and their British imperial conquerors. Above all it was “anti-conscriptionism.” In this regard she cites historian Elizabeth Armstrong: “It is beyond doubt that Quebec today stands solidly beside the Dominion to win the war. But it also denies, as firmly as yesterday, the need and the pertinence of sending its sons to fight overseas, unless they have freely chosen to do so.”

And when we look at the choices they did make, we have to acknowledge that young French Canadians answered the call to fight the Axis forces, says Richard: “During 1942, between 50,000 and 60,000 of them enrolled as volunteers for active service overseas. They totalled around 180,000 members at the end of the war, of whom between 84,000 and 90,000 came from Quebec.” Of course, these figures can be explained in part by the unemployment and lack of attractive alternatives for young francophones in the job market. But, she maintains, “Coming from a group that was so clearly anticonscription and anti-imperialist, and taking into account the prob-



Sunni Muslims in Baghdad celebrate Mawlid al-Nabiy, the anniversary of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, May 2003. Some used the celebration to protest against the Coalition occupation. GEERT VAN KESTEREN PHOTO

lems involved in integrating into an English-speaking army with a British tradition, the true worth of this effort deserves to be recognized.”

As for French Canadians who were opposed to conscription, according to Richard, their choice expressed mainly “an isolationist tendency comparable to that of the United States during the two world wars.” Thus it would be more the reflection of a “territorial and cultural North American identity than some upsurge of religious or ethnic sentiment.”

From Catholicism to social democracy

There are fundamentally two great historical reasons that have led Quebecers to choose a radical “peaceful” position at sev-

eral moments in their history. One is their status as a national minority, without a real international existence. The other is Catholicism, although since the Quiet Revolution the role of religion has been downplayed or even completely eliminated in favour of social democracy. The various Catholic Action movements that began to take root in Quebec in the 1930s, in which Michel Chartrand, Simone Monet-Chartrand, Gérard Pelletier, Jeanne Sauvé, Pierre Trudeau and other anticonscription figures participated, represented a first phase of this transition. After 1960, historical events such as decolonization, the counterculture and opposition to the Vietnam war left an indelible mark on the Quebec psyche. “Social democracy, although a latecomer to Quebec, radically transformed Quebec political culture starting in the 1960s,” notes

Stéphane Kelly. “It had begun in the early 20th century and was based on a humanist philosophy that rejected violent conflict as a way to resolve political or social problems.”

Now another figure comes to join the rebel and the martyr: the progressive. In the progressive as a figure and the progressive cause, Jocelyn Létourneau sees two poles of identity that are central to Quebec’s contemporary condition. For him, it is a “distinguishing mark of a society (for the sovereigntists, a nation) highly valued by the vast majority of public commentators in Quebec.” A large number of Quebecers respond to this figure and to this cause, thanks to which, says Létourneau, “they put themselves collectively on the world stage and present themselves and think of themselves as a collectivity whose minority position requires that it exist in peace and through negotiation, and whose future depends on endless dialogue.”

Létourneau even goes so far as to say that a new “clearcut alternative imposes itself on Quebecers at the dawn of the millennium: to be progressive or not to be.” In practice, he adds, it is “very difficult to be simultaneously a Quebecer and ‘to the right’, ‘reactionary’, ‘for the great, the rich, the celebrated and the winners.’” What Jocelyn Létourneau brings out here is crystallized in the repulsive figure of Elvis Gratton, a sort of bogeyman, a fiercely pro-American caricature who sides with the great, with “winners,” as well as being macho, homophobic, vulgar – everything the Quebec *doxa* (prevailing line of thought), or as Jocelyn Létourneau derisively calls it, the “general system of conventional thinking (GSCT),” abhors.¹⁸

This brings us back to Quebecers’ position in favour of the oppressed. Létourneau emphasizes that “the idea of suffering is cen-

tral to Quebecers’ identity. Having suffered and, through the state of their identity, symbolically suffering still, they can only express themselves by opposing any idea of suffering.” For many Quebecers, the U.S.-U.K. invasion of Iraq was seen first and foremost as a cause of suffering for the Iraqi people. A related position seems to be crystallizing with regard to the Israeli-Arab conflict – the conflict that can be said to have replaced the East-West opposition of the Cold War. For numerous Quebecers, the Palestinians, being clearly those who are suffering the most, are more deserving of their support.

A European identity?

If Quebec’s rejection of conscription at the time of the two world wars reflected a thoroughly North American isolationism, do the massive Quebec demonstrations against the invasion of Iraq in 2003 reflect a trend toward a new European-style identity?

In fact, there seems to be a deepening identity chasm between Quebec and the rest of Canada on the one hand and the United States on the other. The first area of disagreement is the Iraq war, with regard to which the Canadian government and a good part of the population of Canada outside Quebec chose not to follow their historic American and British allies. (Note that in English Canada, opponents of the war often invoke the tradition of peacekeeping as a cardinal value in Canada’s international relations. For example, Catherine Ford wrote in the *Calgary Herald*, “We are not false Americans, but true Canadians. And what are we good at as a nation? At making peace.”)

Quebec and the rest of Canada also disagree with the United States on three other



People from Musayyib look for remains of their relatives among bodies dug up from the mass grave near Faluja, May 2003. GEERT VAN KESTEREN PHOTO

social and cultural fronts: religion, same-sex marriage and marijuana. Pollster Michael Adams maintains that while Canadians are becoming less and less religious, the opposite is happening in the United States.¹⁹ And Naomi Klein has – cautiously – put forward the hypothesis of a Canadian “hippie nation,” underlining Canada’s “openness” with respect to same-sex marriage and medical use of marijuana, seemingly unthinkable in its neighbour to the south.²⁰

On all these questions, Quebec holds the most radical positions in Canada. It usually finds itself in opposition to Alberta, unquestionably the most American of Canadian provinces.²¹ On questions of power or multilateralism, as on social questions, Canada – with Quebec in the lead – is thus aligning itself increasingly with an “Old Europe” stance. It comes from Venus, while its neighbour to the south is from Mars (to re-

turn to Robert Kagan’s categories). In the new “West versus West”²² confrontation, at the centre of the deepening “Atlantic rift,”²³ Canada and Quebec are converging and coming more and more to resemble the Old World. Let us exclude here the old British metropolis, as well as the countries of the New Europe, whose governments have chosen to follow the United States to the end in the Iraq adventure (although it is questionable whether the people are following). Canada is one of the only countries in the Anglosphere, the countries that benefit from the Echelon spy system, that has refused to climb aboard the war train. Former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, with scathing irony, reproached his successor for having followed France and Canada’s “new friends”: the Russians, the Chinese and the Germans.

One thing is certain: as an Ekos poll in late March showed, support for Chrétien’s

refusal was strongest in Quebec: 85 per cent, compared to 71 per cent for the rest of Canada. We are forced to acknowledge that, contrary to what Bernard Landry said, the rest of Canada and Quebec are converging on many questions. Does Quebec simply embody a more “radical” Canada, or is Canada letting Quebec draw it toward France?

Some answer these questions with revealing caricatures. Writing in the ultra-neoconservative American online magazine FrontPage in April, after Bernard Landry’s defeat, Lowell Ponte suggested that Quebecers had realized that they no longer need to become independent: “The Franco-Canadians, three centuries after their de-

The federal government has gone essentially in Quebec’s pacifist direction. This undoubtedly allowed it to avert a serious crisis with Quebec, as Michael Ignatieff suggests, although there may be one brewing for the federal government in Alberta.

feat, have at last won. They have conquered their conquerors. Canada’s Leftist Prime Minister Jean Chrétien shares the culture, tongue, and anti-American political views of French President Jacques Chirac – both of whom, with typically French modesty, think it no accident that their initials J.C. are also those of Jesus Christ.” In other words, continued Ponte, “The nation north of the United States is no longer Canada. It has become France II, Nouvelle France, a cultural and political clone of the nation that behaved as America’s enemy.”²⁴

The new configuration

Ponte presents us with a broad caricature, to be sure. But he shows us how far we have come from the pro-free trade discourse of Quebec elites before September 11, the war in Afghanistan and the conquest of Iraq. Far, too, from the deluge of repetitive arguments in the nineties about “Quebec’s Americanness,” a dimension of our identity to which we had no choice but to “consent.” (And isn’t it significant that we hear practically no one talking about this theme any more?)

As Graham Fraser wrote in the Toronto Star last March, “Traditionally, Quebec has been more pro-American than other provinces; now, even among hockey fans, it is more anti-American.” For the past two years, terrorism and security, wars and the progressive cause have turned relations among the various players in North America upside down. And Quebec, partly in line with its history, has taken radical positions. In so doing it has made itself distinct, but the federal government, contrary to what happened in the past, especially during the conscription crises, has also gone essentially in Quebec’s pacifist direction. This undoubtedly allowed it to avert a serious crisis with Quebec, as Michael Ignatieff suggests,²⁵ although there may be one brewing for the federal government in Alberta. And the cooling between Canada and the United States has no doubt only begun. People suspect that Paul Martin, soon to be federal Prime Minister, wants to hire his friend Maurice Strong, radical multilateralist and former UN Under-Secretary-General (and one-time artisan of the National Energy Program), as a special adviser on foreign relations. This is a prospect which will no doubt please a majority of Quebecers, but may well enrage the influential neoconservatives in Washington. ■

Notes

- ¹ Graham Fraser, “Quebeckers more opposed to war than rest of Canada,” Toronto Star, March 23, 2003.
- ² Le Devoir, February 17, 2003, p. A3.
- ³ Some will argue that these polls show that, aside from Albertans, the rest of Canada had substantially the same opinion of the war as Quebec. More than 60 per cent of Ontarians, for example, also opposed the war “without the UN’s backing,” although with UN backing all polls showed clearly more Ontarians than Quebecers in favour of an invasion of Iraq. Let us also note that then-Ontario Premier Ernie Eves, like Alberta Premier Ralph Klein, sent the White House a letter of support, marking his official disagreement with the Chrétien government in the name of a hard core in favour of the invasion. This gesture didn’t stir much debate in the RoC. In Quebec, Bernard Landry went so far as to phone his personal congratulations to his political enemy Jean Chrétien.
- ⁴ Paris: Gallimard, 2002.
- ⁵ Paris: Plon, 2003.
- ⁶ Figures reported by Raymond Giroux in Le Soleil, March 1, 2003, p. A4.
- ⁷ The occupation changes as the song progresses to gardeners, labourers, prisoners, singers, financiers.
- ⁸ Serge Mongeau, ed., *Pour un pays sans armée* (Montreal: Éditions Écosociété, 1993), pp. 81–89.
- ⁹ Mongeau cites as a source “Non-violent actions in Canada,” in Dimitrios Roussopoulos, ed., *Our Generation against Nuclear War* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1983), p. 296.
- ¹⁰ “It would be interesting for historians to address this question,” says Mongeau, who doesn’t claim to be doing a definitive historical study.
- ¹¹ André Pratte, “Que reste-t-il des zouaves?,” La Presse, May 12, 1998, p. A14.
- ¹² For example, in the Oka crisis of 1990, Quebecers saw the army’s intervention in a positive light. Note also that in that episode Quebecers (the rock-throwers in Châteauguay)

chose violent means of protest against the behaviour of the Native people. Jocelyn Coulon also suggests that Quebecers were rather favourable toward the Korean War. And during the first Gulf War, pacifism was centred in British Columbia, not Quebec.

- ¹³ La Presse, November 18, 2001, p. S8.
- ¹⁴ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 1, part 1, chapter 2.
- ¹⁵ Term used in its philosophical sense, related to Kant’s “Perpetual Peace.”
- ¹⁶ Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (New York: Knopf, 2003).
- ¹⁷ Béatrice Richard, *La mémoire de Dieppe: radioscopie d’un mythe* (Montreal: VLB Éditeur, 2002).
- ¹⁸ Jocelyn Létourneau, “Intellectuels silencieux,” Le Devoir, February 24, 2003, p. A7.
- ¹⁹ Michael Adams, *Fire and Ice: The United States, Canada and the Myth of Inevitability* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2003).
- ²⁰ Naomi Klein, “Canada: Hippie Nation?,” The Nation, July 2, 2003, available online at www.thenation.com/doc.mhtml?i=20030721&s=klein
- ²¹ Alexandre Sirois wrote, “The differences between Albertans and Quebecers are most pronounced with regard to the rights of same-sex couples and gun control. While 83.7% of Quebecers are in favour of the federal law requiring the registration of all firearms, only 57.4% of Albertans agree. Moreover, a majority of men in Alberta, 51.6%, are against gun control. Among these men, 43.6% say they are “entirely opposed” to the federal law, while in Quebec only 14.4% of men say they are “entirely opposed” (La Presse, September 9, 2000, p. B5).
- ²² André Glucksmann, *Ouest contre Ouest* (Paris: Plon, 2003).
- ²³ The expression comes from Mario Roy, who used it in La Presse on January 25 and May 18, 2003.
- ²⁴ Lowell Ponte, “France II,” FrontPageMagazine.com, April 16, 2003.
- ²⁵ In a conversation with the author.

Australia's great debate

by David Tucker

On

OCTOBER 12, 2002, BOMBS EXPLODED IN TWO CLUBS IN KUTA, BALI, Indonesia, killing 202 people, 89 of them Australian. Soon afterward, the taped voice of Osama bin Laden suggested that Australians had brought this on themselves by supporting the United States in East Timor and Afghanistan.

Against this background, it might be expected that Australians would try to distance themselves from the United States, in an effort to persuade Asians that Australia is not a “deputy sheriff” for the United States in the Asian region, as Prime Minister John Howard once described the Australia-U.S. relationship.¹ However, when he came into office, Howard had flatly rejected a strategy of “sucking up” to Asian dictators in the hope that they would stop dismissing Australians as “racists” or as crude, ill-mannered “westerners.” At the first opportunity, he

told an Asian audience that Australia did not “claim to be Asian” and that he was not ashamed of its liberal culture.² Not surprisingly, he refused to try to placate Islamic fundamentalists after the Bali bombings by apologizing for fighting in Afghanistan alongside the United States.

More puzzling is the Labor opposition's inability to use the Bali bombings more effectively to criticize Howard's “We are just like the Americans” characterization of Australians. Why couldn't Simon Crean, the Labor Party leader, persuade Australians



The U.S. Army searches for terrorists, Ba'ath supporters, ammunition and Saddam Hussein, Tikrit, August 2003. GEERT VAN KESTEREN PHOTO

that their involvement in a war in Iraq was unwise because it would place Australian lives in danger throughout the Asian region? Crean faced serious difficulties in the debate over whether Australia should be involved in the recent war. He was outmanoeuvred by Prime Minister Howard, even though his approach was not very different from the position adopted by other world leaders, such as Canada's Jean Chrétien and France's Jacques Chirac, who managed to gain some stature because of their refusal to do what George W. Bush wanted them to.

The Australian public could have been mobilized into a huge outpouring of anti-American, anti-Bush hostility, and this happened to some extent on university campuses and in the huge marches organized by the Greens and others. A “stop the war

at all costs” campaign led by Crean might have placed Howard in a position where domestic opposition made it impossible for him to send Australian forces to participate in the Iraq war. But this didn't happen, and as it turned out, a strategy of steadfast loyalty to the United States worked well for John Howard.

Common ground

After George W. Bush made his speech challenging the United Nations to deal effectively with Saddam Hussein's intransigence, he asked the Australian government for its support. This was offered without any hesitation.

Australia's response flew in the face of a consensus within the Australian foreign

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United Nations headquarters in Baghdad after the bomb attack, August 19, 2003.
GEERT VAN KESTEREN PHOTO

policy making elite that Australians need to accept the fact that their security depends very heavily on the ongoing cooperation of neighbouring states such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei that are predominantly Islamic. Other important nations in the region whose friendship Australians need to cultivate, such as the Philippines and Thailand, have large Muslim minorities. Most of the people in these countries are deeply suspicious of American motives in dealing with Islamic countries. Moreover, Iraq's weapons presented little threat to Australians.

So how do we explain the knee-jerk bipartisan Australian support for the United States after Bush's call? Why didn't John Howard – or Simon Crean – assert that what happened in remote Iraq was of very little interest to Australia?

At one level the positive first response by Australians was habitual. The 51-year

history of cooperation between the United States and Australia, which includes six previous wars (World War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War and the recent war in Afghanistan) and the formal ANZUS agreement that both governments had entered into made it highly likely that Australia would be supportive if the United States was to lead a war in Iraq – or anywhere else for that matter. Australians are comfortable with being closely aligned with the United States and their instinctive response is to work cooperatively with the superpower, cherishing the close relationship and the influence this provides.

Australia did have its own agenda in responding positively to Bush's call for the nations of the world to unite against Saddam Hussein. As a small nation, it had a huge stake in ensuring that United States worked within the framework of the United Nations

and complied with international law. The conservative Liberal-National coalition government was relieved that Bush had accepted the cautious advice of his father and other senior Republicans who had urged the United Nations route in dealing with Iraq. The leaders of the Australian Labor Party shared this view. Both the government and the opposition in Australia feared that a frustrated United States, led by a very conservative President whose advisers despised the ineffectual and vacillating United Nations Security Council, would eventually act unilaterally in seeking to secure regime change in Iraq. In an effort to prevent this from happening, Australian diplomats tried to persuade the various members of the Security Council to recognize that the United States had a legitimate vital national security interest at stake.

This is why support within Australia for Resolution 1441 that warned that an invasion of Iraq by an American-led force could follow if Saddam Hussein failed to cooperate fully with the Security Council was bipartisan and strong. Once this threat had been issued to Iraq, however, the United States was more or less committed to backing it up. If Saddam ignored the warning and then the United States failed to respond, President Bush's leadership would lack credibility. As New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman put it, after his threat, Bush was in the same position as a driver of a car who had ripped out the steering in a game of chicken – careering headlong toward another car to see who would swerve first. In terms of this analogy, which captures the circumstances quite accurately, only Saddam Hussein could have prevented the military invasion of his country.

Many people thought that Bush's challenge to Saddam Hussein was foolhardy.

They argued that Iraq's weapons were not an imminent threat to anyone and that the United States could continue to rely on deterrence. They wanted to avoid a war and did not think Bush's decision to escalate the conflict over Iraq's weapons of mass destruction by threatening war if Iraq did not comply with Resolution 1441 was wise. France in particular made this case, arguing that a military invasion of Iraq with all the risks that this entailed should not be contemplated so long as there was any chance at all that UN inspectors could locate and destroy forbidden weapons. In this connection France demanded that the issue of

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whether to embark on a war with Iraq over its noncompliance with Resolution 1441 should be decided by the Security Council and not by the United States acting unilaterally.

The problem with this response is that it did not take President Bush's situation into account. Once the United States had deployed its army, there were only three possibilities if Iraq was in material breach of Resolution 1441:

- *A back-down by the United States:* This would humiliate Bush and secure a triumph for Hussein that would be trumpeted throughout the Middle East as evidence of his wise leadership and cunning, with all the bad longer-term consequences a show of weakness by the United States would have in the region and throughout the world.

- *Unilateral United States leadership of a military invasion of Iraq:* This would set a very bad precedent. Public opinion throughout most of the world was also very hostile to this possibility.
- *Multilateral military alliance to invade Iraq sanctioned through the United Nations Security Council:* This was undoubtedly the best option.

In this light, Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair and John Howard both chose to accept the reality of the U.S.'s superpower status and its right, because of this, to assert leadership – so long as American leadership is reasonable, as it surely was in asking the French to accept regime change in Iraq. The two prime ministers understood how, once Resolution 1441 had been adopted, the choices available to President Bush were narrowed. What Australia and Britain wanted, after the endorsement of Resolution 1441, was to ensure that the United States would keep working within the UN framework. To secure this, they suggested an eventual strengthening of the resolution with a clear and unequivocal statement by France and other members of the Security Council that a U.S.-led war to secure regime change in Iraq would be sanctioned if Saddam did not fully comply with Resolution 1441.

But Simon Crean did not make this case. He preferred to sit on the fence and was not prepared to concede that France's vocal opposition to the United States gave Saddam Hussein hope that he could eventually secure a diplomatic victory, showing Bush's threat to invade as a hollow one. Because of Crean's reticence about Bush's leadership, the differences between France and the United States over the meaning of Resolu-

tion 1441 and the role of the weapons inspectors shattered the consensus between the two major parties in Australia. A bipartisan approach was no longer possible.

The Labor Party opposition

The Australian Labor Party faced the most difficult dilemma. It was deeply frustrated after election losses in 1998 and 2001. John Howard had helped to secure both these defeats by convincing some voters who normally voted Labor to shift their support to his coalition. To prevent this from happening again, Labor needed to position itself as a moderate Third Way party. This was the goal of Simon Crean, who wanted to show that he could be relied on to make difficult decisions in Australia's national interest that went against the instincts of the left-wing factions of his party. In achieving this, Crean could not allow himself to be perceived as instinctively anti-American, and he understood that it would have been fatal for him to declare, as Australian Green Party leader Bob Brown had done, that any war to disarm Iraq would be immoral and reckless.

A special danger for Crean was that more than half the Australian electorate said they would support a UN-sanctioned war against Iraq: a poll conducted in mid-January 2003 showed 57 per cent of Australians in favour of Australian forces being part of military action against Iraq that was sanctioned by the United Nations. Only 39 per cent of Australians were against military participation in this circumstance.³ Faced with this evidence, Labor Party strategists feared that a quick victory in such a war, resulting in regime change with few Australian losses, would be even more popular. In their view, Crean should not allow himself to be ma-



A street scene in Baghdad as normal life resumes after the U.S.-U.K. invasion, May 2003.
GEERT VAN KESTEREN PHOTO

noeuved into opposing war in circumstances where other democracies were likely to be supportive. Crean accepted this challenge. He did not want to lead the Australian Labor Party into another election defeat by giving those in the centre of the political spectrum yet another reason for voting for Howard.

But it was difficult for Crean to project himself as someone who was seriously working to ensure the disarming of Iraq because the polls also showed that 76 per cent of Australians were against participation in any military action that was not sanctioned by the UN. Most significantly for Crean, 91 per cent of the Labor Party's supporters said in January 2003 that they were against this kind of participation.⁴ Thus, Crean was torn between two incompatible impulses. He did not want to be portrayed as anti-American or irresponsible, yet he

fully understood that his leadership of the Labor Party would be challenged if he doggedly supported an unpopular American President who had declared that he was prepared to act unilaterally.

Crean also needed to hold onto a core constituency within his own party that loathed George W. Bush and agreed with the Green Party leader that any American-led war against Iraq would be immoral. He wanted to appeal to the defecting right wing but he also wanted to prevent a potential hemorrhaging of Labor supporters on the left. As many as 55 per cent of Labor voters were against Australian troops being involved in a war with Iraq even if it was supported by the United Nations, and 42 per cent of these said they were strongly against such involvement.⁵ This was a significant group within the Labor Party and Crean realized that he had to work hard to keep

them from voting for the antiwar Green Party. He also needed to find a way of consolidating his own tenuous hold on the party leadership in circumstances where many in his caucus were strongly questioning the Australia–United States alliance and demanding to know why Iraq could not be deterred through the kind of containment policy that had succeeded quite well with other delinquent nations.

Crean's chosen strategy for securing what seemed to be incompatible objectives was to rearticulate idealistic beliefs about international order and United Nations mecha-

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nisms that most Australians share. Disregarding the past failures of the Security Council in solving world problems and the fact that diplomacy and harsh economic sanctions over a period of 12 years had failed to secure cooperation from Saddam Hussein, Crean urged Australians to endorse only multilateral solutions. Embracing a commitment to process over substance, he announced that Labor would support whatever the Security Council decided. He demanded that the Security Council, rather than the United States, take charge of the disarmament process.

But Crean wanted to make this case without appearing anti-American or unpatriotic. He wanted to ensure that conservative Aus-

tralian did not dismiss the Labor Party as “extremist” or “irresponsible,” and he needed to persuade the Australian people that he understood the importance of the ongoing and longstanding strategic alliance between the United States and Australia. His problem is that he had to do this while opposing Bush on a matter that the American President had declared a fundamental national security priority. He also wanted to persuade the Australian people that he was consistent.

But his notion that Australia should be in the war if the United Nations said it was a good thing but against military intervention if the United States said it was necessary seemed spineless. The key issue was whether regime change in Iraq was worth fighting for. If Saddam Hussein was in breach of Resolution 1441, Crean needed to tell the electorate what he thought about this. If he was against the looming war whether Hussein cooperated or not, he should have argued the case for this position, making it clear that Labor would not support military involvement whoever authorized it. But if he was for forcing Iraq to disarm and agreed with Bush that regime change in Iraq was desirable, he should have backed the United States more forcefully.

Not surprisingly, Crean's hiding behind process to avoid making a commitment on substance failed to convince anyone. His failure to come out openly and say what he thought is one reason why his standing in the opinion polls was so low when people were questioned about his leadership qualities. Asked about Crean's leadership in April–June 2002, only 36 per cent of Australians said they were happy with it. This was a very poor start, but things got worse for Crean. Just one year later, in April–June

2003, after his performance in the debate over what to do about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction had had some impact, only 26 per cent were prepared to say that they approved of Crean's leadership. When asked who they thought would make the better prime minister, only 17 per cent selected Crean, down from 24 per cent a year earlier.⁶

One reason for this poor showing in the opinion polls was that Crean was constantly forced further left than he felt comfortable. Not wanting to be seen as anti-American, this is how he came to be viewed. A position on the weapons of mass destruction issue that was hostile to the United States would have been popular had Crean simply announced that he disliked George W. Bush and was against a U.S.–Australia alliance. But he could not do this without being perceived as anti-American. The result was that he presented to the Australian people as someone who could not really make up his mind about how Australia should respond to the American call for help.

Crean's strategy of not taking sides between France and the United States was further complicated by the stridently anti-American views articulated by many of his senior colleagues within the Labor leadership, whom he had no way of disciplining. Carmen Lawrence, a leader of the left faction in the Labor caucus and widely respected within the party, decided to quit the federal opposition's front bench, declaring that she was disgusted with Simon Crean's ambivalent leadership on the possible military strike against Iraq (as well as on other matters, such as his attitude to asylum seekers). She also heated up the rhetoric by saying things like “This is United States foreign policy gone mad. They have created a

monster in Saddam Hussein. They armed and protected him, they were arming him when he killed 200,000 Iranians, yet now they are seeking to destroy him.”⁷

In other words, for the likes of Carmen Lawrence, the United States could do no good: if it tolerated Saddam Hussein it was complicit in his crimes; if it sought to remove him, it was condemned for duplicity. Nor was there any understatement in the loathing of George W. Bush within the Labor caucus – indeed, during the parliamentary debate about the looming war in Iraq, many Labor speakers were so contemptuous of the American President that the U.S. Ambassador complained to Crean.⁸

Another difficulty for Crean was that it was impossible to avoid being dragged into the debate in the Security Council between Britain, the United States and France. Again and again Crean was forced to give answers to questions that eventually made it clear that he supported France and distrusted the United States.

He said he wanted to see Saddam Hussein disarmed but he did not really mean to do anything to bring this goal about. He said he favoured the Australia–U.S. alliance, but when the Americans asked for support from Australia he buckled to pressure from the anti-American left wing of the Labour Party. Given what appeared to be his real beliefs about the wisdom of an invasion of Iraq, the Australian people wondered why Crean did not join Bob Brown, Carmen Lawrence and others in openly denouncing the United States and George W. Bush. And if he seriously wanted to see Iraq disarmed, they wondered why he didn't support Australia's most important ally who wanted to make sure this happened.

The coalition government

Prime Minister John Howard and other senior members of his government never had any doubts about the wisdom of committing Australia to a U.S.-led alliance to secure regime change in Iraq. Of course, given what the polls showed about the public's respect for the UN Security Council, the government's leaders hoped that the council would support the United States in its confrontation with Saddam Hussein. But Howard was prepared to support Bush's doctrine of pre-emptive war and to have

More than any other government leader in the world, the Australian Prime Minister understood why the United States was no longer prepared to sit back passively while others agitated against it, fomenting hatred or planning to use sabotage and terror as a weapon.

Australian troops participate in an invasion of Iraq even if the Security Council did not sanction this action.

This is why Howard and Foreign Minister Alexander Downer steadfastly supported the United States in its demand that Iraq dismantle its weapons of mass destruction program. In their view, the United States had every right to expect international support in securing Iraq's disarmament. Of course, wider issues were also discussed. Howard and Downer agreed with Tony Blair that the humanitarian argument for regime change was also significant and that the Iraqi people deserved to be liberated. But the central focus throughout the Australian debate about the war was on the legal argu-

ment for confronting Iraq – the fact that Iraq had an obligation under international law to dismantle its weapons of mass destruction program.

Support for the United States in confronting Iraq was a risky strategy, given that most Australians were not convinced that a war was necessary and were strongly opposed to any pre-emptive strike. It is, however, not difficult to see motivations behind the government's backing for Bush. These include:

1. Political calculation

Going into a war when public opinion is against it may be dangerous. But this was unlikely to be an ordinary war. In his past wars, Saddam Hussein had performed incredibly badly as a military commander so it was very unlikely that he had put in place an effective plan to offer serious resistance to the invading forces. Indeed, it was doubtful whether many of the Iraqi soldiers could be persuaded to fight. Even if they were willing to fight bravely, however, Australians had recently participated in the successful war to secure regime change in Afghanistan and they fully understood the power afforded by new military technology.

If the war was quickly over, if the Iraqi oil wells were not set on fire, if weapons of mass destruction were destroyed before they could be used, if Australian casualties were low, if Hussein was paraded before the world as guilty of mass killings and torture, and if the Iraqi people welcomed the invading troops as liberators, Howard calculated that it would be easy to persuade the Australian people to change their minds about the wisdom of the war. Even if only a few of these very likely outcomes were secured, and government strategists surely



A man goes to work early in the morning past a destroyed tank, Baghdad, May 2003.
GEERT VAN KESTEREN PHOTO

thought that most of them would be, Howard's personal standing as a national leader was likely to be boosted enormously.

Most significantly, Crean and other Labor leaders would be placed in a very difficult position once a war in Iraq had begun. They could hardly cheer for the Iraqis who were killing Australians, yet a quick victory would place their judgement to oppose the war and their dire warnings about the serious risks and consequences that would follow such an invasion in a very bad light.

2. Understanding of the significance of September 11 in the United States

John Howard was visiting the United States when the attack against the Pentagon and the World Trade Center took place. He was able to witness at first hand the changing mood within the United States. More than any other government leader in the world,

the Australian Prime Minister understood why the United States was no longer prepared to sit back passively while others agitated against it, fomenting hatred or planning to use sabotage and terror as a weapon. Unlike France, to take an example of a country that simply had no idea about the significance of September 11, the Australian government understood why Bush could not tell the American people that Saddam Hussein presented a threat and then sit back and do nothing about this.

3. Recognition that a U.S. retreat in the face of Hussein's intransigence would be fatal

The Australians were committed to securing an alliance with the world's leading power. They understood that the influence of the United States would be fatally diminished if George Bush allowed Saddam Hussein to use the United Nations to thwart him.



Crumbling symbols of the old regime remain after the Coalition victory. GEERT VAN KESTEREN PHOTO

4. Shared values with neoconservatives in the Bush administration

The Howard coalition government has not been embarrassed about Australia's relationship with the United States, and has been forceful in advancing "western" values. Indeed, in the view of Howard and Downer, Australia's close relationship with the superpower will eventually enable it to play a leadership role in the east Asian region. In this connection they argue that Australia should cooperate closely with other allies of the United States in the region, including Japan, South Korea, Thailand and Singapore, promoting market capitalism and democracy.

The government's belief in the universal application of "western" values echoes the views of some neoconservatives in the Bush administration. Thus, it is not surprising that Downer and Howard have been happy

to work closely with them in seeking to transform Iraq into a liberal democracy. Along with Tony Blair, they also urged Australians to take into account the many crimes against humanity that Hussein and his regime have been guilty of. Intervention in Iraq was justified, they argued, partly because of Hussein's poor human rights record and his failure to secure liberal institutions in Iraq.

Winners and losers

The successful Iraq war was initially a huge triumph for Howard and Downer and a disaster for Crean. Australia suffered no casualties and Howard wisely withdrew the troops as soon as it was appropriate to do this.

One reason for Crean's poor performance in the debate leading up to the war is that,

unlike Prime Minister Chrétien in Canada, he had to make his case from opposition. Thus, he had very little ability to discipline senior members of his own party and could not prevent Australian military involvement in the war. Most significantly, once Howard had committed Australian troops, Crean could not allow himself to be characterized as unpatriotic. He was always in danger of being on the wrong side in a successful war and he knew this.

Most people will be glad that the United States and its military allies got rid of the homicidal Saddam Hussein, who was guilty of ordering two acts of genocide against the Kurds and two acts of mass killing, against Shi'ites and in Kuwait. In some of these killings Hussein's soldiers used chemical weapons that caused appalling suffering, even for babies. The killings were also accompanied by humiliation, rape and extreme cruelty that often focused on parent-child bonds. We can celebrate that this kind of behaviour will not be ordered again in Iraq for the foreseeable future and that an awful tyrant has been driven from power.

The political gain from the military victory has not been as sweet for Howard's coalition as it might have been, however, because no threatening weapons of any kind have been found in Iraq. The Australian public is now very questioning about the fact that these weapons have not been found (67 per cent of Australians think they have been misled by Howard and Downer and 36 per cent believe that they were "knowingly misled"⁹). Starting a war on false pretenses is not something that can be overlooked even when the outcome of the war is a good one. Howard already has a serious credibility problem and any further evidence that calls his veracity into question

could eventually prove fatal. So far, however, his luck has held. Most significantly, the war proceeded as he predicted it would, so he has ended up looking like a leader who can be relied on to make difficult choices for Australia.

In contrast, Crean's ambivalence about American leadership ("I am for it but can't go along with Bush") left him looking weak and indecisive. It is not surprising that, in August 2003, his standing with voters was still low: only 18 per cent of Australians thought he would be a more effective prime minister than John Howard.¹⁰ ■

Notes

¹ This is a goal that Paul Keating's Labor government had tried to accomplish by cosying up to the corrupt Indonesian President Suharto. Indeed, so close was the bond between Prime Minister Keating and Suharto that criticism of Indonesia was muted even when its soldiers deliberately murdered Australian journalists (as the Australian public eventually learned). See Alison Broinowski, *About Face: Asian Accounts of Australia* (Melbourne: Scribe Publications, 2003), p. 119.

² Broinowski, *About Face*, p. 26.

³ Newspoll and *The Australian*, January 17–19, 2003.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Newspoll and *The Australian*.

⁷ "Labor MPs tell Crean to tread carefully on Iraq," *Sydney Morning Herald*, September 23, 2002.

⁸ Paul Kelly, "To war Howard's way," *The Australian*, February 15, 2003.

⁹ Newspoll and *The Australian*, July 18–20, 2003.

¹⁰ Newspoll and *The Australian*, August 1–3, 2003.