

A British report released a few weeks ago roundly castigated former Prime Minister Tony Blair for his misguided support of America's war to unseat Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Blair is as much condemned (and loathed) by the British left as former President George Bush is by the American left (and Donald Trump). Both leaders are accused of having "lied" about Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction. To defend both positions, it is true that these weapons were not found during the invasion. But there is much more to this situation that requires sharp critical thinking before accepting the accusation of deliberate lying.

Just because "everybody is saying so" does not make it right. I would like to go through an exercise that may well have been one used by our president's advisers and those of the UK before our invasion of Iraq.

- o WMD. Saddam Hussein had tried for years to have weapons that would deter anybody from thinking of invasion. The Israelis destroyed his nuclear complex in 1981. We did not know whether he rebuilt it. We do know that he had poison gas (Sarin) that he used on Iraq's Kurdish villages. And I myself remember hearing an Iraqi chemical warfare physicist who had fled Iraq telling us in a lecture at the Defense Language Institute, that Saddam Hussein was obsessed with developing chemical and biological weapons.

Saddam Hussein threatened that he had not only a two-million-man army, but also WMDs that could destroy an invader. When the US military captured and debriefed Saddam, he confessed that the threats were meant for Iran, and he assumed that our CIA would know that he really did not have such things. He also said that if he had time, he would have rebuilt his nuclear facilities and ramped up his chemical/biological programs.

We didn't find stockpiles of mustard gas (which they had used on Iran ten years earlier) or biological weapon stockpiles because Saddam's pals, the Russians, trucked out this material and spirited it all to Lebanon and Syria. The convoys were observed from our planes and satellites for the week before we invaded. I remember seeing the pictures of these convoys, and hearing rumors that barrels of this stuff were rotting in Beirut and Syrian basements. No, we found nothing when we invaded Iraq, but that doesn't mean they had not possessed them.

- o Political Decisions. When the Bush administration took power, they responded to the general public's demand that our defense budget be reduced. A Democratic president never could have gotten away with this, but a Republican could and did. We invaded Iraq with a minimal force and prevailed because Saddam's army was incompetent and soldiers ran away. Had we just handed power over to a respectable Iraqi general (some of whom were American trained) and demanded that he find and execute Saddam, we would have been heroes. We didn't have sufficient manpower to maintain order. Looting began.

- o Democracy Project. This well-intentioned project has worked only once since President Wilson proposed it: on Germany, Italy, and Japan, under our occupation after World War II. We keep trying to plant "democracy" in countries that cannot possibly sustain it. Voting is not democracy. Institutions and rule of law are the basis for creating and maintaining a democracy. No country with a Muslim majority can sustain democracy for more than a short time.

- o Disbanding the Baathist Party. The Baathist Party was modeled after Nazism and needed to be disbanded. However, not all Baathists were true believers (nor were all Nazis). We had the good sense in Germany to de-Nazify government officials who were not criminal so that they could rejoin and serve German society. Had we done the same in Iraq, we would not have had the horrible war we still fight.

- o What we didn't know. Iraq had a Sunni Muslim majority for centuries---but the Shiite population had a birth spurt during the last decades under Saddam. Dictatorships are very secretive about data such as updating census numbers. They lie.

History may well back my assessment better than knee-jerk Monday Morning Quarterbacking.

684 words

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