

History of Government Deception Moves Us Closer to War

By Greg LeRoy
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Every day I become more convinced that the lack of historical perspective allows our government to mold public opinion to support unjust actions like the proposed invasion of Iraq.

How many people, I wonder, are aware that the pretext for our wresting Cuba from the Spanish was an alleged attack of a US ship, the Maine, while in the Cuban Bay? Or that the same boldfaced lie was successfully taken out again to begin our involvement in Vietnam, with the Gulf of Tonkin resolution, the result of an alleged attack on two U.S. warships in the Gulf of Tonkin?

How many of our citizens are even aware that this is the salient point of the Pentagon Papers, wherein our military's own historians show-cased decades of deceit and subterfuge being used against their own people? In Asia and the Middle East, Africa, Central and South America -- from the "halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli"-- there is an ever expanding propaganda battlefield littered with the bodies of U.S. soldiers who died for reasons that were never explained to them, probably because cheap oil, bananas, or geopolitical strategic initiatives are not the type of things men willingly give up their lives for.

There are, of course, times when the American military has acted with high purpose and nobility.

In the case of Iraq, however, our own government misrepresented the reasons for the first Gulf war, ignoring how the invasion of Kuwait had literally been green-lighted by the first Bush administration. They lied about Saddam's reason for invasion, which had a basis in "economic warfare" being waged by Kuwait, as detailed a week before the Iraqi invasion in a front page New York Times' article. Kuwait was using slant drilling technology to tap Iraq's oil fields and had begun to sell oil for 40% less than previously set OPEC rates. Iraq had already lost \$14 billion of revenue at a time when they "were in desperate need" of "greater revenues" to replace the funds spent during the eight years of war with Iran.

They also did not tell the truth about the primary reason for American involvement -- which is oil. Saudi Arabia and Iraq are the number one and two oil producers in the world, respectively. And they've lied about the American orchestrated U.N. sanctions, the only time in United Nations history that sanctions have been inhumanely "comprehensive," the intent of which we were told was to hurt Saddam Hussein in his palaces, bunkers and luxurious safehouses. Since the program began, however, it is estimated by the Global Policy Forum that 500,000 Iraqi children under the age of five have died as a result of critical food, medical and commercial items which could not be imported. Our government purposefully has tried to keep this issue (as well as the bombings which have continued almost on a weekly basis unimpeded on the Iraqi people since the end of the Gulf War) out of the media spotlight.

I am not defending Saddam Hussein who is, without doubt, an immoral egomaniac, a butcher who brooks no dissent.

But the truth is that we have supported and continue to support much worse, or routinely turn a blind eye. Moreover, it is our military and our tax dollars which trains and funds these petty despots until we decide that they are no longer to our liking. The chemical weapons the Bush administration is concerned about, for example, were originally made by Iraq on equipment bought from the U.S. with training from our own people. Between 1978 and 1988, the U.S. government shipped seven different strains of Anthrax to Iraq. But the nexus with the U.S. government and corporate America doesn't end there. Even after the first Gulf War, when Iraq was elevated to a "terrorist" state, Vice President Dick Cheney, then CEO of Halliburton oversaw over the sale of \$23.8 million of oil industry equipment and services to Iraq under its Dresser Rand and Ingersoll-Dresser Pump divisions. According to the Financial Times of London, these contracts began in 1988 and ended last winter.

Cheney is not the only current administration hawk who alters his point of view in a Machiavellian moment. In 1983, President Ronald Reagan sent a "special envoy" to Iraq with a gift of "golden spurs" to Saddam Hussein in order to normalize relations. This was after the revolution in Iran deposed the Shah and brought anti-American Mullahs to power, and Saddam Hussein was seen as a secular strong man in neighboring Iraq -- the best horse to back to contain the threat of fundamentalist Iran from expanding throughout the region. And support him we did. With military and intelligence and commercial assistance. That special envoy was Donald Rumsfeld, current Defense Secretary. By the time of Rumsfeld's second visit, on March 5, 1988, both the United Nations and the U.S. State Department had issued separate reports of Iraqi chemical weapons use against Iran. Rumsfeld had no problem supporting Saddam Hussein then.

This is why the attempt to link Iraq to a nebulous "axis of evil" with Al Qaeda ties is so ludicrous.

There is no other Arab or predominantly Muslim country in the world where there is less proof of any connection to Al Qaeda. Iraq is among the most socially progressive countries in the Middle East, where woman can travel alone, need not be draped in purdah, and easily may hold high ranking professional jobs. No one in Iraq wants medieval Muslim fanatics like Al Qaeda controlling their lives.

Should you want to find links to the Al Qaeda terrorist network look no further than our primary Middle Eastern Arab allies, the Saudis. Almost all of the September 11th terrorists were Saudi Arabian nationals, not to mention Bin Laden himself. Many Saudi royal family members have been linked to Al Qaeda in some capacity, as have funds from the wife of the Saudi ambassador to the U.S. Under the toughest scrutiny from the United Nations and the United States there has never has a dime of Al Qaeda money been attributed to Hussein.

The most direct link to the Al Qaeda terrorists, strangely enough, is the U.S. government who created, organized, funded and trained Bin Laden and his henchman to the tune of \$3 billion when they were formed by the CIA to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan.

All of this is so transparently obvious that with the notable exceptions of Israel and Great Britain, there exists hardly another nation in the world that supports a direct military confrontation with Iraq. Even stalwart allies like France and Germany, after the most dire American threats, will not sign up. Are massive first strikes and ongoing occupations and U.S. enforced puppet regimes going to win the "hearts and minds" of the people in these countries, never mind of the people of the world at large?

Of course not. It will be viewed in Arab society as yet another bullying imperialist move. In fact, given the resultant groundswell of public support from the world at large for us after 9/11, it is amazing how quickly that support has dissipated. Virtually the entire world is now united against us.

What the world sees is an arrogant America bristling with weapons.

In 2002 the U.S. military budget was \$320 billion dollars. Add in secret "black" budgets, recent "domestic security" funds, interest on the debt for past wars, etc., and that translates into more than 50¢ of every tax dollar being spent on the military and "national security." The United States alone spends more than the combined spending of next twelve highest ranking nations. Our country, according to the Center for Defense Information, spends almost one third of the worlds' entire military budget.

And while we attempt to make the argument that the world will become too unstable a place if nations like Iraq and North Korea develop even a single nuclear device, we ignore the fact that Pakistan already has nuclear warheads and is a bigger and more unstable threat (with direct Al Qaeda links) than both of them, and yet we support Pakistan. We ignore North Korea's avowed nuclear program, more advanced than Iraq's, which the Bush administration acknowledges can be dealt with by diplomatic means. And we ignore the fact that it is inconsistent to tell the rest of the developing nations that their nuclear programs are impermissible when the American arsenal includes more sophisticated nuclear weapons than the rest of the world combined.

As an American, I find that the preponderance of war hardware affects our moral tone and policies. Funding of the American military provides a necessary imperative for its very use. You can't fund increasing Pentagon budgets in a down economy unless there is a perceived need and if the existing military material moves off the shelves to the "consumers."

As a Houston businessman this is an issue that directly impacts my quality of life.

Overly militarized, a society is forced to rob its tax base to the detriment of the education, health care, good roads, public transportation, public investment, and key research and development. It is not coincidence that Germany and Japan, two of the countries with the most devastated economies after World War 2, became economic powerhouses only forty years later. One significant factor was that they were precluded by law from having or supporting a significant military, allowing them to free up 30%, 40% or 50% of their tax base to invest in high return items like education, health care, technology and manufacturing priorities.

It is also frightening how quickly our nation has taken an Orwellian turn. American officials concede that we in the midst of a perpetual war against a nebulous, uncertain and ever changing enemy, which is straight out of Orwells' 1984. The policy of the Bush administration, when confronted with a contentious issue worthy of debate, is to bombard us with doubleplussupergoodly bombast and to steal more of our constitutionally protected liberties. The Patriot Act passed by Congress with little debate or thought, in the wake of a handful of Anthrax attacks has made it possible to imprison Americans without cause or due process, to break into our homes without warrants, to tap our phones and check business transactions, library records, internet usage and banking actions.

No one argues against the right of America to defend itself, but is an endless litany of preemptive strikes and coercive actions the best way to achieve it?

Those who have been on the receiving end of our military technology don't understand the American governments' reasoning which changes with the direction of the wind. When the bombs fall, bullets fly and innocents and military personnel alike start dying, when schools and water treatment plants and hospitals and roads are destroyed in "collateral damage," there is no sense to the American rhetoric of "defending democracy" because the country we are attacking is a feudal dictatorship. How does one explain a weak Iraq under United Nations' sanctions as a threat to the most powerful military on the planet?

Like many of my fellow concerned citizens, who have joined together recently in New York, Washington, California, and in smaller cities, in the largest protests since the Vietnam War, I have begun to try and change my governments' decision. In Houston, many people meet at Mecom Fountain, across from Hermann Park every Friday evening to hold candles and placards to show our opposition.

I found it encouraging, while standing on Main Street in protest, that a full one half or more of the motorists were sympathetic, often honking with an enthusiastic thumbs up as their SUVs zoomed by. The majority of Americans understand that there is no need, and certainly not a compelling one, to put a quarter of million American lives in harms way. In fact a recent poll showed that only 29% of Americans would support attacking Iraq if it meant going in on our own.

At one point a young man hung out of his pickup truck, as he circled the fountain, fist held high, pumping the air and screamed "Kill them all! Kill them all! Kill them all!"

It was the same violent fanatical anger as shared by a fundamentalist Al Qaeda operative. Unthinking, unanalytic, pure hate from a man willing to murder everyone -- men, women and children, diplomacy or peaceful solution be damned.

For Americans, these feelings of anger and vengeance surfaced during the aftershocks of 9/11. It was the first major attack within the continental United States. Some Muslims, likewise, have formed and distilled their hatred as a result of what they view as a one-sided pattern of U.S. support and acts of aggression against their societies. You can bet that the invasion of Iraq, if it occurs, won't ameliorate that anger. It will nurture their preconceptions and convince them once and for all that we are the "evildoers" and, as Bin Laden once said, turning our own rhetoric against us, "the greatest terrorist nation".

Last time Al Qaeda was armed with box cutters, Global Positioning Devices from Radio Shack and, most important of all, their unblinking hatred to bind it all together. Yet another American invasion of a sovereign Arab nation, the slaughter of its people, women and children and other collateral damage included, the takeover of its society and the imposition of a puppet dictator, will most certainly ratchet up the cycle of hatred and violence even further. No matter how many terrorists may be put out of commission thousands more will spring up in countries throughout the world.

Let us demand of our government that sane and humane minds prevail.

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