

Iraq War: Lies and Realities¹

Giuseppe Nardulli²

*Physics Department, University of Bari, Italy
Union of Scientists for Disarmament, Bari, Italy*

The big lie

A nice game can be played these days on Google. Go to this popular web site and search for *weapons of mass destruction*. The following answer will appear: *These Weapons of Mass Destruction cannot be displayed. The weapons you are looking for are currently unavailable. The country might be experiencing technical difficulties, or you may need to adjust your weapons inspectors mandate.*

Then a few instructions follow: *If you are George Bush and typed the country's name in the address bar, make sure that it is spelled correctly. (IRAQ). Click the Bomb button if you are Donald Rumsfeld.*

And still more, but enough for fun. Laughing about these subjects can appear outrageous and it is, given the huge toll of human lives that has been paid by both sides during and after the war. Nevertheless, in a way or in another, lies must be denounced and truth must be reaffirmed. According to I. Ramonet, on *Le Monde Diplomatique* magazine (July 2003 issue) before and during the Iraq war American and World public opinion have been victims of a gigantic manipulation operation orchestrated at the highest levels of the Bush Administration, with the complicity of the UK premier Anthony Blair. Examples of these lies are as follows. First and foremost are the revelations on the weapons of mass destructions. In September 24th 2002 Blair claimed in a session of the British that Iraq possessed chemical and biological weapons; moreover its missiles could be deployed within 45 minutes. The US Secretary of State Powell declared at the UN Security Council that Saddam Hussein had begun researches on dozens of biological agents able to provoke diseases such as plague, typhus, cholera, smallpox etc. Vice-president Cheney declared on March 2003 that the Bush administration was convinced that Saddam Hussein had reconstructed nuclear weapons. President Bush declared on February 8th 2003 that Iraq sent experts on explosives to work with Al-Qaeda; he also claimed that an Al-Qaeda agent was sent several times to Iraq at the end of 1990s to help Baghdad to acquire gases and poisons.

Needless to say, no proof on the links between Al-Qaeda and the Iraq government has been provided. As to the weapons of mass destruction, they are no longer of interest for the United States. Secretary of Defence D. Rumsfeld has

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² email: Giuseppe.nardulli@ba.infn.it

recently declared that probably Saddam Hussein destroyed them just before the opening of war. I cannot imagine any rationale behind such hypothetical decision of the Iraq dictator, unless he was so shrewd to foresee the present troubles of Mr Blair (and perhaps the future difficulties of Bush jr.).

New realities in international relations

Future international relations will strongly depend on the evolution of the American foreign policy. At the moment it appears dominated by a group *The Economist* (April 26th, p.37) has called *the shadow men*, a clique of neoconservatives (*neocons*) that according to this magazine is *at the heart of the administration*. Although shadow men, their names have now become well known to the public, also because they occupy high positions within the Bush jr. administration. Paul Wolfowitz is the deputy secretary of defence and was the driving force behind the Bush strategy for war to Iraq; Doug Feith, is the Pentagon's number three; Scooter Libby is chief of staff of R. Cheney. Another well-known neo-con is Richard Perle, the ancient *Prince of Darkness*, as he was called during the Reagan administration, when we continuously opposed any INF agreement between USA and URSS. Until March 2003 he was Chairman of the Defence Advisory Board, a group of private sector employees that advise government. He was nominated to that position by D. Rumsfeld in 2001, but four months ago he was forced to resign because of a conflict of interest. It may be useful to recall this story as it clearly shows the idealistic passions that animate the member of this group. Global Crossing, a bankrupt telecommunications company, contracted Perle to assist in winning regulatory approval to sell its assets to a joint venture formed by Hutchison Whampoa and Singapore Technologies Telemedia. According to some reconstructions, see e.g. J. Chaffin in *Financial Times* March 22-March 23, 2003, there was conflict of interest, because Perle was using his position on the board to win business. In another article in the March issue of *The New Yorker*, it was documented that Perle met with the arms dealer Adnan Kashoggi in January to help his investments. We were used to the role of the military-industrial complex since the Eisenhower days, nevertheless the arrogance of the neocons' is really astonishing.

After his resignation from the chair of the Defence Advisory Board, Perle retains his influence within the administration. One of the ways this influence is exercised is through the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), a conservative think-tank; another is given by the *Weekly Standard*, a conservative magazine edited by W. Kristol, son of Irving Kristol, another founder of the neo-con clique.

The neo-cons' can be charged with many things, but at least they speak frankly. As reported again by *Financial Times* March 22-March 23, 2003 (G. Dinmore "Hawks set out bold post-war vision of world"), during a meeting of AEI in March, W. Kristol, said that the failure of the first Bush Administration to finish the job in 1991 resulted in "a lack of awe for the US" in the Middle East, which encouraged Al-Qaeda. In the same meeting Perle said that *the fall of Saddam would be an inspiration for Iranians seeking to be free of their dictatorial mullah*. Another

neo-con participating in the meeting, Michael Ledeen, claimed that the conflict is part of a “longer war” and such terrorist sponsors as Iran and Syria knew that. According to Ledeen, France and Germany insisted on “shoring up tyrannical regimes” and this should be remembered by the US. Therefore, when Perle asserted in that meeting that “Americans are not vindictive”, Ledeen in context of France said that he hoped they were. As for the UN, the opinions were unanimous; Kristol said the UN did not matter much, Perle that “its time has passed”.

When Kristol says that the US should be afraid of a lack of awe it is impossible to avoid comparison with the words uttered by the Athenian ambassadors to the oligarchs of the small town of Melos when they refused to surrender to the overwhelming forces of the Athenian maritime empire. Thucydides, reports this famous dialog in V,84-116. To the Melos aristocrats who ask: Would you choose our friendly neutrality instead of our hostility? the Athenians answer: Your hostility is not as harmful to us as your friendship. In fact the latter would be a clear proof, for our subjects, of our weakness, whereas hate is symbol of our strength. Given the special relation between the President of the United States of America and God also the rest of the dialog provides striking analogy. To the Melos oligarchs who hope that gods will help them because they, pious men, oppose unjust people, the Athenians say: We believe that, by natural law, the strongest must command and we are sure that also gods agree on that.

Athens was a democracy, as opposed to the rival Sparta: Thucydides’ analysis is devoted to the discovery of the mechanism that induced this democracy to become warlike and imperialistic. The explanation was a historical necessity that led Athens first to become too strong, then to exercise an hegemony over her subjects and eventually to transform hegemony into dominion and oppression. We can be doubtful of the historical law of ἀνάγκη (necessity) that the great Greek historian assumed to be true, and we can also doubt that each act of ὑβρις must be followed by its own νέμεσις. As a matter of fact the evolution of the American empire can proceed along lines completely different from Athens. In particular US society has economic and social needs that are hardly compatible with the overextension of American military presence. Although manipulated, American democracy is a factor to be taken into account and the US public opinion can change and adopt a less nationalistic and dangerous tone.

However it must be considered that the neo-con clique does not act by alone and has, at present, the support of more realistic leaders, very close to the military industry, such as Cheney and Rumsfeld, to say nothing of President Bush himself. Why this second group, has forged an alliance with the neo-cons? An immediate explanation is given by the events of September 11th. A strong answer was necessary and was considered politically productive for an administration touched by the corporate scandals and the weakness of economy. There is however a deeper reason that can be traced back to the political vacuum left by the end of Cold War and the disappearance of Soviet Union. The US administration seem convinced that this vacuum has to be filled by the only remaining superpower, the only state with the military means to ensure stability to the world.

International relations seem to abhor vacuum. Many of us hoped that the empty space left by the fall of the Berlin's wall could be filled by the UN, with a new texture of relations among the member states. It must be said however that the system of collective security embodied by the UN never worked effectively during the Cold War. After the end of the Cold War many hoped that the UN could act more effectively because the situation was changed and the reciprocal vetoes of US and USSR that paralysed UN were no more expected. The reality was however different because the UN lacked the military structure to work in the new scenarios of civil war and internal violence. The conflict in former Yugoslavia was very instructive under this respect.

Besides empires and systems of collective security, history offers a third example of structured international relations. It is the *Balance of Power*, i.e. a dynamical equilibrium among different actors whose actions act to balance themselves reciprocally. It was the sort of equilibrium that arose among the Hellenistic kingdoms after the interregnum following the death of Alexander the Great. A more recent example is given by the European powers, following the Westfalia's peace that closed in 1648 the Thirty Years War. This equilibrium lasted until the Napoleon's quest for a European empire and after his fall still lasted for almost 100 years. It is not synonym of peace, of course, because it is a dynamic equilibrium with changing alliances and shifting positions to ensure that no single power acquires a hegemonic position.

Will future international relations be shaped according the collective security paradigm, with a new major role of UN? Or will an American Empire be established? Or should we interpret the opposition of Russia, France and Germany to the US, before the Iraq war, as the premonitory signal of a future Balance of Power? All these alternatives are possible and since History is not ruled, in my modest opinion, by any iron law, we should act, as individuals as well as collective actors, to push forward our preferred choice.

We cannot exclude the Empire, because, as stressed already, strong forces push in this direction. To summarize: First, the overwhelming military strength of the US, matched by its technological, scientific and cultural hegemony. Second, the vested interests of the Pentagon and the military industry. One can imagine two versions of the Empire. The first one is more benign. It is motivated by ethic and by the desire to extend Human Rights everywhere. To a Machiavellian or Hobbesian cynic this might appear a hypocritical way to affirm American superiority disguised by ethical motivations. It is not necessarily so, because also ideas have their own strengths and ethical motivations have been recurrent behind American foreign policy, from W. Wilson down to B. Clinton. In this version the Empire can have the support of most of the progressive European parties, and some of the European rightist political parties. The second version of the Empire is that of the neo-cons' and the Bush jr. Administration. We discussed it already. It seems imagined with the specific aim to alienate sympathies for America abroad (except perhaps Israel, the only country, besides USA, the neo-cons' take care of). This version is now offered to us. Two years after September 11th it reached the remarkable result to multiply worldwide the

foes of America and cool the sympathies of many others, from Europe to the Arab world, from China to Russia. Thus far these undesired results have not changed the Bush policy, despite the efforts of some moderates such as Blair and Powell. It remains to be seen if the difficulties in rebuilding Iraq will decrease the arrogance of the Bush Administration, although it is unlikely they can stop the driving forces pushing towards the Empire. It must be said however that the costs of the Empire are very high and American people can well decide for a different policy, more careful of the big social problems the US has at home. Withdrawal could be a spontaneous solution chosen by the US, as recently discussed by E. Hobsbawm on *Le Monde Diplomatique* magazine (June 2003 issue).

This leads us to the Balance of Power scheme. At the moment this seems unrealistic, for the extreme weakness of all the other actors. But this weakness, at least for Europe and China is only military. From an economic point of view these are emerging powers and especially so for Europe. China is less relevant economically, but has the advantage of political unity, which still is missing to Europe.

Should we desire Balance of Power as the overall scheme for World Security? I have no definite answers. From one side Balance of Power produces only a precarious equilibrium. Historically it was not able to ban wars, and wars, in a nuclear era, are too dangerous to be accepted as a reasonable way to settle controversies. On the other hand, even though a major role of the UN is certainly welcome and the UN system of collective security should be reinforced, it remains to be seen if this institution will be able to reform itself, thus producing a more representative board, including big countries now excluded from the Security Council and without anachronistic veto powers. Therefore balance of Powers could eventually prevail, independently of the actual desires of the international actors and in spite of the risks that accompany it. If this is the outcome, one perhaps in a future day will say that once again Reason used one of Its unpredictable tricks.