

**Center for Transatlantic Relations
The Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies
The Johns Hopkins University**

**American Consortium on European Union Studies (ACES)
EU Center Washington DC**

TransAtlantic Magazine

The Financial Times

Breakfast Briefings on Politics and Foreign Policy

“Iraq: Do Voters Care?”

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Thursday July 8, 2004

My title is: Why voters should care. Because I think that at least comes closer to what my interests... engage... me.

And let me begin by two qualifications, and I think they're relevant in view of what I intend to say. The first is something about myself that you should know. I am a Democrat in domestic politics. That's an important qualification. I vote Democratic when we have elections and particularly when Congressional issues are involved. On foreign policy, I vote the man (we haven't had a woman yet to choose from), in terms of my best judgment, as to what would be best for American national security, America's role in the world. And that has meant over the years that while more often than not I chose the Democratic candidate, there were several instances when I preferred the Republican. So you are to know that. In other words, what I'm talking about is not a partisan perspective on foreign policy. It's my perspective. It may be right, it may be wrong. But it is derived from what I hope is a serious concern for the national well-being.

My second preliminary point pertains to my views on Iraq over the last several years. And I think it's useful to remind some of you of them because it is pertinent to my current views. Immediately after 9/11 and in the subsequent year and a half up to the invasion of Iraq, I wrote a series of op-eds in the Wall Street Journal, in the New York Times, in the Washington Post. They are on the public record. Let me just very succinctly state the key points I made from the very beginning. The first point was: we have to deal with the problem of Saddam and of Iraq because it was a long-range problem. And 9/11 gives salience and urgency to the need to deal with that problem. I said it very explicitly, and I said that this is an issue that needs to be addressed. But then I also went on to write and say is that how we deal with him is almost as important as that we deal with him. And therefore how we approach the issue of Iraq and how we structure a response is of critical importance. And I stressed that we had to wait until such a

point as we were able to create genuine consensus for dealing with Iraq. And that there was no imminent threat. There was a long-range threat that was serious, that dictated the need to respond, but there was not an immediate threat.

The day the war started, I was a major interviewee on the Jim Lehrer show which devoted a large part of that show to the war. And on the day the war started, I said on the air that I have been skeptical increasingly about the weapons of mass destruction. But I certainly hoped now that the war had started that it was established that they were there. Hopefully not because they were used against us, but because that they were found. And if they wouldn't be, that this would be a massive problem for the United States.

And I have always throughout this entire period urged that our efforts on Iraq be accompanied by a broader initiative in the Middle East so that anything we do regarding Iraq is not viewed as a kind of American vendetta against an Arab state, but should be part of a larger effort to stabilize and address some of the basic problems.

That's by way of background. Now, where are we today? What next?

And here I'd like to stress the following several points. First of all, the costs of the unilateral war, because it was a unilateral war, have been disproportionately high. And they have been disproportionately high on several levels. The most obvious one is the human cost. It is not enormous, but it is no longer insignificant. We now have close to 900 American dead, close to 5,000 wounded and maimed. That's not an insignificant number, for a nation basically at peace. And of course, many times more Iraqis have been killed in that war. But we don't keep those statistics. So the cost in blood is high.

The cost in money is high. In 1991 when we followed more-or-less the kind of stratagem that I would have favored in the pursuit of the campaign against Saddam this time, namely the deliberate sustained effort to build a coalition, the war cost \$80 billion. The American taxpayers paid \$7 billion, because we had a genuine international consensus and international support and therefore the financial costs of the war were relatively limited. Now the costs are pushing \$200 billion, and they are going to be borne, are being borne, by the American taxpayer alone. That's pretty high.

In addition to it, American credibility worldwide has been shot. And that's very serious. And the current excuse that's used in reference to that issue is "But the whole world thought [they had] weapons of mass destruction." That's the excuse that's being used, that's the excuse that the intelligence committee's majority is going to use in its report in a few days. But just think what that assertion really means. "The whole world thought he had weapons of mass destruction." I take it that means that for example, and I'm picking countries at random, Finland had a sustained intelligence effort to establish whether Saddam has weapons of mass destruction. And so did Paraguay. And so did Mongolia. And so did South Africa. No, the reason the whole world indeed did think that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction is that the president of the United States said that he did. Repeatedly. Categorically. Without qualification. And supported by all of his

principle officers, who would publicly, or in face-to-face meetings in which I have participated, would look at you in the eye and say, “but look, we *know* they have weapons of mass destruction!” And when you know these people, and you’ve worked with them, and you respect them, it doesn’t cross your mind that they could be *that* wrong. We were the ones that said to the world that they had weapons of mass destruction, and we were believed.

It was under forty years ago that in a situation in which we were on the brink of war in which millions of people would have died, namely the Cuban Missile Crisis, President Kennedy sent the crusty old Secretary of State Dean Acheson to Europe to brief European leaders on the Cuban crisis, the deployment of the Soviet weapons in Cuba, nuclear-tipped rockets targetted at the United States. He briefed de Gaulle the first time, the first day. He told him that this is a message that he’s bringing from the President of the United States and that we’re going to take those weapons out unless they are withdrawn, and that may mean nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union, between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and that therefore France would be engaged. And when he finished, he said to de Gaulle, “And now I would like to show you the evidence.” He had all those photographs with him that Stevenson showed at the UN a day later. And de Gaulle looked at Dean Acheson and said, “I don’t want to see your evidence. I don’t want to see your evidence. Go back and tell the President of the United States, his word is good enough for me, France stands with the United States.” We have been trusted because by-and-large our record has been very good in terms of credibility and honesty. But in this particular case, what we asserted was false. Totally false. I’m not alleging that the president lied deliberately. I just don’t know. What I do know is that if he didn’t lie, he was misled. And if he was misled, somebody misled him. And if somebody misled him with such costs, they should have been fired. All we have heard of instead was, “The director of Central Intelligence has done a superb job, the CIA has done an extremely good job.” But someone or other was totally wrong. Our credibility has been shot and that’s a very high price.

Our alliances have been strained, because you don’t lead an alliance of democracies by saying to them (I counted this on the computer once in the first year after 9/11 and particularly when the campaign against Iraq mounted) “If you’re not with us, you’re against us.” That is not the way to mobilize an alliance. And I think the costs of the fracture in the alliance are still high. So the political costs have been high.

In the region, there is much more hostility towards America than ever before. That is just a fact, attested by everyone involved. So we have regional hatred in addition to the direct costs for the United States.

And moreover, we have in effect expanded the war on terrorism from Afghanistan to a much larger region and we have expanded it without the American public fully understanding what is involved, and without much international support. You might remember that after 1945 when the Cold War started we committed ourselves to Europe. It was a major commitment. A historic commitment in fact. A long-lasting commitment. It was conveyed to the American people in a series of major speeches that were substantive, ranging from the Truman Doctrine to statements by Senator Vandenberg because it was pursued in a bipartisan fashion, to the speech by Churchill

in Fulton. It was a comprehensive commitment based on a strategic historic justification.

We are now engaged since 9/11 in an area which I have called in my most recent book the Global Balkans, which spans a region from Suez to Tsianjong, from Souther Russia all the way to the Indian Ocean, encompassing 550 million people, ethnically conflicted, nationalistically increasingly self-conscious, religiously aroused, socially frustrated, generally rather poor, increasingly motivated by bitter resentments. And we're engaged largely alone. And our engagement spans countries from Egypt to Pakistan. I hope, for example, that in the not-too-far future we'll capture Osama bin Laden or kill him. But how many of you would bet that that is more likely than that Musharaf gets killed. And just think of what the consequences of that will be for a nuclear-armed Pakistan that's volatile with 140-150 million people. We're engaged in Afghanistan. We have a rather difficult relationship with Iran. We're embroiled in Iraq. The Middle East is seething with hostility. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is ongoing with casualties on both sides almost on a daily basis. And all of that is intensifying the inclination of terrorism to focus on the United States. As the IIS reports, since the action in Iraq, there has been a tendency for different terrorist groups in different parts of the world to coalesce. To coalesce and focus their hostility increasingly on the United States.

Both the president and the vice-president like to say that we are dealing with terrorism as a generalized phenomenon. Terrorism with a global reach is our enemy. Or terrorism as an evil is our enemy. Or as the president quaintly put it once, "We love freedom, they hate freedom. We love things, they hate things." The vice-president has said that terrorists hate every government in the world, every nation in the world.

Facts are a little different. The terrorists in Kashmir hate the Indian government but they don't Norway. The terrorists in Palestine hate Israel but they don't hate Chile. And the terrorists in Ulster hate the British government, but they don't hate America.

We have refrained, actually, on the issue of terrorism from asking the most obvious question, instead, simply sweepingly and broadly generalizing in the most vague fashion. We have not asked "Who are the terrorists? Where do they come from? What makes them terrorists?" speaking of the terrorists that are hostile to us. And the answers, to me at least, are very clear. The terrorists are Middle Eastern terrorists. And just look at the nationalities of the terrorists in 9/11, or the others that have gone after American assets. They come from a region. They come from a region with a history. The fact of the matter is that in that region, the United States is the inheritor of the colonialism of the British and the French. In 1991, we, by being present in Saudi Arabia, stimulated the extremist fundamentalist hatred of the Wahabis, and that gave a real spurt to Osama, and gave him the kind of impetus he needed to generate his activities against us. And we're viewed in the region as very partial in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which at the same time is not being moved forward on the road to peace.

All of that creates the problem we face. And what do we do with it in that context? I would suggest that the following steps are really needed. First of all, we need to clarify the extent and durability of our presence in Iraq. This is a difficult issue, but I think it is an issue which will

have to be addressed. I have tried to address it publicly, I've had some disagreements on this subject with some of my friends. I recently had a rather lively debate on this subject with Henry Kissinger on national television which became a little acrimonious even though that we are actually, despite of what the press says, old friends, have known each other for 30 years... 40 years... 50 years, actually! Yeah, 50 years. And it got rather heated so the next day, television actually took excerpts from that and kept rebroadcasting it under the title "The Clash of the Titans." It wasn't "Clash of the Titans", it was a disagreement between two old friends. But my point was that we have to set a date for getting out. If we don't set a date for getting out, our presence is indefinite. And in the region, that leads to real suspicions as to what our intent is and suspicions rooted in historical experience. If we don't set a date, we strengthen the resistance to what is then perceived increasingly as a foreign occupation, and we make it more difficult for the new interim government to consolidate itself as an authentic Iraqi government.

If we don't set a date at some point, we'll set in motion a competition among Iraqi leaders, particularly when the elections begin, to set an early date for telling us to get out because that would be a way to respond to nationalist aspirations. Which means in effect we lose control over the schedule, while at the same time by being indefinite we accentuate the difficulties both of the interim regime and of course get bogged down ourselves. If we set a date, we are the ones in charge of the calendar, the Iraqi interim government has more of an incentive to try to get itself in shape so that it can stand on its own feet. We convey to the Iraqi people our determination to leave rather than provoke the impression of a desire to stay indefinitely with all sort of conspiratorial theses about our desire to control oil and so forth. And of course if we set a date and the date approaches and the Iraqi government is not capable of carrying on without us, it can always ask us to stay longer. Which then makes us respond affirmatively in response to an explicit request.

What the date should be can be debatable. I have suggested in fact April of next year, which would be two years after the occupation. And in part because the security situation is not as bad as it looks on television. What we see on television is of course the violence, largely in four places.. What we don't see on television is the non-violence, which is the case in the majority of the country. So the situation security-wise is not critical. But the longer we stay, the more likely it is to be transformed into a national liberation struggle, and Algeria and the Battle of Algiers come to mind.

Secondly, we have to, I think, become more energetic in pushing the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, this is a tragic conflict in which both peoples are suffering, both peoples have a legitimate claim to the same territory, they will never resolve it on their own. They don't have the leadership, they don't have the vision, they have the fears and the mutual antagonism that makes that impossible. Unless we push that more actively, that issue will not be resolved. And if we leave Iraq without progress, will guarantee that any next Iraqi government quickly will become both anti-American and anti-Israeli. And hence one will have to ask, what was the real benefit of getting rid of Saddam Hussein.

Third, I think we'll have to explore patiently and cautiously some normalization of relations with

Iran. Iran is in the position to maximize our difficulties in Afghanistan and in Iraq. But Iran is also a stable historically significant country with a defined role: it's a genuine country and a serious country. It is also a country which quite paradoxically, given the theocratic veneer it currently has, has considerable prospects for democratic evolution in the way of Turkey. It has a well-educated public, high levels of literacy, a long tradition of a significant role for women in that society. It is not some sort of primitive third-world entity incapable of moving forward.

Fourth, I think we have to tone down the anti-Islamic atmosphere that's been generated, not so much by what's officially said but by the implied association of terrorism with fundamentalism with Islamism or Islamic fundamentalism, which does create an atmosphere which is not conducive to the stabilization of the region.

Fourth, in order to engage our European allies in working with us, we have to change a little bit the nature of the dialogue. The dialogue between us and the Europeans more or less can be defined today as follows. We say to the Europeans, "You are our allies, you have to share the burdens with us because you are our allies." And the Europeans say to us, "We are your allies, and you have to share your decision-making with us." I think the obvious formula that has to be used is: we make the decisions jointly and we share the burdens jointly. But if we are going to make the decisions jointly, then we'd better listen to the Europeans when they talk about the Middle East, because they happen to know it a little better than we do, and they know the Islamic world a little better than we do. And they're not fully supportive of our views in the Middle East. They have made a number of suggestions on a number of fronts which we haven't pursued and we're not going to get them simply to follow us. And I think that building alliances is important intrinsically, but it's very relevant to the problem we face in the Global Balkans.

And last, and I'll conclude on this, while it's difficult to say because we don't know what might happen later today, or tomorrow, or two weeks from now, or six weeks from now, but we still need to cool it on the whole issue of terrorism. We're not the only country in the world that experienced terrorism. There are a number of countries, there are representatives from some of them in this room here today. 1978, there were 2,000 terrorist attacks in one country alone in Europe: Italy. Former prime minister was kidnapped and murdered, leading businessmen were killed and murdered. A number of other European countries have been or are experiencing terrorism. Few of them have created the kind of panicky atmosphere at the highest level that has been created here. Few of them have nationwide alarms, which are then justified by vague references to some eavesdropped conversations. It doesn't take a very high IQ for a few people who wish America ill to get the idea, given the fact that we monitor so many telephone conversations around the world, to get the bright idea of talking to each other about terrorist plots directed against the United States, especially when they notice that this precipitates nationwide alarms in the United States immediately. And crying wolf is not healthy. And becoming panicky is not constructive. And conveying the impression of permanent fear is not conducive to responsible leadership.

So I think that too is a part of the problem we confront. And all of these issues are ultimately related to the problem of Iraq. Thank you very much.