



Aron's Israel Peace Weblog

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Gangs of Baghdad

The dilemma is not whether Saddam Hussein has 8,000 liters or half a liter of nerve gas, whether he has close ties with Al-Qaida or did no more than make medical treatment available to one of its members. The U.S. Secretary of State last week presented one convincing reason for going to war against Saddam Hussein - to make the world a safer place.

In the light of this rationale, there is no need to prove anything. Saddam Hussein himself provided all the proof anyone could want when he made use of chemical weapons against the Kurds and the Iranians, invaded Kuwait, fired missiles at Iran, Israel, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, and built a nuclear reactor with the ambition, as demonstrated in documents, of producing nuclear weapons.

After his crimes were proved and after it was agreed he had to go - and not even the opponents of the United States are disputing that conclusion - a more important question arises. Will a war against Sadam really make the world a safer place? The answer to that lies not only in the uncertainty about who will succeed Saddam, or in the chances of Iraq becoming a federated, democratic, peace-seeking and human rights observant state. The real question is what type of new enemy such a war is likely to create. Iraq, after Afghanistan, could be the last orderly goal of a conventional war in which one state fights another. As in Afghanistan, however, the goal is not to effect a "regime change" for its own sake, but to eliminate a danger. And as in Afghanistan, that danger is liable not to disappear; the problem is that in the case of Iraq it is liable to be fragmented into clusters of

threats that will blow up far and wide.

What will a post-war Iraq look like? Who will rule who? Will the Shi'ites, who are the majority, control the Sunnis and the Kurds? Will the Kurds agree to forgo their areas and abandon their aspirations for independence? Will they subordinate themselves to a central government when they are incapable of reaching agreement even among themselves? What will the attitude of the new Iraq toward Shi'ite Iran? And what if a civil war breaks out, which will reverberate through all the Gulf states, where large Shi'ite minorities live? How many internal organizations and fragments of organizations will be created by the war?

After all, the "official" Iraqi opposition alone consists of six or seven organizations that find it difficult to get their act together. And there are another 16 organizations that are not members of that opposition, and dozens of more bits and pieces of organizations that are against everything. Each of them, though, has a community some of whose members are in Iraq while the rest are scattered across all the countries of Europe and in the United States.

One example is the organization of Abu Musaab al-Zarkawi, the person whom Powell cited as proof of the links between Iraq and Osama bin Laden. Zarkawi - real name is Amhed Fadil al-Halaila, of Palestinian descent - is a member of an organization called Ansar al-Islam. It emerged out of an organization called Jund al-Islam, which in turn came from an earlier organization called Hamas - not the current Palestinian group. Iran financed it and its mosques in the Islamic district of northern Iraq were funded by Saudi Arabia.

Another case in point is the "Kurds," who are incorrectly perceived as being ethnically monolithic and pro-American. They are not - in addition to two large branches there are a variety of others. When it was necessary to give shelter to Iraqi Kurds who were suffering at Saddam's hands, the heads of the large branches told them to look elsewhere, because they didn't want to share their oil royalties with them. Some of them went on to Italy and France.

Anyone looking for an example close to home is invited to consider the chaos that was engendered in Palestine after Israel brought about the collapse of the

Palestinian Authority. Twelve Palestinian groups are now trying to arrive at understandings in Egypt - and they are all Sunni Muslims and share a common ideological interest. The story in Iraq is immeasurably more complex. Even more complex than what Israel found when it sought to create a new order in Lebanon and its troops were showered with rice and flowers.

Saddam Hussein is a dangerous leader who must be neutralized, but using the same method by which a boob-trapped bomb is defuzed - slowly, gingerly, and with great precision. A war against Iraq may be the quick route, but the outcome is liable to be a new type of war. That would have to be fought for years against "gangs of Baghdad" - each of which would possess "only" a small vial of anthrax bacteria like the one Colin Powell showed the world.

By [Zvi Bar'el](#)
