

OCTOBER 24, 2002

IRAQ AND THE UNITED STATES: HOW THREATENING A STORM?
BY JOHN DUKE ANTHONY

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EDITOR'S NOTE:

GulfWire's Publisher, Dr. John Duke Anthony, reports on a meeting he and others had last night with Dr. Kenneth M. Pollack at the Council on Foreign Relations, of which Dr. Anthony is a member. Dr. Pollack was a CIA analyst on Iraq during Operation Desert Storm in 1991 and subsequently served on the National Security Council in the Clinton Administration as the principal specialist on Gulf affairs. Currently the Deputy Director of the newly established Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, Dr. Pollack is also the author of the newly published *The Threatening Storm: The Case for Invading Iraq*, published by the Council on Foreign Relations in association with Random House.

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Introduction

Following is a rough and unofficial rendition of a conversation/briefing others and I participated in this evening with Dr. Pollack. While permission was obtained to publish what follows, I alone am responsible for any mistakes of omission or errors of fact.
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"I will be the first to admit that I was the 'poster boy' for the strategy of containment vis-à-vis Iraq, for arguing that deterrence could work. In retrospect, it is clear that we could have done a number of things differently that would have allowed the policy of containment to continue into the future, but the truth is that we did not. That calls into question how we got from 'containment' to 'regime change.'

"To answer that question, it is important to recall what containment was to have accomplished. First, it was designed to keep any and all Iraqi threats confined to areas inside Iraq - the government was not to be allowed to threaten anyone outside its borders. Second, the 'No-Fly-Zones' were designed to constrict the government even further from threatening either its neighbors or even its own people, specifically those in the southern one third and the northern one third of the country.

"Third, containment was to take place alongside a robust system of sanctions. Fourth, together with the sanctions, there was to be an effective regime of inspections. There are some who still favor an effective inspections regime as an alternative to regime change. I am not one of them.

"The reason is that under the sanctions regime, Saddam used the money he obtained as a result of the oil sold to determine who got which contract for the purchase and distribution of food and medicines, who got to provide this or that service, and who received this or that favor. Over time, he used the sanctions in this way to reward those who cheated, those who did business outside the sanctions regime, and those willing to provide him kickbacks.

"In the 1990s, from the 250-350 million dollars a year that he was getting through oil smuggled out of Iraq in violation of the sanctions, Saddam has steadily increased his take to what, this year alone, is likely to amount to three billion dollars. The sanctions regime, in other words, is not working; in fact, it is hemorrhaging - far too much is going to Saddam as a result of the sanctions.

"If one has any doubt, there have been statements from Jordanians and Turks that they expect to make twice as much from [Iraqi] smuggled oil and other goods this year than last year. And Syria is not far behind - much of what President Assad allows to come into Syria from Iraq, for a price, can be assumed to be in violation of the sanctions.

"As to how neither sanctions nor inspections have or are likely to serve well as deterrence, in the early 1990s the Iraqis became so good at evading the inspectors that we simply don't know how much of what we discovered represented how much of what there was - so much was concealed. In fact, it got to the point where one of the main tasks was to penetrate the 'concealment mechanism' that Saddam used to hide where the weapons really were.

"To this day, we simply don't know what we don't know. We don't even know where all the weapons of mass destruction production and storage sites are. One thing for sure, they are not in the reported 700 sites where the Iraqis and others, including former inspectors, say they are.

"Further, people forget or overlook the fact that although the previous inspectors were supposed to find and ensure the destruction of the country's weapons of mass destruction, in actual fact the inspectors were not authorized or otherwise empowered to forcibly disarm the country of such weapons - in other words, they never had the license to physically take such weapons out of Saddam's hands, and they didn't. What they had was a checklist, and when it was reported that this or that weapon of mass destruction had been destroyed, they often simply checked that item off the list.

"Currently, the way the debate is going in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) suggests that it will be up to the UNSC to insist as well as to ensure that Iraq complies. But, this said, we cannot find, and we have not yet found, anybody who would force him to do what he was supposed to do. Now, as before, the vast majority of countries are not interested in forcing him to comply. As for the 700 or so sites where there are supposed to be weapons of mass destruction, no such weapons are likely to found in any of those sites.

"The Bush Administration is presently holding a gun to the world's head in order to get a forceful UN resolution vis-à-vis Iraq. But we cannot keep the world on edge indefinitely, or even for as long as six to twelve months; at some point, the world's attention, interest, and resolve will fade. And with that the world might once again not be as interested as we are in disarming Saddam.

"Despite this, some continue to ask, 'Why not deterrence?' My answer is that, in 1991, the reason for deterrence was the assumption that Saddam could not be deterred and therefore had to be -- that is, he had to be kept from obtaining weapons of mass destruction, and not only that: he had to be kept from having the Iraqi armed forces crossing the country's borders again.

"The belief then, as now, was that Saddam was not and is not a traditional decision maker. What he does is calculate the odds of his succeeding or failing in doing this or that based on what he wants to happen, regardless of whether others agree with him. A few examples will suffice.

"In 1991, he convinced himself that he would be able to defeat on the battlefield the Allied Coalition that was arrayed against him. According to one of his former chiefs of staff who defected, when Saddam was informed about the extraordinary technology of the Stealth Fighter [the F117s], he was reported to have said that the country's shepherds would be able to see them coming and alert the government in time.

"When informed about the effectiveness of Cruise missiles, Saddam is said to have responded by claiming that the country's armed forces would be able to divert them from their targets. When briefed on the attributes of the Apache helicopters, he was reported to have been dismissive, saying, 'Their existence is a myth.'

"I believe, therefore, that here is a man that is too difficult, indeed likely impossible, to deter. The reason is because he is not a rational actor. He does what he wants to do. Thus, the real problem with Saddam is that, given that he is likely four to six years away from having nuclear weapons, when he does get them, the United States is likely to be too frightened to take him on. And then, he will be able to dominate the Gulf and Middle Eastern oil, whereas now, the United States is the one big obstacle to all his goals.

Discussion

Q. "It's been said that if we do attack Iraq, Saddam is almost certain to use whatever weapons of mass destruction he may have. Would you comment?"

A. "In such a scenario, I believe he will most certainly use them - he'll pull out all the stops. It's true, though, as many have pointed out, that his WMD status at present is quite weak. Lots of it was destroyed earlier, even though some of it has been rebuilt. What we know is that he does not have any nuclear weapons, nor does he have smallpox.

"Saddam does have chemical weapons, which he has used before, and he has the means to deliver them. But his biological weapons are less well known even if what we know about their delivery is that he has not yet had an opportunity to use them, in part perhaps because the warheads he has [for this purpose] are horrible. This said, [the current difficulties he faces in this regard are remedial and] he could indeed use such weapons later.

Q. "Why do you think Saddam decided to empty the country's prisons the other day?"

A. "For carefully crafted political reasons having to do with his international image. To counter the image of his being politically repressive, he allowed elections to 'prove' to people that he is liked, accepted, legitimate. To counter the image that he is cruel and in gross violation of his people's civil and human rights, he lets all of the country's prisoners go free to show that the image is incorrect.

"These acts are to be seen in the context of Saddam believing he can get away with his making efforts to stop or stave the moves towards war. In this, he's not to be mistaken for being someone like Adolf Hitler. Hitler was given to mood swings and periods of despondency when he conceded that all was lost. Saddam is exactly the opposite. Our hope is that we can get him to go far enough down the road in his thinking along these lines until it's too late, and only then does he realize that his goose has been cooked.

Q. "What if one concedes for the moment that all the diplomatic maneuvering and wrangling with the United Nations and our allies at this time is but a charade, a strategic gimmick to serve as a guise for tactical surprise, to allow us to move quickly and forcibly in such a way as to head off some of the things that, if we do not get him now, he could do to us later?"

A. "Good question. Timing is undoubtedly important. Look what we learned the last time around, in Desert Storm. In a sense, some say we may have moved too fast. That is, before he could unleash his weapons of mass destruction against us or anybody else, we had overrun his forces and his and their capability to do so. We took the expectation that Saddam might use chemical weapons against us out of his hands - we made it impossible for him to do so. This time around, let's not kid ourselves: Saddam, if he concludes that he is going down, is going to have an incentive to use WMD.

Q. "What are your views about the likelihood of our staying around to rebuild Iraq?"

A. "Ideally, I would like to see the United States build the broadest possible coalition in support of this exact goal. By that, I mean we need to line up the NGOs, the donors, Iraq's neighbors, and those in a position to help Iraq's neighbors help Iraq - to receive refugees, and particularly to meet the very real needs of the Jordanians and the Turks in this regard.

"All of this will entail costs. Although you did not ask the question, an alternative question is what will be the humanitarian cost if we do not go into Iraq? And what will be the cost if Saddam does obtain nuclear weapons?"

Q. "What is the likelihood of Saddam using WMD against Israel?"

A. "High. That said, one might be able to convince Saddam not to do so until later in the game. We convinced him in this way during Desert Storm, when he did not fire missiles against Israel until late in the game - he knows that the United States' retaliation against him were he to do so would be unimaginable. [In the same vein,] it is just possible that we could get Saddam not to do so in order for Israel not to respond with its own nuclear attack against Iraq.

Q. "I listen to you and hear you say that Iraq has no nuclear weapons but that it has chemical weapons, and I am bothered by the scenario of an Iraqi somewhere with a suitcase full of either chemical or biological weapons. But my question has to do with something else. How do you respond to the many four-star generals and admirals and former secretaries of defense and state that have the same security clearances and access to classified and privileged information that you have but believe that now is not the time to attack Iraq and that containment CAN work?"

A. "Look, it is not as if we have to do it this hour. It's that we have to do it sooner rather than later. I agree with much of what the generals you mention have said. I agree, in particular, with most of what General Zinni, for example, has said on this very point. I would also like to point out that all the Arabs are horrified that we would even think of doing this

[invading Iraq] before getting negotiations between the Palestinians and Israelis back on track.

"If we have to postpone an attack - maybe for a year or more to get a better grip on Afghanistan, on the [Israeli-Palestinian] peace process, on clamping down on Al-Qaeda - if it means delaying an attack for those reasons, I believe that's a reasonable proposition. I don't believe that an Iraqi threat is imminent; it's longer term. What we must make certain is to use the time we have now to be sure as we can be [that we are doing the right thing] when we do go in.

Q. "In the event that there is not a United Nations resolution authorizing the use of force against Iraq, or there is one, and the inspectors return but find that they are unable to vouch one hundred per cent that all of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction have been discovered and destroyed, would you recommend that the United States attack Iraq anyway? And what are your views about the possibility that, in the hindsight of history, all the present diplomatic maneuvering was but a pretext or a ruse of some kind for an attack at a time not revealed beforehand?

A. "I don't agree that it's a proposition of either us by ourselves or with the United Nations, or that there are no other alternatives. Having said that, neither am I prepared to say that I agree with the concept of 'interminable delay' in the dismantlement of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. It's not as if one can say we have not given Saddam enough advanced notice.

"From a purely strategic perspective, I'm prepared to wait. Yet I have no confidence that the United Nations is going to be able to disarm Iraq.

"I believe that, if necessary, the United States could build a coalition outside the United Nations. Certainly there are numerous countries in the region that want to see Saddam go. Yet these same countries' leaders also want to see a viable and credible Israeli-Palestinian peace process. President Bush was right to say that 'this is a test for the United Nations, that it was given an opportunity in the early 1990s but failed the test.' We are going to the United Nations again, and what will happen there remains to be seen.

Q. "You mentioned earlier that in the 1990s there were roads that were present but not taken. What were some of those roads, and why couldn't we take them now?

A. "One of the options we had back then, when Saddam was much weaker domestically than he is now, was overthrowing him. That's still an option, but he's much stronger now, and that option, as a result, is less credible than before.

"Another opportunity presented itself in the mid-1990s. We had an opportunity to put into place a different kind of sanctions, ones that would have essentially lifted or reduced the economic sanctions but retained the military ones, bolstered the financial controls, and tightened the rules and regulations by which Saddam would be able to get his hands on the money and how he would be able to distribute it, all of which was something that many countries, and the Peoples Republic of China in particular, very much wanted to see happen. But we cast about for support and found that the requisite interest and support to back us up was lacking.

Q. "Among the unanticipated consequences of an American invasion of Iraq, there are perhaps too many to name, but could you perhaps elaborate a little on just a few of them - for example, what might be the prospects for the

country's Kurds, the Shia, the country's territorial integrity, refugees, etc.?

A. "I'm one of many who believe that the initial military operation is likely to be the easiest part. The post-Saddam period is certain to be the most difficult aspect of this operation. If we try to apply to Iraq what we have done in Afghanistan, it would be a disaster, a much worse situation.

"There's another way. If we have the will and the resources, it need not be anything like a MacArthur operation, nor need it be anything like merely propping up an Iraqi point man and walking away. Don't forget that Iraq has much in the way of natural and human resources to rebuild the country. Within three years, it could pay for its own reconstruction, especially in light of its oil resources.

"In addition, Iraq is well prepared on the secular front - the challenges are of a nature and number that are less difficult than would be the case in, say, Sudan, Somalia, or Yemen. If we were willing to stay to do whatever was necessary to rebuild the country, and if there was the requisite international support, we could do it, although it would not be easy or cheap.

Q. "What about the possible post-invasion effects on the stability of other countries in the region, for example, Jordan and Saudi Arabia?"

A. "We shouldn't be more Catholic than the Pope on such matters. By that, I mean that if the governments of the countries concerned believe that they can manage most of the envisioned scenarios of discontent - provided there is a credible return to meaningful peace negotiations in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict - we should not be more worried than they are.

"Not to be overlooked is that we have reason to be concerned about the impact upon our own people at this time, given how they feel. Our people feel we need to lower the level of violence and restore a semblance of hope for the Palestinians. If we could do these things, our friends in the region are comfortable that they can handle the situation.

Q. "But is it likely that we will spawn new Usamah Bin Ladens, a new generation of Al-Qaeda supporters, if we invade Iraq?"

A. "Some people will undoubtedly hate us without regard to the circumstances, not all or most of whom are necessarily from the Middle East; in fact, a great many are from other continents. Many will look long and hard at what we intend to do in or to Iraq - for example, whether we do everything within our power to ensure that it becomes and remains a strong and stable state. It is true that we hear from many that, 'You have betrayed your ideals', that 'You say that you are trying to improve the lot of the people and to promote democracy, but in reality what you are really interested in is propping up regimes.'

"If chaos were to ensue in Iraq, we could end up with mayhem on a greater scale than anyone could imagine and possibly with even worse results in the United States. As to the prospects for furthering the cause of democracy in the region, it's important to recall that movements in this direction are relatively new and recent, many of them starting only in the period since Desert Storm in 1991.

"Yet it's important to note what has been stimulated in this regard - in particular, in Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain, all of which have parliaments, albeit without, as yet, much in the way of real political power. And in Saudi Arabia, Crown Prince Abdallah has been very good in talking about his

commitment to political reform in Saudi Arabia's own way and at its own pace. The Kingdom's majlises [open forums, a traditional political process observed nationally, regionally, and locally every day, throughout the Kingdom], are as vibrant a system of democracy in action as one can see.

"On balance, I think that prior to 9-11, as a country and a government we were a little too blasé about the region's political and economic systems and their prospects for reform. There is no need or reason to abandon these regimes and no grounds whatsoever for bullying them. Changes will take place, are taking place, and some will take place over the coming decades.

Q. "I understand why you think we should invade Iraq, but I would like to know why you think the Bush Administration thinks we should invade Iraq.

A. "I don't know why. I'm not privy to their discussions. That said, I am privy to some of their arguments, for example, their trying to link 9-11 to Al-Qaeda and to the idea that Saddam might give weapons of mass destruction to Al-Qaeda operatives. To me, this would be the direct opposite of Saddam's modus operandi. He's not prone to giving WMD to someone else - he's a control freak. He wouldn't do it unless he felt he was doomed to die.

"Having said this, I am aware that numerous Members of Congress and some British officials say they have been on the receiving end of classified briefings by the Administration. These people tell me that they have "heard the evidence, but we just don't believe it." Many ask, basically, "What is the Administration hiding from us that no else believes?"

"As for myself, I believe that there is a strong case for invading Iraq and it rests on Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction and its intent to acquire additional weapons of mass destruction.

Q. "Would the 'breaking up of Iraq' be better or worse than continuing the status quo or some other scenario involving Iraq?

A. "In strategic terms, Iraq's borders should be inviolable. We won't get support from Turkey if we argue, think, or act otherwise. Also, were the state to break apart, one would likely see an even greater degree of 'score-settling' than one is likely to see in any case, especially between Sunnis and Shia, with each simultaneously likely to try to use force to regain or retain the country's territorial integrity. As neither of the two groups is likely to have adequate power to so do, the result could easily be civil war. Introduce that scenario and you also introduce the likelihood of the Iranians, Syrians, and Turks being sucked in to support their supporters and their interests.

"I'm one who wants someday to see the 25 million Kurds secede from the countries in which they presently find themselves and obtain an independent state. But now my biggest challenge is to try to get rid of Saddam Hussein. The Iraqi Kurds are not unaware of the risks, the pitfalls, the dangers in what looms ahead. Were they to secede, they know they would bring the full force of the Turks and the Iranians down on their heads.

"A free, independent, and sovereign Kurdish state in northern Iraq would be hemmed in and surrounded by nothing but hostile neighbors, all of which would be bent on its destruction. In this context, only a kind of autonomy [for the Kurds of northern Iraq] is possible - that, and what a Kurdish area might look like in a [post-Saddam] federal Iraqi system.

Q. "Why do you think the Bush Administration switched from fighting Al-Qaeda to attacking Iraq as its number one foreign policy priority in the region?

A. "Good question. I hate to answer it by citing rumors, but, really, that's all I have to go on. The most persistent rumor in this regard is that a bunch of people who came into the Bush Administration wanted, from the very beginning, to remove Saddam Hussein. They believed that if this could be achieved, it would solve a lot of problems.

"This particular objective picked up a lot of momentum in November 2001, when there were briefings that postulated that Saddam Hussein actually would be likely to give WMD to terrorists, members of Al-Qaeda among them. It followed that, if Al-Qaeda operatives were to get their hands on such weapons and use them, thousands would wind up dead. The reasoning followed that this would be so bad that it cannot be allowed to happen, so, in order to prevent it from happening, we have to take him [Saddam Hussein] out.

Q. "Much has been written in recent days and weeks about there being a 'window of opportunity' for attacking Iraq, with many commentators pointing out that for reasons related to climate and other factors, an attack ideally must be launched between now and the end of March. My question is, 'Who is likely to prevail in this 'window of opportunity?'' For example, if Saddam and/or the United Nations, and/or other factors cause seven months to slip by without an effective resolution of the current challenges, will that mean that the present window of opportunity has been closed and that one will have no choice but to wait for another 'window of opportunity,' one that could be closer to 2004? And what about some other unanticipated consequences of our going into Iraq?

A. "The Bush Administration is on the horns of a dilemma with the ongoing debate that we have as a result of going down the United Nations path. On one hand, it is important to go down that path. Yet we know that the Administration believes that the inspectors are not likely to succeed. Simultaneously, it is just as likely that there is not going to be a single incident or series of incidents that, in and of itself, will provide sufficient provocation in the eyes of other countries to warrant an attack. In other words, it is possible that, with or without the kind of UN resolution that we might like to see, Saddam might be able to string us out. Alternatively, Saddam might try to string us out only to see us break off and invade him anyway, even if, were we to do so, we would have far fewer allies with us. Were we to go in that way, there's no question that we would be electing to split off from our allies.

"It's not that difficult to wait a year. There are political reasons for doing so. People forget that it was in 1998, during the Clinton Administration, that the President of the United States concluded that 'regime change' in Iraq was the only U.S. policy option. A corollary to that conclusion was that the only way to implement the conclusion, the only way to do it right, was to invade. But in 1998, no one in Washington was ready to do so.

"Since 9-11, though, things have changed. There's a readiness for such action at present. But that readiness could wane.

"From a strategic perspective, we could wait. Yet I'm afraid that we have put our foot in a bear trap from which it is going to be hard to pull it out without consequences.

"One of the unanticipated but possible consequences that worries me the most is Jordan. [JDA: Others whisper 'Pakistan', too]. Jordan is completely dependent upon Iraq for its oil. Iraq is its largest trading partner. Between seventeen and twenty-two per cent of Jordan's total trade is with Iraq. In a country of five million people, some 400,000 Iraqis live and

work in Jordan - half of whom, say some, are assumed to be official or clandestine operatives of Iraqi intelligence.

"Jordan is another one of the 'ducks' that we need to get in order - for example, [if we are going to attack Iraq] we need to find a new source for Jordan's oil needs and for help with its finances. Regarding the latter, it will be hard for Saudi Arabia to come to the rescue because it has less to be able to help with than it had in the past. And especially in the case of Jordan, there is no alternative to our having to work with the Palestinians. It is nonsense to read reports that say King Abdallah has agreed to give consent to the United States to use Jordan's bases to attack Iraq - such unfounded and irresponsible reports can only erode an already fragile situation."

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John Duke Anthony is President and CEO of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations; Publisher of GulfWire; and Secretary of the U.S.-GCC Corporate Cooperation Committee. All three are Washington, D.C.-based nongovernmental and nonprofit organizations dedicated to educating Americans and others about the Arab countries, the Middle East, and the Islamic world.

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