

SGR*Promoting ethical
science and technology***Scientists for Global Responsibility**

WHY THE WAR ON IRAQ IS A WARNING FOR THE PLANET

Introduction

War is probably the most direct example of the contentious use of science and technology. As has already been expressed, **Scientists for Global Responsibility (SGR)** opposes the unilateral pre-emptive military action against Iraq, or indeed any state, on the basis that it is an aggressive act and therefore illegal, fundamentally unethical and in breach of the UN Charter.

SGR also supports efforts to halt the use and development of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The justification provided by the US and UK for this particular war — to free the people of Iraq from a brutal dictator and to stem the development and supply of weapons of mass destruction — creates an ethical maze through which a clear path can be hard to find without scrutinising information not readily available to the public. For this reason SGR presents here an analysis of the policies and strategies that have led to this situation, mostly US-originated, as an aid to clarification of the broader forces at work.

In so doing, SGR intends to bring an independent perspective that reflects its concern for the grave implications that these policies and trends have for the development of a sustainable future, both in terms of justice and peace in human society and of the long-term well being of the wider environment. It is SGR's understanding that the far-reaching implications of the motives for this war will profoundly undermine such goals. We are extremely concerned about this situation and keen to encourage others to become informed and speak out against it.

BACKGROUND TO THE WAR ON IRAQ

The current US administration and indeed the governments of its “coalition” allies including the UK have offered four key justifications for their invasion of Iraq. They are:

- To spare the people of Iraq from further suffering resulting from an oppressive, brutal dictatorship
- To rid the region of weapons of mass destruction under development by Saddam Hussein as called for by various UN resolutions
- To install free democracy within Iraq and ultimately the surrounding region for the benefit of the people.
- To sever connections between Saddam Hussein (and his weaponry) and international terrorist groups of threat to the West.

These justifications fail to withstand the most basic scrutiny.

The first aim may be desirable but is shown to be insincere in the light of the extensive and well-documented support that the UK and the US have given to Saddam Hussein over preceding decades, especially when it was convenient to those countries' political interests (such as during Western opposition to the Iranian regime when

the US and UK welcomed and indeed helped arm Saddam Hussein's conflict with that country). Not only that, 12 years of sanctions subsequently imposed on Iraq have had disastrous humanitarian consequences and are said to be responsible for thousands of deaths and untold human suffering, compounded by the aftermath of previous US/UK attacks on the country. The United Nations Children's Fund documented an increase in the under-five child mortality rate in Iraq from 56 to 131 per thousand in the sanction years 1990-1998, with an estimated child death toll of several hundred thousand, although there is fierce debate over who is to blame for these additional deaths. Whatever the details there is a clear indication that US policies tend not to be based on regard for the people of Iraq, however true it is that the people may wish themselves rid of their leader.

The second point collapses, as a last-resort justification for invasion, on examination of the considerable remaining doubt that Saddam Hussein actually has at his disposal (or had, prior to this war), sufficient numbers of WMD with which to intimidate other nations. Expert opinion has suggested that this is unlikely, and indeed little evidence has as yet emerged of WMD arsenals in Iraq. Nonetheless, it would be naïve to deny that Saddam Hussein has both the will and the capability to produce and use chemical and biological weapons and perhaps nuclear weapons as well, even if there is uncertainty as to what extent this may have occurred. Such a suggestion needs to be addressed, as do such developments in other countries. But history suggests that UN-approved weapons inspections offer an effective means of eliminating stocks of WMD and containing their development. Former UN weapons inspector Scott Ritter's book *War On Iraq* (Ritter and William Rivers Pitt, Profile Books, 2002), describes his belief that Iraq has already once been "fundamentally disarmed" by means of this approach, apparently with 90-95% of its weapons of mass destruction eliminated. Of nuclear weapons capability, for example, Ritter says: "*When I left Iraq in 1998... the infrastructure and facilities had been 100% eliminated. There's no doubt about that. All of their instruments and facilities had been destroyed*" (p.26). There is no legitimate reason that weapons inspections could not have been continued on this occasion.

As for the third point: it is possible to argue that, from a moral perspective, bringing a democratic regime into being in Iraq would be a good thing, from the perspective not only of human rights in Iraq but also of human rights in the rest of the Arab world. While this may be true, the argument in its favour is an over-simplification. There is much potential for the reverse to happen, i.e. for this action to result in increased Arab hostility to the West because of the imposition of a Western-friendly regime on Iraq. The well-meaning intentions claimed by this objective also look weak upon examination of the details of the current US foreign policy, which are clearly geared to self-interest (see more below). In addition, consideration must be given to the chaos that ensues when "power vacuums" remain after conflict in politically and ethnically divided countries, especially given the diverse and already divided composition of Iraq's people. There is much doubt that the US has the will to follow the plan through for the years it would take to ensure a functioning democracy. The outcome of similar military campaigns and claims does not bode well; for example in Afghanistan there is continuing instability more than a year after the main conflict, with warlords in control of much of the west of the country, a low-intensity civil war continuing to this day, and ongoing cases of appalling human rights abuses, poverty and deprivation.

Evidence for the fourth point has already been scoffed at by the mainstream media, which revealed dossiers on Al Qaida's links with Iraq to be of no merit whatsoever. As Scott Ritter points out (*War on Iraq* [see above], pp. 45 and 47), the Iraqis have laws providing for "an immediate death sentence for proselytizing in the name of Wahabbism, ...; which is of course Osama Bin Laden's religion." If Iraq gave Al Qaida weapons of mass destruction, Al Qaida would probably use them against Saddam Hussein.

It is inevitable that such an obviously dubious set of justifications, delivered by the authorities at different times with an apparent view to securing favourable public opinion, will cause observers of this war to feel confusion and frustration about the real motives behind it. Close scrutiny of a number of US policy documents brings some illumination, however, as outlined next.

UNDERLYING MOTIVES AND OBJECTIVES OF THE US ADMINISTRATION

The arguments presented above are among the many presented in the mainstream media for an attack against Iraq. Almost never discussed are some of the underlying drives and reasoning behind this conflict, drives that go back to the previously stated (as far back as 1997) and published objectives and world view of those now currently part of — or highly influential in — the George W. Bush administration.

These underlying strategic themes bring into focus a discernible pattern and an explanation of why the US administration is taking action now, against the majority of world opinion and without the backing of the UN. The action is in line with the administration's perceived self-interest based on a world-view that is founded on US dominance and control of world affairs. We can only assume that the UK's Blair government shares this point of view: these issues have been openly discussed since 1997 and particularly strongly since September 11, 2001, during which time Blair has consistently concurred with the Bush perspective.

The sources

A key document that goes some way towards explaining the current US administration's approach is *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, (September 2002, The White House, Washington).

This document in turn refers to several keynote speeches made by President George W. Bush since September 11, 2001. Also, before the current Bush administration came to power on a slim ruling by the US Supreme Court, those who are now key players in this new administration had been setting out their strategic approach to world affairs as part of the "Project for a New American Century" (PNAC). PNAC was set up by a group of neo-Reaganite republicans in 1997 to promote the case for a new, aggressive military and "moral" role for the US in world affairs. It includes several of the current US administration, such as Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, Stephen Forbes and Dick Cheney. Much of its strategy now forms the basis of current US foreign and military policy.

Other elements of the military plans are also set out in the Joint Chiefs of Staff documents *Vision for 2020* and *Joint Vision 2002*, and another document entitled *Vision 2020* published by the US Space Command.

There are some very significant threads running consistently through these documents, all of which are freely available for public consumption; see the following Web references.

Project for the New American Century: www.newamericancentury.org;

National Security Strategy of US 2002: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html>; Joint Vision 2020 (Joint Chiefs of Staff): <http://www.dtic.mil/jv2020/>.

The military strategy: strike first

Current US military strategy is one of "full spectrum dominance". The US military aims to be dominant in any form of conflict by having complete technological supremacy in all spheres: air, sea, land and space.

"The full range of operations includes maintaining a posture of strategic deterrence. It includes theater engagement and presence activities. It includes conflict involving employment of strategic forces and weapons of mass destruction, major theater wars, regional conflicts, and smaller-scale contingencies." (Section 3, *Joint Vision 2002*).

The National Security Strategy (NSS) clearly sets out that the US will take pre-emptive action against states that

it considers a threat before they have even developed any actual threat.

“The United States must and will maintain the capability to defeat any attempt by an enemy — whether a state or non-state actor — to impose its will on the United States, our allies, or our friends. We will maintain the forces sufficient to support our obligations, and to defend freedom. Our forces will be strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in hopes of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States.” (NSS p.31)

This pre-emptive strategy is in direct contradiction of the United Nations Charter, which states that member nations may only use military force for the purpose of self-defence in the event of an armed attack. This wording clearly precludes pre-emptive strikes from being described as “defensive,” ensuring that militaristic nations are not given carte blanche to declare war on those around them.

The threat that the US says it fears is WMD — Weapons of Mass Destruction. Because of the extreme danger that these weapons pose, the US Administration argues that it is fully justified in taking necessary action without the support of the UN before it is itself attacked. The US is also fully prepared to take action to put in place regimes that are sympathetic to its point of view in what it considers are strategic areas of the world. The NSS specifically refers to Central Asia, the Caspian Region, Africa and the “Western Hemisphere” as strategic areas.

Another way of putting this was encapsulated by Robert Kagan of the *Washington Post* (September 13, 2002) in the article “Multilateralism, American Style”:

“If you're the kind of person who worries about American unilateralism, here's what should really keep you up at night: even most American multilateralists are unilateralists at the core. Consider what passes these days for a ‘multilateralist’ view on Iraq: Before taking any action against Iraq, the United States should seek the approval of the U.N. Security Council. Then, if the Security Council refuses, the United States can invade anyway. As Secretary of State Colin Powell said on Sunday, the Bush administration will bring the Iraq case to the United Nations, but that doesn’t mean ‘we lose our option to do what we might think is appropriate to do.’ Or, as James Baker put it, ‘even if the administration fails in the Security Council, it is still free’ to make its own decision.

“Fear of the Bush administration's ‘going it alone’ has already begun forcing important Europeans such as Chirac to accommodate themselves to an American-created reality on Iraq. Now Bush's willingness to talk about the United Nations' role may ease the path for Chirac, Tony Blair and others to join in an eventual military action, even if, at the end of the day, there is no explicit U.N. authorization. It's the unilateralist iron fist inside the multilateralist velvet glove.”

Bearing in mind that this article was published in September 2002 it is a startlingly accurate description of how events have unfolded at the time of writing, March 27, 2003.

The article continues: *“This blend of unilateralism and multilateralism reflects a broad and deep American consensus. Americans prefer to act with the sanction and support of other countries if they can. But they're strong enough to act alone if they must. That combination may prove to be the winning formula in Europe and elsewhere. Maybe it won't be quite the principled multilateralism Europeans and Kofi Annan prefer. In an age of American hegemony, it will be multilateralism, American style.”*

The attack against Iraq is probably the clearest example of this strategy in practice. Another example, perhaps clearer in retrospect, was the attack upon Afghanistan under the cover of an attempt to capture Osama Bin Laden. To quote the NSS again: *“The events of September 11, 2001, taught us that weak states, like Afghanistan, can pose as great a danger to our national interests as strong states”* (from the Introduction, signed by President Bush).

According to William Kristol, president of the Project for the New American Century, in a statement on

February 7, 2002 to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee: *“And President Bush singled out three regimes, North Korea, Iran and Iraq, as enemies; they constitute an ‘axis of evil’ that poses ‘a grave and growing danger’. Nor will he ‘stand by, as peril draws closer and closer. Time’, he said, ‘is not on our side.’ The President is thus willing to act pre-emptively and, if need be, unilaterally. This is a matter of American self-defense. Yes it is.”*

If that isn't emphasis enough, the US in the NSS clearly states why it does not support the International Criminal Court (ICC):

“We will take the actions necessary to ensure that our efforts to meet our global security commitments and protect Americans are not impaired by the potential for investigations, inquiry, or prosecution by the ICC, whose jurisdiction does not extend to Americans and which we do not accept. We will work together with other nations to avoid complications in our military operations and cooperation, through such mechanisms as multilateral and bilateral agreements that will protect U.S. nationals from the ICC” (NSS p.31).

It is clear from these documents that the US has decided it has the right to impose its will on other states, but that other states do not have any right to hold the US to account if its actions are deemed illegitimate.

The protection of “strategic” oil reserves

The National Security strategy specifically mentions “the need to develop and expand the sources and types of energy supplied” (NSS pages 19,20). There is a tie up with the need to develop renewable energy but this element of the strategy is given extremely low levels of funding. (The budget for 2002 involved funding for the Department of Energy's renewable energy programmes being cut from \$376 million to \$186 million, according to <http://www.edie.net/news/Archive/4096.cfm>.) The clear implication is that it is oil supplies that must be developed and expanded.

Gary Schmitt, Executive Director of the Project for the New American Century issued a memo to “Opinion leaders” on May 23, 2002 (which also refers back to William Kristol the Chairman) in which he states a goal of creating an oil-producing Iraq with implications for other states in the region:

“And, as in Kabul but also as in the Kurdish and Shi'ite regions of Iraq in 1991, American and alliance forces will be welcomed in Baghdad as liberators. Indeed, reconstructing Iraq may prove to be a less difficult task than the challenge of building a viable state in Afghanistan.

“The political, strategic and moral rewards would also be even greater. A friendly, free, and oil-producing Iraq would leave Iran isolated and Syria cowed; the Palestinians more willing to negotiate seriously with Israel; and Saudi Arabia with less leverage over policymakers here and in Europe. Removing Saddam Hussein and his henchmen from power presents a genuine opportunity — one President Bush sees clearly — to transform the political landscape of the Middle East.”

And on the importance of other strategic oil producing regions:

“So in addition to hoping for and encouraging change from within Saudi Arabia, we should develop strategic alternatives to reliance on Riyadh. In the military sphere, we have already begun to hedge, with agreements and deployments to other Gulf emirates. Although still the strongest influence on oil prices, other source (sic) in Russia, the Caspian Basin, Mexico and elsewhere ...can be developed and brought to market at a reasonable cost. The attacks of September 11 remind us that it is not just what we pay at the pump but what we pay in lives, security and international political stability that comprise the true price of Saudi oil.” See <http://www.newamericancentury.org/saudi-052302.htm>.

It is therefore clear that for the US, ensuring free-flowing oil from a number of states is an important element of

controlling world oil markets and prices, until now at the behest of OPEC and particularly Saudi Arabia. This goes some way to explaining further why Iraq — which is thought to have the world's second largest oil reserves — has been an early proving ground for the new pre-emptive strategy.

That the desire to offset the power and influence of Saudi Arabia is linked with the attack on Saddam Hussein is substantiated further still:

“In particular, removing the regime of Saddam Hussein and helping construct a decent Iraqi society and economy would be a tremendous step toward reducing Saudi leverage. Bringing Iraqi oil fully into world markets would improve energy economics. From a military and strategic perspective, Iraq is more important than Saudi Arabia. And building a representative government in Baghdad would demonstrate that democracy can work in the Arab world. This, too, would be a useful challenge to the current Saudi regime.”

While oil is by no means the full story, there can be no doubt that it plays a significant part in the overall picture, being one of the keys to economic and therefore overall global dominance. Lest some doubts as to the relevance of oil profits still remain, it is worth noting the interests of the main UN Security Council opponents to the attack on Iraq, according to “The new great game,” *The Ecologist*, April 2003:

“Russian oil companies ... have a lot to lose in Iraq. Russian oil giant Lukoil signed a contract with Saddam to develop Iraq's giant West Qurna oilfield. ... And Chinese and French energy corporations have also been active in Iraq for years. In the 1990s, TotalFinElf made preliminary agreements with Baghdad to develop the oilfields of Majnoon and Mahr Umar in southern Iraq. Moscow and Paris fear that a new Iraqi government indebted to Washington would declare the old regime's contracts null and void, and offer them to US firms.”

And, looking back in time, from the same article:

“In the mid-1990s the US government supported plans by the US oil company Unocal to build oil and gas pipelines from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan to the Indian Ocean. When it became clear in 1998 that the Taliban supported anti-US terrorists, the pipeline plans for Afghanistan were temporarily shelved. Now the US-led so-called ‘anti-terrorist’ campaign in Afghanistan has reopened the Herat-Kandahar corridor, these plans have been dusted off.”

Israel and oversights

Note the view of the US Administration that regime change is the objective of a war on Iraq. The quotes from the PNAC memo referring to Iraq and Saudi Arabia are just examples among many that highlight the “problems” created by the stance of many Muslim states in the Middle East, as seen by the US, while failing to mention anywhere the impact and influence of the state of Israel and the occupied territories. Israel is a key ally of the US and the neo-conservative lobby that gave rise to the PNAC and the existing administration has strongly pro-Israel members. By deliberately ignoring the Israel question, the highly selective view offered by US foreign policy on the problems of the Middle East ignores one of the key underlying causes of conflict in the region. Note that US finance currently supporting Israel every year is roughly double that allocated to restructuring Afghanistan over six years. Israel is one of the largest recipients of US foreign aid. It is already due to get \$2.04 billion in military assistance and \$720 million in economic aid in fiscal year 2003. It has, for years, been getting \$3 billion a year. In addition, the US has given Egypt \$117 billion and Jordan \$22 billion in foreign aid in return for signing peace treaties with Israel. See <http://www.csmonitor.com/2002/1209/p16s01-wmgn.html> or <http://www.rense.com/general35/israelss.htm>.

THE ECONOMIC REALITY

The following, sweeping statement comes from the National Security Strategy:

"The United States will use this moment of opportunity [referring to the post-September 11 uniting of countries] to extend the benefits of freedom across the globe. We will actively work to bring the hope of democracy, development, free markets, and free trade to every corner of the world."

While this may seem a noble aim, this so-called "economic freedom" — some (including the PNAC) call it "*pax americana*" after the type of peace brought about by the Roman Empire, which dominated world affairs for four centuries — is also part of the problem. It is based upon a version of economic globalisation dominated by institutions favourable to the US and other developed countries such as the UK and Germany, and which works against the interests of many extremely poor, developing countries. For example, the US trade deficit stands at \$2.2 trillion while third world debt roughly equals it at \$2.5 trillion, and the poorer countries pay nearly eight times the interest. US military spending at \$399 billion is thus partly subsidised by the debt payments from the world's poorest countries.

The economic implications of the above statement, and of the war on Iraq, are key to an understanding of the present situation. While it is straightforward to reject violence, death and destruction, it can sometimes be tempting to pin hope on the "reconstruction" process following a war, and to believe that this could actually be a positive development.

But it is important to remember that the post-war Iraq plans, as far as can be discerned to date, look likely to benefit primarily US interests. As has been shown with other post-war US reconstructions, whatever the US says it will do to help the invaded country (or even its own allies), it has the will and the means to find ways of imposing economic conditions on reconstruction programmes that cost the "liberated" country dearly through impossibly expensive loans via the IMF, World Bank, etc (see *The Best Democracy Money can Buy*, Greg Pallast, Plume, 2003). These provide high profits for the US coffers and little for anyone else. Note also that (at the time of writing) the US has suggested that payments for post-war reconstruction costs can come from Iraqi oil revenues.

So far, five US companies have been earmarked for those lucrative reconstruction contracts but even pro-US imperialists are unlikely to benefit from these gains. Where reconstruction and/or control of newly acquired assets falls to multinationals, profits are distributed among their upper echelons and shareholders only. It has been said that the costs of wars like this are socialised while the profits are privatised. An interesting economic analysis, which sees wars as ways of investing capital externally for a return (rather than spending it internally), is presented in "Too Much of a Good Thing; Underlying the US drive to war is the need to open up new opportunities for surplus capital," in *The Guardian*, 18th February 2003 but also freely available on the author George Monbiot's Web site at <http://www.monbiot.com>. While lucrative defence and energy contracts are by no means the full story, we should take care to assess who exactly benefits from wars like this and also to remember who bears their monstrous cost: the thousands, sometimes millions who suffer in the course of their prosecution.

THE REAL COSTS

Loss of human life

For Iraq, this is of course as yet unknown. A UN document published before the war estimated that tens and, in the worse case, hundreds of thousands of lives could be lost as a direct or indirect result of the conflict. More recently, the Campaign for an End to Sanctions in Iraq (CASI) published a leaked UN document ("Integrated Humanitarian Contingency Plan for Iraq and Neighbouring Countries", from the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 7 January 2003) that predicts that 30 percent of children under 5 in Iraq, or 1.26 million, "would be at risk of death from malnutrition" in the event of a war. The document, available at <http://www.casi.org.uk/info/undocs/internal.html>, also says:

"the collapse of essential services in Iraq ... could lead to a humanitarian emergency of proportions well beyond the capacity of UN agencies and other aid organizations" [p. 4(6)]

“all UN agencies have been facing severe funding constraints that are preventing them from reaching even minimum levels of preparedness” [p. 1(3)]

“the effects of over 12 years of sanctions, preceded by war, have considerably increased the vulnerability of the population” [p. 3(5)]

“The WFP [World Food Programme] estimates that approximately 10 million people ... would be highly food insecure, displaced or directly affected by military action” [p. 11(13)]

In addition, at the time of writing there are signs that food aid will be diverted from the current major famine in Africa to help deal with the refugees resulting from the Iraq war (*New Scientist*, 15 March 2003, p10). This is likely to increase the number of deaths due to malnutrition in Africa.

Reduced quality of life

For those who survive, the loss of infrastructure, damage to social and healthcare services, farming, the economy and the environment will leave hundreds of thousands impoverished and malnourished for years. See above and also: Milan Rai's *War Plan Iraq: Ten Reasons Against War on Iraq*, Verso, 2002; Section X, part 4: 'Catastrophe — War Could Trigger a Humanitarian Disaster'.

A Harvard Study team wrote: “There is a link in Iraq between electrical power and public health. Without electricity, water cannot be purified. Sewage cannot be treated, water-borne diseases flourish and hospitals cannot cure treatable diseases’ (p. 137, as cited by Francis Kelly, ‘War Crimes Committed Against the People of Iraq’, in Ramsey Clark and others, *War Crimes: A Report on United States War Crimes Against Iraq* [Washington, D.C., Maisonneuve Press, 1992], p. 54). “[T]he destruction of the country’s power plants in 1991 ‘brought its entire system of water purification and distribution to a halt, leading to epidemics of cholera, typhoid fever, and gastroenteritis, particularly among children.’ Death rates doubled or tripled among children admitted to hospitals in Baghdad and Basra. Cases of marasmus, a disease of acute malnutrition, appeared for the first time in decades... ‘There were approximately 47,000 excess deaths among children under five years of age during the first eight months of 1991. The deaths resulted from infectious diseases, the decreased quality and availability of food and water, and an enfeebled medical care system hampered by the lack of drugs and supplies’” (p. 138 of *War Plan Iraq* [as above], from Leon Eisenberg, M.D., ‘The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters — Human Costs of Economic Sanctions’, *New England Journal of Medicine*, vol. 336(17), 24 Apr. 1997, pp. 1248-1250).

Delayed impacts from remains of weapons

Depleted uranium, or DU, is radioactive and is used “in the manufacture of armaments such as tank cartridges, bombs, rockets and missiles.” (p. 96, William Blum, *Rogue State: A Guide to the World’s Only Superpower*, updated edition, 2002, first published in the UK by Zed Books, Ltd., London.) Up to 3kg of DU are emitted from one Abrams tank round.

From that same text:

“Upon impact with a target, DU aerosolizes into a fine mist of particles, which can be inhaled or ingested and then trapped in the lungs, the kidneys or elsewhere in the body. This can lead to lung cancer, bone cancer, kidney disease, genetic defects and other serious medical problems. Or a person can be hit by DU shrapnel, and have a chunk of radioactive metal imbedded in their insides. One atomic scientist has asserted that DU particles thrown into the air by the round’s impact, or by resultant fires and explosions, can be carried downwind for 25 miles or more.” (p. 96, citing International Action Center (New York), *Metal of Dishonor: Depleted Uranium*, pp. 3-40, 134-149.) *“In 1995, Iraqi health officials reported alarmingly high increases in rare and unknown diseases, primarily in children and presented a study of this state of affairs to the United Nation. The increases*

occurred in leukemia, carcinoma, cancers of the lung and digestive system, late-term miscarriages, congenital diseases, and deformities in fetuses, such as anencephaly (absence of a brain), and fused fingers and toes, not unlike those found in the babies of Gulf War veterans.’ (p. 97, citing The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, July/August 1995, p. 105).

And, on cluster bombs:

“A 1999 Human Rights Watch report says that of an estimated 24 to 30 million bomblets dropped during the Gulf War, between 1.2 and 1.5 million did not explode, leading so far to 1,220 Kuwaiti and 400 Iraqi civilian deaths.” (p. 102, citing Rachel Stohl, ‘Cluster Bombs Leave Lasting Legacy’, report of the Center for Defense Information [Washington, D.C.], August 5, 1999.) One canister (i.e. the contents of a cruise “dispenser” weapon) of cluster munitions can cover an area the size of several football pitches with mines and anti personnel weapons, making farmland and open spaces too dangerous to use until after very time-consuming mine clearance operations.

Effects on the environment

The environmental effects of the war in Iraq will be major, and will include local air pollution and climate change due to burning oil wells and groundwater pollution from leaking oil wells and other bombed industrial facilities. This will damage many fragile ecosystems in the country (see *New Scientist*, 15th March 2003, p12-13). The total CO₂ emissions from invasion are estimated to be roughly equivalent to the total UK emission for one year (according to Aubrey Meyer of the Global Commons Institute, <http://www.gci.org.uk/main.html>; see

<http://www.tyndall.ac.uk/forum/messages/189.html>).

The IUCN, a World Conservation Union representing 70 governments, has issued a statement calling for “the humanitarian and environmental tragedy” that will follow from this war to be averted. The statement says that the IUCN concluded that the environmental consequences of the 1991 war against Iraq had caused widespread, devastating damage extending far beyond the conflict itself, and anticipated a repeat of this damage particularly to rivers, wetlands, marshes, the desert and the seas which could undermine the natural resource base on which millions of people depend for their livelihood and would leave a human and ecological debt that will take years or decades to pay off. The statement is available at:

http://www.iucn.org/info_and_news/press/iraqstatement210303.pdf

A reminder of where the dollars go

The proposed US budget of 2004 clearly demonstrates Washington’s priorities. President Bush has requested \$380 billion for the military, \$4.7 billion for countries that have joined in his “war on terror” and \$2 billion for fighting poverty (*Inter Press Service*, February 3rd 2003).

Additional US spending in Iraq is to be \$47 billion (*Sky News*, 25 March 2003), but in fact the total is \$75 billion if \$6 billion for “aid” and \$24 billion in loan guarantees to Turkey is included.

<http://newsobserver.com/news/story/2374894p-2212684c.html>

THE WISER WAY

While US policy is concerned with avoiding the acute consequences of WMD on American soil, the equivalent of silent weapons of mass destruction are exploding every day as a result of widespread poverty, lack of medical care, lack of clean water (5,000 children die needlessly every day from waterborne illnesses), lack of cheap and available medicines, global climate change and the inequitable world economic system. All of these factors

conspire to cause the widespread and lifelong suffering of many millions of people, who must endure hunger, disease and abject poverty.

SGR believes that the current US approach to achieving world “security” is dangerous and misguided. However, while it is easy to blame the US, we should remember that in the broader historical context there have been swings of power resulting in just the sort of overbearing, unilateralist and self-interested policies that we are seeing today. Any nation is capable of reaching this stage in its evolution and to some extent we are all locked in to the global system that benefits from and feeds into US wealth. Ultimately, when the system proves unsustainable, the US will be in no better position to benefit from its current policies than will any other country.

The real requirement now is to recognise the need for a society based on cooperation rather than competition. As part of this transformation SGR suggests that greater long-term security could be created by spending a proportion — even a small fraction — of military budgets on critical world problems, such as debt relief, water supplies or the reconstruction of war-torn countries.

For example, \$100 billion dollars (i.e. 30% of the annual US military budget or roughly twice the cost of this current conflict) would: provide \$20 per annum for 5 billion of the world’s poorest people; dwarf current aid programmes; go more than half way towards giving the world clean water; or provide the first of five instalments to reduce world poverty by half.

Far preferable for energy security, meanwhile, would be to pursue policies aimed at reducing the oil dependence of the western world (thereby simultaneously undermining the power held by unsavoury dictators) and at the same time to pursue consistent foreign policies that support human rights and ban weapons sales.

If the oil-dependent countries could reduce their dependence upon long oil routes by developing comprehensive renewable energy programmes, this would not only preclude further “oil wars” but would also reduce the environmental impacts of fresh oil exploration in the remote, untapped regions of the world. Even more importantly, it would help ameliorate that other developing crisis — climate change — which will itself result in huge problems of world security and conflict due to water shortages, displaced populations, floods and famine.

Security and peace can come only when wealthy nations recognise that all human beings share the same needs and that all deserve to be treated as equal partners in the world.

Philip Webber and Vanessa Spedding, March 27, 2003

with contributions from Stuart Parkinson and Eva Novotny.

A rectangular button with a blue border. The word "Contact" is in a blue serif font, and "SGR" is in a bold blue sans-serif font below it.A rectangular button with a blue border. The word "Join" is in a blue serif font, and "SGR" is in a bold blue sans-serif font below it.A rectangular button with a blue border. The word "Home" is in a blue serif font, "to" is in a smaller blue sans-serif font, and "SGR" is in a bold blue sans-serif font below it.

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