

**ON THE *NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY*  
AND AMERICAN POLICY TOWARD IRAQ**

Barry S. Strauss<sup>1</sup>

Before discussing the Bush administration's *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* of September 2002 or the possibility of war with Iraq, it is necessary to say a word first about the conditions of debate in the academy today. Unfortunately, those conditions are not good.

The search for truth requires subjecting theories to vigorous criticism. Indeed, without testing a theory by means of the toughest critique, it is impossible to be sure whether or not it is true. As a practical matter, an intellectual institution needs to represent a wide variety of schools of thought, methodologies, and political opinions in order to ensure that every theory be put to a hard-hitting test.

Unfortunately, elite universities in America no longer represent the necessary intellectual diversity. Instead, today's elite universities are dominated by one set of opinions and one set only: liberal, left-wing, politically and theoretically correct opinions. The elite university is in danger of becoming a "unicality": that is, an institution that rejects its historic mission of airing the universe of ideas and instead becomes an institution where only one set of ideas is allowed. (Cornell's Peace Studies Program is an honorable exception.)

In today's elite American university, conservatives, dissenters, heretics, and free thinkers are rarely hired; if they are hired, they are rarely promoted; if they manage to be promoted, they rarely receive professional encouragement, let alone fellowships or endowed chairs. A young academic who wants to have a successful university career knows that he is unlikely to have a future unless he adheres to the p.c. party line. As a practical matter, it is difficult if not impossible to search for truth under such conditions.

The result, in terms of the matters under discussion today, is to skew debate. Since virtually every academic in our elite universities defines himself as an opponent of the Bush administration, it becomes almost a heuristic necessity to take the opposite position. In order to keep the

---

<sup>1</sup> Professor of History and Classics at Cornell.

academy honest, one is constrained to take an extreme position in defense of the administration. To put it bluntly, I don't want to be yet another professor throwing stones at the president.

The ironic and unintended consequence of political correctness, therefore, is to drive a minority of academics into the arms of the right. The middle ground disappears.

Were things different, it would be easier to dwell on the flaws of the *National Security Strategy*. One might point out, for instance, that the document's call for "moderate and modern" governments in the Muslim world is altogether too timid (page 6). Muslims are no less deserving of democracy than every other inhabitant of this planet. One might also take exception with the statement that America's enemy is terrorism (page 5). Terrorism is a tactic, and as such it is open to use by anyone. America's enemy is both more specific and more general: it is Islamism and its anti-democratic ideology.

Islamism must be distinguished from Islam; Islam is a great religion, while Islamism is a political philosophy that distorts religion in the interests of creating anti-democratic regimes. America must never be hostile to Islam or to Muslims. Nor must America be hostile to democratic political parties that employ Muslim values while guaranteeing freedom to all, regardless of religion. Islamists, however, are an altogether different matter. Because they oppose democracy, Islamists are enemies of America, just as fascists and communists are enemies of America. While terrorism is a primary tool of Islamism, other tools are also open to that ideology and are no less objectionable. For example, an Islamist party that wins power in an election and then proceeds to legislate an end to democracy is also America's enemy, even if it does not employ terrorism.

Finally, one might also take issue with the *National Security Strategy*'s emphasis on preventive war (e.g., page 15). While it may be necessary for states to wage preventive war under extreme circumstances, it is also dangerous, and therefore not something to be encouraged. It would have been more prudent, as it would also have been adequate, for the statement to have focused instead on the need to enforce treaties and to strike treaty-breakers before they have a chance to strike first.

Yet these are all asides. The thrust of this paper's argument is to praise the *National Security Strategy*. The Bush administration is to be commended merely for having undertaken to redefine American security, a task that is as difficult as it is necessary after the attacks of 11 September 2001. It is to be applauded for re-committing the United States to championing liberal,

representative government for all peoples everywhere in the world. It does exactly the right thing in stating the existence of rogue states and their potential threat to world peace. It correctly emphasizes the United States' new strategic relationship with Russia, which is likely to play an increasingly important role in an era of weakness, self-doubt, and greed among such traditional NATO allies as France and Germany.

The administration is exactly right to draw a line between the past policy of deterrence and the new security strategy that is needed today. It is to be congratulated for stating forthrightly that America will defend itself "against . . . emerging threats before they are fully formed" (page v). With the caveat about preventive war noted above, one can support the administration's policy fully—and in particular, in regard to Iraq.

Whether there will be a war with Iraq is currently (November 2002) unclear. If the United States and its allies can find a way to pressure Saddam to honor his treaty commitments and give up all weapons of mass destruction completely, and if the alliance can also find an ironclad way of monitoring his compliance, then a war may not be necessary. Neither proposition, however, seems likely.

Saddam Hussein is a homicidal megalomaniac with a proven track record of aggression and mass murder. He hates the United States and wants to harm it. Although there is no proof positive that he is working with al-Qaeda, many pieces of evidence suggest that conclusion. In any case, he has every reason to support al-Qaeda, because for all the differences between their philosophies, they share a common goal: driving the United States out of the Muslim world and especially out of the Middle East. Al-Qaeda's terror tactics advance that goal. If Saddam acquires heavy-enriched uranium, he could pass it on to terrorists who could smuggle a Hiroshima-sized bomb into an American city.

It would be difficult indeed to envision, let alone enforce, an inspections regime capable of stopping a man like Saddam. The alternative is regime change in Iraq, and that will surely require a war.

It will neither be easy nor bloodless to deny Saddam the ability to unleash such weapons on the United States or on his neighbors. To fight him will stir up a storm of criticism, particularly in the Muslim world. One must face this without illusion but also without fear, because the alternative is far worse.

Besides, the United States is already at war with Saddam. American forces patrol the Gulf, at great cost to the taxpayer. American power ensures that northern Iraq is virtually an independent Kurdish state. American weapons and soldiers engage in intermittent combat with Saddam's forces.

The United States, moreover, enforces an embargo on Iraq. Saddam cynically exploits the rules of this embargo to inflict great suffering on ordinary Iraqis while building up his military and enriching himself and his friends. The result is little short of a humanitarian crisis. Americans are a great and good people, and they need to think seriously about whether they want such a policy to continue to be carried out in their name.

For these reasons, friends of freedom, peace and security, as well as people of goodwill, ought to support a war against Saddam. Let us consider, finally, what a postwar world might look like.

As the victor, the United States will bear primary responsibility for rebuilding Iraq and for fostering democracy there. The job will not be done overnight, any more than it was done overnight in Germany, Japan, South Korea, or Taiwan. By staying the course, however, the United States eventually oversaw the establishment of democracies in all of these states, an achievement of which Americans ought justly to be proud.

American power in post-war Iraq offers the best hope to the Iraqi people of a free and prosperous future. By the same token, it should pay dividends in moving—ever so slowly—such neighboring states as Iran and Saudi Arabia in a pro-American and liberal direction. And by demonstrating America's seriousness of purpose, it will also encourage those states to play a more active role in tightening the net around al-Qaeda and similar terrorists who might be active on their territory.

In short, as sad as the prospect of war must always be, in the imperfect world in which we live, it is sometimes necessary. Today, war with Iraq is probably the best way of obtaining security and justice, just as it is the best way of implementing the praiseworthy and noble ideals of the Bush administration's *National Security Strategy*.