

## The Empire of Fear

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*Whatever they fear from you, you'll be threatened with.*  
—Seneca (Roman philosopher and statesman, 4 BCE–65 CE)

In late February 2001, a year after President George W. Bush took office, his secretary of state, Colin Powell, spoke on the subject of Iraq and its military capabilities. Ten years had passed since the 1991 Gulf War, a decade marked by international inspections aimed at finding and destroying Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and missile programs, stringent sanctions that restricted its access to basic military equipment, as well as denying many vital civilian goods and so causing countless deaths and enormous suffering among Iraq's people. Powell explained that the US believed Saddam Hussein's regime "has not developed any significant capability with respect to weapons of mass destruction," and that Iraq's leader was even "unable to project conventional power against his neighbors."<sup>1</sup>

Powell was not alone in the assessment that there was no military danger from Iraq to its neighbors, or to the United States. In late summer of that year, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice told CNN: "Let's remember that his [Saddam's] country is divided, in effect. He does not control the northern part of his country. We are able to keep his arms from him. His military forces have not been rebuilt."<sup>2</sup> Few would have disputed this judgment. But over the next two years, the Bush administration was able to convince many Americans that a desperate and broken Iraq was an imminent and mortal threat that could only be confronted by war.

In this chapter, we look at how the fear of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) was used by the Bush administration to organize public support for its war on Iraq in 2003. We trace the sources for this policy toward Iraq and the pressure for a more militarized US foreign policy and the role played by key figures in the Bush administration who belonged to a hard-line conservative group calling itself the Project for a New American Century (PNAC).

The media played a central role in the creation of public opinion in favor of a war on Iraq. We look to see what public understanding and misunderstanding of basic issues connected to the war against Iraq reveals about the media, and especially how misperceptions about the war are linked to watching television channels like Fox and CNN.

The nuclear fears that moved the Bush administration and that it used to build public support for its war are widely shared, run deep, and have a long history. We look briefly at the way these have been expressed in American culture and have mobilized an anti-nuclear movement for the six decades since the atomic bomb was first invented and used by the United States to destroy the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Iraq was not the only instance of desperate US efforts to prevent another country from acquiring nuclear weapons. These efforts are as old as the bomb itself. We trace this history and then look at the case of Iran, the newest arena for US efforts to police the proliferation of nuclear weapons capabilities. President Bush has said the acquisition of nuclear weapons by Iran would be “intolerable,” and many hear echoes of the rhetoric used against Iraq before the war in 2003. At the same time, the threat of the use of nuclear weapons has become more serious as terrorist groups like al-Qaeda may now be seeking nuclear weapons.

A broader assessment of US policy on nuclear weapons makes clear there is much more at stake than an effort simply to reduce and end the threat of nuclear weapons. The determination of the US leadership to keep and modernize American nuclear weapons, to allow chosen allies and friends to retain and develop these weapons, and to use sanctions and military force to prevent some states from even trying to acquire knowledge about these weapons is at the heart of American policy. We look in particular at the way the United States has been aiding the development of nuclear capability in India and Israel.

We conclude by reflecting on the demands for the elimination of nuclear weapons and the kind of politics this might require.

### **How the White House Set Out to “Educate the Public”**

According to Richard Clarke, then national coordinator for counterterrorism, at a cabinet meeting the day after the 9/11 attacks on the United States, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld talked about “getting Iraq,” arguing that there were “no decent targets for bombing in Afghanistan” and proposed “we should consider bombing Iraq instead.” This suggestion was not rejected by President Bush, who “noted that what we needed to do with Iraq was to change the government, not just hit it with more cruise missiles.”<sup>3</sup> The early positions within the government were described by a senior Bush administration official in an interview:

Before September 11th, there wasn’t a consensus Administration view about Iraq... There were those who preferred regime change, and they were largely residing in the Pentagon, and probably in the Vice-president’s office... Then, in the immediate aftermath of the eleventh, not that much changed... Some initial attempts by [Deputy Secretary of Defense] Wolfowitz and others to draw Iraq in never went anywhere, because the link between Iraq and September 11th was, as far as we knew, nebulous at most—nonexistent, for all intents and purposes.<sup>4</sup>

President Bush’s speechwriters were asked at the end of 2001 to make a case for war against Iraq to be included in the forthcoming State of the Union Address.<sup>5</sup> In the January 2002 speech, Bush declared that the US confronted an “axis of evil,” naming North Korea, Iran, and Iraq. North Korea and Iran received one sentence each in the speech; the real focus was Iraq.<sup>6</sup> The problem, President Bush declared, was that “Iraq continues to flaunt its hostility toward America and to support terror. The Iraqi regime has plotted to develop anthrax, and nerve gas, and nuclear weapons for over a decade.”<sup>7</sup> He went on to say, “By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the

means to match their hatred. They could attack our allies or attempt to blackmail the United States.” These arguments were to be repeated over the next year with ever greater force and detail.

Vice President Dick Cheney returned from the Middle East and on March 24, 2002, appeared on three major Sunday public affairs television programs, bearing similar messages on each. On CNN’s *Late Edition* he offered the following comment on Saddam: “This is a man of great evil, as the president said. And he is actively pursuing nuclear weapons at this time.” On NBC’s *Meet the Press* he said, “[T]here’s good reason to believe that he continues to aggressively pursue the development of a nuclear weapon. Now will he have one in a year, five years? I can’t be that precise.” And on CBS’s *Face the Nation*: “The notion of a Saddam Hussein with his great oil wealth, with his inventory that he already has of biological and chemical weapons, that he might actually acquire a nuclear weapon is, I think, a frightening proposition for anybody who thinks about it.”<sup>8</sup>

A few months later, speaking at the United States Military Academy at West Point, President Bush made a more general point that revealed the real fears of the United States:

When the spread of chemical and biological and nuclear weapons, along with ballistic missile technology—when that occurs, even weak states and small groups could attain a catastrophic power to strike great nations. Our enemies have declared this very intention, and have been caught seeking these terrible weapons. They want the capability to blackmail us, or to harm us, or to harm our friends.<sup>9</sup>

The reason why proliferation must be prevented, for President Bush and leaders before him, is that “even weak states and small groups could attain a catastrophic power to strike great nations.” Left unsaid here, of course, is that some “great nations,” most notably the United States, have long had the “catastrophic power” to destroy weak nations, and the goal is to keep it that way.

The fear that the spread of WMDs and especially nuclear weapons might allow “weak states” to counter the ambitions and interests of “great nations” is almost as old as the atomic bomb. President’s Bush words echo an argument advanced 50 years ago in one of the earliest studies about how coming of the atomic bomb might affect international relations. It was argued that the atomic weapons were a grave danger to the United States not just because “regular rivals on the same level” might acquire these “absolute weapons” (as the Soviet Union and Britain had already done by then) but that “possibly some of the nations lower down in the power scale might get hold of atomic weapons and change the whole relationship of great and small states.”<sup>10</sup> To prevent this has been an important goal of US policy, and that of the other nuclear weapons states as each has developed its weapons.

In late July 2002, Sir Richard Dearlove, head of MI6, the British Secret Service, upon returning home from Washington explained at a meeting of British Prime Minister Tony Blair and his top advisers, that the Bush administration had decided to attack Iraq and

“military action was now seen as inevitable.” In what has come to be known as the Downing Street memo, Dearlove explained that “Bush wanted to remove Saddam through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD.” He continued: “the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy.”<sup>11</sup>

This plan was to unfold over the next several months, with leaders in the US and UK emphasizing what Dearlove called a “conjunction of terrorism and WMD threat” from Iraq. Britain joined the US drive to war despite the recognition at that meeting by the British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw that “the case was thin. Saddam was not threatening his neighbors, and his WMD capability was less than that of Libya, North Korea or Iran.” This reflected the assessment by the British Foreign Office in early 2002 that there was no hard evidence that Iraq had stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction.

To coordinate the case for war in the United States, in August 2002, White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card set up the White House Iraq Group; the members included Karl Rove (senior political advisor to Bush), Condoleezza Rice and her deputy (now National Security Adviser) Stephen Hadley, Lewis Libby (chief of staff to Dick Cheney), and communications strategist Karen Hughes, among others. Its mission was to organize US strategy on Iraq, and according to one participant to “educate the public” about the danger posed by the Saddam Hussein regime.<sup>12</sup>

This group of key officials planned the speeches on Iraq by the administration and the reports and papers laying out policy. The focus was to be the threat of WMDs. How this came about was explained later by Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz when he revealed that “The truth is that for reasons that have a lot to do with the US government bureaucracy we settled on the one issue that everyone could agree on which was weapons of mass destruction as the core reason.”<sup>13</sup>

The first major speech was on August 26, 2002, by Vice-President Cheney, to a conference of the US military veterans: “There is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction. There is no doubt he is amassing them to use against our friends, against our allies, and against us.” It was a question of when, not if, such an attack would come, Cheney seemed to say as he summoned up the vision of the Japanese attack on the US fleet at Pearl Harbor, claiming “Only then did we recognize the magnitude of the danger to our country.” Now, he argued, “time is not on our side. Deliverable weapons of mass destruction in the hands of a terror network, or a murderous dictator, or the two working together, constitutes as grave a threat as can be imagined.”<sup>14</sup>

On September 8, 2002, the *New York Times* ran a story under the headline “US Says Hussein Intensifies Quest for A-Bomb Parts”:

More than a decade after Saddam Hussein agreed to give up weapons of mass destruction, Iraq has stepped up its quest for nuclear weapons and has embarked on a world wide hunt for materials to make an atomic bomb, Bush administration officials said.<sup>15</sup>

The report went on that “hardliners” in the administration were afraid that “the first sign of a ‘smoking gun’ ... may be a mushroom cloud.”

The hardliners went on major news and current affairs television programs that day and conjured up what is perhaps the most fearful image of our times, the mushroom cloud produced by an exploding atomic bomb. Condoleezza Rice argued on CNN that “We do know that he [Saddam Hussein] is actively pursuing a nuclear weapon... there will always be some uncertainty about how quickly he can acquire nuclear weapons. But we don’t want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud.”<sup>16</sup> On CBS, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld explicitly linked Iraq, terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and 9/11, arguing that

Iraq is a terrorist state on the terrorist list. It is a—a state that is developing and has developed and possessed and, in fact, used weapons of mass destruction already... If you go back to September 11th, we lost 3,000 innocent men, women and children. Well, if—if you think that’s a problem, imagine— imagine a September 11th with weapons of mass destruction.<sup>17</sup>

In early October 2002, the same images and language were deployed by President Bush. In a nationally televised speech from Cincinnati, Ohio, President Bush claiming that “America must not ignore the threat gathering against us... we cannot wait for the final proof—the smoking gun—that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud.”<sup>18</sup>

This view was propounded not just in interviews and speeches on major television stations by leading figures; it also figured large in official policy documents. In September 2002, the National Security Strategy (NSS) of the United States was released. It announced that “We must be prepared to stop rogue states and their terrorist clients before they are able to threaten or use weapons of mass destruction against the United States and our allies and friends.”<sup>19</sup> The message of threat and pre-emption before the threat was realized was repeated again and again; the report claiming that “We must deter and defend against the threat before it is unleashed” and “We cannot let our enemies strike first.”

American public opinion responded to this determined effort to portray an imminent nuclear threat from Iraq to the United States. A poll in late September 2002 found that 80 percent of Americans thought Iraq already had the capability to use weapons of mass destruction against US targets.<sup>20</sup>

There was some dissent from within government but it failed to make the major media. An October 2002 report based on extensive interviews with officials claimed

a growing number of military officers, intelligence professionals and diplomats ... have deep misgivings about the administration’s double-time march toward war [and] charge that administration hawks have exaggerated evidence of the threat that Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein poses—including distorting his links to the al-Qaeda terrorist network—have overstated the amount of international support for attacking Iraq and have downplayed the potential repercussions of a new war in the Middle East.<sup>21</sup>

These officials were categorical that “the US government has no dramatic new knowledge about the Iraqi leader that justifies Bush’s urgent call to arms.” They took issue in particular statements by President Bush, Vice President Cheney, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, and National Security Advisor Rice.

This assessment was subsequently confirmed publicly by Paul Pillar, the US National Intelligence Officer for the Middle East from 2000–2005, the person responsible for coordinating US intelligence assessments on Iraq. In 2006, he observed that “intelligence was misused publicly to justify decisions already made” by the Bush administration. Pillar has described the claims by senior officials and the administration as being “at odds” with the intelligence community’s judgments. He revealed in particular that “the greatest discrepancy between the administration’s public statements and the intelligence community’s judgments concerned ... the relationship between Saddam and al-Qaeda,” and was categorical that “the intelligence community never offered analysis that supported the notion of an alliance between Saddam and al-Qaeda.”<sup>22</sup> According to Pillar:

Well before March 2003, intelligence analysts and their managers knew that the United States was heading for war with Iraq. It was clear that the Bush administration would frown on or ignore analysis that called into question a decision to go to war and welcome analysis that supported such a decision.<sup>23</sup>

Tyler Drumhellar, a senior CIA officer, has confirmed and added to Pillar’s account. He has revealed that in September 2002, CIA chief George Tenet told President Bush and Vice President Cheney that they had good reason to believe Iraq had no ongoing program for weapons of mass destruction. The source for this information was the foreign minister of Iraq, a paid CIA agent. Three days later, according to Drumhellar, the White House told the CIA that “this isn’t about intel[ligence] anymore. This is about regime change.”<sup>24</sup>

As Pillar makes clear, the intelligence community chose to bend with the wind.<sup>25</sup> It did not take a stand against the Bush administration’s pressure, or ensure that Congress and the public understood what was happening. No senior intelligence official chose to follow the example set 35 years by Daniel Ellsberg, who revealed the Pentagon Papers showing that successive US officials had been lying in public about US policy in Vietnam. This disclosure helped end the Vietnam War. If they had been made public, the intelligence assessments on Iraq could have allowed for a more informed public debate about the Bush administration’s claims about WMDs in Iraq and its policy of choosing war.

On October 11, Congress passed a resolution that cited

Iraq’s demonstrated capability and willingness to use weapons of mass destruction, the risk that the current Iraqi regime will either employ those weapons to launch a surprise attack against the United States or its armed forces or provide them to international terrorists who would do so

and authorized President Bush to “use the armed forces of the United States as he determines to be necessary ... to defend the national security of the United States against the continuing threat posed by Iraq.”<sup>26</sup>

In his State of the Union speech in January 2003, President Bush summoned the same fears:

Evidence from intelligence sources, secret communications, and statements by people now in custody reveal that Saddam Hussein aids and protects terrorists, including members of Al-Qaeda. Secretly, and without fingerprints, he could provide one of his hidden weapons to terrorists, or help them develop their own. Before September the 11th, many in the world believed that Saddam Hussein could be contained. But chemical agents, lethal viruses and shadowy terrorist networks are not easily contained. Imagine those 19 hijackers with other weapons and other plans—this time armed by Saddam Hussein. It would take one vial, one canister, one crate slipped into this country to bring a day of horror like none we have ever known.<sup>27</sup>

Lest anyone doubt that Saddam Hussein was capable of using weapons of mass destruction, President Bush recalled that “The dictator who is assembling the world’s most dangerous weapons has already used them on whole villages—leaving thousands of his own citizens dead, blind, or disfigured.”<sup>28</sup>

Iraq’s use of chemical weapons against Iran in the Iran–Iraq War, and against Iraqi Kurds in the late 1980s, was a recurring argument used by President Bush and other policymakers in their drive to scare people into a war. They did not mention, of course, the US–Iraq relationship at the time these weapons were being used. A *Washington Post* investigation revealed that during the 1980s “the administrations of Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush authorized the sale to Iraq of numerous items that had both military and civilian applications, including poisonous chemicals and deadly biological viruses, such as anthrax and bubonic plague.”<sup>29</sup>

They did not explain (nor were asked to explain) why when Iraq had been making “almost daily use” of chemical weapons against Iran, the United States, according to a National Security Council official, “actively supported the Iraqi war effort,” with billions of dollars and “by providing military intelligence and advice to the Iraqis.”<sup>30</sup> As the *New York Times* reported,

American military officers said President Reagan, Vice President George Bush and senior national security aides never withdrew their support for the highly classified program in which more than 60 officers of the Defense Intelligence Agency were secretly providing detailed information on Iranian deployments, tactical planning for battles, plans for air strikes and bomb-damage assessments for Iraq

while at the same time “the C.I.A. provided Iraq with satellite photography of the war front.”<sup>31</sup> Similarly, Iraq’s use of chemical weapons against the Kurds, most notoriously in 1988 against the town of Halabjah, was met with increased US military assistance.

On January 31, 2003, President Bush met with British Prime Minister Tony Blair and according to an official memo of the meeting, Bush explained that “the military campaign was now penciled in for March 10. This was when the bombing would start.”<sup>32</sup> Bush also discussed with Blair ways of provoking a confrontation with Iraq; the memo records President Bush suggesting “flying U2 reconnaissance aircraft with fighter cover over Iraq, painted in UN colors” and then “if Saddam fired on them, he would be in breach.” The memo notes that Bush also proposed bringing out a defector who could talk about Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction, and even raised the possibility of assassinating Saddam Hussein.

The decision to go to war was kept secret as the US and UK sought and failed to get UN Security Council support for an attack on Iraq. The process of educating the public about the threat from WMDs, and especially nuclear weapons, from Iraq and the need to pre-empt any possible threat continued. It culminated in Bush’s March 17, 2003 address to the nation announcing the war on Iraq. He said:

the Iraq regime continues to possess and conceal some of the most lethal weapons ever devised... it has aided, trained and harbored terrorists, including operatives of al-Qaeda... using chemical, biological or, one day, nuclear weapons, obtained with the help of Iraq, the terrorists could fulfill their stated ambitions and kill thousands or hundreds of thousands of innocent people in our country, or any other... With these capabilities, Saddam Hussein and his terrorist allies could choose the moment of deadly conflict when they are strongest. We choose to meet that threat now, where it arises, before it can appear suddenly in our skies and cities.<sup>33</sup>

The United States brought war to Iraq. Despite the certainties displayed by President Bush, a year of direct US occupation and the efforts of 1,400 experts from the Department of Defense, the Department of Energy, national weapons laboratories, and intelligence agencies turned up no weapons of mass destruction.<sup>34</sup>

Subsequent investigative reporting by the *Washington Post* found

a pattern in which President Bush, Vice President Cheney and their subordinates—in public and behind the scenes—made allegations depicting Iraq’s nuclear weapons program as more active, more certain and more imminent in its threat than the data they had would support.

There was also the sin of omission, according to the Post: “on occasion administration advocates withheld evidence that did not conform to their views.”<sup>35</sup>

### **Whose Idea Was It Anyway?**

The Bush strategy on Iraq did not have its origins in 2001. It was based on ideas and arguments about Iraq and nuclear weapons that had been developed and promoted for several years in the late 1990s by a group calling itself the Project for a New American Century (PNAC). Founded in 1997, this network of conservative politicians, academics, and policy brokers involved people who were to become central figures in the Bush administration—there is Vice President Dick Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald



Rumsfeld, Lewis Libby, Paul Wolfowitz (now president of the World Bank), Zalmay Khalilzad (Afghanistan ambassador, now appointed Iraq ambassador), and also Jeb Bush.<sup>36</sup>

A major initiative of this group was to change the US policy that had been in place since the end of the 1991 Gulf War and relied on sanctions and inspections to discover and destroy Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programs. They laid out their thinking in a letter to President Clinton in January 1998. In this letter, they argued that "current American policy toward Iraq is not succeeding" in controlling the threat from Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction. In their judgment such failure could have disastrous consequences for the United States:

If Saddam does acquire the capability to deliver weapons of mass destruction, as he is almost certain to do if we continue along the present course, the safety of American troops in the region, of our friends and allies like Israel and the moderate Arab states, and a significant portion of the world's supply of oil will all be put at hazard.

PNAC proposed to Clinton:

The only acceptable strategy is one that eliminates the possibility that Iraq will be able to use or threaten to use weapons of mass destruction. In the near term, this means a willingness to undertake military action as diplomacy is clearly failing. In the long term, it means removing Saddam Hussein and his regime from power. That now needs to become the aim of American foreign policy.

As described earlier, as soon as members of PNAC such as Rumsfeld, a signatory to the letter, came into office and found an opportunity, they sought to put this strategy into effect. The war on Iraq, and the importance given to WMDs as the justification of that war, was a direct result of their efforts.

There is more to PNAC, however, than the war on Iraq. The PNAC name and statement of principles is clearly meant to echo the ideas set out by Henry Luce in his famous 1941 essay "The American Century" in *Life* magazine. In their founding statement PNAC focused on the shared concern of its members that "American foreign and defense policy is adrift." Their purpose was clear: "We aim to make the case and rally support for American global leadership."<sup>37</sup>

In particular, PNAC worried that the United States after the Cold War may not have what they describe as the "resolve to shape a new century favorable to American principles and interests." They lamented in particular the unwillingness of Americans "to embrace the cause of American leadership." What was needed for such leadership was "a military that is strong and ready to meet both present and future challenges; a foreign policy that boldly and purposefully promotes American principles abroad; and national leadership that accepts the United States' global responsibilities."

PNAC is by no means alone in this view. It simply brings together some of the most prominent and influential proponents of it. Many others support an imperial role for the

United States and are frustrated by the unwillingness of many Americans to take up their responsibility. For instance, the historian Niall Ferguson in his book *The Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire* laments the fact that “the United States has acquired an empire, but Americans themselves lack the imperial state of mind.”<sup>38</sup> There is, he says somewhat sadly, among Americans “the absence of a will to power.”

Americans leaders who seek a more willing national embrace of the imperial role have struggled long and hard to find something to stand in for the missing “will to power.” The problem, as Eqbal Ahmad pointed out, was that “imperialism has not been a good word in American political culture. People do not identify with it.”<sup>39</sup> He explained the options open to US decision-makers to create an “imperial state of mind,” noting that “To become palatable, [empire] has to draw on citizens’ anxieties and their sense of mission.” Ahmad recalls the advice of Senator Arthur Vandenberg to President Harry S. Truman, who was trying to increase military spending and preparedness in the late 1940s as part of a policy to strengthen US power and confront the Soviet Union. Vandenberg told President Truman that to create American public support for the Cold War, “You’ve got to scare the hell out of them.”

US politics through the Cold War bears witness that this advice was often followed. Crisis has followed crisis, seemingly inexorably, with the United States facing missile gaps and bomber gaps, a “red menace,” and a “yellow peril,” to name only a few fears. A pattern has become obvious. As Richard Barnett observed in the early 1970s, “in mustering public support for national security policy, national security managers find it necessary alternately to frighten, flatter, excite, or calm the American people.” American national security managers, Barnett suggested, “have developed the theater of crisis into a high art.”<sup>40</sup>

### **The World As We Know It**

There is no doubt that the Bush administration was successful in mobilizing public fears over weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear weapons, and the possibility of nuclear terrorism, in its effort to generate support for its war on Iraq. It is important to understand the scale of this success and the role of the media in shaping the acceptance of these messages.

The Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) conducted public opinion polls through much of 2003 to look at public understanding of the issues associated with the buildup and start of the US war in Iraq.<sup>41</sup> In January, it found that a majority of Americans (68 percent) believed that Iraq played an important role in the attacks of 9/11 and some (13 percent) even thought there was “conclusive evidence” of this. A subsequent study found that about 20 percent of Americans believed Iraq to have been directly involved in 9/11, and a majority (65 percent) thought Iraq had given some kind of support to al-Qaeda in its attack or was somehow linked. Polling after the war had started and the United States had occupied Iraq found that about half of Americans thought the US had actually discovered proof in Iraq that the Saddam Hussein government had been linked with al-Qaeda.

The polls also found about a third of Americans believed that WMDs had been found in Iraq (even though none had). About a fifth actually believed that Iraq had used them in the war. Despite the large protests around the world against the US war, and the failure of the Bush administration to win international support, almost a third of Americans believed that a majority of people in the world were in favor of the US war with Iraq.

PIPA polling showed that about 60 percent of Americans had at least one of these three basic misperceptions about the Iraq war, namely that Iraq had been linked to al-Qaeda and 9/11, that weapons of mass destruction had been found, and that the world supported the American war. Only 30 percent of Americans had none of these misperceptions.

To study the origin of these misperceptions, PIPA used polling in June, July, and August–September 2003 to try to examine whether people's opinions on these issues were connected to their choice of media for getting news. The results are stunning. Among Fox television viewers, 80 percent had one of these misperceptions of the Iraq war. In sharp contrast, only about 20 percent of people who got their news from National Public Radio and PBS television had the same mistaken views. People who relied on print media were only somewhat better informed than their counterparts who watched only television: 47 percent still had one of the three basic misperceptions.

These misconceptions about what actually went on in Iraq are reflecting something more complex than just where Americans get their news. The misunderstandings about the real situation are not connected to party political affiliation or identity. The most important correlation was whether people support the president or not. It is the single largest factor that captures these misconceptions—68 percent of people who said they supported President Bush thought the US had actually found evidence that Saddam worked with al-Qaeda and a third of them thought the US had found evidence of weapons of mass destruction.

The underlying phenomena shaping public opinion seems to be the measure of trust in and support for the president. The misperceptions of those who support the president increase with exposure to the news. Among those who are opposed to him, misperceptions fall with the more news they get, regardless of the source. The media, in short, seem only to strengthen a prior willingness to trust or be skeptical of President Bush.

Polling data also reveals a profound public ignorance about nuclear weapons, despite the seemingly endless coverage given in recent years to the nuclear threat from Iraq and from possible nuclear terrorism. A 2004 PIPA poll found considerable ignorance about global nuclear geography. Large majorities of the public know Russia and China have nuclear weapons. But the list of perceived nuclear armed states then moves to North Korea (74 percent) and Pakistan (59 percent). More Americans mistakenly think Iran has nuclear weapons (55 percent) than know that Britain has them (52 percent), or are aware that India (51 percent), Israel (48 percent) and France (38 percent) actually have these weapons. The polls also show that over 40 percent of Americans believe Japan and Germany have nuclear weapons.

Also, most Americans have little idea of the size and character of the US nuclear arsenal. When asked “How many nuclear weapons do you think the US has in the US, or on submarines, that are ready to be used on short notice,” more than half offered an estimate of 200 weapons or less. In fact, the United States has about 6,000 nuclear warheads, with some 2,000 on high alert. Once again, it should be noted that when asked how many nuclear weapons the United States should have, the median answer was 100, half the number of weapons that people thought the US actually had.

This 2004 poll found that almost 60 percent of Americans did not know that a commitment to disarmament was part of the 1970 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.<sup>42</sup> Yet over 80 percent thought eliminating nuclear weapons was a good idea and almost 90 percent said the US should “do more to work with the other nuclear powers toward eliminating their nuclear weapons.” A 2005 Pew Survey found that 70 percent of the public supports signing an international treaty to reduce and eliminate all nuclear weapons, including those of the United States.<sup>43</sup>

### **Nuclear Fears**

Nuclear fears run deep in the United States. These fears are as old as the bomb itself and have been fed both by the government and nuclear complex that has sought to garner support for a large and ever more capable nuclear arsenal supposedly to defend against the nuclear weapons of others, and those who would oppose the bomb in all its aspects. This is what makes nuclear fear a powerful force if it can be mobilized.

The American nuclear weapons program was created in World War II out of the fear that Germany under the Nazis might be able to build an atomic bomb. The program was a secret until the first bombs were used to destroy Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The support for this action was overwhelming; according to opinion polls in 1945, over 80 percent of Americans supported the bombings.<sup>44</sup>

The fearful nature of nuclear weapons, with one bomb able to destroy an entire city, was suddenly evident to all. There were many articles and essays written against the bomb by prominent public figures, political activists, scientists, writers, poets, and theologians, and many letters to the editor by ordinary people.<sup>45</sup> They saw the terrible logic that was being unleashed on the world. A. J. Muste, the great pacifist activist, wrote of the bomb having created a “logic of atrocity,” and asked

what can we say to any nation which may launch atomic bombs ... against us under the conditions of frightful, unbearable tension which will presently exist in the world unless the threat of atomic war is extinguished. How can we possibly persuade anyone else or ourselves that if we have atomic bombs at all we shall not use them if we deem it expedient? There is not the slightest guarantee even that we shall not launch bombs first, take the offensive, if a sharp international crisis develops.<sup>46</sup>

A year after the atomic bombing of Japan, President Truman threatened the Soviet Union (which had been a US ally during World War II and did not have nuclear weapons) with nuclear attack if it did not withdraw its troops from Iran. The US

adopted and continues to maintain today a declared policy of being prepared to use nuclear weapons first in a conflict. The US has also made clear repeatedly that it would use nuclear weapons even against countries that do not have them. Writing in 1981, Daniel Ellsberg, who worked on US nuclear war planning in the early 1960s, observed that

every president from Truman to Reagan, with the possible exception of Ford, has felt compelled to consider or direct serious preparations for possible imminent U.S. initiation of tactical or strategic nuclear warfare, in the midst of an ongoing, intense non-nuclear conflict or crisis.<sup>47</sup>

American presidents since then have been no different: President G. H. W. Bush threatened Iraq with nuclear weapons in the 1991 Gulf War, President Clinton threatened North Korea, and President George Bush threatened Iraq and recently Iran.

There were other powerful early responses to the uses of the atomic bomb. Most notably, the *New Yorker* gave over its entire issue in August 1946 to John Hersey's essay *Hiroshima*, the story of half a dozen survivors of the atomic bombing of the Japanese city. It was read out over the radio in four installments and published as a book that became a bestseller and was reprinted over and over again. But as the historian of the anti-nuclear movement Lawrence Wittner notes "it did not change the minds of most Americans about the bombing. Instead, it reinforced the pre-dominant emotions about nuclear weapons that had already become widespread among Americans: awe and, especially, fear."<sup>48</sup>

These efforts to alert people to the terrible consequences of the coming of the atomic bomb galvanized an enduring anti-nuclear movement.<sup>49</sup> In the aftermath of Hiroshima, the anti-nuclear movement focused on the threat and consequences of nuclear war. Scientists and physicians played a prominent role in explaining the terrible effects of a nuclear explosion, the blast, the heat, the radiation, and the nuclear fallout. They brought the death and destruction home by mapping Hiroshima onto each city and explaining that there was no defense. The anti-nuclear movement created for the public the image of "the world as Hiroshima."<sup>50</sup> The purpose seems to have been, in physicist Eugene Rabinowitch's phrase, "scaring men into rationality."<sup>51</sup>

Journalism, literature, cinema, and television all found abundant material in the powerful images and ideas associated with nuclear weapons.<sup>52</sup> But the most powerful medium was probably the visual. The mushroom cloud became an iconic symbol of the nuclear age. *Hiroshima/Nagasaki, August 1945*, the 1970 documentary that was the first to use film actually taken by Japanese cameramen at the time of the bombing was shown on the 25th anniversary of the bombing and attracted one of the largest audiences ever for American public television and had a real impact on people's thinking.<sup>53</sup> But the film that may have shaped how most Americans imagine the effect of nuclear weapons was *The Day After*. Broadcast on Sunday, November 20, 1983, it showed the effects of a nuclear attack on the city of Lawrence, Kansas. The film ends with a stark reminder to viewers that "The catastrophic events you have witnessed are, in all likelihood, less severe than the destruction that would actually occur in the event of a

full nuclear strike against the United States.” The film was apparently watched by half the adult population of the United States.<sup>54</sup>

Many other films about a possible nuclear attack followed. After the end of the Cold War, the focus shifted from a nuclear war between the United States and Soviet Union to the threat of nuclear terrorism, with Hollywood films such as *Broken Arrow* (1996), *The Peacemaker* (1997), and *The Sum of all Fears* (2002). It has become a common theme on popular television shows, most notably Fox’s action series, 24. The 2002 series centered on a plot by a terrorist group to set off a nuclear weapon in Los Angeles; subsequent seasons have dealt with terrorists seeking to use chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons. The *New York Times* called it “one of the best series on television.”<sup>55</sup> In 2005, the show had an average viewing audience of 12.1 million, with peak audiences of over 15 million, and DVD sales of earlier series have apparently been in the millions.<sup>56</sup>

Like so much of the discussion and writing, *The Day After* and other movies before and since have focused on the threat and the effects of a nuclear attack on the United States. Inevitably, they require the viewers to identify with those in the film as possible victims of a nuclear attack who must seek to survive. It is a perspective that politicians can use to call for public support of all possible means to defend America from the nuclear threat.

### **Controlling the Bomb**

The bomb is not just about fear. It is also about the power to create fear. In the six decades it has been a nuclear weapon state, the United States has created a vast, diverse, and massively destructive nuclear arsenal and made detailed plans to use these weapons, while also seeking to restrict the spread of nuclear weapons to other states.

Once the bomb had been built and used to destroy the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it came to be seen by US leaders as a profound new instrument of national power. On being told of the destruction of Hiroshima by the atom bomb, President Harry Truman called it “the greatest thing in history.”<sup>57</sup> After the war, it was seen as the “winning weapon” by the United States and soon afterward by some other states.<sup>58</sup> Nuclear weapons have since then come to define for most people the subsequent phase of world history and to be seen as the iconic WMD.

Recognizing the power of the bomb, the United States sought from early on to restrict other states from gaining access to nuclear weapons. Even before the bomb was finished, General Leslie Groves, who was in charge of the Manhattan Project, proposed that the United States try to acquire total control of all the known uranium supplies in the world and so stop any other state from having access to the raw material from which nuclear weapons can be produced.<sup>59</sup> But it was clear even then that uranium reserves were far too common around the world for the US to be able to control all of them.

Recognizing that its monopoly would not last, the United States turned to the newly created United Nations to try to exercise international control over the spread of atomic weapons. On January 24, 1946, in the very first General Assembly resolution, the

United Nations called for the elimination of nuclear weapons and of all other weapons of mass destruction.

The US soon proposed a plan for disarmament. It called for all other states to commit never to make nuclear weapons and to open all their nuclear facilities to inspections; once this system was established the United States would give up its own weapons. This poorly cloaked effort to preserve a US monopoly for as long as possible while trying to ensure no other state would or could build them came to naught.

The US fear of other states gaining nuclear weapons was great and there were calls for unprecedented measures, including pre-emptive war. A 1946 report for the US Joints Chiefs of Staff argued that

Traditionally, the policy of the United States is one of non-aggression and, as a result, in the past we have awaited attack before employing military force. Because such forbearance in the future will court catastrophe, if not national annihilation, it is necessary that, while adhering in the future to our historic policy of non-aggression, we revise past definitions of what constitutes aggression calling for military action.<sup>60</sup>

The report went on to suggest that future war planning should be based on the recognition that

the processing and stockpiling of fissionable material in a certain quantity by a certain nation at a certain time may not constitute an aggressive act (incipient attack) while the same acts by another nation at another time may, upon their discovery, call for swift action in the national defense.<sup>61</sup>

In short, the development of nuclear capabilities in another country under some circumstances should be sufficient grounds for preemptive attack by the United States. To this end, the United States needed “first, protection against surprise and, second, the ability to attack with overwhelming force before an enemy can strike a significant blow.”

The report was explicit about what was required; it called for legislation from the US Congress that would “make it the duty of the President of the United States, as Commander in Chief of its Armed Forces after consultation with the Cabinet, to order atomic bomb retaliation when such retaliation is necessary to prevent or frustrate an atomic weapon attack upon us.” In other words, the United States should be required by law to launch a nuclear attack as part of a preventive war strategy.

The obvious concern was the Soviet Union. There was a debate in the US in 1947 about whether to attack the Soviet Union with nuclear weapons, both to check its rise and to stop it acquiring its own nuclear forces. Threats were made but never carried out, and then in 1949 the Soviet Union tested its own nuclear weapons. The age of mutually assured destruction was born.

By the early 1960s, the US and USSR had been joined as nuclear armed states by Britain and France, but both were allies and elicited no concern from the United States.

In fact they received some US support. Things changed when it seemed that China might soon be ready to test nuclear weapons. Once again, thoughts turned to war as an option to prevent a state acquiring nuclear weapons. In April 1963, the US Joint Chiefs of Staff developed plans for conventional air attacks and a tactical nuclear attack on Chinese nuclear weapons facilities, and there was a similar report from the State Department in 1964.<sup>62</sup> Other options proposed were sanctions, infiltration, subversion and sabotage, and invasion. None of these plans were put into effect and in 1964 China tested nuclear weapons for the first time.

In 1968, the US and the Soviets agreed on a Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT). Peter Clausen, a historian of the NPT, has noted that for the US the timing of this initiative was linked to its pursuit of its interventionist policies and global interests:

[I]t was no accident that the period of the treaty negotiations corresponded to the high water mark of America's postwar global activism... the spread of nuclear weapons in a region of vital interest to the United States could increase the risks of containment and threaten American access to the region.<sup>63</sup>

This is not to say that the use of force was to be abandoned. In 1970, the year the NPT entered into force, Harold Agnew, director of Los Alamos National Laboratory, suggested that "if people would prepare the right spectrum of tactical weapons, we might be able to knock off this sort of foolishness we now have in Vietnam and the Middle East or anyplace else."<sup>64</sup>

A decade after the end of the Cold War, US nuclear weapons designers and military planners began pushing for new designs using arguments couched in similar strategic terms. Paul Robinson, the director of Sandia National Laboratory and chairman of the Policy Subcommittee of the Strategic Advisory Group for the commanders in chief of the US Strategic Command has proposed developing a special low-yield "To Whom It May Concern" nuclear arsenal, directed at Third World countries.<sup>65</sup> Stephen Younger, director of the Defense Threat Reduction Agency and former associate laboratory director for nuclear weapons at Los Alamos National Laboratory, has argued that in the post-Cold War world, the US needs new kinds of low-yield nuclear weapons because it faces "new threats" and the continued US "reliance on high-yield strategic [nuclear] weapons could lead to self-deterrence, a limitation of strategic options."<sup>66</sup>

The US "Nuclear Posture Review 2002" recommended continued reliance for the indefinite future on nuclear weapons "to achieve strategic and political objectives," and mandated new facilities for the manufacture of nuclear bombs, research into new kinds of nuclear weapons, new delivery systems, and much more.<sup>67</sup> It laid out a new strategy, in which nuclear weapons were to be used to "dissuade adversaries from undertaking military programs or operations that could threaten US interests or those of allies." It named as possible targets Russia, China, North Korea, Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Libya, and opened the door to the use of nuclear weapons to respond to "sudden and unpredicted security challenges."



The Review explains that “the proliferation of NBC [nuclear, biological, chemical] weapons and the means of delivering them poses a significant challenge to the ability of the United States to achieve these goals.”<sup>68</sup> Even this, though, does not make clear how nuclear weapons in the hands of states in these regions would be a threat to the United States. Michael May, the director emeritus of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (America’s second major nuclear weapons laboratory) and Michael Nacht, former assistant director of the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency in the Clinton administration have done so, explaining that:

Since the cold war, the top US military priority, as stated in congressional testimonies, has been to deploy the world’s most effective power projection forces. These forces have been used in the Balkans, the Persian Gulf and central Asia. A power projection force operates in or near hostile territory... Any power projection force needs air bases and ports of debarkation and logistics centers for sustained operations. These facilities must be rented or conquered. Their number is limited—a handful in Iraq, and not many more in east Asia, seven or so in Japan, some bases in South Korea, and a few others. These facilities are highly vulnerable even to inaccurate nuclear missile attacks.<sup>69</sup>

In short, nuclear weapons in the hands of states opposed to US policy are a constraint on US capability to project military power in their region. As a Bush administration official put it more directly: “It is a real equalizer if you’re a piss-ant little country with no hope of matching the US militarily.”<sup>70</sup>

Iran is the current arena of conflict for US policy of restricting the spread of nuclear capabilities to states that it sees as a potential threat. It is one of the “axis of evil” states identified by President Bush in his 2002 speech. He described it as a state that “aggressively pursues” weapons of mass destruction and “exports terror.”<sup>71</sup> President Bush has declared that the “stated goal” of US policy is that “we do not want the Iranians to have a nuclear weapon, the capacity to make a nuclear weapon, or the knowledge as to how to make a nuclear weapon.”<sup>72</sup> Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has clarified US concerns, arguing that “the Iranian regime must not acquire nuclear weapons. The vital interests of the United States, of our friends and allies in the region, and of the entire international community are at risk, and the United States will act accordingly to protect those common interests.”<sup>73</sup>

It is not hard to imagine what “vital interests” of the United States and its “friends and allies in the region” are “at risk.” It is clearly important to current conceptions of US interests and those of its clients in the Middle East (for example, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates) that Iran is a major producer of oil and gas—it has almost 10 percent of global oil reserves—and borders on the Caspian Sea, a key oil and gas producing region of the world in its own right.<sup>74</sup> A nuclear armed Iran would change the power politics of both regions.

But there is more at stake than a potential loss of US control over significant global sources oil and gas. Henry Kissinger has worried that if Iran were to acquire nuclear weapons it “would be able to use nuclear arsenals to protect [its] revolutionary activities around the world,” and in time “all significant industrial countries would consider

nuclear weapons,” and “have the ability and incentives to declare themselves as interested parties in general confrontations.”<sup>75</sup> In short, Kissinger fears that with nuclear weapons other countries would be able to do what presently only the US and handful of other nuclear armed states feel able to do, and this would, he argues, “make the management of a nuclear-armed world... infinitely more complex.”

To forestall a nuclear armed Iran, the US has chosen to try to prevent the current Iranian regime from having full control over the nuclear fuel-cycle even for civilian purposes, claiming (rightly) that there is an intrinsic dual-use character of key nuclear technologies, especially uranium enrichment, which allow them to be used for either civilian (nuclear energy generation) or military (nuclear weapons) purposes. But while the US has sought to restrict enrichment technology (and that for separating plutonium, the other material that can be used for making nuclear weapons, from spent nuclear fuel) in the way it has tried to deal with Iran, no such efforts have been directed at other non-nuclear weapons states that have developed uranium enrichment or plutonium separation technologies (for example, Germany, Japan, Holland, and recently Brazil). Should their governments choose, these states could make a nuclear weapon much more quickly than Iran. US Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte noted in early June 2006 that “the estimate we have made is some time between the beginning of the next decade and the middle of the next decade they might be in a position to have a nuclear weapon”—that is, Iran is five to ten years from being able to make a nuclear weapon, should it choose to do so.<sup>76</sup>

This US concern is a far cry from US policy toward Iran’s nuclear ambitions in the late 1970s, when the country was ruled by Reza Pahlavi (the Shah of Iran), a close ally of the United States. Some of the officials in the Bush administration now, most notably Vice President Cheney and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, were in President’s Ford administration and supported a multi-billion dollar deal with Iran to help it build a large nuclear energy industry that would have given it access to material and technology needed for making nuclear weapons.<sup>77</sup> This deal was cancelled when the Shah was overthrown in the 1979 revolution.

The cause for concern is the revelation that for almost two decades Iran has had a secret program to enrich uranium; enriched uranium can be used to make nuclear fuel for civil nuclear reactors or at higher levels of enrichment to make fuel for nuclear weapons. Iran’s actions are at odds with the commitments it made when it signed the NPT. The International Atomic Energy Agency and the UN Security Council have called on Iran to suspend all its uranium enrichment activities and resolve outstanding questions about the history and purpose of its nuclear program.<sup>78</sup> The US is pushing for the Security Council to impose sanctions and keep open the possible use of force to compel Iran to comply.<sup>79</sup> It has been frustrated by opposition from Russia and China to the use of sanctions or force.

Having failed in its initial efforts to muster Security Council support to confront Iran, the US has offered to join Britain, France, and Germany in talks with Iran on its nuclear program, if Iran suspends its uranium enrichment. But there are indications that this

may be driven less by recognition of the need to resolve the crisis diplomatically than the compulsion to build international support for a more coercive approach. The *New York Times* reported that:

During the past month, according to European officials and some current and former members of the Bush administration, it became obvious to Mr. Bush that he could not hope to hold together a fractious coalition of nations to enforce sanctions—or consider military strikes on Iranian nuclear sites—unless he first showed a willingness to engage Iran’s leadership directly over its nuclear program and exhaust every nonmilitary option.<sup>80</sup>

Given the course to war over Iraq, it is perhaps no surprise that, as one former US official told the *New York Times*, “it came down to convincing Cheney and others that if we are going to confront Iran, we first have to check off the box” of talks.<sup>81</sup>

There are indications that the United States has begun preparing for the use of force against Iran. The *Washington Post* reported on April 9, 2006 that the Bush administration was “studying options for military strikes against Iran.” It claimed that

two main options are under consideration, according to one person with contacts among Air Force planners. The first would be a quick and limited strike against nuclear-related facilities accompanied by a threat to resume bombing if Iran responds with terrorist attacks in Iraq or elsewhere. The second calls for a more ambitious campaign of bombing and cruise missiles leveling targets well beyond nuclear facilities, such as Iranian intelligence headquarters, the Revolutionary Guard and some in the government.

The *Post* report claimed additionally that “Pentagon planners are ... contemplating tactical nuclear devices.”

In the April 17 issue of the *New Yorker* magazine, veteran reporter Seymour Hersh claimed that “intensified planning for a possible major air attack” had begun and that “Air Force planning groups are drawing up lists of targets, and teams of American combat troops have been ordered into Iran, under cover, to collect targeting data.” Hersh revealed that “One of the military’s initial option plans, as presented to the White House by the Pentagon this winter, calls for the use of a bunker-buster tactical nuclear weapon, such as the B61-11, against underground nuclear sites.” A Pentagon advisor told Hersh of a “resurgence of interest in tactical nuclear weapons among Pentagon civilians and in policy circles.”

These reports seem to have been confirmed on April 18, 2006. At a White House press conference, President George Bush was asked “when you talk about Iran, and you talk about how you have diplomatic efforts, you also say all options are on the table. Does that include the possibility of a nuclear strike? Is that something that your administration will plan for?” President Bush replied: “All options are on the table.”<sup>82</sup>

These reports have rightly stirred many fears. Many believe the Bush administration is trying to repeat the strategy it used for mobilizing public support for the war on Iraq. Zbigniew Brzezinski, the hard-line former national security advisor, has warned that “If

there is another terrorist attack in the United States, you can bet your bottom dollar that there also will be immediate charges that Iran was responsible in order to generate public hysteria in favor of military action.”<sup>83</sup>

Brzezinski also pointed out that a US attack on Iran “in the absence of an imminent threat ... would be a unilateral act of war.” He argued that

If undertaken without a formal congressional declaration of war, an attack would be unconstitutional and merit the impeachment of the president. Similarly, if undertaken without the sanction of the United Nations Security Council, either alone by the United States or in complicity with Israel, it would stamp the perpetrator(s) as an international outlaw(s).<sup>84</sup>

A similar logic has played itself out in the case of North Korea, the third state in President Bush’s “axis of evil.” North Korea was, Bush declared, “a regime arming with missiles and weapons of mass destruction, while starving its citizens.” What he did not explain was that North Korea was arming partly as a response to United States threats, including the use of nuclear weapons. The first nuclear threats were made in the Korean War, barely five years after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; in 1950, President Truman said the United States would use “every weapon we have” against North Korea if things went badly, and toward the end of the war, in 1953, President Eisenhower declared that the US would “remove all restraints in our use of weapons” if North Korea did not come to terms.<sup>85</sup>

The Korean War ended in a stalemate, and is still not formally over. Korea was divided, with the US occupying the southern part of the country. Starting in 1957, the US armed its forces in South Korea with nuclear weapons. By the early 1990s, it became clear that North Korea was building a nuclear weapons capability and in March 1993 North Korea announced its intention to withdraw from the NPT. The United States began to consider military action to end the program, including possibly attacking North Korea’s nuclear facilities. In early 1994, US Defense Secretary William Perry announced that he had ordered military preparations and warned that the U.S. was looking at “grim alternatives.”<sup>86</sup> President Clinton later explained that “We actually drew up plans to attack North Korea and to destroy their reactors and we told them we would attack unless they ended their nuclear programmes.”<sup>87</sup>

A 1994 agreement to freeze and dismantle the North Korean nuclear weapons program and prospects for improved US-North Korean relations soon suffered a setback with the victory of the Republicans in the US congressional elections in 1994. The Republicans rejected the deal negotiated by the Clinton administration and sought to end funding for it.<sup>88</sup> The Bush Administration took an even harder line with North Korea after coming to power in 2001, including trying to discourage South Korea from improving its relations with the North.<sup>89</sup> In the wake of the “axis of evil” speech, the US repeatedly claimed it sought a diplomatic settlement and would not invade North Korea, but would not explicitly rule out attacks on North Korean nuclear facilities.<sup>90</sup>

With China, Russia, Japan, and even South Korea refusing to accept the US use of force against North Korea, a diplomatic process finally yielded an agreement. In September

2005, North Korea agreed to “abandon all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs” and the United States and North Korea committed to “respect each other’s sovereignty” and “to normalize their relations.” But veteran Korea watcher Selig Harrison reported, “It was no secret to journalists covering the September 2005 negotiations, or to the North Koreans, that the agreement was bitterly controversial within the [US] administration and represented a victory for State Department advocates of a conciliatory approach to North Korea over proponents of “regime change” in Pyongyang.”<sup>91</sup>

It came as no surprise then that the conciliatory posture was short lived. A few days after the agreement was reached, the US Treasury Department imposed severe financial sanctions against North Korea in an effort to isolate the country from the international financial system and squeeze its leadership and economy. The North Korean response was defiance; they prepared a long-range missile test.

This, in turn, prompted former Secretary of Defense William Perry and former Assistant Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter (both of whom served in the Clinton administration) to ask: “Should the United States allow a country openly hostile to it and armed with nuclear weapons to perfect an intercontinental ballistic missile capable of delivering nuclear weapons to US soil?” They argued:

We believe not. ... [T]he United States should immediately make clear its intention to strike and destroy the North Korean Taepodong missile before it can be launched. ... It undoubtedly carries risk. But the risk of continuing inaction in the face of North Korea’s race to threaten this country would be greater.<sup>92</sup>

Others argued that instead of attacking the missile as it was readied for testing, the United States should focus on more important targets—North Korea’s nuclear reactors. “Those reactors could produce enough plutonium for several dozen nuclear warheads a year. They must not be allowed to operate. Preemption would make good sense against them.”<sup>93</sup>

On October 9, 2006, North Korea carried out its first nuclear weapons test.<sup>94</sup> The failure of US policy could hardly have been more complete.

While Iran and North Korea currently occupy most international attention, there are other sources of nuclear fear. It is no longer just states that want the capability to match the United States. Other political actors have Hiroshima on their minds. There are claims that there is an intercepted message in which Osama bin Laden talks of planning a “Hiroshima” against America.<sup>95</sup> After the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, a meeting came to light between three scientists from Pakistan’s nuclear weapons program and Taliban and al-Qaeda leaders.<sup>96</sup> There was a possibility that several others may have had similar ties.<sup>97</sup> There are also fears about the security of Pakistan’s nuclear facilities, its nuclear weapons, and the fissile materials used to make them.<sup>98</sup> It has been suggested that should the present Musharraf regime fall and radical Islamic groups look ready to seize power, the US may try to intervene and capture Pakistan’s

nuclear weapons.<sup>99</sup> The prospect of nuclear terrorism will remain even after the struggle over Iran's nuclear ambitions has been resolved.

### **With a Little Help from My Friends**

There are some countries that have nuclear weapons and elicit no American fears. Britain and France are obvious examples. But they were already US military allies before they acquired their weapons and this was in the time before nuclear proliferation was a serious concern. Much can be learned by looking at the other more recent cases of where the United States has in fact accepted and even fostered the nuclear ambitions of chosen states. US policy toward the nuclear weapons programs of India, Pakistan, and Israel offers a simple way to see the anomaly that is the attack on Iraq and the threats against Iran.

India began laying the base for its nuclear energy and nuclear weapons program soon after its independence in 1947. Its early progress was facilitated by the US Atoms for Peace Program, which trained nuclear scientists and engineers and provided a research reactor. In the early 1960s, amid American concerns about China's first nuclear weapons test, the US Atomic Energy Commission considered helping India with "peaceful nuclear explosions," which would involve the use of US nuclear devices under US control being exploded in India.<sup>100</sup> For their part, senior officials in the State Department and the Pentagon went so far as to consider "the possibilities of providing nuclear weapons under US custody" to India.<sup>101</sup> The plan envisaged helping India modify aircraft to drop nuclear weapons, training crews, providing dummy weapons for practice runs and information on the effects of nuclear weapons for use in deciding targets. These ideas were eventually not taken up.

India went ahead with its own nuclear weapons program and in 1974 carried out its first nuclear weapons test. In May 1998, India conducted another five nuclear tests and announced it was now a nuclear armed state. US law required sanctions be imposed on any state that tested nuclear weapons. But they were nominal at best in the case of India.

In spring 2000, President Clinton made the first visit to South Asia by a US president since 1978 and differences on nuclear weapons were set aside. The United States made clear it was willing to pursue a new relationship with nuclear India. A joint statement in 2000 declared that "India and the United States will be partners in peace, with a common interest in and complementary responsibility for ensuring regional and international security."<sup>102</sup> One expression was a 2001 agreement to permit greater joint military planning, joint military operations, and US supply of weapons and military technology to India.<sup>103</sup>

The development of a security alliance between the US and India took another step forward with the January 2004 "Next Steps in Strategic Partnership" agreement. This committed the US and India to "expand cooperation" in civilian nuclear activities, civilian space programs, and high-technology trade, as well as on missile defense. US officials have made clear the purpose of this agreement. A senior official announced that "Its goal is to help India become a major world power in the 21st century.... We

understand fully the implications, including military implications, of that statement.”<sup>104</sup>

Former senior US officials have pointed out the inference that is to be drawn from the new US effort to “help India.” Robert Blackwill, who served in the Bush administration as US ambassador to India and then as deputy national security adviser for strategic planning, has wondered, for instance, “Why should the US want to check India’s missile capability in ways that could lead to China’s permanent nuclear dominance over democratic India?”<sup>105</sup> His adviser drew a direct analogy to the critical role of US support for the nuclear programs of Britain and France during the Cold War and argued that

If the United States is serious about advancing its geopolitical objectives in Asia, it would almost by definition help New Delhi develop strategic capabilities such that India’s nuclear weaponry and associated delivery systems could deter against the growing and utterly more capable nuclear forces Beijing is likely to possess by 2025.<sup>106</sup>

This plan took another step forward with the July 18, 2005 joint statement by President Bush and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of Indian. The two leaders announced a deal in which the US would change its own laws and try to amend international controls that for 30 years have restricted nuclear trade with India. This deal, if approved by the US Congress and the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), will enable India to strengthen both its civil and military nuclear capability.

The history of Pakistan’s nuclear weapons program tells a similar story about how far the United States will go in turning a blind eye to proliferation where a state seeking nuclear weapons is willing to support what the US sees as key interests. Pakistan set out to make nuclear weapons in the early 1970s, in part driven by fears about India’s nuclear ambitions. The US tried to stop Pakistan from acquiring the basic technology to make highly enriched uranium and to separate plutonium.<sup>107</sup> But the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and Pakistan’s willingness to support the US in its proxy war against the Soviet Union changed that. The US lifted its non-proliferation sanctions on Pakistan, poured billions of dollars of economic and military aid into the country, and supported the military dictatorship of General Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq. The nuclear weapons program was no longer an issue, as Leonard Weiss, the former staff director of the US Senate’s Governmental Affairs Committee said in testimony to Congress:

the lifting of sanctions against the Pakistanis coupled with a \$3.2 billion aid package sent them the message that they could continue with their nuclear weapons acquisition activities with the U.S. government doing little to stand in their way as long as they continued funneling assistance to the mujahideen and did not embarrass us by setting off a nuclear explosion.<sup>108</sup>

It took the end of the Afghan war and collapse of the Soviet Union for sanctions to be restored on Pakistan.<sup>109</sup> By then, Pakistan had acquired nuclear weapons and radical Islam had taken root.

Through the 1990s, Pakistan faced a growing economic and political crisis, a spiraling debt burden, a growing balance of payments problem, and increasingly militant Islamist groups. Pakistan was described as on its way to becoming a “failed state”; General Anthony C. Zinni, commander in chief of US Central Command (which encompasses Pakistan) worried in 2000 that “If Pakistan fails we have major problems... hardliners could take over, or fundamentalists or chaos.”<sup>110</sup> One fear was that victory for radical Islam or chaos in Pakistan could mean its nuclear weapons falling into the hands of groups hostile to US interests in the Middle East, or globally. But no action was taken. After the 9/11 attacks, the United States needed Pakistan’s support to wage war against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. The US rescheduled hundreds of millions dollars of Pakistan’s debt, approved a \$300 million credit line for private investors, over \$100 million to help patrol borders and fight drug trafficking, and \$600 million in foreign aid.<sup>111</sup> In June 2003, coinciding with an official visit by President Pervez Musharraf, the United States rewarded Pakistan’s support in the “war against terrorism,” with a further \$3 billion aid package, of which half was military support.<sup>112</sup>

Washington has been willing to overlook Pakistan’s continued development of nuclear weapons and testing of ballistic missiles. It has also been muted in its response to the sale of uranium enrichment technology to Iran, North Korea, and Libya (and perhaps other states) and in some of these cases even a nuclear weapons design, by A. Q. Khan, a key figure in Pakistan’s nuclear weapons program.<sup>113</sup> After A. Q. Khan confessed, General Musharraf placed him under house arrest and at the same time pardoned him.

Yet there is, of course, an even more telling example of US support for a state that has acquired nuclear weapons in the face of international opposition. It is the one country in the Middle East that has nuclear weapons and elicits no American fears: Israel. Israel now has the largest nuclear arsenal outside of the five major nuclear weapons states; it is believed to have up to 200 nuclear weapons, long-range ballistic missiles as well as aircraft capable of delivering nuclear weapons, and submarine-launched nuclear cruise missiles.<sup>114</sup> There have been repeated demands from the international community that Israel give up its nuclear weapons and sign the NPT. It is the only state in the Middle East that is not a signatory to the Treaty. There are also longstanding calls for the Middle East region to become a nuclear weapon free zone. A 1998 UN General Assembly Resolution on the Middle East called on “the only state in the region that is not a party to the NPT to accede without further delay and not to develop, produce, test or otherwise acquire nuclear weapons.”<sup>115</sup> One hundred and fifty-eight states supported the call. Only two states were opposed: Israel and the United States.

The United States supports Israel despite Israeli policies and actions that in another country it would condemn and seek to reverse. Israel has still not ended its occupation of the Palestinian territories captured in 1967. It prepared to use nuclear weapons in its 1973 war.<sup>116</sup> In 1982, Israel’s invasion of Lebanon led to the deaths of about 20,000 people.<sup>117</sup> Israel has had a policy of assassinations and bombings directed against Palestinian leaders in third countries, including an October 1985 attack on the headquarters of the Palestine Liberation Organization in Tunis, with US-supplied jets, in which over 70 people were killed.<sup>118</sup>



The US has extended economic and military support also. It has given \$70–80 billion dollars of military and economic aid to Israel over the past two decades, and currently gives Israel well in excess of \$3 billion a year. Israel also has access to information on US military technologies.<sup>119</sup> It may even have had access to US and French nuclear weapons design and test expertise.<sup>120</sup> This cooperation has become closer over time. In 1998, the US signed a Memorandum of Agreement with Israel committing it to “enhancing Israel’s defense and deterrent capabilities” and “upgrading the framework of the US–Israel strategic and military relationship, as well as the technological cooperation between them.”<sup>121</sup> This included a US commitment to provide “ways and means of assuring and increasing Israel’s deterrent power by supplies of modern technology and weapons systems.”<sup>122</sup> It is hard to read this as anything but active US support of Israel’s nuclear weapons capabilities.

### **Toward Freedom from Nuclear Fear**

American novelist and critic E. L. Doctorow has suggested that in the 60 years since the atomic bomb was first built and used, nuclear weapons have become a central part of the politics, economy, and culture of the United States: “We have had the bomb on our minds since 1945. It was first our weaponry and then our diplomacy, and now it’s our economy. How can we suppose that something so monstrously powerful would not, after years, compose our identity?”<sup>123</sup>

The fear of this “monstrously powerful” technology, captured vividly in the image of the mushroom cloud, makes it amenable to manipulation by political leaders to mobilize public support.

But the bomb as weapon, diplomacy, economy, and identity has not gone unchallenged in all this time. Many seek to free themselves from nuclear fears. The anti-nuclear and peace movement has been a powerful force in American politics. In particular, it has been a fundamental obstacle confronting American leaders whenever they have considered using nuclear weapons. A testament to their power is evident in the judgment by McGeorge Bundy, President Kennedy’s national security advisor, that “no president could hope for understanding and support from his own countrymen if he used the bomb.”<sup>124</sup>

The proof of its success is evident in the change in public perceptions about nuclear weapons over the past 60 years. Widespread support now exists for the elimination of all nuclear weapons and a rejection of their use. A 2005 poll found that 66 percent of Americans believe no nation should have nuclear weapons, and 60 percent of younger people, those aged 18 to 29 years, now disapprove of the bombing of Hiroshima.<sup>125</sup>

At the same time, key officials who have held responsibility for preparing to wage nuclear war for the United States have become public critics of nuclear weapons. As secretary of defense, Robert McNamara was a nuclear cold warrior responsible for a large build up of the nuclear arsenal in the 1960s. He was a key player in the Cuban missile crisis, when the United States threatened to launch nuclear war against the Soviet Union. Given the catastrophic character of such a war, many believe it was perhaps the most dangerous moment in the history of humanity. McNamara now says “I

would characterize current US nuclear weapons policy as immoral, illegal, militarily unnecessary, and dreadfully dangerous.”<sup>126</sup>

No opponent of US nuclear weapons policy is perhaps more striking than General Lee Butler, who had responsibility for all US Air Force and Navy nuclear weapons as commander in chief of the US Strategic Air Command (1991–1992) and then of the US Strategic Command (1992–1994). Butler now believes that “nuclear war [has] no politically, militarily or morally acceptable justification.”<sup>127</sup>

In the face of public demands for the elimination of nuclear weapons and support for this goal from prominent former officials, why does the United States keep nuclear weapons and insist on its right and willingness to use them? General Butler has offered an explanation. It is a rare first hand account of the darkness at the heart of the nuclear weapons complex:

I have no other way of understanding the willingness to condone nuclear weapons except to believe that they are the natural accomplices of visceral enmity. They thrive in the emotional climate born of utter alienation and isolation. The unbounded wantonness of their effects is a perfect companion to the urge to destroy completely. They play on our deepest fears and pander to our darkest instincts.

For Butler, the continued reliance on nuclear weapons by the United States is due to the nuclear complex. The institutions that make and plan to use nuclear weapons are, he says, “mammoth bureaucracies with gargantuan appetites and global agendas... beset with tidal forces, towering egos, maddening contradictions, alien constructs and insane risks.”

Today, the United States both clings to its nuclear weapons and rightly lives in fear of the bomb it first brought into the world and tried to use to establish its dominance. The elimination of nuclear weapons cannot succeed as long as the US is insistent on retaining and improving its nuclear arsenal, supports the nuclear ambitions of its friends and allies, and tries to deny these weapons only to those it sees as enemies. In a world in which the United States insists that nuclear weapons are fundamental to its power and security, and that of its friends and allies, no argument can reliably persuade others to give up these weapons (or not acquire them in the first place).

To add to the danger from states that seek to emulate the US and the other nuclear weapon states by developing the capacity to wage nuclear war, and so gain national power and prestige, there is now the threat of nuclear-armed Islamist political groups and movements. For these religious zealots, nuclear weapons may represent the ultimate tool with which to confront the United States and force a change in its policies.

To end the nuclear danger in all its forms will require people everywhere to put down the banners of nation and faith and embrace a greater shared identity. This was recognized 50 years ago, in the words of this manifesto by Albert Einstein and Bertrand Russell:

We have to learn to think in a new way. We have to learn to ask ourselves, not what steps can be taken to give military victory to whatever group we prefer, for there no longer are such steps; the question we have to ask ourselves is: what steps can be taken to prevent a military contest of which the issue must be disastrous to all parties?... We appeal as human beings to human beings: Remember your humanity, and forget the rest.128

## CHAPTER 5: MIAN

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