

## A Moral Stance

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I take the primary rule in the dissemination and apprehension of truth to be the unqualified, unadorned statement of fact. Nothing, I believe, does more for the clarification of principle and intent than plain speech. This being so, I will do all in my power to speak plainly, willingly accepting chastisement for any lack of clarity or unintended misuse of language that portrays what is not.

Let me begin abruptly and at my main point: The government of the United States of America—my government—conducted an unprovoked war of aggression against an essentially defenseless nation. Iraq did not declare war against the United States; Iraq's military at no time took up offensive positions against the United States or its citizens. The government of Iraq did not attempt to sabotage American interests abroad, damage American industry, harm US nationals, or hinder US growth. Iraq did not commit even one act from among a list which, taken as a whole, would not have been cause for war. Indeed, since the Gulf War Iraq has lived silenced under United Nations sanctions, trading its one commodity (oil) for what it could obtain.

The United States attacked a nation a fraction the size of itself, with only a fraction of the population of the US, with only a small fraction of the Gross National Product of the US, and a tiny fraction of the military strength of the United States. This attack was labeled a "war". The result of this "war" was a foregone conclusion: Iraq had no hope of defending itself in any serious sense, no chance of inflicting

meaningful casualties, and no opportunity to negotiate a truce or advocate compromise. Fighting was impossible, defense was unthinkable, and surrender unacceptable. Left with no options commonly available to countries operating within the known rules of war, Iraq rolled over and died.

For the sake of clarity, I would like to review the points in the previous paragraph. Throughout the history of warfare, a state's size and power has always been a consideration in deciding for or against aggression. Few countries have opted to attack others without some considered advantage, be that advantage technical, military, attritional, or geographical. The case of the United States' attack on Iraq was no different. The US military had an extraordinarily well-refined plan that it executed with precision, falling quickly into contingency plans on the rare occasions that something unexpected happened. The US knew of its enormous military advantage and used this advantage to minimize casualties and isolate resistance quickly. All this is to say that the United States' size and power, and Iraq's size and power, were significant considerations in going to war.

To understand the importance of this consideration of comparison of size and power, we need to reflect upon one of the longest wars in history: the Cold War. This war began after the United States deployed weapons of mass destruction against the civilian population of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It gained force with the division of Eastern Europe into Western and Soviet spheres of influence, and came to a head when the USSR demonstrated the ability to deploy nuclear weaponry equal to that of the United States. It reached a point of caricature during the Cuban Missile Crisis when the two superpowers threatened each other and prayed that the

other would not respond in a hostile fashion to the threats. The Cold War was characterized by a never-ending battle of display.

The single greatest factor in the Cold War was the combined perception and actuality of size and strength. Each side constantly assessed what the other had, what it would do, how it would do it, and opted at every turn to continue doing nothing. In a word, because the two powers were of equal size and strength, and because that strength had such enormous and devastating capacity, the two sides *chose not to aggress*. I would like to emphasize that both the United States and the USSR considered aggression at many turns, but always elected to await attack and respond to hostile activity rather than initiate. Neither side, it should be added, did so for humanitarian reasons: they acted strategically because the outcome of aggression could not be predicted with sufficient accuracy because of the balance of size and strength that existed between the two.

In the case of the United States and Iraq, the outcome could be predicted with great accuracy, as is evidenced by the fact that the execution of the US military attack followed the plan almost precisely. There were few surprises: not because of the tremendous expertise of the US military, but because of the great disparity between the strength of the respective militaries. Unlike the Cold War, which lasted nearly half a century, the war against Iraq ended quickly because one side possessed so much more military strength than the other.

Despite an overwhelming military advantage, the United States solicited assistance from four of the five next most powerful militaries in the world: England, France, Germany, and Russia. Because the US military was so far superior to the Iraqi military, we must assume that the US did not need the military assistance of

these other countries in order to defeat Iraq. Certainly the US knew that without their help the outcome of the "war" would be the same, or else the US would not have proceeded against Iraq so quickly. If the United States did not truly *need* the help of even the strongest military forces in the world, why did it seek their help?

There are several possible answers to this question, none of which is flattering. First is the possibility that the United States sought to pass potential losses or costs to its allies. Second is the possibility that it enlisted help as a purely political move aimed at enhancing the questionable logic that allied participation implied that Iraq deserved to be attacked: if Germany, France, Russia, and England all participated, then Iraq was guilty of the crimes imputed to her. Third is the possibility that the US enlisted help for the mere sake of enlisting help. This is like inviting someone you don't like to a dinner party knowing that he will not come because he doesn't like you, either. Fourth is the possibility that the acceptance or rejection of the invitation to join the US in war would prove which was truly a friendly nation, and which was not. The motives attached to these possibilities are all ugly. The first is exploitive, the second is guileful, the third is dissimulative, and the fourth is calculating. Any human with those traits would be compared rightfully to Iago: a character of legendary sinister qualities.

There was one country, however, that the United States needed: Turkey. Here I use the word "needed" somewhat laxly because US military authorities were careful to state that Turkey's role in the pending "war" would matter only tactically. If Turkey chose to grant access to land that would allow attacks to be launched from certain convenient positions, then those attacks would be that much easier. If not, they could and would be launched from other arenas at some minor

inconvenience. To demonstrate how unimportant Turkey's sites were, the United States offered simply to bribe Turkey with its most abundant commodity: money. When added to the above list, openly offering a bribe to a member of the United Nations without caring about creating international moral outrage brings the additional charge of *chutzpah* to the table.

The next issue is: Iraq had no hope of defending itself in any serious sense, and no chance of inflicting meaningful casualties.

The attack began with long range strikes at targets that would incapacitate communications, power, and transport capabilities. The rather ridiculously self-aggrandizing name of Operation Shock and Awe was applied to the attacks within the first 24 hours that dropped 1500 bombs on Iraq. These bombs severely limited Iraq's capability to direct troops, counter US moves, cover exposed troops, and transport materials to engaged forces that needed supplies. Because of this, US troops, tanks, and artillery rolled nearly unimpeded across Iraq, defeating all resistance with minimal losses. When ground troops met with resistance, they called for air support, which quickly wiped out Iraqi ground forces with massive bombs. On the rare occasions that the Iraqi military could communicate needs to transport troops to embattled areas, they were intercepted and destroyed by US air power. The US military seemed to know about every move, as was typified in the attack on a building that housed a mere 200 members of the Iraqi military in Central Baghdad. Using laser-guided bombs, a pair of F-15E fighter jets destroyed the building and everyone in it without so much as radar detection.

The sense of Iraqi helplessness in the face of such advanced military technology was matched by the desperation in attempting to inflict casualties on US

troops. For the short time that the Iraqi government could access the media to make claims about damage that they had caused, they reported ridiculously small victories: two men captured, a helicopter shot down, ten marines killed. Any larger claims would have been laughed at even in the Arab world, leading to what were probably honest reports that the best they could do was kill a few Americans by chance, some of them in the act of surrendering. The Iraqi military quickly turned to guerilla tactics, exploding makeshift bombs here and there and hiding among civilians.

Given the fact that virtually every US attack achieved its aim, and the fact that every military does everything within its power to defend itself, we can conclude that the Iraqi military did just that, and that it was helpless. Given that the Iraqi military would have inflicted as many casualties as possible to turn back US forces, and the fact that it killed very few US troops, we can conclude that it did not have the ability to do so. In the simplest terms possible: Iraq had no hope of defending itself in any serious sense, and no chance of inflicting meaningful casualties, *and the United States knew that.*

This is not to say that the US did not expect resistance. The military knew that any fight is an undesirable fight and that lives would be lost. They also knew that they could not give the Iraqis an opportunity to fight a conventional war, take advantage of physical training in the desert, use knowledge of local conditions and terrain for an advantage, and cultivate opportunities for equilateral attrition. The decision to fight this kind of war was taken because it made the most sense, and because it offered such extraordinary advantages that the US was guaranteed the kind of fight that would avoid widespread protest. The "war" against Iraq was, as

much as anything else, a staged media event with a planned ending that the US military would not have undertaken without being certain of its outcome.

The third point to review is: Iraq had "no opportunity to negotiate a truce or advocate compromise."

Before the "war" against Iraq, President Bush emphasized two points: Iraq's developed weapons program that included a full range of weapons of mass destruction, and the imminent danger in which this program placed the citizens of the United States of America. Bush repeatedly expressed outrage at Hussein's lies to the international community regarding these weapons, and demanded that a "full disclosure" be made of such weapons. Despite protests from UN weapons inspectors that time would be needed to discover these weapons (if they existed at all), President Bush insisted that Hussein's time had run out and that military intervention would be required in order to disarm Iraq. I cannot emphasize enough that this group of statements regarding weapons of mass destruction, their danger to US citizens, the lies to cover them, and the actions necessary to remove them were presented repeatedly in every imaginable form and forum as the basis, cause, and motive for the "war" against Iraq. The only possible conclusion from these statements was that if Iraq surrendered its weapons of mass destruction, there would be no war. Iraq insisted that it had made a full disclosure, and the military attack began.

After the "war" began, the publicized justifications for it shifted. Suddenly, the American public was told that Hussein had to be removed because of his Stalinesque violations of human rights. We were told that the people of Iraq were tortured, raped, and killed for even the mildest form of dissent; that they lived in

constant fear of reprisals for even a slur in jest against Saddam's name; and that they longed for democracy that would never be theirs without US intervention. These charges—validated by the State Department, Amnesty International, and a variety of other reliable agencies—now became the supposed basis for action. While many people questioned the actual threat that Hussein posed to the American people, and others questioned the existence of his weapons program, no one could question the truth that an inhuman dictator ruled Iraq.

One result of this change in rhetoric was to shift the focus away from dubitable claims about weapons of mass destruction. Another was to remove the possibility of surrender. If the regime was guilty of developing weapons in violation of UN sanctions, it could at any time surrender those weapons and the US would be forced to evacuate Iraq under the compelling force of compliance. The United States would have achieved its aim: there would be no reason for it to remain. However, the absolute truth of human rights violations, political repressions, and genocide removed any hope of the existing government regaining power. If the reason for the war was to restore freedom to the Iraqi people, then this freedom could be had only by removing any and all vestiges of the leadership that deprived that freedom. Under these conditions, there could be no compromise, negotiation, or peace. *All* of the Iraqi government had to be removed.

The rhetoric to enable this shift took place in the early days of the "war" when military personnel and government workers began to be referred to indiscriminately as "Iraqi regime terror squad members." Applying the word "terror" to groups of people whose function was completely unknown to their attackers had the effect of building a mystique of evil. This assisted the process of creating ex

*post facto* justifications for the military campaign that failed to discover the weapons that served as the original justification for war. More importantly, it removed the possibility of compromise, and hence the possibility for anything less than US control of Iraq.

The process of convincing even a narrow percentage of 250,000,000 American citizens to accept an attack on a country one-tenth its size that had committed no direct offense against us was a precarious one. When doing so, speaking the truth plainly and boldly was not an option. It would have been impossible to announce that the United States planned a military attack on Iraq with the purpose of killing Saddam Hussein and his followers, overthrowing his regime, and establishing a democratic government under US purview. In the unlikely event that even a small minority of the public acquiesced to such an arrantly hostile plan, adding that the attack and its results would cost \$200,000,000,000.00 and hundreds of US lives would certainly have brought universal condemnation. The process, therefore, had to be subtle.

I have described briefly how it happened, leaving out many details about how Operation Shock and Awe turned into Operation Iraqi Freedom. Now I would like to turn my attention from the facts to reflect on the significance of those facts and their meaning to us as individuals.

The first thing that I noticed about the growing rhetoric surrounding Iraq was a complete lack of commitment toward military force. This commitment was buried under the logic of compulsion: if the United States were *forced* to take military action, it would do so. This language—which I *thought* was completely

transparent—had the effect of building in many people’s minds the precursor of indignation. By repeatedly insisting that Saddam Hussein had ignored international law in pursuing a massive weapons program aimed at the destruction of the United States and its allies, the public gained a sense of blame that was essential in taking the next step. Once indignation and blame were in place, President Bush could suggest that the United States had *no choice* except to act to disarm Saddam Hussein.

In order to fully understand these steps, we should review them together:

1. The United States did not wish to enter into an armed confrontation. However, it would do so if necessary.
2. Saddam Hussein committed wrongs that deserved severe punishment.
3. That punishment would be forcible disarmament.
4. The United States had to act with force in order to achieve disarmament.

A question should have occurred to Americans during the first phase: What were the necessary conditions to justify the use of military action? Since the premise was that the United States did not wish to use military force, it should have been asked: What conditions would change that desire? Incredibly, I did not hear one person ask that question. Why?

The answer is that we believed that statement. When the President of the United States of America addresses the American public and states clearly that the United States wishes to avoid the use of force, we believe him. We understand that the use of military force involves enormous expenditures, loss of life, and the risk

that any such operation can spiral out of control. Consequently, we take such announcements seriously.

The next phase involved accusing Saddam Hussein of violating international law. Understandably, the American public knew little about this. We learned to rely upon United Nations reports to tell us that, until that moment, the UN inspectors had found no weapons of mass destruction, and no evidence that they had ever existed. At this point, the general mood in America was skeptical. Most everyone was capable of reasoning that if Saddam Hussein did not violate international law by manufacturing such weapons, then certainly there was no reason to fear him and his country. Then, the matter took a turn. President Bush insisted repeatedly that Saddam Hussein was lying, that there was concrete evidence against him, that he did have an illegal weapons program, and that he intended to use those weapons. President Bush even presented to the American public the *evidence* that Hussein had attempted to import enriched uranium from Africa for the express purpose of creating a nuclear weapon.

Quite naturally, no one asked President Bush for proof of his statements. Why? Because when the President of the United States of America addresses the American public and states clearly that the United States has incontrovertible evidence that a malicious regime attempted to import the materials necessary to create nuclear weaponry, we believe him. We understand that nuclear weapons in the hands of an antagonistic tyrant have potentially grave consequences. So, we take such announcements seriously.

The next phase answered the question: What is to be done? At this point nearly every American could follow the logic: if Hussein had weapons of mass

destruction, they had to be taken away. He had to be disarmed. Throughout the period in which the case was being built to disarm Hussein, we assumed that disarmament meant just that: we would enter Iraq, disclose and remove the weapons of mass destruction, and leave. Why did we assume that? Because we were told at every turn that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction, that he had violated international law, and that he had to be disarmed. It could not have been clearer.

What followed surprised a number of Americans: the United States military entered Iraq, toppled the government, destroyed the infrastructure, and found absolutely no weapons of mass destruction. Six months and billions of dollars later, we have found nothing. Now, it appears that the goal of the "war" was to topple the Iraqi government and replace it with a US led democracy. From our current vantage point in history, we can wonder how the United States of America could undertake a war of aggression with the express purpose of replacing a political ideology. The idea of entering another country, forcing it to leave off its system of government and installing our system of government turns even the most imperialistic of thinkers cold.

But what surprised us most was that we had been had. I know dozens of people who vehemently and vocally supported the invasion of Iraq who will not speak about the subject now because it is patently obvious that we were lied to. The double shame of being lied to and being dumb enough to accept the lie makes mutes of the most vociferous.

Anyone, however, can be lied to. There is no shame in believing someone who we consider to be trustable who tells a story that appears credible. The shame

lies elsewhere. It lies in America's collective inability to take a moral stance against the invasion of Iraq in March of 2003.

No one was lied to about the fact that the United States decided to undertake an unprovoked war of aggression against an essentially defenseless nation. That fact was apparent from those at hand: we attacked, they did not, and they did not possess the military technology to defend themselves adequately. The issue of how justified such an invasion was is quite another matter, because any facts that might add up to justification lay outside the bounds of the fact that the United States, for the first time in its proud history, undertook an unprovoked war of aggression against an essentially defenseless nation. Even if Saddam Hussein did attempt to purchase enriched uranium illegally; if he stockpiled biological weapons; if he developed missile delivery systems beyond the range dictated by the United Nations, we cannot escape the fact that the United States military entered Iraq, destroyed the country's infrastructure and killed ten thousand of its citizens without having been attacked first. The shameful aspect of this is how few Americans stood up and said, "This is wrong. This is not what America stands for, it is not how America acts, and I will not stand for it." Instead, we bowed to puerile sloganism, allowing ourselves to be shouted down by sign-toters who yelled "Support Our Troops".

I would like to digress a moment to tell a story. Its purpose is to illuminate a principle at hand.

A Russian intellectual named Lev Kopelev served his country at the Western Front against Germany as a propagandist. His job was to inculcate in the nearby German troops in 1945 the idea that they were losing the war and that they would

do well to surrender peacefully. How he did so is another matter. Whether his work was effective is unimportant. What matters is that Kopelev found himself in Germany, advancing with the Soviet army into devastated German territory. As they did, the members of the Soviet military knew of the horrible crimes that the Nazis had committed. They knew that they had slaughtered civilians, burned towns to the ground, committed genocide, raped young girls, plundered wherever they went, and left a trail of destruction that could not be repaired for decades. The Soviets considered the Germans to be beasts, probably not without cause.

As the men advanced, they began to take retribution on the populace that lay in their way on their march to Berlin. They burned down houses, plundered businesses and homes, raped innocent girls, shot civilians for sport, and justified all in the name of revenge. Kopelev did everything that he could to stop the soldiers from committing those horrible crimes. Sometimes, he succeeded.

The authorities got wind of his concern for the enemy and tried him for "bourgeois humanitarianism." He was accused of showing sympathy for the enemy. He argued in defense that he was not merely showing sympathy for the enemy; in fact he thought that the Germans got what they deserved. He said that what concerned him was the moral decay of the Soviet soldiers. In doing what the Germans had done, he said, the members of the Red Army were little better than the Nazis. When he pulled Soviet soldiers away from potential crimes, it was not to save a German from death, it was to awaken them to the idea that what they were about to do was wrong as well as harmful to their own psychological makeup. He saw in every crime the potential for degradation of character.

Despite his arguments, Kopelev was sent to a prison camp for many years. He made his case in front of many judges at many retrials. But not once did he deny that he had done what he was accused of. Kopelev maintained that if he were punished for taking a moral stance against actions of horrific depravity, then he would accept punishment.

I return, now, to the story at hand: the "war" against Iraq. One of the reasons that the "war" happened was because not enough people in the United States of America followed inescapable logic with an adamant moral stance against an immoral action. The single fact under moral scrutiny is that the United States of America undertook an unprovoked war of aggression against an essentially defenseless nation. Whether or not one agreed to "Support Our Troops"; whether or not one believed that Saddam Hussein truly sought materials to build nuclear weapons; whether or not one considered it necessary to use military force to remove those weapons; whether or not one believed that those weapons existed is *irrelevant* in answering the question of whether you and I personally objected to the war against Iraq on the grounds that *it was wrong for the United States of America to begin a war of aggression*.

Gratefully, taking such a stance would not have landed any of us in prison as it did Kopelev. Even though we would not have been punished for taking such a stance, we should ask the question, would it have mattered if we did?

It is possible that any protests from the American public, no matter how loud, no matter how long, may not have changed the decision to go to war. However, if we take a moral stance with the purpose of obtaining a desired outcome, we are not taking a moral stance at all: we are taking a practical stance.

There is nothing moral about principled courage if the courage fades with the lack of a guarantee. Taking a moral stance is done because one cannot do otherwise, because such a stance is part of one's internal values that one cannot surrender or compromise. In fact, one may be sure that they are not values that run deep within one's soul if they can be compromised under pressure.

I am not outraged that the President of the United States lied to the American public in order to garner political acceptance for his international agenda. I have no doubt that he feels strongly that he did what was right in the long-term interests of the United States. I am not upset with the people who chanted "Save Our Troops" without thinking that they were doing little more than attempting to categorize their world into "us" and "them". But I am upset with the millions of Americans who failed to take a firm, unwavering, moral stance against the "war" in Iraq when they knew within their hearts that such a war was wrong. And I hope that, when the true need arises to defend our country, we can turn to our sense of what is right and what is wrong for the strength and depth of courage that will be required.