

icked. Every report from the White House is that he's as firm as ever in his belief that Saddam must go and that Bush himself must make sure it happens. Rather than allies' encouraging Bush, it's been his task to buck them up when they've grown weary in warding off opposition at home. The weary include his two closest allies, Blair and Spanish prime minister Jose Maria Aznar.

The good news for Bush is that he still has considerable clout with the American public. Bush loathes press conferences, but he did well enough on March 6 that he changed public opinion. Backing for war and regime change increased. Better yet, the jump was exceeded by the national desire (up 15 percentage points in a Fox news survey) to stop dithering at the U.N. and start fighting. I suspect that is Bush's sentiment exactly. ♦

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Vox Ignoramus

On issues of war and peace, public opinion has proven an unreliable guide. **BY MIKE MURPHY**

MUCH OF THE RECENT DEBATE over the Bush administration's Iraq policy has centered on two foolish ideas. The first is that the goal of American foreign policy should be to make certain the United States is "liked" by as many other countries as possible, particularly at that great high school of the world, the United Nations. The second is that policymakers should look to public opinion in the United States and abroad as the compass by which to make wise decisions on vital matters of war and peace.

This theory of international relations as a dinner party where national interests should be subordinated to good manners is disturbingly ubiquitous among the chattering class. It is also very dangerous in our age of state-sponsored mass terror. Public opinion, while always sanctified when we talk about our great democracy, is often dangerously naive and ill-informed. History shows us that public opinion in times of grave national crisis often puts great pressure on leaders to do exactly the wrong thing.

Consider: In the fall of 1939 Adolf Hitler had already started the Second World War. Austria and Czechoslovakia had been conquered. Poland was falling to German armies. Britain and France had just declared war.

Against this, Gallup measured American public opinion on the European war. Perhaps unsurprisingly, 96 percent of Americans opposed joining the war against Hitler. But when asked if the United States should stay out of the war, even if that

meant fascist Germany would conquer the democracies of England and France, 79 percent of Americans still said America should avoid the war.

This was public opinion in the United States after a decade of Hitler's ranting, re-arming, and marching across his neighbors' borders. Even as late as 1941, with France defeated and England alone, a poll showed 79 percent of Americans still opposed involvement in the war.

European public opinion was no wiser. Shortly after Chamberlain won peace in our time at Munich, only 39 percent of British public opinion opposed his policies. After losing millions in the slaughtering fields of the First World War, it is no surprise that France and England craved peace during the 1930s. Woodrow Wilson lured a reluctant America into that Great War with a promise that it would end all wars. The newspapers of the 1930s frequently terrified readers with stories of vast air armadas that would bomb crowded cities with poison gas. That public opinion would cling to peace at nearly any cost is easily understandable, and arguably commendable. No civilized society will ever embrace the horror of war if given any other option, even options that are illusions. But it is the duty of leaders to see through the illusions.

Hitler made his riskiest initial move in March 1936 by remilitarizing the Rhineland, and thereby dramatically repudiating the Treaty of Versailles. France's vastly superior army of the time could easily have rolled into the Ruhr valley, upholding the treaty that ended World War I and stopping Hitler's ambitions by dis-

Mike Murphy is a political and media consultant.

arming his regime. Reacting to Hitler's gamble, France's caretaker premier Albert Sarraut made a snarling radio speech, weighed military action, and consulted his British allies in the Baldwin government, who told the French that Britain could not "accept the risk of war" and urged diplomatic action within the League of Nations.

Facing elections in May and fearing a backlash from a powerful "pacifist tornado," the Sarraut cabinet quickly rejected military action. "If we had declared a general mobilization two months before the elections," wrote Sarraut's air minister in 1944, "we would have been swept out of parliament by the voters, if it did not happen beforehand through a revolution in the streets." France, the dominant land power in Europe during the 1930s, did nothing.

Public opinion in most Western democracies today is pushing leaders against the use of military force. Only in the United States does public opinion support military action in Iraq, and that support is far from overwhelming. What has changed dramatically in the decades since World War II is the cost of a miscalculation. The great oceans that protected America from the blitzkriegs of 1939 and 1940 offer no protection against a crude atomic weapon in a cargo container. Acting too late against a deadly enemy would now be catastrophic. National leaders who face atomic terrorists cannot afford the luxury of hindsight.

Presidents often succeed in everyday politics by deftly following public opinion. Witness the recession-proof vitality of the political polling industry. A time comes, however, when protecting the public is far more important than catering to it. The highest duty of elected leaders at moments of critical national interest is to resist the impulses of the public mob with its many illusions, regardless of whether the mob is rushing toward angry violence or a naive peace. George W. Bush and Tony Blair are wise and brave to understand this. ♦

Bush's Grand Strategy

Iraq is one move in a bigger game.

BY JEFFREY BELL

THE FOCUS for the past six months on obtaining United Nations approval for the invasion of Iraq has obscured a simple, logical American strategy based on a clear premise. The premise is that the mass civilian killings of 9/11 triggered a world war between the United States and a political wing of Islamic fundamentalism, sometimes called Islamism.

This world war would not be happening on the scale it is were it not the case that the rise of Islamism is part and parcel of a convulsive upheaval destabilizing the billion-member world of Islam as well as neighboring countries and—at least potentially—countries with Islamic minorities. In a war of such reach and magnitude, the invasion of Iraq, or the capture of top al Qaeda commanders, should be seen as tactical events in a series of moves and countermoves stretching well into the future.

If this premise is true, then just about everything the Bush administration is doing makes sense. So do the actions and announcements of our various adversaries and non-well-wishers in this far-flung war.

The most shocking thing about 9/11 was the willingness of Islamists to carry out indiscriminate mass killing of noncombatant Americans. The attacks that day laid bare the desire of our enemies to obtain weapons of mass destruction to inflict vastly greater destruction on our country and people.

The day after 9/11, there existed four deeply anti-American rogue

states, clearly open to helping Islamists achieve the mass murder of Americans. They were Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, and North Korea. The invasion of Afghanistan in late 2001 removed one of these four regimes. The coming invasion of Iraq will remove a second.

Is it any wonder that the two remaining anti-American rogue states are doing everything in their power to race toward clear-cut possession of nuclear weapons? Possession of nuclear weapons by these rogue states can serve two purposes. It can deter the United States from doing to them what we have done to the Taliban and are about to do to the Baath. And, if President Bush is as determined and implacable as they fear he is, it can keep the Islamist cause alive (Iran) and allow revenge (Iran and North Korea) in the face of the impending overthrow of their governments by military or other means. The vengeance they have in mind could be prospective and openly state-sponsored, or carried out later by Islamist terror networks in possession of weapons of mass murder as a last will and testament of the North Korean and/or Iranian regimes.

Not every U.S. adversary, not even every rogue state, is as clearly anti-American as Iran and North Korea. Libya and Syria, for example, have been repeatedly classified by the U.S. government as rogue states (or, in the term substituted by the Clinton administration, "states of concern"). Yet at least so far, it is unclear that they are inclined to collaborate with Islamists in the mass murder of Americans. As long as this continues to be the case, Syria, Libya, and other

Jeffrey Bell is a principal of Capital City Partners, a Washington consulting firm.