

# The Case for the War in Iraq

 [peterberkowitz.wordpress.com/2004/04/16/the-case-for-the-war-in-iraq](http://peterberkowitz.wordpress.com/2004/04/16/the-case-for-the-war-in-iraq)

April 16, 2004

*April 16, 2004 at 8:00 am*

**This essay originally appeared in the *Stanford Daily News*.**

A year after the elimination of Saddam Hussein's murderous dictatorship, a few months before the Coalition Provisional Authority hands over power to the Iraqi people and with violence in Iraq on the upswing, how do the Bush administration's arguments in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom hold up?

Critics assert that those arguments amount to two lies — Saddam's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) posed an imminent threat, and Iraq cooperated with al-Qaeda in executing the Sept. 11 attacks. In fact, the administration put forth five main arguments in favor of military action. Those arguments were advanced by the administration with varying intensity and frequency — and they hold up, separately and together, reasonably well.

First, in the build-up to war, the Bush administration highlighted the intolerable danger Saddam's WMD posed. Its claims were consistent with Clinton administration statements dating back to 1998, and both were rooted in the best available intelligence. Although we now know that the intelligence was flawed, the Kay report confirmed dozens of Iraqi weapons programs and documented Saddam's intention to restart programs when possible. Dick Cheney's assertion in the summer of 2002 that the risk of inaction in Iraq was greater than the risk of action was debatable. But based on the evidence at hand, and the terrifying new realities Sept. 11 made manifest, it was a reasonable judgment.

Second, on September 21, 2001, in a nationally televised speech to a joint session of Congress, President Bush declared that the war on terror extended to terrorist networks around the world and to "any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism." Although a link to Sept. 11 has not been established, Saddam's trafficking in terror is incontestable — among other bloody ventures Iraq had been, until the fall of Baghdad, Hamas' biggest financial backer.

Third, the United States invoked international law. In November 2002, the administration persuaded the United Nations Security Council to unanimously pass Resolution 1441, which warned of "serious consequences" if Iraq failed to provide a thorough accounting of its weapons and weapons programs and to completely disarm. Hans Blix, a U.N. weapons

inspector, reported in December 2002 that Iraq had failed to provide the required account. In March 2003, the United States upheld the Security Council's integrity by implementing 1441 and sixteen previous resolutions flouted by Iraq.

Fourth, humanitarian considerations counseled action. In addition to the hundreds of thousands he consigned to mass graves, and the dissenters his henchmen fed alive into meat grinders, Saddam exploited our containment regime to divert oil-for-food money to his palaces and weapons programs, leading to the deaths, according to the United Nations Children's Fund estimates, of 60,000 Iraqi children a year.

Fifth, removing Saddam would promote democracy in the Middle East, an appealing prospect for all, save perhaps for those in the region who rule by fear and for those around the world who profit from doing business with tyrants.

Reasonable people can differ. Arguably, containment better served U.S. national security interests, in part because the establishment of democracy in Iraq may yet prove beyond our competence. The Bush administration has fallen short in educating public opinion — both domestically and internationally regarding Operation Iraqi Freedom. But what cannot be denied, all things considered, is the reasonableness of the case that has been made.