

The Case Against the War

Jonathan Schell *The Nation*—March 3, 2003

<http://www.thenation.com/doc.mhtml?i=20030303&c=1&s=schell>

"All of us have heard this term 'preventive war' since the earliest days of Hitler. I recall that is about the first time I heard it. In this day and time...I don't believe there is such a thing; and, frankly, I wouldn't even listen to anyone seriously that came in and talked about such a thing."

--President Dwight Eisenhower, 1953,
upon being presented with plans to wage
preventive war to disarm Stalin's Soviet Union

"Our position is that whatever grievances a nation may have, however objectionable it finds the status quo, aggressive warfare is an illegal means for settling those grievances or for altering those conditions."

--Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson,
the American prosecutor at the Nuremberg trials,
in his opening statement to the tribunal

I. The Lost War

In his poem "Fall 1961," written when the cold war was at its zenith, Robert Lowell wrote:

*All autumn, the chafe and jar
of nuclear war;
we have talked our extinction to death.*

This autumn and winter, nuclear danger has returned, in a new form, accompanied by danger from the junior siblings in the mass destruction family, chemical and biological weapons. Now it is not a crisis between two superpowers but the planned war to overthrow the government of Iraq that, like a sentence of execution that has been passed but must go through its final appeals before being carried out, we have talked to death. (Has any war been so lengthily premeditated before it was launched?) Iraq, the United States insists, possesses some of these weapons. To take them away, the United States will overthrow the Iraqi government. No circumstance is more likely to provoke Iraq to use any forbidden weapons it has. In that event, the Bush Administration has repeatedly said, it will itself consider the use of nuclear weapons. Has there ever been a clearer or more present danger of the use of weapons of mass destruction?

While we were all talking and the danger was growing, strange to say, the war was being lost. For wars, let us recall, are not fought for their own sake but to achieve aims. Victory cannot be judged only by the outcome of battles. In the American Revolutionary War, for example, Edmund Burke, a leader of England's antiwar movement, said, "Our victories can only complete our ruin." Almost two centuries later, in Vietnam, the United States triumphed in almost every military engagement, yet lost the war. If the aim is lost, the war is lost, whatever happens on the battlefield. The novelty this time is that the defeat has preceded the inauguration of hostilities.

The aim of the Iraq war has never been only to disarm Iraq. George Bush set forth the full aim of his war policy in unmistakable terms on January 29, 2002, in his first State of the Union address. It was to stop the spread of weapons of mass destruction, not only in Iraq but everywhere in the world, through the use of military force. "We must," he said, "prevent the terrorists and regimes who seek chemical, biological or nuclear weapons from threatening the United States and the world." He underscored the scope of his ambition by singling out three countries--North Korea, Iran and Iraq--for special mention, calling them an "axis of evil." Then came the ultimatum: "The United States of America will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons." Other possible war aims--to defeat Al Qaeda, to spread democracy--came and went in Administration pronouncements, but this one has remained constant. Stopping the spread of weapons of mass destruction is the reason for war given alike to the Security Council, whose inspectors are now searching for such weapons in Iraq, and to the American people, who were advised in the recent State of the Union address to fear "a day of horror like none we have ever known."

The means whereby the United States would stop the prohibited acquisitions were first set forth last June 1 in the President's speech to the graduating class at West Point. The United States would use force, and use it pre-emptively. "If we wait for threats to fully materialize, we will have waited too long," he said. For "the only path to safety is the path of action. And this nation will act." This strategy, too, has remained constant.

The Bush policy of using force to stop the spread of weapons of mass destruction met its Waterloo last October, when Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs James Kelly was informed by Vice

Foreign Minister Kang Sok Ju of North Korea that his country has a perfect right to possess nuclear weapons. Shortly, Secretary of State Colin Powell stated, "We have to assume that they might have one or two.... that's what our intelligence community has been saying for some time." (Doubts, however, remain.) Next, North Korea went on to announce that it was terminating the Agreed Framework of 1994, under which it had shut down two reactors that produced plutonium. It ejected the UN inspectors who had been monitoring the agreement and then announced its withdrawal from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, under whose terms it was obligated to remain nuclear-weapon-free. Soon, America stated that North Korea might be moving fuel rods from existing reactors to its plutonium reprocessing plant, and that it possessed an untested missile capable of striking the western United States. "We will not permit..." had been Bush's words, but North Korea went ahead and apparently produced nuclear weapons anyway. The Administration now discovered that its policy of pre-emptively using overwhelming force had no application against a proliferator with a serious military capability, much less a nuclear power. North Korea's conventional capacity alone--it has an army of more than a million men and 11,000 artillery pieces capable of striking South Korea's capital, Seoul--imposed a very high cost; the addition of nuclear arms, in combination with missiles capable of striking not only South Korea but Japan, made it obviously prohibitive.

By any measure, totalitarian North Korea's possession of nuclear weapons is more dangerous than the mere possibility that Iraq is trying to develop them. The North Korean state, which is hard to distinguish from a cult, is also more repressive and disciplined than the Iraqi state, and has caused the death of more of its own people--through starvation. Yet in the weeks that followed the North Korean disclosure, the Administration, in a radical reversal of the President's earlier assessments, sought to argue that the opposite was true. Administration spokespersons soon declared that the North Korean situation was "not a crisis" and that its policy toward that country was to be one of "dialogue," leading to "a peaceful multilateral solution," including the possibility of renewed oil shipments. But if the acquisition by North Korea of nuclear arms was not a crisis, then there never had been any need to warn the world of the danger of nuclear proliferation, or to name an axis of evil, or to deliver an ultimatum to disarm it.

For the North Korean debacle represented not the failure of a good policy but exposure of the futility of one that was impracticable from the start.

Nuclear proliferation, when considered as the global emergency that it is, has never been, is not now and never will be stoppable by military force; on the contrary, force can only exacerbate the problem. In announcing its policy, the United States appeared to have forgotten what proliferation is. It is not army divisions or tanks crossing borders; it is above all technical know-how passing from one mind to another. It cannot be stopped by B-2 bombers, or even Predator drones. The case of Iraq had indeed always been an anomaly in the wider picture of nonproliferation. In the 1991 Gulf War, the US-led coalition waged war to end Iraq's occupation of Kuwait. In the process it stumbled on Saddam Hussein's program for building weapons of mass destruction, and made use of the defeat to impose on him the new obligation to end the program. A war fought for one purpose led to peace terms serving another. It was a historical chain of events unlikely ever to be repeated, and offered no model for dealing with proliferation.

The lesson so far? Exactly the opposite of the intended one: If you want to avoid "regime change" by the United States, build a nuclear arsenal--but be sure to do it quietly and fast. As Mohamed ElBaradei, the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, has said, the United States seems to want to teach the world that "if you really want to defend yourself, develop nuclear weapons, because then you get negotiations, and not military action."

Although the third of the "axis" countries presents no immediate crisis, events there also illustrate the bankruptcy of the Bush policy. With the help of Russia, Iran is building nuclear reactors that are widely believed to double as a nuclear weapons program. American threats against Iraq have failed to dissuade Iran--or for that matter, its supplier, Russia--from proceeding. Just this week, Iran announced that it had begun to mine uranium on its own soil. Iran's path to acquiring nuclear arms, should it decide to go ahead, is clear. "Regime change" by American military action in that half-authoritarian, half-democratic country is a formula for disaster. Whatever the response of the Iraqi people might be to an American invasion, there is little question that in Iran hard-liners and democrats alike would mount bitter, protracted resistance. Nor is there evidence that democratization in Iraq, even in the unlikely event that it should succeed, would be a sure path to denuclearization. The world's first nuclear power, after all, was a democracy, and of nine nuclear powers now in the world, six--the United States, England, France, India, Israel and Russia--are also democracies. Iran, within striking range of Israel, lives in an increasingly nuclearized neighborhood. In these circumstances, would the Iranian people

be any more likely to rebel against nuclearization than the Indian people did--or more, for that matter, than the American people have done? And if a democratic Iran obtained the bomb, would pre-emption or regime change then be an option for the United States?

The collapse of the overall Bush policy has one more element that may be even more significant than the appearance of North Korea's arsenal or Iran's apparently unstoppable discreet march to obtaining the bomb. It has turned out that the supplier of essential information and technology for North Korea's uranium program was America's faithful ally in the war on terrorism, Pakistan, which received missile technology from Korea in return. The "father" of Pakistan's bomb, Ayub Qadeer Khan, has visited North Korea thirteen times. This is the same Pakistan whose nuclear scientist Sultan Bashiruddin Mahood paid a visit to Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan a few months before September 11, and whose nuclear establishment even today is riddled with Islamic fundamentalists. The BBC has reported that the Al Qaeda network succeeded at one time in building a "dirty bomb" (which may account for Osama bin Laden's claim that he possesses nuclear weapons), and Pakistan is the likeliest source for the materials involved, although Russia is also a candidate. Pakistan, in short, has proved itself to be the world's most dangerous proliferator, having recently acquired nuclear weapons itself and passed on nuclear technology to a state and, possibly, to a terrorist group.

Indeed, an objective ranking of nuclear proliferators in order of menace would place Pakistan (a possessor of the bomb that also purveys the technology to others) first on the list, North Korea second (it peddles missiles but not, so far, bomb technology), Iran (a country of growing political and military power with an active nuclear program) third, and Iraq (a country of shrinking military power that probably has no nuclear program and is currently under international sanctions and an unprecedented inspection regime of indefinite duration) fourth. (Russia, possessor of 150 tons of poorly guarded plutonium, also belongs somewhere on this list.) The Bush Administration ranks them, of course, in exactly the reverse order, placing Iraq, which it plans to attack, first, and Pakistan, which it befriends and coddles, nowhere on the list. It will not be possible, however, to right this pyramid. The reason it is upside down is that it was unworkable right side up. Iraq is being attacked not because it is the worst proliferator but because it is the weakest.

The *reductio ad absurdum* of the failed American war policy was illustrated

by a recent column in the *Washington Post* by the superhawk Charles Krauthammer. Krauthammer wants nothing to do with soft measures; yet he, too, can see that the cost of using force against North Korea would be prohibitive: "Militarily, we are not even in position to bluff." He rightly understands, too, that in the climate created by pending war in Iraq, "dialogue" is scarcely likely to succeed. He has therefore come up with a new idea. He identifies China as the solution. China must twist the arm of its Communist ally North Korea. "If China and South Korea were to cut off North Korea, it could not survive," he observes. But to make China do so, the United States must twist China's arm. How? By encouraging Japan to build nuclear weapons. For "if our nightmare is a nuclear North Korea, China's is a nuclear Japan." It irks Krauthammer that the United States alone has to face up to the North Korean threat. Why shouldn't China shoulder some of the burden? He wants to "share the nightmares." Indeed. He wants to stop nuclear proliferation with more nuclear proliferation. Here the nuclear age comes full circle. The only nation ever to use the bomb is to push the nation on which it dropped it to build the bomb and threaten others.

As a recommendation for policy, Krauthammer's suggestion is Strangelovian, but if it were considered as a prediction it would be sound. Nuclear armament by North Korea really will tempt neighboring nations--not only Japan but South Korea and Taiwan--to acquire nuclear weapons. (Japan has an abundant supply of plutonium and all the other technology necessary, and both South Korea and Taiwan have had nuclear programs but were persuaded by the United States to drop them.) In a little-noticed comment, Japan's foreign minister has already stated that the nuclearization of North Korea would justify a pre-emptive strike against it by Japan. Thus has the Bush plan to stop proliferation already become a powerful force promoting it. The policy of pre-emptive war has led to pre-emptive defeat.

General Groves Redux

Radical as the Bush Administration policy is, the idea behind it is not new. Two months after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Gen. Leslie Groves, the Pentagon overseer of the Manhattan Project, expressed his views on controlling nuclear proliferation. He said:

If we were truly realistic instead of idealistic, as we appear to be [*sic*], we would not permit any foreign power with which we are not firmly allied, and in which we do not have absolute confidence, to make or possess atomic weapons. If such a country started to make atomic

weapons we would destroy its capacity to make them before it has progressed far enough to threaten us.

The proposal was never seriously considered by President Truman and, until now, has been rejected by every subsequent President. Eisenhower's views of preventive war are given in the epigraph at the beginning of this article. In 1961, during the Berlin crisis, a few of Kennedy's advisers made the surprising discovery that Russia's nuclear forces were far weaker and more vulnerable than anyone had thought. They proposed a preventive strike. Ted Sorensen, the chief White House counsel and speechwriter, was told of the plan. He shouted, "You're crazy! We shouldn't let guys like you around here." It never came to the attention of the President.

How has it happened that President Bush has revived and implemented this long-buried, long-rejected idea? We know the answer. The portal was September 11. The theme of the "war on terror" was from the start to strike pre-emptively with military force. Piece by piece, a bridge from the aim of catching Osama bin Laden to the aim of stopping proliferation on a global basis was built. First came the idea of holding whole regimes accountable in the war on terror; then the idea of "regime change" (beginning with Afghanistan), then pre-emption, then the broader claim of American global dominance. Gradually, the most important issue of the age--the rising danger from weapons of mass destruction--was subsumed as a sort of codicil to the war on terror. When the process was finished, the result was the Groves plan writ large--a reckless and impracticable idea when it was conceived, when only one hostile nuclear power (the Soviet Union) was in prospect, and a worse one today in our world of nine nuclear powers (if you count North Korea) and many scores of nuclear-capable ones.

The Administration now hints, however, that although its overall nonproliferation policy might be in trouble, the forcible disarmament of Iraq still makes sense on its own terms. Bush now claims that "different threats require different strategies"--apparently forgetting that the Iraq policy was announced with great fanfare in the context of a global policy of preserving the world from weapons of mass destruction. The mainstream argument, shared by many doubters as well as supporters of the war, is that if Iraq is shown to possess weapons of mass destruction, its regime must be attacked and destroyed. Thus the only question is whether Iraq has the weapons. A team of "realist" analysts, organized by Stephen Walt of Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government and John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago, have given a convincing response: They are prepared to live with a

nuclear-armed Iraq. "The United States can contain a nuclear Iraq," they write. They argue that Hussein belongs, like his idol Stalin, in the class of rational monsters. The idea that he is not deterrable is "almost certainly wrong." He wants power; he knows that to engage again in aggression is to insure his overthrow and likely his personal extinction. The record of his wars--against Iran, against Kuwait--shows him to be brutal but calculating. He is 65 years old. Time will solve the problem, as it did with the Soviet Union.

What is of most desperately immediate concern, however, is that America's pre-emptive war will lead directly to the use of the weapons whose mere possession the war is supposed to prevent. In the debate over the inspections now going on in Iraq, it sometimes seems to be forgotten that Iraq either *does* possess weapons of mass destruction (as Colin Powell has just asserted at the UN) or *does not* possess them, and that each alternative has consequences that go far beyond the decision whether or not to go to war. If Iraq does not have these weapons, then the war will be an unnecessary, wholly avoidable slaughter. If Iraq does have the weapons, then there is a likelihood that it will use them. Why else would Saddam Hussein, having created them, bring on the destruction of his regime and his personal extinction by hiding them from the UN inspectors? And if in fact he does use them, then the United States, as it has made clear, will consider using nuclear weapons in retaliation. Powell has asserted that Saddam has recently given his forces fresh orders to use chemical weapons. Against whom? In what circumstances? Is it possible that this outcome--a Hitlerian finale--is what Hussein seeks? Could it be his plan, if cornered, to provoke the United States into the first use of nuclear weapons since Nagasaki?

We cannot know, but we do know that White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card has stated that if Iraq uses weapons of mass destruction against American troops "the United States will use whatever means necessary to protect us and the world from a holocaust"--"whatever means" being diplomatese for nuclear attack. The *Washington Times* has revealed that National Security Presidential Directive 17, issued secretly on September 14 of last year, says in plain English what Card expressed obliquely. It reads, "The United States will continue to make clear that it reserves the right to respond with overwhelming force--including potentially nuclear weapons--to the use of [weapons of mass destruction] against the United States, our forces abroad, and friends and allies." Israel has also used diplomatese to make known its readiness to retaliate with nuclear weapons if attacked by Iraq. Condoleezza Rice has threatened the Iraqi people with genocide: If

Iraq uses weapons of mass destruction, she says, it knows it will bring "national obliteration." (Threats of genocide are flying thick and fast around the world these days. In January, Indian Defense Minister George Fernandes threatened that if Pakistan launched a nuclear attack on India--as Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf has threatened to do if India invades Pakistan--then "there will be no Pakistan left when we have responded.") William Arkin writes in the *Los Angeles Times* that the United States is "drafting contingency plans for the use of nuclear weapons." STRATCOM--the successor to the Strategic Air Command--has been ordered to consider ways in which nuclear weapons can be used pre-emptively, either to destroy underground facilities or to respond to the use or threats of use of weapons of mass destruction against the United States or its forces.

Oil and Democracy

Other critics of the war have concluded from the disparity in America's treatment of Iraq and North Korea that the Administration's aim is not to deal with weapons of mass destruction at all but to seize Iraq's oil, which amounts to some 10 percent of the world's known reserves. The very fact that the Bush Administration refuses even to discuss the oil question (the war "has nothing to do with oil," Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has said) suggests that the influence of oil is moving powerfully in the background. One is tempted to respond to Rumsfeld that if the Administration is not thinking about the consequences of a war for the global oil regime, it is culpably neglecting the security interests of the United States. However, there is in fact no contradiction between the goals of disarming Iraq and seizing its oil. Both fit neatly into the larger scheme of American global dominance.

Still other critics place the emphasis not on oil but on political reform of Iraq and even the entire Middle East. Thomas Friedman of the *New York Times* is prepared to support Hussein's overthrow, but only if we "do it right"--which is to say that we devote the "time and effort" to creating "a self-sustaining, progressive, accountable Arab government" in Iraq. And this delightful government (can we have one at home, too, please?), in turn, must become "a progressive model for the whole region." "Our kids" can grow up in "a safer world" only "if we help put Iraq on a more progressive path and stimulate some real change in an Arab world that is badly in need of reform." Fouad Ajami, of Johns Hopkins University, likewise wants the United States to get over its "dread of nation-building" and spearhead "a reformist project that seeks to modernize and transform the Arab

landscape," now mired in "retrogression and political decay." Michael Ignatieff, director of the Carr Center for Human Rights at Harvard, is also of the "do it right" school. His starting point, however, is the need to disarm Iraq. In his essay in the *New York Times Magazine* "The American Empire: The Burden," he begins by noting that if Saddam Hussein is permitted to have weapons of mass destruction, he will have a "capacity to intimidate and deter others, including the United States." Being deterred in a region of interest is evidently unacceptable for an imperial power, and forces it to remove the offending regime. Yet if the regime is to be removed, a larger imperial agenda becomes inescapable. By this reasoning Ignatieff arrives at the same destination as Friedman and Ajami: The United States must mount "an imperial operation that would commit a reluctant republic to become the guarantor of peace, stability, democratization and oil supplies in a combustible region of Islamic peoples stretching from Egypt to Afghanistan." We arrive at a new formula that has no precedent for dealing with nuclear danger: nonproliferation by forced democratization. Ignatieff acknowledges that a republic that turns into an empire risks "endangering its identity as a free people"--thus menacing democracy at home by trying to force it on others abroad. Nevertheless, he wants the United States to take on "the burden of empire."

The Bush Administration, however, has given little encouragement to the evangelists of armed democratization. Notoriously, it has kept silent regarding its plans for postwar Iraq and its neighbors. But if its actions in the "war on terror" are any guide, democracy will not be required of Washington's imperial dependencies. The Bush Administration has been perfectly happy, for example, to extend its cooperation to such allies as totalitarian Turkmenistan and authoritarian Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan--not to speak of such longstanding autocratic allies of the United States as Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The United States has in fact never insisted on democracy as a condition for good relations with other countries. Its practice during the cold war probably offers as accurate a guide to the future as any. The United States was pleased to have democratic allies, including most of the countries of Europe, but was also ready when needed to install or prop up such brutal, repressive regimes as (to mention only a few) that of Reza Pahlavi in Iran, Saddam Hussein in Iraq (until he invaded Kuwait), Mobutu Sese Seko in Zaire (now Congo), Fulgencio Batista in Cuba, Park Chung Hee in South Korea, a succession of civilian and military dictators in South Vietnam, Lon Nol in Cambodia, Suharto in Indonesia, Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines, the colonels' junta in Greece, Francisco Franco in Spain and a long list of military dictators in Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Uruguay,

Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua.

The Administration has in any case made its broader conception of democracy clear in its actions both at home and abroad. In this conception, the Administration decides and others are permitted to express their agreement. (Or else they become, as the President has said threateningly to the UN, "irrelevant"--although it's hard to imagine what it means to say that the assembled representatives of the peoples of the earth are irrelevant. Irrelevant to what?) Just as the Administration welcomed a Congressional expression of support for the Bush war policy but denied it the power to stop the war if that were to be its choice, and just as the Administration "welcomes" a vote for war in NATO and the UN but denies either NATO or the UN the right to prevent unilateral American action, so we can expect that the people of Iraq or any other country the United States might "democratize" would be "free" to support but not to oppose American policy. (Imagine, for example, that the people of Iraq were to vote, as so many other free peoples, including the American people, have done before them, to build nuclear arsenals--perhaps on the ground that their enemy Israel already has them and Iran was building them. Would the Bush Administration accept their decision?)

We do not have to wait for war in Iraq, however, to consider the likely impact of Washington's new policies on democracy's global fortunes. The question has already arisen in the period of preparation for war. The Bush Administration has not forced the world to read between the lines to discover its position. It proposes for the world at large the same two-tier system that it proposes for the decision to go to war and for the possession of weapons of mass destruction: It lays claim to absolute military hegemony over the earth. "America has, and intends to keep, military strengths beyond challenge, thereby making the destabilizing arms races of other eras pointless, and limiting rivalries to trade and other pursuits of peace," the President said in his speech at West Point. The United States alone will be the custodian of military power; others must turn to humbler pursuits. The sword will rule, and the United States will hold the sword. As the Yale historian John Lewis Gaddis has pointed out, the policies of unilateral pre-emption, overthrow of governments and overall military supremacy form an integral package (the seizure of Middle Eastern oilfields, though officially denied as a motive, also fits in). These elements are the foundations of the imperial system that Ignatieff and others have delineated.

However, empire is incompatible with democracy, whether at home or

abroad. Democracy is founded on the rule of law, empire on the rule of force. Democracy is a system of self-determination, empire a system of military conquest. The fault lines are already clear, and growing wider every day. By every measure, public opinion in the world--its democratic will--is opposed to overthrowing the government of Iraq by force. But why, someone might ask, does this matter? How many divisions do these people have, as Stalin once asked of the Pope? The answer, to the extent that the world really is democratic, is: quite a few. In a series of elections--in Germany, in South Korea, in Turkey--an antiwar position helped bring the winner to power. In divided Korea, American policy may be on its way to producing an unexpected union of South and North--against the United States. Each of these setbacks is a critical defeat for the putative American empire. In January, the prime ministers of eight countries--Italy, Britain, Spain, Portugal, Denmark, Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary--signed a letter thanking the United States for its leadership on the Iraq issue; but in every one of those countries a majority of the public opposed a war without UN approval. The editors of *Time*'s European edition asked its readers which nation posed the greatest threat to world peace. Of the 268,000 who responded, 8 percent answered that it was North Korea, 9 percent Iraq and 83 percent said the United States. Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair is prepared to participate in the war without UN support, but some 70 percent of his people oppose his position. The government of Australia is sending troops to assist in the war effort, but 92 percent of the Australian public opposes war unsanctioned by the UN. Gaddis rightly comments that empires succeed to the extent that peoples under their rule welcome and share the values of the imperial power. The above election results and poll figures suggest that no such approval is so far evident for America's global pretensions. The American "coalition" for war is an alliance of governments arrayed in opposition to their own peoples.

In a defeat parallel to--and greater than--the military defeat before the fact in the field of proliferation, the American empire is thus suffering deep and possibly irreversible political losses. Democracy is the right of peoples to make decisions. Right now, the peoples of the earth are deciding against America's plans for the world. Democracy, too, has pre-emptive resources, setting up impassable roadblocks at the first signs of tyranny. The UN Security Council is balking. The United States' most important alliance--NATO--is cracking. Is the American empire collapsing before it even quite comes into existence? Such a judgment is premature, but if the mere approach to war has done the damage we already see to America's reputation and power, we can only imagine what the consequences of actual

war will be.

II. The Atomic Archipelago

The Administration has embarked on a nonproliferation policy that has already proved as self-defeating in its own terms as it is likely to be disastrous for the United States and the world. Nevertheless, it would be a fatal mistake for those of us who oppose the war to dismiss the concerns that the Administration has raised. By insisting that the world confront the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, President Bush has raised the right question--or, at any rate, one part of the right question--for our time, even as he has given a calamitously misguided answer. Even if it were true--and we won't really know until some equivalent of the Pentagon Papers for our period is released--that his Administration has been using the threat of mass destruction as a cover for an oil grab, the issue of proliferation must be placed at the center of *our* concerns. For example, even as we argue that containment of Iraq makes more sense than war, we must be clear-eyed in acknowledging that Iraq's acquisition of nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction would be a disaster--just as we must recognize that the nuclearization of South Asia and of North Korea have been disasters, greatly increasing the likelihood of nuclear war in the near future. These events, full of peril in themselves, are points on a curve of proliferation that leads to what can only be described as nuclear anarchy.

For a global policy that, unlike the Bush policies, actually will stop--and reverse--proliferation of all weapons of mass destruction is indeed a necessity for a sane, livable twenty-first century. But if we are to tackle the problem wisely, we must step back from the current crisis long enough to carefully analyze the origins and character of the danger. It did not appear on September 11. It appeared, in fact, on July 16, 1945, when the United States detonated the first atomic bomb near Alamogordo, New Mexico.

What is proliferation? It is the acquisition of nuclear weapons by a country that did not have them before. The first act of proliferation was the Manhattan Project in the United States. (In what follows, I will speak of nuclear proliferation, but the principles underlying it also underlie the proliferation of chemical and biological weapons.) Perhaps someone might object that the arrival of the first individual of a species is not yet proliferation--a word that suggests the multiplication of an already existing thing. However, in one critical respect, at least, the development of the bomb by the United States still fits the definition. The record shows that

President Franklin Roosevelt decided to build the bomb because he feared that Hitler would get it first, with decisive consequences in the forthcoming war. In October 1939, when the businessman Alexander Sachs brought Roosevelt a letter from Albert Einstein warning that an atomic bomb was possible and that Germany might acquire one, Roosevelt commented, "Alex, what you are after is to see that the Nazis don't blow us up." As we know now, Hitler did have an atomic project, but it never came close to producing a bomb. But as with so many matters in nuclear strategy, appearances were more important than the realities (which were then unknowable to the United States). Before there was the bomb, there was the fear of the bomb. Hitler's phantom arsenal inspired the real American one. And so even before nuclear weapons existed, they were proliferating. This sequence is important because it reveals a basic rule that has driven nuclear proliferation ever since: Nations acquire nuclear arsenals above all because they fear the nuclear arsenals of others.

But fear--soon properly renamed terror in the context of nuclear strategy--is of course also the essence of the prime strategic doctrine of the nuclear age, deterrence, which establishes a balance of terror. Threats of the destruction of nations--of genocide--have always been the coinage of this realm. From the beginning of the nuclear age--indeed, even before the beginning, when the atomic bomb was only a gleam in Roosevelt's eye--deterrence and proliferation have in fact been inextricable. Just as the United States made the bomb because it feared Hitler would get it, the Soviet Union built the bomb because the United States already had it. Stalin's instructions to his scientists shortly after Hiroshima were, "A single demand of you, comrades: Provide us with atomic weapons in the shortest possible time. You know that Hiroshima has shaken the whole world. The equilibrium has been destroyed. Provide the bomb--it will remove a great danger from us." England and France, like the United States, were responding to the Soviet threat; China was responding to the threat from all of the above; India was responding to China; Pakistan was responding to India; and North Korea (with Pakistan's help) was responding to the United States. Nations proliferate in order to deter. We can state: Deterrence equals proliferation, for deterrence both causes proliferation and is the fruit of it. This has been the lesson, indeed, that the United States has taught the world in every major statement, tactic, strategy and action it has taken in the nuclear age. And the world--if it even needed the lesson--has learned well. It is therefore hardly surprising that the call to nonproliferation falls on deaf ears when it is preached by possessors--all of whom were of course proliferators at one time or another.

The sources of nuclear danger, present and future, are perhaps best visualized as a coral reef that is constantly growing in all directions under the sea and then, here and there, breaks the surface to form islands, which we can collectively call the atomic archipelago. The islands of the archipelago may seem to be independent of one another, but anyone who looks below the surface will find that they are closely connected. The atomic archipelago indeed has strong similarities to its namesake, the gulag archipelago. Once established, both feed on themselves, expanding from within by their own energy and momentum. Both are founded upon a capacity to kill millions of people. Both act on the world around them by radiating terror.

India and the Bomb: The Proliferator's View

India's path to nuclear armament, recounted in George Perkovich's masterful, definitive *India's Nuclear Bomb*, offers essential lessons in the steps by which the archipelago has grown and is likely to grow in the future. India has maintained a nuclear program almost since its independence, in 1947. Although supposedly built for peaceful uses, the program was actually, if mostly secretly, designed to keep the weapons option open. But it was not until shortly after China tested a bomb in 1964 that India embarked on a concerted nuclear weapons program, which bore fruit in 1974, when India tested a bomb for "peaceful" purposes. Yet India still held back from introducing nuclear weapons into its military forces. Meanwhile, Pakistan, helped by China, was working hard to obtain the bomb. In May of 1998, India conducted five nuclear tests. Pakistan responded with at least five, and both nations promptly declared themselves nuclear powers and soon were engaged in a major nuclear confrontation over the disputed territory of Kashmir.

Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh has explained the reasons for India's decision in an article in *Foreign Affairs*. India looked out upon the world and saw what he calls a "nuclear paradigm" in operation. He liked what he saw. He writes, "Why admonish India after the fact for not falling in line behind a new international agenda of discriminatory nonproliferation pursued largely due to the internal agendas or political debates of the nuclear club? If deterrence works in the West--as it so obviously appears to, since Western nations insist on continuing to possess nuclear weapons--by what reasoning will it not work in India?" To deprive India of these benefits would be "nuclear apartheid"--a continuation of the imperialism that had

been overthrown in the titanic anticolonial struggles of the twentieth century. The Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, under which 183 nations have agreed to forgo nuclear arms, and five who have them (the United States, England, France, Russia and China) have agreed to reduce theirs until they are gone, had many successes, but in India's backyard, where China had nuclear arms and Pakistan was developing them, nuclear danger was growing. Some have charged that the Indian government conducted the 1998 tests for political rather than strategic reasons--that is, out of a desire for pure "prestige," not strategic necessity. But the two explanations are in fact complementary. It is only because the public, which observes that all the great powers possess nuclear arsenals, agrees that they are a strategic necessity that it finds them prestigious and politically rewards governments that acquire them. Prestige is merely the political face of the general consensus, ingrained in strategy, that countries lacking nuclear weapons are helpless--"eunuchs," as one Indian politician said--in a nuclear-armed world.

Curiously, the unlimited extension in 1995 of the NPT, to which India was not a signatory, pushed India to act. From Singh's point of view, the extension made the nuclear double standard it embodied permanent. "What India did in May [1998] was to assert that it is impossible to have two standards for national security--one based on nuclear deterrence and the other outside of it." If the world was to be divided into two classes of countries, India preferred to be in the first class.

As Singh's account makes clear, India was inspired to act not merely by the hypocrisy of great powers delivering sermons on the virtues of nuclear disarmament while sitting atop mountains of nuclear arms--galling as that might be. He believed that India, with nuclear-armed China and nuclearizing Pakistan for neighbors, was living in an increasingly "dangerous neighborhood." The most powerful tie that paradoxically binds proliferator to deterrer in their minuet of genocidal hostility is not mere imitation but the compulsion to respond to the nuclear terror projected by others. The preacher against lust who turns out to take prostitutes to a motel after the sermon sets a bad example but does not compel his parishioners to follow suit. The preacher against nuclear weapons in a nation whose silos are packed with them does, however, compel other nations to follow his example, for his nuclear terror reaches and crosses their borders. The United States terrorizes Russia (and vice versa); both terrorize China; China terrorizes India; the United States terrorizes North Korea; North Korea terrorizes Japan; and so forth, forming a web of terror whose further extensions (Israel terrorizes...Iran? Egypt? Syria? Libya?) will be the

avenues of future proliferation. It is thanks to this web that every nuclear arsenal in the world is tied, directly or indirectly, to every other, rendering any partial approach to the problem extremely difficult, if not impossible.

The devotion of nations to their nuclear arsenals has only been strengthened by the hegemonic ambition of the United States. Hitherto, the nuclear double standard lacked a context--it was a sort of anomaly of the international order, a seeming leftover from the cold war, perhaps soon to be liquidated. America's imperial ambition gives it a context. In a multilateral, democratic vision of international affairs, it is impossible to explain why one small group of nations should be entitled to protect itself with weapons of mass destruction while all others must do without them. But in an imperial order, the reason is perfectly obvious. If the imperium is to pacify the world, it must possess overwhelming force, the currency of imperial power. Equally obviously, the nations to be pacified must not. Double standards--regarding not only nuclear weapons but conventional weapons, economic advantage, use of natural resources--are indeed the very stuff of which empires are made. For empire is to the world what dictatorship is to a country. That's why the suppression of proliferation--a new imperial vocation--must be the first order of business for a nation aspiring to this exalted role.

India's Bomb: The Possessor's View

It's equally enlightening to look at India's proliferation from the point of view of a nuclear possessor, the United States. Nuclear arsenals are endowed with a magical quality. As soon as a nation obtains one it becomes invisible to the possessor. Nuclear danger then seems to emanate only from proliferation--that is, from newcomers to the nuclear club, while the dangers that emanate from one's own arsenal disappear from sight. Gen. Tommy Franks, designated as commander of the Iraq war, recently commented, "The sight of the first mushroom cloud on one of the major population centers on this planet is something that most nations on this planet are willing to go a long ways out of the way to prevent." His forgetfulness of Hiroshima and Nagasaki might seem nothing more than a slip of the tongue if it did not represent a pervasive and deeply ingrained attitude in the United States. Another revealing incident was Secretary of State Powell's comment that North Korea, by seeking nuclear weapons, was arming itself with "fool's gold." But the military establishment that Powell once led is of course stuffed to bursting with this fool's gold. Another example of the same habit of mind (I have chosen American examples, but the blindness afflicts

all nuclear powers) was provided by some comments of President Bill Clinton shortly after India's tests of 1998. He said, "To think that you have to manifest your greatness by behavior that recalls the very worst events of the twentieth century on the edge of the twenty-first century, when everybody else is trying to leave the nuclear age behind, is just wrong. And they [the Indians] clearly don't need it to maintain their security." Wise words, but ones contradicted by more than a half-century of the nuclear policies, including the current ones, of the nation he led.

The reactions of some of America's most prominent thinkers on the nuclear question to India's proliferation were also instructive. Almost immediately, their belief in the virtues of nuclear arms began to surface through the antiproliferation rhetoric. Henry Kissinger, for instance, judiciously mocked Clinton's "unique insight into the nature of greatness in the twenty-first century...the dubious proposition that all other nations are trying to leave the nuclear world behind," and "the completely unsupported proposition that countries with threatening nuclear neighbors do not need nuclear weapons to assure their security." Kissinger, more consistent than Clinton, found India's and Pakistan's tests "equally reasonable." He thought Washington's best course was to help its new nuclear-armed friends achieve "stable mutual deterrence," and "give stabilizing reassurances about their conventional security." Kissinger even saw a silver lining for American interests in the hope that nuclear-armed India would help the United States "contain China" (the very China to which Krauthammer now turns to disarm North Korea). It was Kissinger's view, not Clinton's, that soon prevailed. America's own love affair with the bomb asserted itself. At first, the United States imposed sanctions on both countries, but soon they were lifted. In December of 2000 President Clinton paid the first visit by an American President to India since 1978, confirming that becoming a nuclear power was indeed the path to international prestige. The United States now has growing programs of military cooperation with both countries.

Kissinger merely adjusted to the irreversible *fait accompli* of South Asian proliferation, as a realist should. He saw the tension between America's love of its own nuclear bombs and its hatred of others', and understood the problems this might cause for America's own arsenal. Could nonproliferation get out of control? Might it reach America's shores? "The administration is right to resist nuclear proliferation," he wrote, "but it must not, in the process, disarm the country psychologically."

III. One Will for One World

War in Iraq has not yet begun, but its most important lesson, taught also by the long history of proliferation, including the Indian chapter just discussed, is already plain: The time is long gone--if it ever existed--when any major element of the danger of weapons of mass destruction, including above all nuclear danger, can be addressed realistically without taking into account the whole dilemma. When we look at the story of proliferation, whether from the point of view of the haves or the have-nots, what emerges is that for practical purposes any distinction that once might have existed (and even then only in appearance, not in reality) between possessors and proliferators has now been erased. A rose is a rose is a rose, anthrax is anthrax is anthrax, a thermonuclear weapon is a thermonuclear weapon is a thermonuclear weapon. The world's prospective nuclear arsenals cannot be dealt with without attending to its existing ones. As long as some countries insist on having any of these, others will try to get them. Until this axiom is understood, neither "dialogue" nor war can succeed. In Perkovich's words, after immersing himself in the history of India's bomb, "the grandest illusion of the nuclear age is that a handful of states possessing nuclear weapons can secure themselves and the world indefinitely against the dangers of nuclear proliferation *without* placing a higher priority on simultaneously striving to eliminate their own nuclear weapons."

The days of the double standard are over. We cannot preserve it and we should not want to. The struggle to maintain it by force, anachronistically represented by Bush's proposed war on Iraq, in which the United States threatens pre-emptive use of nuclear weapons to stop another country merely from getting them, can only worsen the global problem it seeks to solve. One way or another, the world is on its way to a single standard. Only two in the long run are available: universal permission to possess weapons of mass destruction or their universal prohibition. The first is a path to global nightmare, the second to safety and a normal existence. Nations that already possess nuclear weapons must recognize that nuclear danger begins with them. The shield of invisibility must be pierced. The web of terror that binds every nuclear arsenal to every other--and also to every arsenal of chemical or biological weapons--must be acknowledged.

If pre-emptive military force leads to catastrophe and deterrence is at best a stopgap, then what is the answer? In 1945, the great Danish nuclear physicist Niels Bohr said simply, in words whose truth has been confirmed by fifty-eight years of experience of the nuclear age, "We are in a completely new situation that cannot be resolved by war." In a formulation

only slightly more complex than Bohr's, Einstein said in 1947, "This basic power of the universe cannot be fitted into the outdated concept of narrow nationalisms. For there is no secret and there is no defense; there is no possibility of control except through the aroused understanding and insistence of the peoples of the world." Both men, whose work in fundamental physics had perhaps done more than that of any other two scientists to make the bomb possible, favored the abolition of nuclear arms by binding international agreement. That idea, also favored by many of the scientists of the Manhattan Project, bore fruit in a plan for the abolition of nuclear arms and international control of all nuclear technology put forward by President Truman's representative Bernard Baruch in June 1946. But the time was not ripe. The cold war was already brewing, and the Soviet Union, determined to build its own bomb, said no, then put forward a plan that the United States turned down. In 1949 the Soviet Union conducted its first atomic test, and the nuclear arms race ensued.

For the short term, the inspections in Iraq should continue. If inspections fail, then containment will do as a second line of defense. But in the long term, the true alternative to pre-emptive war against Iraq, war one day against North Korea, war against an unknowable number of other possible proliferators, is to bring Bohr and Einstein's proposal up to date. A revival of worldwide disarmament negotiations must be the means, the abolition of all weapons of mass destruction the end. That idea has long been in eclipse, and today it lies outside the mainstream of political opinion. Unfortunately, historical reality is no respecter of conventional wisdom and often requires it to change course if calamity is to be avoided. But fortunately it is one element of the genius of democracy--and of US democracy in particular--that encrusted orthodoxy can be challenged and overthrown by popular pressure. The movement *against* the war in Iraq should also become a movement *for* something, and that something should be a return to the long-neglected path to abolition of all weapons of mass destruction. Only by offering a solution to the problem that the war claims to solve but does not can this war and others be stopped.

The passage of time since the failure in 1946 has also provided us with some advantages. No insuperable ideological division divides the nuclear powers (with the possible exception, now, of North Korea), as the cold war did. Their substantial unity and agreement in this area can be imagined. Every other nonnuclear nation but one (the eccentric holdout is Cuba) already has agreed under the terms of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty to do without nuclear weapons. Biological and chemical weapons have been

banned by international conventions (although the conventions are weak, as they lack serious inspection and enforcement provisions).

The inspected and enforced elimination of weapons of mass destruction is a goal that in its very nature must take time, and adequate time--perhaps a decade, or even more--can be allowed. But the decision to embrace the goal should not wait. It should be seen not as a distant dream that may or may not be realized once a host of other unlikely prerequisites have been met but as a powerful instrument to be used immediately to halt all forms of proliferation and inspire arms reductions in the present. There can be no successful nonproliferation policy that is not backed by the concerted will of the international community. As long as the double standard is in effect, that will cannot be created. Do we need more evidence than the world's disarray today in the face of Iraq's record of proliferation? Today's world, to paraphrase Lincoln, is a house divided, half nuclear-armed, half nuclear-weapons-free. A commitment to the elimination of weapons of mass destruction would heal the world's broken will, and is the only means available for doing so. Great powers that were getting out of the mass destruction business would have very short patience with nations, such as Iraq or North Korea, getting into that business. The Security Council would act as one. The smaller powers that had never made their pact with the devil in the first place would be at the great powers' side. Any proliferator would face the implacable resolve of all nations to persuade it or force it to reverse its course.

Let us try to imagine it: one human species on its one earth exercising one will to defeat forever a threat to its one collective existence. Could any nation stand against it? Without this commitment, the international community--if I may express it thus--is like a nuclear reactor from which the fuel rods have been withdrawn. Making the commitment would be to insert the rods, to start up the chain reaction. The chain reaction would be the democratic activity of peoples demanding action from the governments to secure their survival. True democracy is indispensable to disarmament, and vice versa. This is the power--not the power of cruise missiles and B-52s--that can release humanity from its peril. The price demanded of us for freedom from the danger of weapons of mass destruction is to relinquish our own.