

A Global Controversy: The U.S. Invasion of Iraq



THE
CHOICES
PROGRAM
BROWN UNIVERSITY

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Introduction: Protests Around the World

On February 15, 2003, millions of people around the world took to the streets to protest the United States' plans to invade Iraq and topple Saddam Hussein. Demonstrations occurred in over three hundred cities across all seven continents—Chicago, Rome, New York, Cape Town, São Paulo, and Jakarta, just to name a few. Even scientists at McMurdo research station in Antarctica spoke out against the war, standing on the ice with a banner that read “Antarctica United For Peace.”

“There were, of course, the usual suspects—CND [Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament], Socialist Workers’ Party, the anarchists. But even they looked shocked at the number of their fellow marchers.... There were nuns. Toddlers. Women barristers. The Eton George Orwell

Society. Archaeologists Against War. Walthamstow Catholic Church, the Swaffham Women’s Choir.... There were country folk and lecturers, dentists and poulterers, a hairdresser from Cardiff and a poet from Cheltenham.”

—Guardian article by Euan Ferguson about the protest in London, February 15, 2003

But many people in the United States supported an invasion. Two weeks prior to the protests, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell had presented U.S. intelligence on Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction programs and connections with international terrorist organizations before the United Nations. He argued that Iraq’s tyrannical dictator, Saddam Hussein, directly threatened U.S. security. Just a year and a half after the devastating terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, many in the United



U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell at the UN Security Council, March 7, 2003. The council was discussing the situation in Iraq.

UN Photo/Evan Schneider

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Teacher Resource Book



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The Media and the Iraq War

Objectives:

Students will: Examine media coverage of Colin Powell's speech before the UN.

Explore the persuasive techniques used in editorials.

Analyze the role of the media in a democracy.

Consider strategies for reading news critically and gaining a complete perspective on events.

Required Reading:

Students should have read Part II and completed "Study Guide—Part II" (TRB 29-30) or the "Advanced Study Guide—Part II" (TRB-31).

Videos:

There are short, free videos designed to be used with this lesson at <<https://video.choices.edu/curriculum/iraq>>.

Handouts:

"A Role for the Media" (TRB-35)

"Reactions to Colin Powell's Presentation" (TRB 36-41)

In the Classroom:

1. Focus Question—Write the question "What is the role of the media in a democracy?" on the board. Record student responses. Ask students whether the media should strive to be objective. How do writers remain objective if they have strong opinions about the issues they write about? Inform students that in this activity they will be analyzing editorials. Ask the class if they know what an editorial is. Explain that, unlike news articles, editorials make the writer's opinion clear up front. In editorials, journalists try to convince their readers that their opinion about a particular issue is the correct one.

2. Examining the Articles—Divide the class into groups of two or three students and give "A Role for the Media" and one of the editorials to each group. Ask students to read their assigned editorial and follow the directions on the handout.

3. Group Responses—After small groups have completed the questions, gather the class together again. Ask the groups to share their responses to the questions. Each group should inform the class about their editorial's interpretation of Colin Powell's speech. Based on the information presented in their editorial, does the group think that a reader at the time would have been convinced that Iraq possessed dangerous weapons and had connections to al Qaeda?

4. Making Connections—After all of the groups have presented their editorials, encourage a discussion about the wide range of opinions presented. How is it possible that writers could have such different opinions about the same event? Ask students whether the activity affected their own opinion of the plan to go to war. After reading their editorial, what did they think about the U.S. justifications for invading Iraq? What about after hearing descriptions of *all* the editorials?

What sorts of media outlets did these editorials come from? Newspapers? Magazines? From other countries around the world? Which editorials were the most critical? Where did the most critical editorials come from? Where did the most supportive editorials come from?

5. The Media and the War—The journalists that wrote these editorials clearly had strong opinions about Colin Powell's presentation and about the war. Do students think that the journalists' preexisting opinion of the war could have influenced their description of the presentation? Alternatively, do they think the presentation may have changed the opinions of the journalists about the war? Ask students whether personal opinions about the

war may have affected the way writers wrote non-editorial news stories during the lead up to the 2003 invasion. Do students think this is a problem? What else might influence the way a news story is written? Revisit the question of the role of the media in a democracy. During the lead-up to the Iraq War, critics often complained that the U.S. media got their information about Iraq primarily from government officials. Is it the responsibility of the media to question the policies of the government, or simply to report on them?

If citizens want the best information about an issue, where should they get their news? From one source or a variety of sources? From news stories, editorials, blogs, social media, or television? What lessons can students learn from the activity about being critical readers of media?

The following Choices video will help students think about the role of the media in 2003:

“Did the U.S. media accurately portray the situation in Iraq leading up to the 2003 invasion?” answered by Charles Tripp, Professor of Middle Eastern Politics at the University of London.

Extra Challenge:

Students should watch the video of the Colin Powell presentation online and write their own editorial describing the event. Ask them to think about the goal of their editorial and to utilize the persuasive techniques used in the articles.

A Role for the Media

In a democracy, people rely on the media to provide them with information so that they can form opinions about political issues. Without a vibrant media, citizens would be unequipped to ask tough questions of their governments.

In 2002 and 2003, people looked to different media outlets for information that would help them draw conclusions about the United States' plan to invade Iraq. In some countries, the news media was highly critical of the Bush administration's case for war. Often the most critical voices came from people from countries that were against the war like France, Russia, and most countries in the Middle East. In the United States, the media was less critical of the case for war.

On February 5, 2002, Secretary of State Colin Powell went before the United Nations to

argue that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and represented a threat to U.S. security. Following the presentation, journalists around the world wrote articles assessing Powell's performance and the reliability of the information he presented.

Many of the articles written about the presentation were editorials. Editorials are articles that try to persuade readers of a particular point of view. In editorials, writers use statistics, quotations, and anecdotes to try to convince people that their opinion is right. Many editorials, particularly in the United States, praised the presentation and declared that Powell had made an adequate case for war. Other commentators felt that the presentation had been unconvincing.

Questions

Instructions: Read one of the six editorial pieces and answer the questions below on a separate piece of paper.

1. Does the author support the claims made by Colin Powell? Why or why not?
2. Does the author believe that the evidence Colin Powell presented was credible? Why or why not?
3. What is the tone of the editorial? (For example, was it angry? fearful? logical?)
4. What aspects of the presentation did the writer find particularly strong? Particularly weak?
5. a) Does the author think that Iraq represents a threat to the United States? Why or why not?
b) If yes, then how does the author believe the international community should respond?
6. What arguments does the author use to back up his or her opinion? Does s/he cite any additional evidence?
7. What source and country was this editorial published in? Why might that be important?
8. Does the editorial affect your opinion of the case for war? If so, how?
9. After reading your article, do you think that Iraq posed a serious threat in 2003?

Reactions to Colin Powell's Presentation

An Impressive Show; but Mr. Powell Failed to Make the Case for War

February 6, 2003, *The Independent* (London, England)

The picture that emerged from the Colin Powell Show, featuring the testimony of defectors, fuzzy satellite images and intercepted telephone conversations between Saddam's henchmen is, as General Powell said, a "deeply troubling" one. But then the world has known for some time that Saddam is a tyrant and a menace. What was new in General Powell's presentation was the suggestion that Saddam has been able to forge some links with al Qaeda terrorists. On that, though, General Powell overstated his case by linking a small al Qaeda presence in Iraq to terrorist activity across Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Chechnya and Russia. His remarks were also at odds with a British defence intelligence document that was leaked yesterday and suggested that such a relationship has foundered.

The problem, as with the two dossiers on Saddam published by Downing Street, is that it is a (relatively) easy task to prove that Saddam is defying the UN, that he has gassed his own people, that he tortures his opponents, that he has invaded his neighbours and that he might be cooperating with al Qaeda. It is much more difficult to make the case that the best way to neutralise that threat is to launch a war on Iraq.

General Powell desperately needed to do that yesterday. As Secretary of State, he knows better than most members of the Bush administration how vital it is to build an international coalition. He is acutely aware, as is Tony Blair, that majority opinion in Europe and the Arab world will always be sceptical. The French Foreign Minister's response, urging the Security Council to "very significantly reinforce the capacity for monitoring and collecting information in Iraq," does not suggest that France is yet ready to help in the framing of a second UN resolution endorsing the use of force.

In closing, General Powell asked the international community to understand that, in the light of all that we know about Saddam and all the intelligence that the Secretary of State shared with the UN, the United States government could not "run the risk" of allowing Saddam to remain in power. In turn, General Powell and the Bush administration must understand that much of the rest of the world is not ready to countenance the even more terrible risks involved in a war. Such an act of aggression by the U.S. threatens to destabilise the whole region, would be a huge encouragement to fundamentalists from Saudi Arabia to Pakistan and would virtually guarantee an upsurge in global terrorism. The policy of containment and sanctions, pursued for twelve years, has been frustrating and messy; but it has constrained Saddam. General Powell did not tell us why we must abandon it.

Mr. Powell, You're No Adlai Stevenson

Stephen Zunes, February 6, 2003, *Foreign Policy in Focus* (Washington, D.C.)

[W]hile it was an eloquent speech, [Colin] Powell fell far short of proving that Iraq had anything that could seriously threaten the security of its neighbors, much less the United States. Evasiveness and paranoia by an isolated dictator does not a security threat make.

One major problem was that most of Powell's accusations were based upon the word of anonymous sources. Given the propensity of U.S. administrations of both parties to fabricate and exaggerate threats to justify previous foreign wars—such as the alleged Gulf of Tonkin incident off the coast of Vietnam and the supposed “rescue” of American medical students in Grenada—there is an understandable reluctance by many to blindly accept such accusations.

Indeed, chief UN weapons inspector Hans Blix has rejected many of Powell's claims. For example, the respected Swedish diplomat has insisted that there is no evidence of mobile biological weapons laboratories, of Iraq trying to foil inspectors by moving equipment before his teams arrived, or that his organization has been infiltrated by Iraqi spies.

The weakest part of Powell's presentation was his effort to link the decidedly secular Iraqi regime with the fundamentalist al Qaeda, whose leader Osama bin Laden has referred to Saddam as “an apostate, an infidel, and a traitor to Islam.” Reports cited by Powell attempting to link Saddam to affiliated groups like Ansar al Islam have come almost exclusively from anti-Saddam Iraqis in exile hoping that establishing such a link could encourage U.S. military action to oust the dictator; as a result, they are not generally considered credible. In reality, Ansar al Islam's stated goal is to overthrow the secular Ba'athist regime in Baghdad and replace it with an Islamist state. The efforts to tie alleged al Qaeda figure Abu Musab Al Zarqawi to the Iraqi regime have also been based largely on unattributed sources. That he received medical treatment in Baghdad is no more proof of direct involve-

ment by the Iraqi regime in his activities than the presence of scores of al Qaeda leaders in allied countries like Saudi Arabia is proof of state collusion either. Ansar al Islam fighters and their al Qaeda supporters have been seen only in autonomous Kurdish areas beyond Iraqi government control.

Indeed, Powell's claim that there had been “decades” of contact between Saddam and al Qaeda was particularly odd, given that the terrorist network is less than ten years old....

Perhaps Powell's strongest arguments came in regard to some strong circumstantial evidence that Saddam Hussein's regime was not fully cooperating with the strengthened inspections regime implemented under UN Security Council resolution 1441. Virtually everybody already assumed this was the case, however, particularly since Hans Blix gave his mixed assessment of Iraqi cooperation the previous week.

Powell's claims that Iraq could spray anthrax from one its F-1 Mirage jet fighters could sound alarming until one realizes that no Iraqi military aircraft could even get as far as the border without being shot down by U.S. planes or the sophisticated anti-aircraft systems of neighboring states....

Even assuming that all of Powell's accusations are true, however, he was simply unable to make the case that war—with all its horror and potential unintended consequences—was the best solution....

Irrefutable

February 6, 2003, *The Washington Post*
 (Washington, D.C.)

After Secretary of State Colin L. Powell's presentation to the United Nations Security Council yesterday, it is hard to imagine how anyone could doubt that Iraq possesses weapons of mass destruction. Mr. Powell left no room to argue seriously that Iraq has accepted the Security Council's offer of a "final opportunity" to disarm. And he offered a powerful new case that Saddam Hussein's regime is cooperating with a branch of the al Qaeda organization that is trying to acquire chemical weapons and stage attacks in Europe. Mr. Powell's evidence, including satellite photographs, audio recordings and reports from detainees and other informants, was overwhelming. Sen. Joseph R. Biden Jr., the senior Democrat on the Foreign Relations Committee, called it "powerful and irrefutable." Revealing those tapes and photographs had a cost, as Iraq will surely take countermeasures. But the decision to make so much evidence public will prove invaluable if it sways public opinion here and abroad. At a minimum, it will stand as a worthy last effort to engage the United Nations in facing a threat that the United States could, if necessary, address alone or with an ad-hoc coalition.

Whether Iraq is disarmed through the authority of the United Nations or whether the United States effectively assumes responsibility depends on how the Security Council responds. Though much of Mr. Powell's report was new to many Americans and Europeans, it probably did not surprise the governments that have most strongly opposed action in Iraq, including France and Germany. Diplomats from these nations do not dispute Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld's assertion that "any country on the face of the Earth with an active intelligence program knows that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction." All supported Security Council Resolution 1441, which said a false statement by Iraq about its weapons, coupled with failure "at any time" to "cooperate fully" in disarmament, would be a "material breach" leading to "serious consequences." None say Iraq has complied. Until

now, however, they have cynically argued that the inspectors must uncover evidence proving what they already know, or that it's too early to judge Saddam Hussein's cooperation. Mr. Powell's presentation stripped all credibility from that dodge.

France was ready with a fallback position yesterday. Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin acknowledged Iraq's defiance of the Security Council and the consequent failure of inspections and then argued that the world should respond by...dispatching more inspectors. This hardly qualifies as the "serious consequences" Paris formally endorsed on Nov. 8, but Mr. de Villepin argued, in effect, that a climb down is preferable to war. Indeed, war must always be a last resort, but the French solution offers no credible path to Iraqi disarmament. Twelve years of experience have demonstrated that it is impossible to strip an unwilling totalitarian government of its weapons by such means. As Mr. Powell asked, how could inspections ever determine which eighteen of Iraq's tens of thousands of trucks carry mobile biological weapons labs? By choosing such a course, the Security Council would send Saddam Hussein the message that it remains the ineffectual body that shrank from enforcing sixteen previous resolutions. By proposing it, France and those who support it are setting the stage for another momentous development they claim to oppose: the transfer of responsibility for countering the most serious threats to international security from multilateral institutions to the world's sole superpower.

A Five-Star Performance Contains Nothing New; More Questions Are Posed than Answered

Ian Bruce, February 6, 2003, *The Herald* (Glasgow, Scotland)

Colin Powell, Gulf war hero, former political dove and current U.S. secretary of state, gave a superlative performance which produced no new, concrete evidence of Iraqi deception and posed more questions than it answered.

He delivered an hour-long, carefully rehearsed speech scripted to alternate between rapid-fire bursts of unsubstantiated allegations by defectors, technically impressive satellite imagery which proved nothing but the presence of military vehicles at a site, and an audio tape said to be a recording of a telephone conversation between two Republican Guard commanders discussing the movement of a “modified vehicle” before the arrival of UN inspectors.

His strongest suit was his personal style and standing. General Powell, a former chairman of the U.S. joint chiefs of staff and a Vietnam veteran with bad memories of combat, has a reputation for avoiding war if possible....

If his personal charisma was the high point of the pitch for global support, the blatant attempt to link Osama bin Laden’s al Qaeda terrorist network with Baghdad’s “support of international terrorism” and the unspoken horrors of September 11 was the nadir [low point].

General Powell hammered home claims of links between prominent Islamic terrorists and Baghdad, of ricin [a chemical used to make weapons] training schools in the Kurdish-held enclave of Iraq and wider terrorism in London and Europe, and of collusion between Saddam’s regime and fanatics seeking weapons and training.

Even the CIA has failed to uncover definitive proof of linkage. The FBI denies it outright. Britain’s security services have had no more success in tying down proof of an unlikely alliance between secular and cynical

Saddam and the ultra-religious zealots of al Qaeda.

The tapes had initial shock value, but again proved nothing. After the finds by inspectors of old—and empty—rocket shells a few weeks ago, the conversations might have been about ensuring there were no more dangerous ambiguities. There was also no proof of the age of the recordings.

The satellite photos showed cargo trucks removing material from alleged or former weapon facilities in the days before UN teams returned. The images could have been taken at any time. Only General Powell gave them authority.

Photographs from space and audio tapes which may or may not be genuine are mere showmanship. Yesterday’s performance was exactly that. It was the greatest show on earth for an hour as General Powell, the thinking-man’s soldier, pounded away at the doubts of the greater public, peppering his speech with details that sounded like proven facts and pictures whose content he shaped in people’s minds. Most civilians are not photo-analysts.

In individual terms, no one else in the U.S. administration could have done it. Only Colin Powell could try to justify the case. He tried his best. In the end, there was just too much p’zazz and too little hard evidence. The jury is still out.

Interview with Iraqi Ambassador to Jordan Sabah Yassin

February 6, 2003, Arab Republic of Egypt
Radio (Cairo, Egypt)

**This interview is not a published editorial, but it does express the opinion of an Iraqi official about Colin Powell's presentation.*

I listened to Mr. Colin Powell's entire speech. I also listened to the responses and remarks made by the representatives of Security Council member states and others. In fact, I had hoped that the following two observations would be taken into consideration: The first observation is that the United States, which talks about international peace and security, should have referred this evidence to the UN weapons inspectors who are working with complete freedom now in Iraq. There is no reason why those inspectors and committees could not verify this evidence directly. The second thing is that I noticed that Mr. Colin Powell has hijacked the legitimacy of the Security Council and Resolution 1441. He spoke on behalf of the United Nations before the Security Council. He should have placed this evidence at the disposal of the Security Council, instead of acting as both prosecutor and judge at the same time, or passing judgment that Iraq was in material breach of Resolution 1441. The Security Council is the body entrusted to make that judgment, not any one of its member states.

Iraq has nothing to say about this issue, except that we emphasize our commitment to implement Resolution 1441. The inspection committees will continue to work freely and positively. We will work with all countries which do not want this region to face tension or war in order to reach a peaceful and logical solution. President Saddam Husayn has urged the international community to solve this problem peacefully in order to spare this region the danger of war, particularly since the U.S. and British forces which are being assembled in the Gulf do not threaten Iraq alone, but pose a threat to the entire region.

I do not want to discuss this evidence, but there are many weaknesses in it, notably that

it did not have any specific dates. Were those pictures taken now or ten years ago? Were they taken in Iraq or in another country? That is one thing. The other thing is that if there is evidence and if the United States is keen on resolving this issue, why was this evidence not submitted to the inspection teams in order to visit those sites and fulfil their responsibility in accordance with Resolution 1441?

What Mr. Colin Powell said, particularly with respect to Iraq's connections with al Qaeda and terror, not with weapons, lacked any logical—let alone conclusive—evidence. Logic runs contrary to this allegation. He said in some cases that this evidence was not conclusive and that it was made up of mere convictions and assessments. The Iraqi side and many members of the Security Council have convictions about this evidence.

We hope that the United States will realize that it is jeopardizing the reputation of the international organization and trying to sidestep this organization in order to make the final decisions by itself and drown this region in chaos and a war, the results of which are unknown to any of us.

I listened to all the speeches and found that, unfortunately, the British representative was echoing the statements of the U.S. representative and the U.S. secretary of state. However, we say with pride that the speeches of the French foreign minister, the Chinese representative and the Russian foreign minister called for keeping this issue within the framework of the international organization; within the Security Council, and called on the international organization and the Security Council to seek changes thought to take into consideration what Colin Powell said, but not to condone unilateral action. The issue should be returned to the Security Council to decide how to deal with all the aspects of this issue.

UN Must Prove Itself

February 6, 2003, *The Gazette* (Montreal, Canada)

The United Nations Security Council has a decision to make, and there's more at stake than just Saddam Hussein's future. Yesterday, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell laid out the case against the Iraqi tyrant, citing chapter and verse on Iraq's deliberate, protracted and systematic campaign to build and hide dangerous weapons.

Within a week or two, council member states will have to decide what to do about Iraq. Powell warned, pointedly and undeniably, that in this process the Security Council "places itself in danger of irrelevance."

Powell's multi-media presentation led immediately, in some quarters, to denials and obfuscations: There was no "smoking gun," some said, and so the inspectors must be allowed more time, as much time as it takes. This sloppy thinking misses the point altogether. The burden of proof here does not lie with the U.S. It lies with Iraq, and Iraq has failed.

On Nov. 8, 2001, the Security Council passed Resolution 1441, a document everyone should read. Citing Iraq's previous failures to disarm and prove compliance, the UN through 1441 gave Iraq "a final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations." The resolution requires "a currently accurate, full and complete declaration of all aspects of its programs to develop chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles...including any holdings and precise locations of such weapons, components, sub-components, stocks of agents and related material and equipment." And 1441 warned that "failure by Iraq at any time to comply with, and cooperate fully in the implementation of, this resolution—including inspections—shall constitute a further material breach of Iraq's obligations." The burden of proof, in short, lay with Iraq.

From some quarters we heard yesterday that the Americans had fabricated their evidence, a claim that proves yet again that there are none so blind as those who will not

see (except perhaps those Kurds blinded by Saddam's poison gas). Aside from Saddam's henchmen and allies, who could possibly take seriously the idea that he is an injured innocent? And who can pretend, after Powell's litany of expanded rocket-test sites, furtive truck movements, defector information, intercepted aluminum tubes, aerial photos, espionage revelations, al Qaeda links, radio intercepts and more, that Iraq is complying with 1441?

Saddam Hussein's malevolence, like his duplicity and his ruthlessness, are beyond doubt. All that remains in doubt is the UN's usefulness as a tool for collective security. The League of Nations foundered in just this way; big on talk, short on action, it proved itself verbosely useless when Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935.

The UN can always be relied upon for protracted deliberation and does provide sometimes valuable if overly costly services as a global social worker. But the UN's *raison d'être* [purpose] from its birth has been collective security. If the UN fails to respond to Iraq's obvious contempt for Resolution 1441, it reveals itself feeble and negligible, perhaps terminally so.

Germany and France, among others, have been intransigent against action on Iraq. But Powell's real work yesterday came after his speech, in a series of bilateral meetings. As he began those talks, U.S. officials appeared confident of getting a new resolution authorizing military action.

The obvious U.S. resolve means that Saddam will surely be forced to disarm. The only question is: by whom? We can see no scenario in which anyone benefits by the UN failing to live up to its ultimatum to Iraq. If the UN can't back up its own resolutions, what's the point of it?