

## On Iraq, McGovernism returns.

# After the Fall

By LAWRENCE F. KAPLAN

**L**AST MONTH a band of lawmakers led by John McCain drafted a letter to President Bush insisting that "Saddam Hussein must be removed from power." There was only one problem: With the exception of Joe Lieberman and McCain's friend Congressman Harold Ford, they couldn't find any Democrats willing to sign it. And so the letter went out with only two Democrats committed to the Iraqi dictator's ouster. Several Democratic congressional aides insist that their bosses might have signed, but complain that Lieberman—apparently wanting to be one of the few prominent Democratic signatories—hurried the letter along before they had time to contemplate its full meaning. But others, including Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, had plenty of time to affix their signatures. And they declined to call for decisive action against Iraq for a simple reason: They don't support it.

In the immediate aftermath of September 11, pundits declaimed that the war on terrorism had finally closed the foreign policy gap between the two parties: that we were all hawks now. But the consensus applied to Afghanistan alone. Today Republicans have largely united in the belief that Saddam must go. (Even Trent Lott, a staunch Bush loyalist who rarely agrees with McCain about anything, signed the letter demanding White House action against Iraq.) And near-unanimity prevails among congressional Democrats as well: that deposing Saddam isn't worth the effort. In October, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Joseph Biden lectured a like-minded audience at the Council on Foreign Relations that an attack "would be a disastrous mistake." Tom Daschle, too, worries that an attack would be "a mistake" because it would prompt international concern "about the direction of U.S. policy." Senator Paul Wellstone claims that "there is [sic] no good short-term options for getting rid of [Saddam]." And House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt argues that, rather than declare war, the United States ought to "increase the pressure, incrementally" and "work with the world coalition."

Sound familiar? They're practically the same lines congressional Democrats uttered in opposition to the Gulf war a decade ago. To be sure, the Democratic congressional leadership may be less suspicious about the general aims of U.S. foreign policy than they were then. But that's mostly because they have less interest in foreign policy. As one Democratic aide on the House International Relations Committee puts it, "[Democratic congressmen] want to talk about taxes and the economy. They couldn't care less about Iraq." And as a result Daschle, Gephardt, & Co. have been relying heavily on those in their party who do have strong foreign policy incli-

nations: in particular a parade of ex-Clinton officials and congressional aides whose instincts remain frozen in pre-Gulf war amber.

**P**OLITICALLY, THE DEMOCRATS' position makes little sense. The party leadership's opposition to the Gulf war badly damaged the political fortunes of prominent Democrats like Sam Nunn and Bill Bradley. And recent polls by *The Washington Post*, CNN, and Reuters show that three-quarters of Americans (a much higher level than supported going to war in 1990) favor a U.S. effort to depose Saddam. Still other surveys—including one by Democratic pollster Mark Penn—show that, more than ever, voters prefer Republicans to Democrats on national security issues. But absent Democratic politicians with strong opinions about, or even solid backgrounds in, foreign affairs, the liberal portion of an already liberal foreign policy establishment has been shaping the party's stance on Iraq.

Some of the worst advice comes from salons hosted by former Clinton aides. Until recently senior Gore adviser Marc Ginsberg ran one group, which in turn competed with another led by Clinton national security adviser Sandy Berger and former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. (They've since merged their accumulated wisdom.) Just as veterans of Bush père's foreign policy team like Brent Scowcroft and Colin Powell seem to view a deposed Saddam as a threat to their legacy of inaction, so do the Clintonites. Berger, who spent eight years in the Clinton White House quashing efforts to depose Saddam, has been counseling Daschle and Gephardt on Iraq, and says that because "we would be alone," an attack against Saddam would be ill-advised. Gore national security adviser Leon Fuerth, who has also been advising the Democratic leadership, claims that an attack may come "at the expense of our national security" and could prove a "fatal diversion." And Albright says that "it's hard to see that [deposing Saddam] is feasible." For his part, Ginsberg calls proponents of the Iraqi opposition "yahoos . . . [who] haven't really done their homework," and former Clinton State Department official Henri Barkey doubts that a credible Iraqi opposition "exists anywhere other than in the minds of a few hawks in Washington." (If so, one reason surely was the Clinton administration's decision to abandon opposition fighters to their fate—summary execution—in the face of an Iraqi government offensive in 1996.)

Aides to Daschle, Patrick Leahy, Christopher Dodd, and Wellstone, as well as Democratic staffers on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, echo the Clintonites. (By contrast, staffers on the House International Relations Committee, and its ranking Democrat, Congressman Tom Lantos, have been outspoken on the need for robust action against Iraq, as have Senators Charles Schumer and Evan Bayh.) "To your average [Democratic] staffer," says one not-so-average staffer, "the whole idea of going after Iraq and supporting the [Iraqi National Congress] is a Republican fetish, which people like [Richard] Perle clubbed them with for years." Indeed, the squeamishness of Democratic aides on Iraq derives as much from partisan resentment as from philosophical disagreement. It's an updated version of anti-anti-communism,

only without the communism; if Republican Neanderthals want to depose Saddam, it must be a bad idea.

But there's also an ideological component to the Democratic foreign policy establishment's stance, which owes to the lingering suspicion that American self-interest and the interests of humanity are inherently incompatible. "The crucial difference between [the Democratic establishment's] support for the interventions in Kosovo and Bosnia," explains the Democratic Leadership Council's Will Marshall, "was that they were cloaked in disinterestedness, whereas in Iraq, America's interests are directly threatened." For such Democrats, action in concert with, and on behalf of, the international community—or even strictly in self-defense, as in Afghanistan—passes the virtue test. But action against Iraq fits none of these criteria. And with the exception of Lieberman, long gone are Scoop Jackson Democrats like Stephen Solarz, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, and their staffs, who unambiguously rejected the sentiment that American power was somehow tainted.

The irony is that what passes for proof of heightened moral awareness among congressional Democrats actually amounts to moral evasion. After all, there's nothing reactionary about wanting to rid the world of a dictator who gasses his own people, invades his neighbors, harbors weapons of mass destruction, and flouts an entire catalogue of UN resolutions. As for the practical argument that an assault on Iraq would "shatter the coalition," it's a line rehashed by opponents nearly every time the United States goes to war, whether in Afghanistan last year or Iraq a decade ago. But the extent of multilateral cooperation required to launch a strike against Iraq today would be permission to use bases in Turkey and Kuwait—permission administration officials express confidence they would receive. The United States might not enjoy the moral support of "allies" like Egypt and Saudi Arabia, such as it is. But does the Democratic leadership really believe that the unilateral exercise of American power threatens the world more than the persistence of Saddam Hussein? If so, Democrats might have some explaining to do when, as seems increasingly likely, the Bush team liberates Iraq. Because preserving George McGovern's legacy—much less Bill Clinton's—hardly justifies preserving an Iraqi tyrant. ■

## Remembering Saudi Arabia. Veiled Threat

By MARTIN PERETZ

MEMORY OFTEN WORKS its way into metaphor, and that has surely happened with my 1991 trip to Saudi Arabia. But I doubt that my recollections are out of date—this is, after all, a society that prides itself on stasis. Yes, oil prices have fallen in recent years, which means that the Saudi welfare state—a dowry for every 18-year-old; long-term, non-interest-bearing loans for new

homes; free (if mediocre) medical care—is no longer quite so lavish. Ideologically, however, Saudi Arabia's economic slide has, if anything, made its royal family more insular and more reactionary, further tightening the noose of permissible ideas. Which is to say that if my experiences no longer precisely track Saudi reality, it is because they are too benign.

Saudi Arabia's princes (all 7,000 or so of them—there are more princes in Saudi Arabia than cab drivers) move lavishly (and often lasciviously) through the pleasure capitals of the world. But the kingdom itself doesn't welcome tourists: You must be invited by someone very important to get the equivalent of a visa. Full-time journalists are discouraged out of fear that they might discover too much. And while its great wealth, mesmerizing backwardness, and reflexive reliance on up-to-date gadgetry makes Saudi Arabia an intriguing case study for social scientists, the monarchy doesn't normally let them in either. You've got a better chance of doing independent research in Beijing than in Riyadh. Every so often the royals do let a travel writer visit, but only because they assume that, incapable of doing any real reporting, he will produce a contemporary orientalist desert romance—rather like the ones styled, in the grand manner many decades ago, by Richard Burton, William Palgrave, Gertrude Bell, St. John Philby, and Wilfred Thesiger.

In fact, the literature on Saudi society is so poor that when I asked a very learned friend what I should read before I went, he didn't suggest a book about Saudi Arabia at all. He suggested I read about ancient Rome—not the Roman republic, but the Roman empire, because that was another dominion in which just about all the labor was done by foreigners (in fact, by slaves). I read Moses Finley's *The Ancient Economy*, which was even then a little dated, but prepared me for one of the most stunning facts of Saudi life: the alienation of Saudis (or, more precisely, the absence of Saudis) from the ordinary work of their society.

There is one exception to this rule: the Saudi Shia, who constitute between 7 percent and 15 percent of the population. (They cluster in the Eastern Province, adjacent to Iraq, which helps explain why Riyadh is so desperate that Saddam's dominion remain intact. If Shia separatism breaks loose in the region, it will threaten the Saudis as well.) But besides them, the country's industry (such as it is) and virtually its entire service economy, depends on the diligence of Pakistanis, Indonesians, Sudanese, Yemenis, and Egyptians. Saudi Arabia, like many other Arab countries threatened by denominational or ethnic divisions (Lebanon and Algeria, for instance) are reluctant to conduct a reliable census. But everyone knows that there are more guest workers in the country than native Saudi adults. And that doesn't even count the most controversial guest workers of all—the ones whose presence prompted Osama bin Laden to blow up the World Trade Center—the soldiers of the United States.

Since September 11 the United States has been forced to confront two critical, but long-ignored, questions about our Saudi "partners." The first is concrete: Is the Saudi regime on our side in the war against terrorism, or bin Laden's? The Bush administration, generally (and laudably) honest in its definition of terrorism, cuts intellectual corners here, perhaps in deference to Poppy, who has deep ties to the Saudi

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