

## **The Reluctant Warrior**

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When the drums of war with Iraq began to roll, Colin Powell sought to muffle them. The instincts born of innate caution and a Vietnam veteran's lingering disquietude made him cling to the judgment he made long ago: that the 1991 Gulf War had ended roughly the right way, and that to tamper with that success was to risk quagmire or unforeseeable terrors.

That is what made the superlative clarity of his speech before the U.N. yesterday so powerful, and so convincing. What the world saw and heard was a soldier and statesman who had weighed the evidence and concluded, "Enough. Enough."

Mr. Powell was the logical spokesman for the administration, not merely because of his office, but because of all our public men and women he is most fit to represent the U.S. to an indifferent, skeptical, or hostile audience. Most fit, because he captures so much of the best about America: not his wisdom, which is uneven, but his character, which is not. He is a reluctant warrior who will wield power when he must; a patriot who believes deeply in the goodness of a country that a few generations ago would have despised his services because of the color of his skin; a man of simple eloquence who, when patronized by the retired archbishop of Canterbury at Davos two weeks ago, responded, "We have gone forth from our shores repeatedly over the last hundred years . . . and put wonderful young men and women at risk, many of whom have lost their lives, and we have asked for nothing except enough ground to bury them in." Alas for the Church of England that the general, not the archbishop, affirmed the moral imperative of struggle against evil men.

The intercepted communications of Iraqis hiding prohibited materials, the agent reports of human experiments with chemical weapons, the tales of al Qaeda hideouts in Iraq, the images of storage sites cleaned out shortly before the arrival of U.N. inspectors and the pictures of test flights of aircraft that can spray biological weapons may have convinced a few genuine waverers. But most of those now reluctantly admitting that Saddam's regime is indeed incorrigibly bent on violating agreements and acquiring hideous weapons have long known these to be the case. They have, however, not wanted to face up to the unpleasant implications of these facts. They all have their reasons: neurotic pacifism in Germany, worry about the economic consequences of war in parts of Asia, national egotism in France, fear of upheaval in the Arab world.

For all the angry talk about a U.S. that would not make its case, it is striking that no leader has had the moral and intellectual courage to say, in effect: "Yes, Saddam has large quantities of VX and anthrax and stands ready to produce more. Yes, he has attempted to rebuild his nuclear weapons program. Yes, he is building prohibited long-range ballistic missiles. Yes, he hides and trains al Qaeda terrorists. Yes, his is a regime of spectacular brutality. It is, nonetheless, better to accept these facts, ignore his flagrant violation of 17 U.N. resolutions and agreements, accept the crumbling of sanctions and

the death of inspections, and hope to deter him until he dies of old age." That argument can still be made, but "why now?" or "let the inspectors do their job" is not it. The governments of many countries, fearing the consequences of Security Council repudiation of an American war, hoping to constrain or shape U.S. policy in the Middle East, or merely seeking a slice of the spoils of war in the shape of oil contracts, will go along. But let no one think that they were "convinced."

The apparent success of the Powell speech, moreover, should not cause Americans to forget the nine months of widespread skepticism, indeed, antipathy toward the U.S. that has characterized the Iraq debate. Even in friendly countries (Britain, most notably) elite opinion is decidedly anti-American. Some of this may result from personalities and cultural tensions. Texan talk no doubt grates on some foreign ears; quotes from the Bible and frank talk of evil worry those who, like Javier Solana, pointedly note that a country that puts "In God We Trust" on its currency differs from those that have lost their faith. Some of this hostility reflects legitimate unhappiness with American decisions, and intellectually respectable aversion to the risks and costs of war. Similarly, an existential, and therefore unassuageable fear and envy of this Gulliver of nations makes some wish to see the U.S. constrained, tamed, perhaps even humbled a bit. Understandable and forgivable, no doubt.

There is, however, something else out there, something deeper, uglier, and far less rational, an artesian river of hatred that has seeped in pools to the surface. It finds expression in the venom with which a British playwright can declare the "pervasive public nightmare of American hysteria, ignorance, arrogance, stupidity and belligerence" worse than the cancer that nearly killed him. It appears in the hysteria that greeted Donald Rumsfeld's off-hand remark about "old Europe" -- after months in which French and German leaders could not conceal their contempt for their American counterparts. It surfaces in petulant complaints that U.S. policy is controlled by "neoconservative hawks" whose protégé state, Israel, is the root of al Qaeda terrorism and the ultimate cause of war with Iraq. In other words, it appears in anti-Semitism of a type long thought dead in the West, a loathing that ascribes to Jews a malignant intent.

This subterranean stream will continue to flow, despite Mr. Powell's evidence and his eloquence. It will be there -- and perhaps stronger -- the next time, whenever the next time may be. If Americans do not recognize it or choose to ignore it, we do so at our peril. How to dam, divert, or dry it up is a great if subtle problem for the future, and not, alas, to be solved in a single speech, no matter how detailed or powerful.

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