

Missing link: The first casualty of war

by [James M. Wall](#) in the [March 8, 2003](#) issue

Secretary of State Colin Powell and President Bush have used September 11 to push this country into war. The Bush administration is fully aware that half of the Americans polled believe that Iraq was involved in 9/11. (See recent polls by Gallup and Pew.) The truth is—and the administration knows this—that no connection has been found to link Iraq with Osama bin Laden. Terrorism is our fear and Hussein is our target, and we link the two in the false hope that eliminating Hussein will curb terrorism. The irony of this linkage is that Hussein was in the cross hairs of the war party in the White House long before terror struck on September 11, 2001.

In a letter addressed to President Bill Clinton on January 26, 1998, the Project for a New American Century called for a regime change in Iraq. The letter, which is still posted on the group's Web site, was signed by veterans of the first Bush administration and other prominent neoconservatives. At that time, all of them were out of power in Washington. Now, as syndicated columnist Salim Muwakkil has noted, George Bush's election has promoted those letter writers to high-level decision-makers and opinion-shapers.

The group includes Donald Rumsfeld; Paul Wolfowitz, Rumsfeld's deputy; John Bolton, Colin Powell's deputy; William Kristol, editor of the conservative *Weekly Standard* and Project for the New American Century chairman; Elliott Abrams, the convicted Iran-contra figure whom Bush appointed to the National Security Council staff; Richard Perle, chairman of the Pentagon's Defense Policy Board; Richard Armitage, another Powell deputy; Zalmay Khalilzad, the Bush administration's envoy to Afghanistan.

Among others who signed the NIC letter are Undersecretary of State for Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky, U.S. Trade Representative Robert B. Zoellick, historian Francis Fukuyama, author William J. Bennett, conservative spokesman Vin Weber and R. James Woolsey, Bill Clinton's first CIA director.

Woolsey began the campaign to link Hussein to 9/11 three days after September 11, when he wrote in the *New Republic's* online edition:

In the immediate aftermath of Tuesday's attacks, attention has focused on terrorist chieftain Osama bin Laden. And he may well be responsible. But intelligence and law enforcement officials investigating the case would do well to at least consider another possibility: that the attacks—whether perpetrated by bin Laden and his associates or by others—were *sponsored, supported, and perhaps even ordered by Saddam Hussein* [emphasis added].

The spin was still at work two weeks later when the NIC wrote to a receptive George Bush: "It may be that the Iraqi government provided assistance in some form to the recent attack on the United States. But even if evidence does not link Iraq directly to the attack, any strategy aiming at the eradication of terrorism and its sponsors must include a determined effort to remove Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq."

George Bush is the president the war party needed. He has the zealot's willingness to highlight emotional details to make his point, even if his allegations are hearsay. In his State of the Union address, Bush told the American people: "*Iraqi refugees tell us how forced confessions are obtained—by torturing children while their parents are made to watch*" (emphasis added).

Those are not the words of a leader who wants to reach an agreement with an enemy. Those are the words of a man who told naval personnel they would be fighting "thugs," a president who feels he has the right to launch a preemptive strike against Iraq, and who conveniently overlooks the fact that the "deliberate instigation of aggressive wars" was one of the charges made against Germany in the Nuremberg trials.

Until his talk before the UN Security Council, Secretary of State Colin Powell was, says *Washington Post* writer Michael Dobbs, "the administration's most powerful dove, a beacon of hope for advocates of a peaceful diplomatic solution to the Iraqi crisis." But Powell, who is now more the soldier than the diplomat, has saluted and joined the war party.

The secretary read his script faithfully at the Security Council, but it was fatally flawed at its core. Take the satellite picture, for example, that "links" Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda in a project to produce chemical weapons. Columnist Robert

Scheer writes that the area depicted is “outside the area controlled by Hussein . . . in the Northern Kurdish region protected by U.S. and British warplanes.”

So great is public respect for Colin Powell that when he spoke of “decades of contact” between Saddam and al-Qaeda, few wanted to hear the correction from journalists. Robert Fisk of the London *Independent*, for example, reminded his readers that al-Qaeda has been around for only five years and that a decade ago Osama bin Laden was fighting for the CIA against the Russians.

John Ashcroft linked the Muslim hajj to a heightened terrorist threat, thus making sure Americans will not forget that Islam is our “enemy” (a threat now shown to be based on a false tip). Meanwhile, Powell, the good guy gone bad, points to Osama’s latest tape as proof that he and Saddam are allies, ignoring the tape’s rejection of the Iraqi leader as a heretical secularist. Two falsehoods, but who notices as the nation rushes to war. The White House would have us believe we are going to war against Iraq because of 9/11. Truth is always the first casualty of any war. So may we assume that war has begun?