

Professor believes war with Iraq not about oil, democracy or freedom

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and a couple of close calls that have turned out favorably from our perspective."

One of those fortunate developments has been the exceptional performance of the Patriot anti-missile system, which has warded off numerous Iraqi Scud missile attacks since the first days of the war.

In fact, the Patriot's good marks may be one of the reasons Israel has not yet retaliated for Scud attacks on many Israeli cities.

"An Israeli reprisal might have made the problem much more intractable, it might have shattered the anti-Hussein coalition and made America's task much more difficult," said Hahn.

Hahn said that "It's not clear yet if Saddam Hussein is going to surrender, or be defeated unconditionally with any great ease by the U.S. and its allies. Certainly a lot more Americans are going to die. We've gotten off easily so far, in terms of casualties. But if Bush decides to press on to unconditional surrender, then tens of thousands of U.S. GI's could be killed, as well as hundreds of thousands of citizens of the area."

On the homefront, the Bush administration may face a tough time keeping the American public convinced that this is an international war against Iraqi aggression.

"Officially this is an international effort under the auspices of the United Nations, and more specifically an effort of a coalition of countries now

numbering about 30. But for all practical purposes it's America's war with Iraq; I think it's unfruitful to think of it as a war on any other terms. This is George Bush's attack on Saddam Hussein and the U.N. I mentioned is nearly a window dressing to give it a sense of political and legalistic legitimacy," he said.

According to Hahn, the

created the U.N. umbrella more for foreign politics than domestic; more to mobilize world opinion than the opinion of the American people."

As for America's stake in the war, Hahn believes the U.S. isn't fighting for cheap oil or democracy, but for less obvious reasons.

"The United States is not fighting for democracy or self-

"The Kuwaitis have been the real financial wizards -- and the Saudi's as well -- at encouraging price hikes. The Iraqis would have been forced, because of their economic underdevelopment, to sell their oil and thus the price of oil would have probably fallen."

The question, then, is why is America at war?

"There are two reasons," said Hahn. "The first is the Munich principle, an idea based on the so-called lessons of the the 1930's that the world community has to respond forcefully against aggression or the aggressor will conclude that it is safe to make further aggressive moves and get away with it.

"Another reason why I think Bush was initially drawn into the question was the fact that Saudi Arabia in the early days of the crisis (last August) was threatened by either immediate military aggression or more long-term aggression -- perhaps an invasion three or four years down the road. Only Saddam himself knows if Saddam meant to do that. I think it would have been a near certainty."

Hahn, along with many other political experts, believes that Bush's decision to "draw a line in the sand" in August of 1990 helped set the stage for confrontation and made war almost inevitable.

Additionally, he believes troops were sent in the first place because "Saudi Arabia was a close military ally of the United States. There is a major air base at Dhahran on the east coast of Saudi Arabia which the US

depended on for Middle East defense during much of the Cold War. There are probably also millions of dollars of weapons that the US had stockpiled in warehouses in Saudi Arabia in an event of war with the Soviet Union -- all part of the rapid deployment plan formulated during the Reagan years."

Possible fear that Hussein might get his hands on US weapons and arms technology, according to Hahn, "might have panicked Bush into deploying US troops to prevent that from happening." With such weapons, some analysts feel Hussein might have been unstoppable, at least until he had conquered the Middle East and destroyed Israel.

For many, the issue is pointless at the moment. American troops: fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, husbands and wives are overseas in a war zone. Hahn said that while the initial phase of the war has gone smoothly, the military phase isn't over and may become uglier with time.

Editor's Note: This is the first in a two-part interview with noted Middle East expert and Behrend history professor Dr. Peter Hahn. While this week's story centers on events in the Gulf, next week's installment will focus on the political and economic fallout of the post-war period.



War talk: Dr. Peter Hahn makes a point during a discussion about the war in the Gulf.

American public has already noticed this. "There's a groundswell of opposition to the fact that most of the troops committed to the Middle East are American troops, hence the Germans or Japanese are sending neither enough money nor manpower as many Americans would like."

Hahn added that the President has created the international force to rally foreign support.

"I think that Bush really

determination, which are some of our ideals or rationals of the past. Fighting for the defense of Saudi Arabia or the liberation of Kuwait means we are fighting for repressive and somewhat medieval-style monarchies -- not democracies or constitutional governments."

Some analysts have even suggested, according to Hahn, that the price of oil may have even gone down if Hussein been allowed to keep Kuwait.



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