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## •• INTERVIEW RICHARD PERLE

**What must one understand about Saddam Hussein and Saddam Hussein's Iraq, even before entering the debate on how we should deal with Iraq?**

Well, about Saddam Hussein, the essential point is that he's a thug who has been willing to murder some of the people closest to him, who has used chemical weapons against his own people, who has invaded his neighbors. He is probably the most dangerous individual in the world today.

**Capable of?**

Capable of anything. Capable of using **weapons of mass destruction** against the United States, capable of launching other military maneuvers as soon as he thinks he can get away with it.

**You have stated in the past that this is not a fringe issue. What do you mean by that?**

The question of Saddam Hussein is at the very core of the war against terrorism. There can be no victory in the war against terrorism if, at the end of it, Saddam Hussein is still in power -- not only because he supports terrorism, not only because he trains

**Richard Perle** is the chairman of the Defense Policy Board, an advisory panel to the Pentagon made up of leading figures in national security and defense which backs laying the groundwork for overthrowing Saddam through military means. He previously served as assistant secretary of defense for international security policy in the Reagan Administration. In this interview Perle says, "There can be no victory in the war against terrorism if at the end of it Saddam Hussein is still in power." He argues that the second phase of the war against terrorism should consist of U.S. political and military support for the Iraqi opposition's efforts to overthrow Saddam Hussein. He was interviewed in mid-October 2001.

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terrorists [Editor's Note: see the [interview with a defector](#) on Iraq's alleged terrorist training camp.] and gives them refuge -- but because he is the symbol of defiance of all Western values. He succeeded in throwing the United Nations out. He's violated all of the undertakings that followed the end of the Gulf War. As long as he is there, we are in danger, and we are in danger from terrorist activity.

**We haven't dealt with this threat. This threat has been there for quite a while. What are some of the reasons why?**

We made a fundamental mistake at the end of Desert Storm: we didn't finish the job. Finishing the job would have meant the destruction of Saddam Hussein's military power, which, in turn, would have led to the destruction of his regime. The people who made that mistake were loath to admit it, so they described the situation in unjustifiably sanguine terms. He was, to use the phrase they adopted, in a box, and safely in a box, and we need not be concerned about him. I think that was wrong. It's been wrong all along, and it is demonstrably wrong today.

**Why is it wrong?**

It's wrong because he has weapons of mass destruction, because he has expelled U.N. inspectors. He has violated all of the terms and conditions of the U.N. resolutions that had been allowed to fall into disuse. He is winning. Because he is winning, and because he has awesome capabilities, he poses a continuing threat to us and to others.

**Have we not only ignored the situation, but in fact had several chances that we didn't do the job?**

We didn't do the job, in part because we didn't understand the dangers. I think after Sept. 11 those dangers are now much better understood. But we have passed up one opportunity after another to take action against

Saddam, even action that would have been led by his own Iraqi opposition.

Saddam Hussein is hated throughout Iraq. There is a small group of people who benefit from his regime, but the vast majority of Iraqis suffer terribly under his regime. There is an opposition. The opposition is eager to take action against him. Instead of supporting that opposition, we have held them back.

**There seems to be a bit of a schizophrenic attitude toward the Iraqi National Congress in Washington. Can you define that for us and what it means?**

Yes. The INC is highly regarded on Capitol Hill, and I believe highly regarded by a number of people who know the INC leadership well. It is not held in high regard by the Department of State and the Central Intelligence Agency, who are, together, the architects of the failed Iraq policy, including the mistakes of 1991 and repeated failures to deal with Saddam since then.

**So how has that translated into the debate that is ongoing in Washington right now over future moves?**

It's very clear that the CIA and the State Department are energetic opponents of support to the Iraqi opposition, partly because they believe that we are safe. That's going to get serious reconsideration when we examine the prospect that Saddam Hussein could -- and very possibly will -- transfer weapons of mass destruction to anonymous terrorists, and thereby escape the retaliatory capabilities that have always been the basis for the theory that he's in a box and can't get out.

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**What is the threshold that needs to be reached before that is believable, or before that action might actually be taken?**

I think sensible people looking at the dangers to the United States, recognizing how we failed adequately to contain terrorism before Sept. 11, will conclude that with [Saddam Hussein's] hatred of the United States, with his blood feud with former President Bush --

EXPULSION FROM  
KUWAIT IN 1991.”

[which] could extend to George W. Bush as well -- to leave him in place and wait for him to take action against us is simply too

dangerous.

**So in very practical terms, what does that mean for our policy as of today?**

I think we will need a new policy toward Iraq, because the current policy is to leave Saddam Hussein alone, to subject Iraq to sanctions which are ineffective. They're increasingly being violated by other countries. They're certainly not going to change Saddam's policy, and yet that is the policy of the last administration and, I'm sorry to say, has been the policy of this administration.

**But the president has already stated that we're in a war against terrorism. We will not end until we weed it out, which include states that sponsor or help terrorists. So help a non-Washington audience; translate that for us.**

If the president means what he says -- and I believe he does -- and if he has a disciplined administration support him -- a Department of State, a Central Intelligence Agency, a Department of Defense, a National Security Council -- who consider that it is their responsibility to implement his policies, then they will design a much more aggressive policy toward Iraq and we will no longer leave Saddam Hussein unencumbered. We'll take action against him.

**As far as this war on terrorism, if you were designing it or advising the administration, would you do it differently? Is the war somewhat flawed at this point?**

Well, we're conducting this war now in phases. Always bet on phase one, because phase one always happens. Phase two sometimes happens and sometimes it doesn't. I would have gone about this differently. I would have gone after Iraq immediately. I would not have relegated it to some subsequent phase. But it's all right, as long as we get to phase two. Phase two should be overwhelming support for the Iraqi opposition. They're eager, they're ready to go. I believe they can do it. We haven't done that until now, and the State Department opposes doing it.

[This should be] coupled with plans that could involve the direct application of American military power in support of the Iraqi opposition.

Bombing targets in Iraq without any connection to a strategy seems to me unwise and ineffective. ...

I think the regime of Saddam Hussein is far weaker than most people believe, and what it would take to topple it is a tiny fraction of what was necessary to expel Iraq from Kuwait in 1991.

**Some people will argue, I suppose, that it's not that simple, that it's another quagmire, the INC is not as easy to rely on, and democracy is not an easy thing that you set up quickly. What is your response to that opinion?**

It's certainly true it's not easy. It's not simple. On the other hand, simply waiting until biological weapons show up in this country because we didn't take action against Saddam when we had the opportunity would be foolish and shortsighted, just as it was foolish and shortsighted to not act with vigor against terrorism in the period in which Al Qaeda was developing into the organization it became. Ten years ago, Al Qaeda was nothing. We watched it grow, because after each terrorist act, it was stronger than before. We never challenged it. We never took significant action against it. And these acts of terror were regarded as great triumphs and the basis upon which Al Qaeda became a magnet for people who want to destroy us. ...

**Jim Woolsey told us basically he considers that the last decade of actions, in regards specifically to Iraq, has been feckless. What's your opinion about the policies they developed and why they developed in the way they have?**

Jim's certainly right that the policies were feckless. Saddam Hussein plots the assassination of a former American president. The American response: a cruise missile, in an unoccupied intelligence headquarters. And before the dust had cleared from that missile attack, American officials were at great pains to explain that we had deliberately chosen the middle of the night so nobody would be hurt. We looked ridiculous; we looked ineffective; we looked weak. Saddam must have enjoyed that night.

And the other occasions were similar -- a few missiles here or there. We said we would take action to keep the inspectors in Iraq. We didn't. We didn't take effective action. Even Desert Fox, which was a slightly more aggressive bombing of Iraq, which was intended to restore the inspection regime, ended without ever restoring the inspection regime. One encounter after the other, and the winner in each round was Saddam Hussein. I don't think there's any doubt about that.

### **What's your opinion on the use of courts to deal with terrorism?**

I don't think you can use the courts against sovereign states. You certainly can't use them against thugs like Saddam Hussein. If you manage to get your hands on an individual terrorist, I suppose you could try it. But these fellows are not working for themselves; they're working for governments like Saddam Hussein's Iraq. To focus our attention on the individuals who are hired to commit murder rather than the people who hire them is a great mistake. ...

### **The secretary of state's policies seem to be, to some extent, based on the fact that you need the coalition, and the coalition is endangered if one, for instance, goes after Iraq. What is correct or wrong about that belief?**

First of all, I have serious doubts about the extent to which we need a coalition. I don't know what this coalition is, who's in it, who's out of it, where you get your membership card. Can you be expelled if you're not doing certain minimum things? Are the Saudis in it? Are they out of it? The Syrians support terror -- are they in, are they out? It's a very vague concept, and an insubstantial one.

Under the best of circumstances, a coalition is a means to an end. If we confuse means and ends and the coalition becomes an end in itself, then we won't win the war on terror, because a broad coalition is not dedicated to winning the war on terror.

### **So why does Colin Powell believe this?**

I think Colin Powell is simply wrong about this, just as I think he was wrong about the end of the Gulf War. He was in favor of leaving Saddam standing, and we now know that that was a very costly mistake. Tens of thousands of people have died since, and Americans are exposed to an unprecedented danger. I think he's wrong now in believing that the coalition is more important than effectively going after those states that sponsor terrorism. If the coalition is going to protect a terrorist state like Saddam, then to hell with the coalition.

### **Some will say that a coalition is necessary for intelligence reasons, for financial closing down of systems. ...**

All of these claims about the benefits of coalition are subject to detailed analysis. Are we getting intelligence that we can rely on that we would not

get if it were our policy to go after Iraq? I haven't seen anyone demonstrate that any country is giving us valuable intelligence that would be withheld if it were our policy to replace Saddam Hussein. Indeed, some of the intelligence that we're getting is coming from countries who would be delighted if we went after Saddam Hussein.

In terms of the financial, the effort to control funds going to terrorists, I have not heard anyone identify a country that would be unwilling to cooperate in that regard, but is doing so today, if we were go after Saddam Hussein.

**The INC maintains that, to some extent, the coalition of Arab nations -- friends of the United States, Saudi Arabia, for instance -- would not be very interested in seeing help to the INC, because you end up, perhaps, with then a democratic Iraq, [which might be detrimental to their own regimes]. Do you believe that that is part of what's going on here?**

There may be an element of that. The Saudis certainly do not want to see the dominoes falling where the dominoes are leaders who use intimidation to stay in power, and [who] live very well at the expense of their own country. That's a fair description of the Saudis, in my opinion.

But I also think the Saudis realize that they are threatened by Saddam. If Saddam had not made the mistake in 1991 of stopping too soon, he would have overwhelmed Saudi Arabia too, and the Saudis knew that, which is why they were our coalition partners. So they want to see him out of the way.

What the Saudis fear, and what others in the region fear, is an insubstantial, ineffective, halfhearted effort against Saddam, because they are left in a dangerous neighborhood with Saddam still there, after having provoked him fecklessly. So it's the fecklessness of American policy that stands in the way of unifying the Gulf states against Saddam. ...

**What would need to happen, in your viewpoint, for the administration to turn towards Iraq?**

I think we're going to turn towards Iraq, because it's impossible to claim victory in the war against terrorism when a man who supports terror continues to occupy power in Iraq. But the important change came with the discovery that anthrax, a lethal biological weapon, can be delivered anonymously to Americans. It was done on a small scale, by posting letters with anthrax in them. But surely the lesson of that is that we can be

attacked anonymously with biological weapons.

So the argument on which those prepared to accept Saddam Hussein forever have based their case -- which is that we can retaliate and punish him so severely that he won't attempt to use his weapons of mass destruction -- that argument is out the window, because it is now clear that he has the option of providing weapons of mass destruction to anonymous terrorists. That is a threat that this country would be foolish to accept.

**But doesn't it then have to be proven that the anthrax in the hands of the terrorists in the United States that are sending it to our news media and to our government officials is Iraqi anthrax?**

No, not at all. In fact, I rather doubt that it's Iraqi anthrax. But what the delivery of anthrax through the mail forces us to consider is a range of options available to Saddam Hussein that we didn't consider before. Because the argument that we could deter Saddam by threatening to destroy him if he used weapons of mass destruction against us is no longer relevant, if you allow the possibility that he could deliver weapons of mass destruction through anonymous third parties. And there's no question he has the capacity to do that. ...

Let me put it this way: Iraq's time will come. Either that, or we will end the war against terrorism without a victory, as we ended the war against Saddam Hussein in 1991 without a victory. ...

**Does that mean that, once you've done with Iraq, you need to turn your attention to Iran and to Syria?**

There are a number of countries that have been supporting terrorism. Many of them get very little benefit out of it. On the other hand, there's been no cost. So as they look at the costs and benefits of offering hospitality, safe haven to terrorists, they have concluded that on balance it's a good thing for them to do. If now we impose serious costs, if we say to them, "If you support terrorism, you're going to be at war with the United States, and you may be destroyed in the process," I think several of these governments will simply get out of the support of terrorism business. It will be too costly, the risks will be too great, and they will exercise some rational judgment and decide they're not going to do that anymore.

**But isn't there an example of basically going after another terrorist state? The attacks on Libya during the Reagan administration didn't seem to dissuade other terrorist states.**



It is true that when the Reagan administration went after Libya, it succeeded only in repressing Libyan terrorism. It wasn't followed up when terrorism began to show up elsewhere, and that was the mistake. Because we didn't say when we went after [Qaddafi] [that] we will go after anyone else who supports terrorism. The ball was dropped at that point, particularly during the long period of the Clinton administration.

**... What's your opinion of what the evidence is out there [against Iraq], and why is it relevant?**

There's a great deal of circumstantial evidence that Iraq was involved in the 1993 attempt on the World Trade Center. Ramzi Yousef, who sits in jail now, was traveling on an Iraqi passport. There were lots of communications back to Iraq that suggest there were people in Iraq who were at least cognizant of the operation and possibly even directing it. Laurie Mylroie has done some serious work on this, and it's very convincing. It's not conclusive at this stage. It was the view of the chief FBI officer who dealt with the case, who passed away, that Iraq was involved. We may never be able to prove conclusively whether Iraq was involved or not, but there's strong circumstantial evidence that suggests Iraq was indeed involved.

**Why is that relevant to the decisions being made today?**

I don't think it is relevant to the decisions being made today. What is relevant to the decisions being made today is one simple question: Does Saddam Hussein, in power in Iraq, in possession of weapons of mass destruction, pose a threat to the United States that is of such a magnitude that we had better take action before he takes action against us? That's the issue. It has little to do with the past history.

But we do know that he has connections with terrorist networks, that he has training facilities for terrorists. At Salman Pak, there's a facility that has mock-ups of a variety of aircraft so that hijackers can be trained. We know that he has motive; we know he has capability. It's a question of whether we wait and hope for the best.

**We talked to a refugee from Iraq who INC has been working with, a gentleman who knows what's been happening at Salman Pak. How believable is the evidence that is out there? What we're told is that terrorists are being trained from many Arab nations, some fundamentalists. They're being trained in how to take over planes with knives and/or pens, and how to use them as a terrorist act. Is it**

**believable? Is it relevant? Why is it important?**

I think it's believable. Look. I don't believe that we will again experience an attack exactly like that of Sept. 11. For one thing, we now know that you never yield control of the aircraft. Instructions to pilots were exactly the opposite, before Sept. 11. So it isn't going to be a repetition.

We're always fighting the last war. I can't tell you what form a new terrorist attack will take. The one that troubles me the most is the use of biological weapons, disseminated not by Iraqi intelligence officials, but by terrorists who are prepared to commit suicide, who would cheerfully kill millions of Americans, if they could do it. All that remains is to organize their entry into the United States together with those biological agents. And that is something that Saddam Hussein and his intelligence apparatus is in a position to do.

So we can either hope he doesn't do what we know he can do, and wait, or we can consider that the threat is large enough to justify action today.

**But is the threat alone enough? Doesn't evidence need to be compiled so that one understands that there is a tie to Iraq and terrorist acts, before making a move to include them this war on terrorism?**

No. I don't know why we would say to ourselves, "Saddam Hussein has biological weapons. He has a well-known hatred of the United States. He spoke approvingly of the attacks on Sept. 11. But despite all of that, we will not take any action against him until we find evidence that he did what." This is a question of protecting ourselves, and we are in a situation where the only credible defense has to include a strong offense. It is too easy to get into the United States. It is too easy to recruit suicide bombers. It is too easy to disseminate weapons of mass destruction. So either we take this to the enemy, or we wait, and hope the enemy chooses not to take it to us. But if we wait, it will be his choice, and not ours.

**There has been some reporting on the meetings of the Defense Policy Board and the importance of this very influential group of former and present day policy makers. You're still the chair, right?**

Yes. ...

**Can you in any way define the importance of the board, in general terms?**

Well, I think the importance of the board is really the importance of the individuals who serve on it. When you have people like Henry Kissinger and James Schlesinger and Harold Brown and Newt Gingrich and Tom Foley and others applying their considerable intelligence and experience to a difficult issue, that counts for something. And they have done that, and they can all speak for themselves about their own views.

**What is the relevance that there are representatives of the INC there, giving testimony to this influential group?**

I wouldn't characterize that part of the deliberation in that way. We thought it was useful for them to meet some of the opposition, so that they would understand who among the opponents of Saddam might be available to help rid the world of Saddam.

**Are we still basically at war with Iraq after ten years? We've been bombing them time and time again, here and there; we assume Iraq is back in the business of biological, chemical and nuclear, probably. Is this a war that's continuing? Or do we not understand, really, the reality of what's going on here?**

What has happened is that, after the defeat of Saddam's forces in Kuwait in 1991, and the imposition of a number of U.N. resolutions aimed at protecting the world against his weapons of mass destruction, we have lost one engagement after another. The result is that those U.N. resolutions are now in the trash can. He's simply defied them, and gotten away with it. There are no inspectors in Iraq today, so we don't know what he is doing. But there's every reason to believe that he continues aggressively to pursue the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction.

So he's no longer in Kuwait. But he's very much in power in Iraq, because he is unchallenged in Iraq. It seems to me foolish in the extreme not to challenge his power and authority in Iraq, since so many Iraqis would gladly join in the effort to do that.

**Why is it that we still haven't released the \$90 million promised to them? Can you shed any light on that?**

The money that was promised to the Iraqi opposition was never spent by the Clinton administration, because they were basically opposed to the policy. So far, that has been the attitude of the Department of State even in this administration, despite a very strong declaration in the platform on which President Bush ran, and despite, I think, the president's own

instincts. So it's going to take a while before some parts of this government come to the inevitable conclusion that, as long as Saddam is in the position he's in, with the weapons he possesses, we are in danger. And I have no doubt that eventually even my friends at the State Department will come to that conclusion. ...

**The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the anthrax attacks that are taking place now ... in some ways, were these inevitable?**

... An attack on this scale was inevitable, because we failed to respond to lesser attacks, and the terrorists were emboldened by their successes. And make no mistake about it: every time they killed Americans or carried out an attack against American property abroad, they considered that they had achieved a victory. They determined to go from victory to victory, and we did not interfere with that. ...

**Is there any point about Iraq one must understand so that an educated view can be made?**

It's important to recognize that Iraq is a country with an enormously talented people, and that is well understood by the rest of the Arab world. So there is real concern when the rest of the Arab world observes suffering in Iraq, which is now widely attributed, I think wrongly, to the embargo that's been in effect for many years. That is very different from believing that the Arab world supports Saddam Hussein, or that it would not welcome the elimination of Saddam Hussein's regime. I think there would be dancing in the streets if Saddam were removed from power, and that reaction of the Iraqi people would be reflected in the attitude of the Arab world, generally. So the notion that if we go after Iraq we are somehow going to advance in the direction of a war against Islam that will turn out to be far worse for us, I think is really quite mistaken. ...

**The common belief is that our soldiers are not welcomed very easily in any Arab nation today, even when there is no battle going on. It's hard for an American public to believe that the Arab allies will indeed welcome us with open arms in any endeavor against any other Arab nation. Is that a mistaken a view?**

Yes, I think it's a mistaken view. This idea of Arab solidarity is complete nonsense. It's been nonsense for as long as I can remember. They're at each other's throats all the time. Saddam invades Kuwait. You have a war between Iraq and Iran. Although Iran is not an Arab nation, it's a Muslim

nation. You have Jordan fighting Syria in the 1970s. It's just nonsense to suggest that there's solidarity. There is no solidarity there. ...

### **If we go into Iraq and we take down Hussein?**

Then I think it's over for the terrorists.

### **Why so optimistic?**

Because having destroyed the Taliban, having destroyed Saddam's regime, the message to the others is, "You're next." Two words. Very efficient diplomacy. " You're next, and if you don't shut down the terrorist networks on your territory, we'll take you down, too. Is it worth it?" Of course it isn't worth it. It isn't worth it for any of them.

**The nightmare scenario is that we get bogged down in Afghanistan, we can't find bin Laden in some cave. We go into Iraq, we have problems, we're hit back at home with biological weapons or whatever; we lose the public, or start losing the public. Things start getting rattled. It's not clean. It's difficult. What happens?**

... I think we will be vulnerable in a way that this country has never been vulnerable before. And this is not a war we cannot afford to lose.

### **So we have to win this war?**

We have to win this war, which is why I'm confident that we will not seek to win it in the cheapest and easiest of all ways, which is to define it so that it is already won. There was that old line about Vietnam: that we should declare victory and go home. You can't do that in this war. Declare victory; but if you haven't won victory, you're as vulnerable as before you made the declaration. So that isn't an option.

### **Does Washington understand that?**

I think the president understands that. I think the secretary of defense understands it. I think the vice president understands it, and I hope others understand it.

**Does the State Department get won over, or does the State Department**

## at some point argue their case to the death?

There are some very intelligent and talented people at the Department of State, and the secretary himself is immensely talented. They'll come to the right conclusion at the end. But they're going to have to work through a lot of historical beliefs before they get there.

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