

The Unasked Questions

by Harry Browne

The other evening Connie Chung on CNN interviewed two Iraqi women living in the U.S. One hoped for peace, the other wanted the U.S. military to unseat Saddam Hussein -- thinking, I suppose, that whoever takes his place will be a kind, benevolent statesman (like all the other kind, benevolent leaders of the world).

The woman who wanted war maintained that Hussein would never disarm voluntarily. I waited in vain, as I so often do, for the interviewer to ask the obvious question:

"Why should Saddam Hussein disarm, when no other country is disarming?"

This prompted me to wonder how many times I've watched an interview and waited for an obvious question to be asked -- only to see the interviewer ignore the obvious and continue with his scripted questions.

I could think of quite a few examples. Here are those concerning Iraq that come to mind now. . . .

Liberating the Iraqis

Assertion: The Iraqi people will be far better off after we unseat Saddam Hussein.

Question: On what do you base that expectation? Have you noticed what's been going on in Afghanistan since the U.S. government lost interest and turned its attention to Iraq?

Those Awful Weapons

Assertion: Saddam Hussein has weapons of mass destruction. You can't allow such a dictator to have such weapons.

Question: If that's the case, why didn't the America threaten Leonid Brezhnev of the Soviet Union the way it's threatening Saddam Hussein now?

Dealing with Dictators

Assertion: You can't do business with dictators.

Question: Then why is George Bush enlisting the support of dictators in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Pakistan, and other countries to make war against Iraq?

War Crimes

Assertion: When the war is over, Saddam Hussein must be prosecuted for war crimes.

Question: Since the war hasn't even started yet, how can he be accused of war crimes already?

Revenge

Assertion: Saddam Hussein even tried to assassinate President Bush's father. Our national honor demands that we unseat this evil man.

Question: Are you aware of what happened when the Austrian government tried to avenge the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand by the Serbs in 1914? The world was plunged into World War I -- a holocaust that caused the deaths of millions of innocent people. How do you know that won't happen in the current situation?

The Evidence

Assertion: President Bush is right, but he hasn't made his case to the American people. He needs to make the evidence against Hussein public.

Question: Since President Bush has been claiming for over a year to have evidence that he hasn't revealed, why are you so sure there is any evidence?

Trusting the Untrustworthy

Assertion: I trust my President and my government.

Question: After the Gulf War, it turned out that all the reasons for going to war had been false -- no Iraqi troops massed on the Saudi Arabia border, no babies ripped from incubators by Iraqi troops in Kuwaiti hospitals. Most of the same people who were in charge then are in the current administration. Why should we trust them again?

Chemical & Biological Weapons

Assertion: We know Saddam Hussein used chemical and biological weapons during the war against Iran.

Question: Then why did the Reagan administration support him so wholeheartedly in that war?

Proving a Negative

Assertion: We've waited for two years for Saddam Hussein to come clean. It's obvious he's not going to. We should go into Iraq, remove him, and destroy the weapons.

Question: But suppose he doesn't have such weapons. How can he prove this when whatever he says is branded a lie by George Bush? Given what's happened so far, we can assume that even if Hussein said, "I give up; here are my weapons," George Bush would claim Hussein is still lying, is still hiding more weapons, and must be disarmed by force. So how can Hussein possibly satisfy George Bush?

Sacrifice

Assertion: We must all make some sacrifices for security in this awful War against Terrorism.

Question: What sacrifices are you making?

Whom Should We Trust?

We know that politicians lie. They've lied to us about Social Security, about the projected costs of Medicare, about surpluses that never existed, about the Gulf War, about enough matters to fill an encyclopedia.

The fact that we're now talking about national security shouldn't cause us to have more faith in government and politicians. Quite the contrary: because it's our lives that are at stake, we should be more skeptical than ever.

Unfortunately, the press -- who should be asking the skeptical questions for us -- is little more than an adjunct of the government, accepting political pronouncements as gospel.

That leaves it up to us. We must be vigilant, assertive in demanding answers-- and sometimes noisy.