

**THE BLOG**

Why's North Korea Now Not What Iraq Was Then?

By Marty Kaplan

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Whatever happened to Bush's pre-emptive war doctrine?

At his White House birthday news conference with the Canadian prime minister, W was asked what kind of threat North Korea poses. Just about everything he said about North Korea today, he could also have said about Iraq in 2002 and 2003 — but didn't.

Today, Bush says it's difficult to tell what's really going on in a closed society like North Korea. But back then, he was swaggeringly confident when purveying the intelligence about Iraq that proved catastrophically unreliable.

Today, Bush says it's really hard to know what's going on Kim Jung Il's mind — we don't know his intentions. But Bush had no problem playing clairvoyant to Saddam Hussein; our presidential Great Karnak told us back then that Saddam was planning to give WMD's to Al-Qaeda for use against us.

Today, Bush says that the best way to deal with the nuclear proliferation threat posed by North Korea is to rely on the nonproliferation security initiative. But in Iraq, the best way wasn't a multinational diplomatic initiative; it was military shock and awe.

Today, Bush says our message to North Korea is, There is opportunity for you if you verifiably disarm. But when Hans Blix and teams of arms inspectors told Bush they couldn't find WMD's in Iraq, Bush's response to verifiable disarmament was to force the inspectors to leave.

Today, Bush says the best way to send a message to North Korea is to work with the United Nations. It can't be just the US trying to solve a problem, he says, reminding us that diplomacy takes a while, and that we need to take that time, work in concert with a variety of partners, and send one unified message. But back then, Bush was contemptuous of the UN, dismissed diplomacy, and instead of creating a broad international consensus with a single message, he was forced to resort to a Pontemkin coalition to camouflage his own isolation and deflect attention from the global cacophony.

So why is North Korea now different from Iraq then?

Maybe it's because there's no cockamamie neo-con cabal's domino theory to "fix" things in East Asia, like the Iraq war was going to fix things for Israel and the Middle East. Or maybe it's because North Korea has no oil. Or because we have no need for long-term military bases at the top of the Korean peninsula. Or because our armed forces are stretched so thin Iraq that it's unthinkable to task them further. Or because W's polls are so low, the only people who'd cheer a pre-emptive North Korean strike are already for him. Or because W's so pissed at Cheney that Bush is now doing the opposite of what Dick's telling him.

Or maybe it's because W actually learned something from Iraq.

(beat)

Nah.

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