



IIPS
Colloquium
19 March 2003

The Bush Administration and Public Opinion in the US

Speaker: Mr Daniel Bob

On 19 March 2003, the day on which the US ultimatum to Iraq expired, the International Institute for Policy Studies held a colloquium on the theme “The Bush Administration and Public Opinion in the US.” The guest speaker was Mr Daniel Bob, former assistant to US senator William Roth.

Mr Bob described how the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 had brought about a shift from the fundamental “deterrence and containment” strategy of the Cold War era to a new strategy that calls for the eradication of threats using pre-emptive attacks. Iraq is the first instance of the application of this new strategy. Mr Bob then presented the results of the latest public opinion polls in the US, which indicate support for the Bush administration and a popular belief that there is no viable alternative to war against Iraq—in marked contrast to public sentiment in other countries. He

attributed these results to the US media’s relatively benign coverage of the Bush administration (which is in sharp contrast to its portrayal by the mass media in other countries). Mr Bob also stated that it is difficult to predict whether the administration will continue to enjoy such favorable treatment by the US media, and went on to cite the example of President Bush’s father, who enjoyed very high ratings after the first Gulf War in 1991, yet went down to defeat in the subsequent presidential election of 1992.

Despite his assertion that Americans tend to be united once a course of action has been decided upon, Mr Bob predicted that, once the war is over, there will be an outburst of dissent, particularly with regard to the state of the US economy. The number of US citizens who disapprove of the Bush administration’s economic policies is rising, and a separate survey conducted at the beginning of March indicates that those who do not approve are now in the majority.

Mr Bob’s speech was followed by a lively question-and-answer session, in which members of the audience posed questions such as: “Even if the current US strategy turns out to be successful, is it not a matter for concern that the hawks in the Bush administration are becoming so powerful?” and “Despite the need for a clear objective in war, why did the Bush administration first state that the purpose of the war was the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, but then switch mid-stream and instead cite as the purpose the ouster of Saddam Hussein?”.

