

QUESTIONS I HAVE ABOUT WAR WITH IRAQ

Bishop John Harrower, 4 February 2003

War: Is it necessary?
Ever moral?
Should a Christian saddle up with Dubya?

Pacifism is the option to refuse to participate in any war. The words of Jesus, 'if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, you turn him the other also', are appealed to as supporting pacifism. I am not persuaded by this option when confronting evil aggression.

The 'Non-Pacifist' Christian tradition seeks guidance in the so-called 'just war' principles when deciding on going to war and in the conduct of war. These moral principles affirm the sanctity of life both in creation; we are created 'in the image of God', and in redemption; Christ died for us. The Christian non-pacifist believes that life may be taken in order to protect the lives of others. A Christian code regarding the morality of war is principled along issues of peace, power, justice and political possibilities.

As the situation with Iraq stands today, I have a number of questions about whether war with Iraq meets traditional 'just war' criteria. To see military action against Iraq without these questions being answered would lower the bar for a 'just war' to an unacceptable level. My hope is primarily that a non-military solution may be found. However, if not, I would need more convincing answers to the questions I and many Australians (and Christians) have, before I could see this war as 'just'.

'Just war' principles raise significant questions,

1. Resort to war should only be taken by legitimate authority.

In attempting to remove Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) from the evil regime of Saddam Hussein, the international community has decided the legitimate authority to determine war with Iraq lies with the United Nations Security Council. Despite its internal disagreements, the UN Security Council is the only international authority we have, and everything must be done to make it work.

The grave danger we are facing is that 'might becomes right'. In other words, the USA becomes the executor and judge of national and international morality and imposes its own sentence on nation states. If the strongest nation is to become the World Policeman, will war be based on any form of justice, including the right to representation and impartial judgement?

2. There should be a just cause in order to resort to war.

Traditionally the only just cause for war has been that of defence against aggression. Is intervention in a nation that is treating its peoples unjustly and brutally, to be classified as aggression against another nation and therefore justify war? Is the suspicion or fact that Iraq has WMD and has shown itself to be irresponsible in a previous war with Kuwait, sufficient reason to classify it as an aggressor and therefore justify war? Would its refusal to abandon its supplies of WMD be sufficient cause to justify war against it as an aggressor? There are other nations that have also shown themselves to be irresponsible in relationship with other nations and to have acted brutally with their own peoples. Will these other nations also be called to account? What register of nations and criteria for their listing has been established? Who has the authority to establish such a list?

The concept of 'pre-emptive strike' assumes guilt before there is evidence or fact of aggression. Our justice system assumes innocence until proof of guilt or aggression is demonstrated and agreed by legitimate authority. Pre-emptive justice is likely to result in major errors of judgement.

3. The intention of the war is to bring about a greater justice.

It is argued that the removal of Iraq's WMD will bring about a greater justice because it will prevent Iraq inflicting harm on its own peoples and it will be unable to use them in association with terrorist groups or use them on other nations. But there is no evidence that Iraq is massing its forces to attack another nation, or that its WMD are about to be used on another nation. Why has action against Iraq become so urgent? Iraq's support of terrorism and any intention to use its WMD are distinct issues. The former does not justify going to war; many nations support terrorism. Why pick on Iraq? Some have claimed that suicide killings of September 11 were an act of war against the USA but it has not been established that Iraq is responsible for that act.

What plans are in place for Iraq after the proposed war? Will a new regime be more just than the current one? What are the proposals for a new Iraq? Which nations have committed themselves to the long term development of post-Saddam Iraq? The suffering and cost to the people of Iraq, UN soldiers, interfaith relationships and the environment will be enormous.

4. War should be a last resort after all other avenues have been exhausted.

It is clearly vital that the team of weapons inspectors appointed by the United Nations be given every opportunity to fully complete their task to their standards and satisfaction.

It must be asked that even if WMD are found, is there not another way for a just future to be secured?

What then may we conclude?

We must pray for and encourage the ways of peace, including a new attitude in the leaders of the Iraqi people.

We urge our Australian leaders to pursue all alternatives to war.

We demand to know the truth regarding the motives for war.

We express the strongest support for upholding the UN Security Council as the 'legitimate authority' to determine issues of war and peace.

We do not hold that the most powerful nation rules the world.