

A public meeting in St Martin-in-the-Fields on Monday 23 Sept
at 6.30pm for 7pm.

Iraq - a just war?

The case against Saddam Hussain can be summarised as follows, (mostly in Tony Blair's own words):

1. Saddam has twice before started wars of aggression. Over one million people died in them.
2. When the weapons inspectors were evicted from Iraq in 1998 there were still enough chemical and biological weapons remaining to devastate the entire Gulf region.
3. Uniquely Saddam has used these weapons against his own people, the Iraqi Kurds. Scores of towns and villages were attacked. In one attack alone, on the city of Halabja, it is estimated that 5,000 were murdered and 9,000 wounded. According to Amnesty International around 100,000 Kurds died in all. In the destruction of the marshlands in southern Iraq, around 200,000 people were forcibly removed. Many died.
4. Saddam has a nuclear weapons programme, denied for years, that was only disrupted after inspectors went in. According to the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS), if he could get weapons grade fissile material from abroad, then within a few months his engineers 'could probably produce nuclear warheads'.
5. For the last four years there have been no inspections, no monitoring, despite constant pleas and months of negotiating with the UN. Saddam is in breach of 23 outstanding UN obligations requiring him to admit inspectors and to disarm.
6. Meanwhile Iraq's people are oppressed and kept in poverty. With the Taleban gone, Saddam is unrivalled as the world's worst regime: brutal, dictatorial, with a wretched human rights record.

7. Given that history, to allow him to use the weapons he has or get the weapons he wants, would be an act of gross irresponsibility and we should not countenance it. It must be clear that he must be disarmed; that there can be no more conditions, no more games, no more prevaricating, no more undermining of the UN's authority.

8. Should the will of the UN be ignored, action must follow. Diplomacy is vital, but when dealing with dictators diplomacy has to be backed by the certain knowledge in the dictator's mind that behind the diplomacy is the possibility of force being used.

So let us test the case for using force, in making war on Iraq, against the Principles for Military Intervention set out in the recent report of the *International Commission on Sovereignty and State Intervention*, (ICISS), themselves explicitly based on the Christian principles of a Just war.

- A. Just Cause. 'For military intervention to be warranted there must be serious and irreparable harm occurring to human beings, or imminently likely to occur, taking the form of large scale loss of life or large scale ethnic cleansing'. Plainly there has been loss of life on a huge scale in Saddam's past military activities. But is there an imminent likelihood of his starting another war? The IISS calls the possibility of an Iraqi nuclear breakout 'a real risk that could dramatically and quickly shift the balance of power in the Middle East'. For example, if Iraq successfully tested a nuclear device capable of being married to a SCUD missile, and then re-occupied Kuwait, threatening to defend his position there by nuclear means, any allied war plan to re-evict him would be very seriously compounded, to say the least. Pre-emptive self-defence can certainly be justified, but only if there is a clear and present danger in every sense of that phrase. You may feel that the present situation, as set out above, still falls short on clarity and imminence.
- B. Right Intention. 'The primary purpose of the intervention must be to halt or avert human suffering'. We may concede that any US-led intervention in Iraq would be likely to have this in mind, rather than the baser motives sometimes canvassed of securing a

tighter grip on Middle Eastern oil or finishing Bush family unfinished business. The ICISS adds that this intention is 'better assured with multilateral operations clearly supported by regional opinion and the victims concerned'. Any operations are likely to be multilateral in the sense that Britain at least will be involved. But regional sentiment at present is against such action and the victims have not been asked.

- C. Last Resort. Military intervention can only be justified when every non-military option for the prevention or peaceful resolution of the crisis has been explored, with reasonable grounds for believing lesser measures would not have succeeded'. You may feel that if the programme suggested above for disarming Saddam through UN action has been followed through and failed yet again, this criterion will have been met sufficiently.
- D. Proportional means. 'The scale, duration and intensity of the planned military intervention should be the minimum necessary to secure the defined human protection objective'. A wide variety of possible military options has been canvassed, and it is fruitless at this stage to try to evaluate them. The Americans are sure to try for minimum casualties to their own side and - to their credit - in recent operations have made real efforts to minimise 'collateral damage'. The point has been made that since disarming Saddam through 'regime change' may well require urban fighting this could be very costly both to soldiers on both sides and especially to civilians. Baghdad is unlikely to fall as easily as Kabul. And there is much well-founded concern that by far the most likely scenario for Saddam actually to use such weapons of mass destruction as he has would be the imminent threat of his own demise. The worry, as it has been put, is 'T-2' - what he will do two days before he is turned into toast.
- E. Reasonable prospect of success. 'There must be a reasonable chance of success in halting or averting the suffering which has justified the intervention, with the consequences of action not likely to be worse than the consequences of inaction'. There is every reason to believe that military action against Iraq, especially unilateral action (i.e. by the US and UK), will be seriously destabilising through the whole region and not many grounds for

hoping it will set flowing a democratic tidal wave. If the US were to make a real and early commitment to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian problem, by setting up negotiations on a final status political blueprint fair to both sides, it might help to make any regional reaction more tractable. But that, regrettably seems very unlikely. And the international community needs a much clearer sense of who or what will replace Saddam after he has been 'disarmed', whether the new regime will be much better, and whether the allies will be able and willing to cope with the 'nation-building' that will be needed thereafter.

- F. Right Authority. 'Security Council authorization should in all cases be sought before any military action is embarked upon'. If the Security Council balks then action by regional or sub-regional organisations can be justified under Chapter VIII of the Charter, subject to their seeking *post facto* authorisation by the Council. It remains to be seen how this aspect will play out.

So what general conclusion do we come to? The American Bishops, in their 'Reflection' adopted in the fall of 1992, entitled *The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace*, gave a useful summary of the Just War tradition, and concluded that the criteria taken as a whole must be satisfied in order to override the strong presumption against the use of force. You must use your own judgement on that. They went on:

'We also recognise that the application of these principles requires the exercise of the virtue of prudence; people of goodwill may differ on specific conclusions. The Just War tradition is not a weapon to be used to justify a political conclusion or a set of mechanical criteria that automatically yields a simple answer, but a way of moral reasoning to discern the ethical limits of action. Policy makers, advocates and opponents of the use of force need to be careful not to apply the tradition selectively to justify their own positions.'

Heaven forbid that anyone in St. Martin-in-the-Fields would ever fail live up to the high standard of moral objectivity that the Bishops rightly require.

[1360 words = 9 minutes]