



Living by the Sword – War on Iraq

February 2003

“But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”
Luke 6:35-26

“Put your sword back in its place” Jesus said to him, “for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.”

Mt 26:52

A war against Iraq seems to be increasingly likely. In the public debate in Australia the following factors appear to the importance to those reflecting on a possible war:

- Does Iraq have weapons of mass destruction? If so, how many and how dangerous would they be?
- What is the likelihood that Saddam Hussein’s regime would use weapons of mass destruction or pass them to terrorist groups, if the regime still has any?
- How many Iraqis does Saddam Hussein’s regime continue to murder and torture and what is the likelihood that the regime will carry out another mass atrocity in the future, as it did against the Kurds in the late 1980s and against the Marsh Arabs in the south in the early 1990s?
- How many civilians will die if the US leads a war against Iraq? There is little concern for how many Iraqi soldiers might be killed, most of whom are conscripts.
- Who will repair Iraq after the war?
- What Government or regime will replace Saddam Hussein’s regime after the war?
- Will a war on Iraq fuel terrorism for years to come?
- What is the US’s motivation for a war on Iraq? Is it concern about freedom, democracy, human rights and weapons of mass destruction or is it about oil?

In effect, what is considered is a cost benefit analysis. Will the ‘benefits’ of a war outweigh the ‘costs’. This fits with ‘just war theory’.

Just War Theory versus the Life, Teaching and Ministry of Jesus

Just war theory is based on the premise that war is undesirable but sometimes might be necessary to prevent a greater evil. Its elements are:

- There must be a just cause, not be a matter of retribution;
- It must be as a last resort;
- It must be waged by a legitimate authority;
- It must use proportional means and target only combatants; and
- There must be a reasonable chance of success.

There is no evidence that, the Justice and International Mission Unit is aware of, that ‘just war theory’ had any real influence on the decision to go to war or the conduct of any war before the late 1800s. In fact, there is plenty of evidence to demonstrate it was ignored, with civilians being regularly massacred in European wars or dying from the indirect impact of armies looting and pillaging their way across the countryside.

In contrast, a rejection of lethal violence is something noteworthy in Jesus’ ministry. Jesus never encouraged violent resistance to the oppressive, murderous and brutal Roman occupation. When tempted in the desert, he rejects the worldly power to coerce offered to him. Jesus called on his followers to love their enemies (Mt 5 and Luke 6). This is something Paul repeats in his letter to the Roman Christian community (Romans 12). Jesus asks that his followers do not repay evil with evil, but rather to be assertive by the use of surprising initiatives that may expose the enemy’s unjust and cruel actions and lead to a transformation of peace with justice (Matthew 5:39-41).

For the first three centuries, Christians understood Christ’s teaching to mean that they should be pacifists and many died for their refusal to serve in Roman armies. ‘Just war theory’ only emerged in the 5th Century as Christianity was adopted by the European ruling authorities.



TEACH PEACE;
PROMOTE
NON-VIOLENCE

As Christians the call from the Gospel would appear to be to find ways to promote peace with justice in our world through non-violent means. There will always be people ready to resort to lethal force and our contribution to such action is not needed.

Inconsistent approach to social justice and human rights

While it is possible to find examples of actions taken by the Governments of the US, UK and Australia to uphold human rights and promote social justice, it is equally possible to find examples where all three Governments have acted unjustly and with callous disregard for the welfare of millions of people around the world.

For example, US military spending for 2002 was US\$379 billion, an increase of US\$48 billion compared to the previous year. The amount of money needed to eliminate the unpayable debts of impoverished countries is estimated to be around US\$400 billion. It is estimated that this would save the lives of 7 million children a year assuming the money saved on debt repayments was spent on health and education. Yet this level of support for debt relief is not forth-coming.

Both the US and UK continue to be the subject of criticism from Amnesty International for their on-going sales of arms and security equipment to governments that use that equipment to murder and torture their own people.

In 2001, army-backed paramilitaries in Colombia were responsible for most of the 4,000 politically motivated murders during the year, including trade unionists, Church workers and other human rights defenders. Despite this, the US Administration continues to pour in hundreds of millions of dollars of military support to the Colombian army.

Such an inconsistent approach to human rights and social justice calls into question how genuine the Governments of the US, UK and Australia are about the well-being of the people of Iraq. This is especially the case when it is considered that it has largely been the actions of US Administrations and UK Governments that have kept in place economic sanctions on Iraq responsible for the deaths of between one and two million people. Extensive background material on the economic sanctions on Iraq can be found at the Justice and International Mission Unit website at <http://vic.uca.org.au/jawm/Internationalissues/Iraq/front.htm>.

Saddam Hussein's Brutality

Details of the human rights abuses that have been committed by the regime of Saddam Hussein can be found at the websites of Amnesty International (<http://web.amnesty.org/web/aboutai.nsf>) and Human Rights Watch (<http://www.hrw.org/>).

Human Rights Watch reports that Saddam Hussein's regime has been responsible for between 250,000 – 290,000 'disappearances', the vast majority date from the 1980's. These include about 100,000 Kurds that 'disappeared' after a brutal campaign waged against by the Iraq army in 1988-1989. A ruthless campaign was also waged against the Marsh Arabs after the 1991 Gulf War, when there was an US encouraged uprising against Saddam Hussein in southern Iraq.

Amnesty International reports that scores of people continue to be murdered and tortured by the regime each year. However, the organisation has expressed concern that the UK Government has used its reports on human rights abuses in Iraq for "cold and calculated manipulation" and "political opportunism" to justify a war on Iraq.

In contrast to the brutality carried out by the regime, the regime has provided free health care and education to all Iraqis wherever possible.

Civilian Casualties from a War

A detailed report of the estimated number of civilian casualties from a war on Iraq has been provided by Medact, an organisation of health professionals that exists to highlight and take action on the health consequences of war, poverty and environmental degradation. The report "*Collateral damage, the health and environmental costs of war on Iraq*" estimated that in a conventional war between 49,000 and 140,000 Iraqi civilians would be killed or die within three months of the war as a consequence of the conflict. This excludes any possible civil war that might follow a US-led war. In addition the report estimated that up to 4 million people could be killed if nuclear weapons were used. The full report can be downloaded from the Medact website at <http://www.medact.org> or that of the Medical Association for the Prevention of War at <http://www.mapw.org.au>.

A report from the Oxford Research Group “Iraq: Consequences of a war” from October 2002 estimated 10,000 civilian deaths would result from fighting in Baghdad alone. This did not include any indirect civilian deaths from the bombing of civilian infrastructure that is regarded as military targets by US war planners, such as power stations. The report can be downloaded from <http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/1outline-publications.htm>.

A strictly confidential UN document was leaked in December 2002. The report stated that 60% of the 26.5 million people of Iraq are dependent on the monthly food ration provided by the regime. A war will disrupt the food distribution and places these 16 million people in danger of starvation and disease. It stated that for two million children and one million pregnant and lactating women the nutritional status will be “dire”. The report estimated that up to 500,000 Iraqis could require medical treatment for wounds and injuries as a result of a war. The document is available at <http://www.casi.org.uk/info/undocs/war021210notes.html>.

An international study team visited Iraq and produced a report “Our Common Responsibility. The Impact of a New War on Iraqi Children” which was released on 26 January 2003. It found that 500,000 Iraqi children are acutely malnourished or underweight currently. These children would be particularly vulnerable to fatal diseases in the case of a war. Disturbingly, the report found that **the effect of the sanctions on Iraqi society and the threat of war meant 40% of Iraqi children did not believe that life was worth living**. The full report can be downloaded from <http://www.warchild.ca>.

Refugees

Action by Churches Together International, a worldwide network of Churches and related agencies working together to meet human need through co-ordinated emergency response, have launched an appeal to prepare for the consequences of a war on Iraq. They estimate the number of refugees from a war on Iraq could vary between 30,000 and 1,500,000, depending on the severity of the war.

The leaked UN report referred to above estimated that there could be up to 2 million people who will flee their homes in a war.

Cost

On 5 December 2002, the *Herald Sun* reported that the US Congressional Budget Office estimated that a short war would cost between US\$44 billion and US\$60 billion.

The Committee on International Security Studies of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences released a report in December 2002 “War with Iraq. Costs, Consequences and Alternatives” that estimated the direct military costs to the US would be between US\$50 billion and US\$140 billion. Repairing the damage from the war and nation building was estimated to cost between US\$30 billion and US\$150 billion. The report can be downloaded from http://www.amacad.org/publications/monographs/War_with_Iraq.pdf.

Alternatives to War

Denis Halliday, former UN Assistant Secretary General, headed the UN “Oil-For-Food” program in Iraq and resigned because he believed the economic sanctions on Iraq were a form of “genocide”. Mr Halliday has argued, from his years of experience in Iraq, that the best hope for a lasting and just solution in Iraq is to lift the economic sanctions in Iraq. This would encourage the Iraqi middle class who have fled the sanctions to return. In the long term the Iraqi middle class are likely to be the best hope for lasting and non-violent change in Iraq.

Mr Halliday’s hope may seem remote, but it can be recalled that there was no war that removed the brutal and murderous dictators Pinochet (in Chile) and Suharto (in Indonesia) from power. While on the subject of General Pinochet, it may be recalled that it was Mr Blair’s Government that assisted him in evading justice for torture and mass murder. This obviously raises serious doubts about how concerned the current UK Government is about not ‘appeasing’ dictators and bringing them to justice for their crimes.

What you can do to express opposition to war

Please write polite and respectful letters to:

The Hon. John Howard MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
Canberra, ACT, 2600

The Hon. Alexander Downer MP
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Parliament House
Canberra, ACT, 2600
Salutation: Dear Minister

The Hon. Simon Crean MP
Leader of the Opposition
Parliament House
Canberra, ACT, 2600
Salutation: Dear Mr Crean



And your local MP

You may wish to draw from the information above in expressing opposition to the war.

There are a couple of ideas that have been circulated that you could add to your letters. One is to include a band aid as a reminder that war will cause death, disability and injuries.

The other idea is to place half a cup of rice in a small plastic bag and include it in your letter. It is suggested that you label the bag with the quote "If your enemies are hungry, feed them. Romans 12:20". If you do this then a couple of points you could make in your letter are:

- Economic sanctions on the Iraqi people have been responsible for the deaths of between one million and two million Iraqis. While Iraq is free to import food, much of the equipment needed to transport the food has been blocked by the sanctions.
- A war will disrupt the food distribution system in Iraq, which is vital to the survival of up to 16 million Iraqis who are dependent on the food ration provided by the regime

Some people are also wearing purple ribbons as a sign of their opposition to a possible war. Ribbons can be ordered by e-mail from purpleforpeace@yahoo.com.au

You can download posters from the website of the Victorian Peace Network to put in the window of your house, in shops or in your workplace to express opposition to a war on Iraq. The address of the website is <http://www.vicpeace.org/>

International Prayer for Peace

Lead me from death to life,
from falsehood to truth,
lead me from despair to hope,
from fear to trust,
lead me from hate to love,
from war to peace,
let peace fill our being,
our world and our universe. Amen

Further Resources

Material against a war on Iraq

- The Victorian Peace Network at <http://www.vicpeace.org>
- The National Council of Churches at http://www.ncca.org.au/dov/iraq_response.html;
- The Medical Association for the Prevention of War at <http://www.mapw.org.au>; and
- Electronic Iraq at <http://electronicIraq.net>

Statements and Actions by the World Council of Churches

These can be found at <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/international/iraq.html>.

Poetry

A group of more than 100 English-language poets have banded together to produce an electronic book of poems speaking out against a war on Iraq. Entitled "100 Poets against the War" the 95-page electronic book can be downloaded free at <http://nthposition.com>.

Background on Iraq

An introduction to Iraq and its political history can be found at the BBC website http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/special_report/iraq/29099.stm or the US State Department <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/6804.htm>.

On going bombing of Iraq

The US and UK airforces continue to bomb Iraq as part of the 'enforcement' of no fly zones in southern and northern Iraq. The Colorado Campaign for Middle East Peace maintains a website that lists incidents of US bombing of Iraq at http://www.ccmeep.org/us_bombing_watch.html.

