

IRAQ



Parliament's debate on Iraq will be caught between two cynical extremes. Saddam Hussain will do whatever it takes to avoid a war. George Bush is no less determined to do whatever it takes to avoid a peace.

I am no lover of Saddam but I will not sign up to the crude greed and reckless immorality that would launch another war on the Middle East.

George Bush will hit Iraq in much the same way a drunk will hit the bottle. And when he's finished, he will go looking for another. Iran, Syria, Saudi Arabia (if an Iraq war results in the overthrow of the current Saudi rulers) it almost doesn't matter. The President will have to turn somewhere else to quench his thirst. In Bush's case it is not just a thirst for dominance but, more particularly, a thirst for oil.

The UN acknowledges that Iraq has made no threat to attack the UK, Europe or the USA. When the weapons Inspectors go back in they will find Iraq has little to threaten others with that was not either destroyed by the Inspectors prior to 1998, or in the constant bombing of the country in the 10 years of the mythical peace it has since lived through.

Iraq's crime is not to have threatened war. It is to have signed oil contracts with Russia and France rather than US companies. The US wants regime change to pursue its interest in oil rights rather than human rights.

If we want to hold Iraq to account for its use of chemical weapons we must do so through international law not an international war. But Saddam would not be in the dock alone. America would have to explain why it supplied Iraq with 'crop spraying helicopters' for use during the Iran-Iraq war (and military equipment to assist with targeting).

The UK would also have to explain the years in which it would not support UN attempts to criticise Iraq, and the £400m in trade credits we gave them only 10 days after the Foreign Office finally condemned the regime.

The coming debate will not, though, be about putting the record straight or assessing the reality of an Iraqi threat. It will be about manipulating public support for a war that should not be fought.

The dossier of allegations will include the same propaganda claims that launched the first Gulf War. We now know that there were no babies plucked from incubators by Iraqi troops in Kuwait. It was a story organised by an American PR firm to boost support for a war. We know too that there were no satellite photos of 250,000 Iraqi troops and 1,500 tanks along the Saudi border, ready for Iraq's next invasion. These were just necessary untruths in the promotion of a war.

British public opinion will be manipulated in the same way today, to present a war as the only way in

which democracy can stand up to tyranny. But in the 10 years since the Gulf War ended the West has done little to further the issues of peace, democracy or social justice in the Middle East.

Bombing Iraqi children hasn't furthered democracy or justice. Nor has abandoning the Palestinians to the most brutal and reactionary Israeli government the country has seen. Still, we will not say when sanctions would end or work on a Middle East Zone 'free of all weapons of mass destruction' would begin.

All this is in the document I have sent MP's about what the weapons Inspectors actually said about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

If MP's cannot vote against a war itself they can vote against the defence estimates needed to pay for it. I refuse to support either the use of UK taxes to support Bush's war, or the assumption that Britain should pay a blood price for an oil contract.

I hope I am not alone in doing so.

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