

THE SCOURGE OF WAR



It was, and still is, the most powerful rallying call of the post-war generation. "We, the peoples of the United Nations, determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind...[will]...unite our strength to maintain international peace and security."

When the UN Charter opened with this preamble it was not hedged in with any of the sophistry that today would justify a war on Iraq, rather than avert one. There were no 'get out' clauses that allowed for a little ritual slaughter when the mood took you; no rationalisation of gratuitous war mongering just to keep the sense buds sharp.

All that was included in an otherwise peace-focused declaration, was the right to individual or collective self-defence. The massive troop deployments by Britain and the US, that threaten to pancake bomb

Iraq in response to a threat that has never been made, are evidence that the UN, and its principles, is being killed off.

If Iraq had the capacity to deliver a threat to global security and the discovery of a few leftover empties from the Iran/Iraq war is scarcely evidence that it does - there are even fewer grounds for believing it would be daft enough to do so. All of Iraq's atrocities have been undertaken with the full knowledge (and consent) of the West. It doesn't make the atrocities any more acceptable but it does explain something of Saddam Hussein's mindset.

Saddam would kill. Maim and slaughter to be the friend of the West. He would also empty his jails and go skinny-dipping with the Weapons Inspectors, if it kept him alive and in power. Odious as his record may be the man will agree to whatever security guarantees and safety checks the West would want....If the object was to avoid a war.

Sadly, there is nothing in Bush's body language or media grunts to suggest that the avoidance of war has ever been on his agenda. Jack Straw's latest statement to the Commons makes this even clearer. Pre-emptive strikes and wars driven by supposition and innuendo are set to create a century of insecurity. The peace dividend is dead. Between them, Blair and Bush have established that the only game in town is the war game.

Those looking for the shelter of a second UN resolution had better think again. The UN will cave in to US demands or be ignored. For Bush it is just a bullfight. In the end the bull is going to get skewered. Play around if you like, cheer or remain silent, but the final outcome remains the same.

It is painful to listen to parliamentary colleagues who believe the UN can somehow save them from having to make a political stand of their own, or can turn an illegal war of aggression into an unavoidable moral act of self-defence. The truth is that the UN is barely a player in the process.

Hans Blix gets summoned to the White House and gets berated for his failure to produce evidence of

Saddam Hussein passing wind - a clear material breach of resolution 1441. In Downing Street as well as on Capitol Hill he is told to take a tougher line. If he cannot find any weapons of mass destruction the US administration would lend him any amount to 'find' on his visits.

How much of the process is driven by Kofi Annan as the head of the UN? None. As January 27th approaches we can expect a string of new revelations/allegations originating from US intelligence sources. There will be too little time to rebuild the claims before the UNMOVIC inspectors report back. The allegations will provide the emotional edge to an argument that will sweep aside the absence of evidence that a war would be justifiable let alone unavoidable. Will Kofi Annan speak out against those who would fabricate the case not for a war but a slaughter? Don't hold your breath.

Someone has to organise a rescue plan that will liberate the UN from its forced detention in Guantanamo Bay; New York. Until then there will be no peace building, internationalism, that can creep back into the UN corridors.

Do we need a new UN resolution to solve this crisis? No. We just need a will to send in the diplomats rather than the Daisy Cutters. Under existing resolutions we could make Iraq an offer it would never refuse.

In exchange for leaving the Weapons Inspectors in Iraq (indefinitely at this stage) the West would lift all but military sanctions on trade with Iraq. The glue that would hold this together would be a new human rights agenda within Iraq itself. The UN could be the central player in this. And everyone, apart from American oil companies, would be a winner.

If Bush had a peace agenda he could claim it for himself. But he hasn't. The real tragedy in this whole crisis is that Bush, without a war plan has no plan at all.

In sombre terms, another confidential UN document warns of the humanitarian consequences of a war on Iraq. Its crude numbers spell out how far we have travelled from the compassion triggered by innocent lives lost in the bombings of 9-11. Up to 250,000 Iraqi citizens will be killed in the bombing and the fighting. Twice that number would require emergency medical treatment that would not be available. Over 2 million children under 5 would be without food, along with 1 million pregnant or lactating women. And almost 1 million Iraqis would become refugees and asylum seekers.

It is hard to see how the spurious cover of a second UN resolution could dress this up as other than a war crime in its own right.

Across the globe there is rising tsunami of non-military opposition to a war of military imperialism. The USA has its biggest ever pre-war, anti-war movement. They, and perhaps they alone, can harness this global resistance to end Bush's honeymoon with America.

If US citizens realise that in the morning, once he has had his way, Bush will respect Americans no more than he respects anyone else, then his Second Term ambitions collapse and the war will be stopped.

Bush may have a passion for regime change, but not when it applies to himself. His daddy went down that way. Dubya's nightmare is that he will do the same.

Before any of the bombers take off we have to convince Bush that the slaughter of Iraqi civilians would also be the death knell for his own second term. There is no morality in the man, only self-interest. To avoid a war, this is the Achilles Heel to aim at.

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