

THE MORALITY AND DANGERS OF A WAR WITH IRAQ

The present tension in the world, brought about by the drumbeat of war playing from the Persian Gulf, is a cause of great concern to many peace loving men and women around the world. Many of people who looked up to the 21st Century as the Millennium of global peace, understanding and solidarity are concerned at the hushed sense of common humanity, commitment to ethical principles and prudential judgment which should govern international relationship. The present US led military grandstanding in the Persian Gulf portends danger to the fragile Middle East situation and is inimical to the global war against terrorism.

Many Christian leaders around the world, including Pope John Paul 11 has called for moderation in resolving this crisis, pointing out that war should never be used as an instrument for peace. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Most Rev R. Williams recently raised serious questions on the moral propriety of a war against Iraq at this point in time. The question in the lips of the opponents of war against Iraq is: Why the rush to war? War is indeed an adventure without return. Violence and war can only bring the peace of the grave; they bring temporary victories not permanent peace. War may bring pride to the victor, but it leads to suffering and shame to the defeated. It may humiliate the defeated, but it does not reform him. War brings bitterness to the survivors and sires brutality in the hearts of the destroyers or victors. War is obsolete.

There may have been a time in the past when war served a negative good, by preventing the growth of an evil force, but the destructive power of modern arsenals of war has raised serious questions about the morality of war for serving a negative good. The idea of 'smart weapons' has not proved the impossibility of collateral damages in modern warfare. The killing of any human being is a great evil and war is about killings and destructions. The country, which does more of the killings and destructions, is always the winner! It is in the light of the dangers of war that Christians, the world over are praying for a peaceful resolution of this conflict. Above all, it is generally held that if the US goes to war against Iraq NOW, it may not have met the criteria of a just war.

There are two moral principles that deal with the justice and conduct of any war. These principles apply to offensive war, that is, where one country strikes another first. Defensive war is always justified, that is where a country faced with an attack from another country, defends her territorial integrity against an unjust aggressor, out of self-defense. The moral principles that should lead to war include among others a just cause (the right of the attacking country has been gravely, permanently and clearly violated by the country that is coming under her attack, the US has not proved beyond reasonable doubt that Iraq has violated her rights or poses immediate threat to her national interest).

The second principle is legitimate authority (if a country violates international law like Iraq, it is the international community, in this case, the UN, which is presently disarming Iraq albeit with difficulties determines how to deal with the situation, no single country should usurp such role). The third principle is the probability of success. This principle implies that the use of force must have serious prospects for success and must not produce evils and disorders graver than the evil to be eliminated. However, as many people have pointed out, war with Iraq would have unpredictable consequences.

The CIA Director, George Tenet in a letter late last year, stated that Saddam Hussein would not likely launch an unprovoked attack on the U.S, but would use any form of biological or chemical weapons to defend his country in the face of a U.S led attack. There are many dangers in any war with Iraq. The U.S has threatened that it would retaliate should Iraq use unconventional weapons on her troops. Thus there is no guarantee that the principle of non-combatant immunity, and the

avoidance of collateral damages, which govern conventional warfare, would be adhered to in the event of war with Iraq. War is hell because it carries maximum human misery and should always be a last option in conflict resolution.

The rejection of a preemptive strike against Iraq is not mere pacifism, rather there seems to be many other alternatives to war and those alternatives have not been exhausted. The U.S has traditionally opposed pre-emptive strikes since 1887, when the British Navy seized the U.S ship Caroline and sent it over the Niagara Falls because it was deemed a threat to the British interest through its support for Canadian rebels. Daniel Webster, then U.S Secretary of State stated that pre-emptive action could only be justified where there was a necessity of self-defense, instant, overwhelming, leaving no choice of means and a moment of deliberation.

In spite of the ubiquity of terrorists, the doctrine of pre-emption would only lead to a new form of imperialism, whereby the powerful nations of the world would intermittently attack and occupy those weaker countries that do not openly support the policies of the invading country. This is why the UN must stand against this pre-emptive first start. Indeed, it must be borne in mind, that the reason for the existence of the UN is to prevent war among nations, the UN should not be forced into a war, the motives of which have not been justifiably defended.

It is obvious that Saddam Hussein is a tyrant and an oppressor of his people; but the very people who are reaching for his jugular once supported him. Most of the nations caught in the war of words over Iraq, actively supported both Iraq's weapons programme and the Hussein regime, just as they are supporting other dictators in the Middle East and else where for economic reasons. No doubt, Saddam has brought unspeakable sufferings on his people. However, the change of the regime of Hussein is the moral duty of the Iraqis, while the international community has the duty of addressing Iraq's violation of international laws and resolutions, through appropriate means.

The Iraqis for the last three decades have not known any peace, nor have they enjoyed the oil wealth of their land (Iraq being the second largest oil producing country in the world). This land which was the center of Sumerian culture and a succession of agricultural and commercial civilizations that dates back to the time of the Biblical Nebuchadnezer of Babylon, is now a desert of poverty and diseases in the sea of wealth. A greater majority of Iraq's 24 million people are caught in the airtight cage of emotional trauma with the dark cloud of war hanging over their heads, coupled with the sweltering heat of misery and inexcusable deaths, which the UN sanctions have brought on their country.

The deep rumbling of discontent we hear today among Iraqis and their brethren in the Middle East is not just the thunder of hatred against Western civilization. It is against failure by the West, especially the U.S., to courageously address the Palestinian question. It is also the pain and frustration that arise from the failure of their respective governments to open the doors of liberty to them - doors through which they could climb the bright hills of freedom and sing the same chorus of democracy, peace and solidarity with the rest of the world. Increasing the pains of these Arabs, at the cost of more hatred for the U.S. and greater insecurity in the world, are too much a price to pay for economic adventurism, national pride or fear of terrorism.