

SPEAKER'S CORNER.....

About George W Bush's Iraq war

I can make no pretence to pacifism. It was out of conviction that, a mere 18 years old in my native South Africa, I volunteered for service in the second world war. And for the next five years I chose to serve in three successive services and on three successive fronts of the war. Nor have I ever regretted doing so, nor questioned that it was a right and necessary thing to do. That is to say, I believed then and believe now that there can be just and necessary wars, one of which was the war against Nazi Germany.

Nor, in the present instance in Iraq, do I dissent from the view that Saddam Hussein is a thoroughly wicked man. He perpetrated much evil among his people, waged war without any justification whatever, used proscribed chemical weapons (in his unprovoked war with Iran and on his own Kurdish subjects), and violated the surrender agreements about UN weapons inspections after the 1991 war he precipitated. An article in *Science*¹ cogently assembles what has been discovered about the vast chemical weapons programme Iraq had going before and probably after the Gulf War.

None the less, as an American citizen (one admittedly transplanted, but one who has enjoyed here something of a charmed life), I must declare that I am appalled by the war in Iraq. The crucial issues are clear. No one will claim that either character disorder (which may well afflict Hussein) or the putative threat Hussein poses as dictator are legitimate grounds for preemptive war. As for allegations that could constitute real grounds subsequent to the Gulf War, two charges

have been made. Firstly, as to the death and destruction wreaked by the attack of September 11, 2001 on the World Trade Towers (towers that I looked on each day out of my office window): no substantive evidence has yet been produced about Hussein's connection with the Al Qaeda onslaught. Secondly, as to weapons of mass destruction (which do indeed raise health questions): since Saddam Hussein stalled the UN inspections instituted after the Gulf War ended, no new evidence has been produced about Iraq's current possession or production of such weapons (although, very likely, only because of successful evasion by the Iraqi regime). Worse, by short circuiting the search of the Security Council weapons team, the short fuse of Bush the Younger's ultimatum to Hussein precluded the possibility of their discovery. In doing so and bypassing the Security Council, a president elected with marginal legitimacy has gone far to undermine if not finally to destroy the world's best hope for an international instrument to maintain peace and law among nations, namely, an effective United Nations.

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References

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