

Is War With Iraq Justified?

Unless you've been living in a cave the last few months, you are painfully aware that war with Iraq looms larger every day. Even if our European allies (who rarely agree with each other, let alone with the US) do not join Great Britain, Poland, the USA and others in disarming Saddam Hussein, it appears increasingly likely that within days or weeks we could again be at war with Iraq.

How are Christians to view this possibility? Should we gladly seek war to punish the atrocities of this tyrannical madman (after all, Saddam didn't hesitate to use chemical weapons against the Iranians or even against his own people)? Should we sit idly by and wait for the United Nations, which seems both inept and inert, to act?



Air Force B1-B Lancer

One thing is certain. We should have no illusions about the behavior or intentions of the Iraqi government. Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi leadership have behaved badly and the regime must stop its internal repression, it must cease to be a constant threat to its neighbors, it must denounce terrorism and stop supporting terrorists, it must abandon its program to develop weapons of mass destruction, and it must destroy all such existing weapons. The UN Security Council has demanded these actions and Iraq has thumbed its nose at that demand. Our genuine, heartfelt and urgent prayer is that Saddam will be

removed from power and war will be averted, but that appears unlikely.

The issue is not really what we think but what is just. Does going to war with Saddam Hussein fit the criteria of justice? The idea of a "just war" is as old as warfare itself. The Bible even hints at ethical behavior in war and the concepts of fighting for a just cause, but the most systematic treatment of a just war in antiquity belongs to Thomas Aquinas. In his *Summa Theologicae* Aquinas outlined what is now considered to be "just war" theory. He not only discussed the justification for war but what activities were permissible in fighting a just war.

From Thomas Aquinas and later writers, these principles have become accepted as "the rules of engagement" for a war that is justified:

Principles of the Just War

- A just war can only be waged as a last resort, after reasonable attempts to bring justice have been exhausted.
- A just war can only be waged by a legitimate authority. People, vigilantes, terrorists do not wage just wars; only a legitimate government is permitted to wage a war that can be considered justified.

- A just war can only be fought to redress wrongs that have been committed. A first strike attack on a nation that has committed no atrocities cannot be considered justice; that's aggression.
- A just war can only be fought with "right" intentions. War is not justified to gain control of another nation, its assets or its people. If the right intention for going to war is not present, justice is not present.
- A just war can only be fought if there is a reasonable chance of success. Deaths and injury incurred in a hopeless cause are not morally justifiable.
- A just war can only be fought if the ultimate goal is to re-establish peace. More specifically, war is not justified if the situation in a country cannot be reasonably expected to be better after the war than before.
- A just war must never allow the force used to be disproportional to the need. Nations must be prohibited from using force not necessary to attain the limited objective of addressing the wrongs that have been committed.
- A just war must employ weapons and tactics that discriminate between combatants and non-combatants. Innocent civilians are never permissible targets of war, and war can only be just if every effort is made to avoid civilian casualties.

When you look at these criteria, the United States seems to have a pretty strong case to stop the threat that Saddam Hussein poses to humanity, especially his own people. The US Government is a legitimate authority and does not bear the sword in vain (Romans 13: 4). Besides, Psalm 82: 4 commands us to "Deliver the poor and needy; free them from the hand of the wicked." As long as the intention of war with Iraq is to redress wrongs and not to acquire the assets of the country, and as long as required inspection for banned weapons is repeatedly rebuffed, I believe war with Saddam Hussein is both legitimate and just.



Secretary Rumsfeld

Hussein has shown himself to be an evil dictator. He has consistently lied about his chemical and biological weapons program. He has been less than forthcoming when pressed by the UN weapons inspectors, both after the Persian Gulf War and in advance of this one. He has brutally murdered untold Iraqis who have dared to resist him. These facts are indisputable. Without question he fits the description that the Church Father Augustine gave of those who are rightly condemned and against whom war is justifiably waged: "The passion for inflicting harm, the cruel thirst for vengeance, an **inclined to make war** and relentless spirit, the fever of revolt, the lust of power, and such like things, all these are rightly condemned in war."

Let's face it. None of us wants war. Many of you have family and friends who have been called up to fight in this potential conflict. You and I both wish they were back home today, safe and sound. But that's not the case. And, in the reality of life and death, as much as we hate it to admit it, we know down deep in our hearts that if war with Iraq materializes, some of our family and friends will not come back. War is ghastly. It takes our best men and women, but it takes them in justifiable causes – justice and humanity.

We hate war, but we hate injustice more. So here are some things you can do whether you have loved ones in the Persian Gulf or not.



U.S.S. Enterprise in Persian Gulf

First, examine your own attitudes. There are many good people who believe that all war is wrong, that no war is ever justified. Most Christians do not agree, but we respect their beliefs and feelings. You must examine your own attitudes and before God come to your own conclusions. Remember, the enemy is not the person who disagrees with you; the enemy is a maniacal murderer.

Second, if you feel that war as the last resort may be justified in certain cases, and you believe the atrocities committed by Saddam Hussein is one of those cases, be supportive of your President, Premier or national leader. Write your Senator or Congressman. Express your beliefs, whatever they may be. That's a privilege of a democratic society, but rarely are unpopular decisions like this one supported by letters or e-mails.

Third, discuss these things in your small group at church. It's important for others to have the benefit of your thinking. Some in your group may never have grappled with these issues before. Whatever your conclusions, help others to come to their own by providing an arena for biblical discussion, respectful of disagreement and bathed in the unity of the faith and the love of the Lord.

Fourth, spend some extra time each day in God's Word. The strength that comes from reading His Word will never come from reading the headlines in the newspaper. God reassures us in His Word, He guides us in His Word, He teaches us in His Word. There's power, comfort, encouragement and hope in the Bible. Don't be a stranger to these when you need them the most.

Finally, talk to God about it. Especially if you have friends and family who may have to participate in any conflict with Iraq, don't fail to keep them before the Lord in prayer. Look how often in the Bible when God's people went to war others stayed behind and prayed. Both tasks were important. And don't forget to pray for those who bear the burden of knowing they had to make the decisions that sent troops off to war. If troops invade Baghdad and weapons are found, or worse, Saddam uses them on the troops, the American people will say, "Bush was right" and they'll forget about it the next day. But if the troops die, no one will forget it. War is a lose-lose situation for presidents too. The President needs your prayerful support.