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Iraq: war or not?

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## Writers, artists and civic leaders on the War

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12 - 1 - 2003

**President Bush has rallied his troops for what he calls first war of the 21st century . What is your view of the crisis, where, briefly, do you stand? This is the question we are putting to people around the world, especially those of their own public reputation and following. Our aim, to create a truly global debate all can identify with.**

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### John le Carré - English novelist

#### A PREDATORY AND DISHONEST WAR

This is High Noon for American democracy. The rights and freedoms that have made America the envy of the world are being systematically eroded. A new McCarthyism is abroad. Bush tells us that those who are not with him are against him. I am not with

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The American over-reaction is beyond everything Osama could have hoped for in his nastiest dreams. But this war was planned long before Osama struck, and it is Osama who made it possible. Without him, the Bush junta would have been mired in Enron, electoral scandal and taxation sledge. Thanks to Osama, Americans are instead being daily misled by their leaders and by their corporate media.

There is a stink of religious self-righteousness in the air that reminds me of the British Empire at its worst. I cringe when I hear my Minister lend his head perfect sophistries to this patently self-interested adventure to secure our oil supplies.

But will we win, Daddy?

Of course we will, child, and quickly, while you are still in bed.

But will people be killed, Daddy?

There will be a few Western casualties. Very few. Go to sleep.

And after that, will everything be normal? Nobody will come back? The terrorists will all be dead?

Wait till you're older, dear. Goodnight.

And is it really true that last time round Iraq lost twice as many dead as America lost in the entire Vietnam war?

Hush child. That's called history.

Where's the hurry? Iraq is a vile dictatorship, and Saddam is a monster who sits on the world's second largest oil reserves. There is ample time to consider how to unseat him before we get into this predatory and dishonest war. Leave the UN inspectors there. Convene Iraq's neighbours. And consider for a moment where the will came from to make this war in the first place.

Americans can still awake to the shame of what is being done in their name.

Britain is half way there. The French and Russians have been bullied and browbeaten into submission. Only the good Germans have so far succeeded in sticking to their silent guns. I wish profoundly that the rest of us Europeans, in the spirit of a nobler President, would declare ourselves to be citizens of Berlin.

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**Roger Scruton - English philosopher, novelist and composer**

AMERICAN INTENTION, TO LIBERATE NOT TO ENSLAVE

When assessing US foreign policy it is important to remember that America has often intervened around the globe, and is uniquely prone to seeking instantly to withdraw thereafter.

It withdrew from Europe after the two world wars, and from Japan, and (wrongly) Kuwait and Iraq last time round. The Americans tried to withdraw from Vietnam, having established what they believed to be a friendly regime in the South. Of course they do not withdraw, as a rule, until securing a settlement in their own favour. But such a settlement, they believe, will be one in which the people of the countries involved have acquired the right to elect their own governments. It is very difficult to object to a policy of intervention, when the intention is not to enslave a foreign people, but to liberate them.

Of course, Americans are bluff optimists, often insensitive to the needs of local culture, to traditional allegiances and to the balance of power. This may mean that things are less stable after an American intervention than before - as was Europe after Woodrow Wilson's input into the Treaty of Versailles.

But compare the Soviets in Ethiopia and North Yemen, in Eastern Europe or the Baltics; compare the Chinese in Tibet or the South of Lebanon.

The vices of the USA are always before us; but the virtues are sufficiently remembered.

America attracts blame because it responds to blame. Criticism of the Soviet Union was always met with a blank wall of indifference, and in any case could not be publicly voiced within the Soviet Empire itself. Hence, during the Cold War, the US was continually singled out as the source of conflict - notably by people on the other side who often turned a blind, or at any rate myopic, eye, as did Christopher Hill and Eric Hobsbawm to name but two, to the incredible and still unatoned-for crimes of the Soviet Communist Party.

With tyrannical regimes there is no point in criticism from outside, and death or imprisonment is the reward of criticism from inside. That is why intellectuals brought up under tyrannies end up in the USA. It is the one place where they can criticize freely, not just the countries they have fled from, but the country which has offered them refuge. In the face of virtues like these, the Chomskian and Pilgerish criticisms of US foreign policy begin to look, to say the least, one-sided.

US foreign policy isn't always right. But it emerges from a process - one in which criticism is permitted, and accountability assumed. The foreign policies of North Korea and Iraq issue through such rational process: which is one reason for using force to prevent them from issuing at all.

©Roger Scruton. His most recent book is *The West and the World* (ISI, Washington and Continuum, London)

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**John Berger**    **Anglo-French writer and critic**

### SHAME, NOT INDIVIDUAL GUILT

I write in a night of shame.

Many fear that U.S. military forces will soon be launching its preventive war against Iraq. Others hope that this can be avoided. Between the announced decisions and the secret calculations, everything is kept unclear, since lies prepare the way for missiles.

By shame I do not mean individual guilt. Shame, as I understand it, is a species feeling which, in the long run, corrodes the capacity for hope and prevents us looking far ahead. We look down at our feet, thinking only of the next small step.

The shame begins with the contestation (which we all acknowledge somewhere but, out of powerlessness, dismiss) that much of the present suffering could be alleviated or avoided if certain real and relatively simple decisions were taken.

To understand and take in what is happening, an inter-disciplinary vision is necessary in order to connect the fields which conventional arguments keep separate. The precondition for action on a global scale is to see the unity of the unnecessary suffering taking place. Any such vision is bound to be, in the original sense of the word, political.

I write in the night, but I see not only the tyranny. If that were all I would probably not have the courage to continue. I see people sleeping, stirring, getting up to drink water, whispering their projects or their fears, making love, praying, cooking something whilst the rest of the family is asleep, in Baghdad and Chicago. I see too the forever invincible Kurds, 4000 of whom were given away with US compliance by Saddam Hussein.) I see pastry cooks working in Teheran and the shepherds, thought of as bandits, sleeping beside their sheep in Sardinia, I see a man in the

Friedrichshain quarter of Berlin sitting in his pyjamas with a beer reading Heidegger and he has the hands of a proletarian. A small boat of illegal immigrants off the Spanish coast near Alicante, I see a mother in Mali, her name is Aya which means on Friday, swaying her baby to sleep.

Democracy is a proposal (rarely realised) about decision making. It has little to do with election campaigns. Its promise is that political decisions be made after, and in the light of, consultation with the governed. This is dependent upon the governed being adequately informed about the issues in question, and upon the decision-makers having the capacity and will to listen and take account of what they have heard. Democracy should not be confused with the freedom of binary choices, the publication of opinion polls, or the crowding of people into statistics. These are its pretense.

Today the fundamental decisions, which effect the unnecessary, are increasingly suffered across the planet, have been and are being made unilaterally without any open consultation or participation.

The new tyranny, like other recent ones, depends, to a large extent, on a systematic abuse of language. Together we have to recover hijacked words and reject the tyrannical's nefarious euphemisms. If we do not, we will be left with only the word shame.

This is written in the night. In war the dark is on nobody's side. To love the dark confirms that we are together.

©John Berger 2003. His most recent book of essays is *THE SHADOWS OF A POCKET* (Bloomsbury, London and Pantheon, New York).  
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## **Pervez Hoodbhoy    Pakistani nuclear physicist**

### THREE HORSES OF BUSH

Three horses draw George W. Bush's furiously racing chariot of war. Their names are Vengeance, Greed, and Fear. Vengeance is a young steed born on 11 September 2001, and gallops well. Greed is old but sturdy, can smell oases of oil from afar, and understands the master's corporate compulsions. The third horse, Fear, is weak and anaemic. Despite lashes from the Texan's whip, he is a drag on the team. Nevertheless he is indispensable for convincing the American public that a puny Saddam Hussein, castrated of weapons of mass destruction, remains a mortal threat to a superpower many miles away. So far the finest spin doctors in Washington have failed to make Fear strong, and Hans Blix has not been totally helpful.

Fortunately, Vengeance and Greed have made up admirably

The fanatical hordes spilling out of Pakistan's madrasas see horses, nor care about them. But they do imagine seeing Richard the Lion Hearted bearing down upon them. It is, for them, a line between Islam and kufr (unbelief). Sword in hand, they pray to grant war. Belief in final victory is, of course, never doubted by the faithful. They seek the modern Saladin, one who can miraculously dodge cruise missiles and turn them back to hit the launchers. Who will he be? How many decades, or centuries, will the modern Crusades last? Surely, a lot longer than you and I are around for.

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