

# Stop the War Stop the Killing



Edward Said

The UN Security Council has been meeting today to listen to the report of the weapons inspectors operating in Iraq and responses to it. I doubt there is a widespread consensus for war in the US, but there is no doubt that the administration led by President Bush and his associates are pushing for a war sooner rather than later. The ostensible reason given for the war against Iraq is that it's an imminent threat to the US, and that Iraq possesses weapons of mass destruction, of which none have been found. In theory Iraq threatens the US from a distance of 7,000 miles. From what we gather from the inspectors, Iraq in the 12 years since the first Gulf War (between Iraq and Iran, started 1980) is in a much depleted and weakened condition—being an imminent threat to the US is preposterous. They are not even considered to be a threat to their neighbours. Should bombing begin, it is to me a mystery if the excuse is really Iraq's military threat.

The other US administration line is equally confected: that Iraq might be distributing arms to al-Qaeda terrorists. There is no direct evidence. But since one of the alleged al-Qaeda people was supposed to be in Northern Iraq, it follows that Iraq and al-Qaeda are in cahoots to wreak terrible violence on the US and other countries. Then again, I don't want to minimise the nefarious quality of the Iraqi regime—its Human Rights record is one of the worst in the world and it is a state based upon repression and terror. But to suggest that Iraq is an immanent danger to the US and the rest of the world is extremely far fetched.

Would there be this kind of US military, diplomatic and political pressure placed on Iraq—and on the rest of the world to join the US in war—if it was a net exporter of oranges? Of course it isn't, it is an oil producing country with the proven second largest oil revenues after Saudi Arabia. It is also a leading Arab country which has gone through an horrendous cycle of sanctions imposed against it for the last 12 years. Sanctions and a very tight embargo which haven't affected Saddam Hussein and his regime at all, but which have affected the Iraqi population—with hundreds of thousands of people dead from malnutrition, the absence of medicine resulting in the onset of terrible diseases, plus the fact that the civilian and military infrastructures were destroyed during the last Gulf War by the US. All in all we have a state which is in an extremely weakened condition, with a rogue government (no doubt) and an extremely long suffering, punished population which, if there is a war, will bear the brunt of American power.

There are many reasons for this war. One of them is oil, and it is not a coincidence that Afghanistan near the Caspian Sea is in a direct line with the oil supplies and regions of the Arabian Gulf—all of which fall under direct American military and political hegemony in the event of a war. Although there is a hegemony right now, what the US seek are the assurances of vast oil supplies, the guaranteed control of this enormously important resource. Remember, China by the end of this decade will be using as much oil as the US already does. So, the contest for cheap and relatively accessible oil supplies is one of the reasons for this war, not so much the crimes of humanity committed by Saddam Hussein's regime, which it is important to remember was

politically and militarily backed in many of those crimes by the US and various European countries.

Another reason is that this is a highly strategic area of the world. There is a real felt need, partly as a result of 9/11, that the old order is no longer of use to the US—those undemocratic, repressive regimes in Iraq and other Middle East countries supported for over 50 years by the US and European allies. This area is unstable now, partly because the people have risen up against their unpopular rulers, but also because of the rise of political Islam—a much exaggerated force but still seen by the US because of 9/11 as a threat. There is a sense in which US interests—which since WWII have always been oil and Israel—would be better served in a realignment of the area, so that Israel and the US with allies like Turkey or India at a further remove, would better control and dominate the area.

Finally, the threat represented by Iraq is considered also to be a threat to the interests of Israel. It is important to remember that many of the hawkish members of the US administration—like Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Perle—have always been close to the Israeli right wing. Perle himself, head of the Intelligence Review Board of the Pentagon [see: 'Lunch with the Chairman', S.M.Hersh, p.18], was a political adviser to Netanyahu when he was a candidate for the Premiership of Israel. Perle argued that he should discard anything like a peace process, annex the West Bank and Gaza, expand the settlements, and perhaps in the future throw out a few more Palestinians so that the area would be relatively easy to control. So somehow the interests of Israel are very much part of this multifaceted war as seen by a right wing, neo-conservative group in Washington which believes Israel is best served by expansion, brutality and a continued contempt for the UN.

One important factor not usually taken into account by commentators in the West is the importance of Iraq to Arab culture and Arab civilisation. Iraq enjoys a particularly privileged place—during the Abassi period, from 750 AD, Baghdad was the capital of the world and for a period of 600 years was the capital of science, art, humanities, in what was then the civilised world and the core of the Arab Empire, which extended into Spain, Southern Europe, as well as Northern Africa, and to the East, today's Sri Lanka. So, the travail of the Iraqi people, as the White House circular suggests,



is to bomb Baghdad to produce "shock and awe" in the population. All of this is considered to be, for most Arabs and Iraqis, an attack at the very heartland of the Arab world, Arab people, Arab civilisation and of Arabism itself. And the US planners' reason for this is to break once and for all the spirit of Arab unity and nationalism, which has historically been a thorn in the side of Western Imperialism. The battle, I contend, is still going on for control of this rich area and for the self-determination of those people.

The link question which is never discussed in the media is Palestine. If you listen to Secretary Powell, all the commentators in the media (during what is the worst moment in the history of the American media when they simply support without question, comment or sufficient investigative energy what the administration says, and are themselves involved in stirring up hysteria for war and a kind of xenophobia against Iraq; a place which they have no idea of, which they personalise

All photographs: Aftermath of the Sabra and Chatila Massacres, Lebanon, 1982.

with this demonic figure of Saddam Hussein) and the furore over Iraq being in contravention of the UN Charter, it's never mentioned that aside from the US, which is also a state which is in contravention of numerous UN treaties and protocols, there is the question of Israel. Israel has been in contempt of 64 UN Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. For 35 years since the 1967 occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, it has systematically flouted the Geneva Convention, the UN Declaration of Human Rights, and 64 resolutions drawing attention to abuses of human rights by Israelis. Sharon—who is now threatened with a law suit against him in Belgium for War Crimes committed during the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon resulting in the massacres of Sabra and Chatila—has conducted a policy of purist repression against Palestinians which must be examined against the abuses of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. The Israeli army has used Apache helicopters, missiles, rockets, F16 jets against civilian populations in the West Bank and Gaza. It has imposed curfews sometimes lasting over 200 days on a civilian population which is basically unarmed: there is no Palestinian Army, Navy or Airforce. Close to 2,000 people have been killed by the Israeli military, some designated as terrorists although none of them ever had trials. There has been a whole policy of “targeted killings”, “extra judicial assassinations” against Palestinians, sometimes whole families are killed by mistake or through “collateral damage”. The economies of the West Bank and Gaza have suffered an enormous and catastrophic economic blow on a day-to-day basis, partly because of the closures where no Palestinian can leave or enter, or go from one part of the same town to another; partly because of the deliberate policy of Israel razing agricultural ground, destroying it, confiscating land, building settlements on it; making it impossible for people to go to work, for students to study, for university professors and students to enter classes. This is the longest military occupation in modern history and yet the US connives in this to supply Israel. The total is \$135 billion since the beginning of the occupation. This is the largest amount of foreign aid ever given by any country to another country. In addition, in the UN the US vetoes resolutions which condemn Israel, which ask Israel to cease and desist for example from demolishing houses—60 houses alone this week and 21 people killed. But that does not even deserve a mention in the American media as they focus on the imminent threat to the US—the largest and most powerful military machine in the history of the world—from this incapacitated, tyrannical regime in Baghdad. All the while, as Sharon has openly said, his government has been abusing the Palestinian civilian population by attacking hospitals and ambulances, by making it impossible for people to have kidney dialysis and pregnant women to have their children in hospitals—they are held up in the rain and mud at barricades sometimes dying as a result. Trees are uprooted—an average of 896 trees have been uprooted every day by the Israeli Army since the beginning of the Intifada and that does not even touch upon the question of the settlers.

Israel entered lands that were Palestinian in 1967, including East Jerusalem which was annexed that year, and has implanted 400,000 settlers against every UN Resolution and Convention. These settlements are now connected to each other by a roads system which cost \$780 million to build, paid for almost entirely by the US, on which only settlers can travel in such a way as in Apartheid South Africa. The economy has been deliberately destroyed on the West Bank and Gaza by Israel. It has de-developed the economy of Palestine so that there is a rate of 65% unemployment. It is estimated that over 60% of the population lives beneath the poverty line of \$2 a day. Malnutrition, as the UN has been saying, is now an endemic structural problem for the West Bank and Gaza. About 70% of the population is in need of food because Israel will not allow them to grow their own, import it or even travel to places where they can get food. In the case of some of the villages near the green line, which have been fed or supplied to some degree by well intentioned

Israeli resisters bringing food in, that is now forbidden. The West Bank and Gaza is basically locked up. On the western side there is the sea, of which two thirds of the coast is closed to Palestinians. Three large settlements numbering 7,500 Israelis inside the middle of Gaza, chopping it up, are protected by 12,000 troops. Whereas 1.2 million Palestinians live like sardines in refugee camps, tenements and towns mostly filled with the stench of rubbish, which they are not allowed to remove; putrefying carcasses, stagnant water, in fact every possible condition of abject poverty, malnutrition and psychological trauma experienced by no other population on earth today. All this has been going on with the sponsorship of the US in a case of the most monumental human hypocrisy. As the US pushes an aggressive policy against Iraq, accusing it of every nefarious crime against its own interests under the cover of fighting terrorism, Sharon and his army pursue an active policy of collective punishment against Palestinian civilians.

While Israel enjoys US military support and unending financial support, the US will not even allow the UN to discuss the Palestinian question; even for International Observers to protect the Palestinians from human rights abuses carried out by Israeli troops who are encouraged in a kind of racist contempt to treat them like animals and make sure their pride and dignity as human beings are trampled upon. They're humiliated whether through random house searches, ransacking of buildings, vandalism of property, or through more brutal means where they remove the records of the Central Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, to make sure that Palestinian records of a collective national existence are erased forever. Those are crimes against humanity, active war crimes committed by acknowledged war criminals like Sharon, who in Israel in 1982 after the illegal invasion of Lebanon (the first modern instance of announced regime change) was convicted by an Israeli court of the responsibility for the massacres of Sabra and Chatila, which occurred under Israeli supervision.

Our protest against war has to be inclusive and has to deal with the issues which are connected to each other. That this military action against Iraq has to be seen as a part of a collective punishment, and that the problem of Palestinian refugees started in 1948 when Israel was established as a result of ruining and destroying Palestinian society. One has to understand and accept this is very much at the core of the tension between the Arab and Islamic world on the one hand, and the West, especially the US, on the other. That our battle against war is also our battle against human rights abuses, where ever they occur. We cannot be invidious and just focus on Iraq, bring them to their knees, occupy the country and rule it militarily just because Iraq is a net exporter of oil connected to the Caspian axis. There ought to be a broad front in the protests not only against US action in Iraq but also against US action in Palestine. It is simply ludicrous to hear President Bush describe Saddam Hussein as a Hitler, as a demon, as an evil man, and on the other hand, with a straight face, describe General Ariel Sharon as a man of peace, which he did in June last year.

#### Questions:

What immediate effect would an attack on Iraq sanctioned by the UN or otherwise have on the situation regarding Israel and Palestine?

How do you assess the chances of the demonstrations or the peace movements in the US?

What is the effect of the anti-terrorism laws in the US?

Is there a place for non violence as a response to any of this, either in Palestine, on the marches, or in relation to Iraq?

You wrote three weeks ago in the *Guardian*: “When will we resist”; we ‘the Arabs’. As you rightly said, the US is close to an attack on the Arab world to redesign the Middle East and control the oil, and you suggest that the Arabs remain passive and submissive and you call for a collective, genuinely Arab alternative. Could you outline this alternative?



**Edward Said:**

The likely effect of an attack on Iraq by the US, what would be the effect on Palestine? The most nightmarish scenario suggests that under the cover of a conflagration in Iraq with the world's attention turned to that locale, the Israeli government under Sharon might undertake what it calls a "transfer of populations"—use the opportunity of the distractions to drive out another large segment of the Palestinian population to places like Jordan, Egypt and Lebanon. Although I think it's also unfeasible because we're dealing with a politicised and galvanised population that hasn't submitted to the terror tactics of Sharon. Speaking as a Palestinian, I am extremely proud of the fact that Palestinians have not surrendered, and that Palestinian life—in its terrible tatters today—is still going on. There will be resistance to an attempt to drive out large numbers of the population.

Another scenario is increasing the number of lands taken from Palestinians, while Sharon says he is willing to make a peace deal, in which case there will be little land left—the figure is now 40% of the West Bank and 75% of Gaza, the rest is annexed by Israel, taken for settlement, and Israel will continue to control the entrances, exists, water and air rights. So anything like a real sovereignty for the Palestinians is definitely not in Sharon's programme and the war in Iraq will make it easier for him (with the support of the US) to impose draconian solutions.

An attack on Iraq would be extremely deleterious to the Palestinians also because the attention of the world will be focused on Iraq and the tremendously needed humanitarian aid for food, shelter and health services required by the Palestinian population under siege, living in a system of Apartheid, will be suspended. There are already stories that UNRWA, the agency for Palestinian refugees, is running out of money. They have a few months left in funds and supplies. There is a humanitarian catastrophe in the offing for a population that has already suffered for 35 years under Israeli occupation.

There is also the possibility that more people will understand the linkage between Palestine and Iraq. That the Imperial hand in both places, the contravention of human rights and UN resolutions in both places, need to be considered together. What we are living through is a continued attempt, which has gone on for over 150 years, to keep the Arab countries of the Middle East divided, weakened and basically under outside domination. Imperial domination is still flourishing, the result being social distortion, wide spread military governments and human rights abuses that one associates with countries like Iraq and Syria.

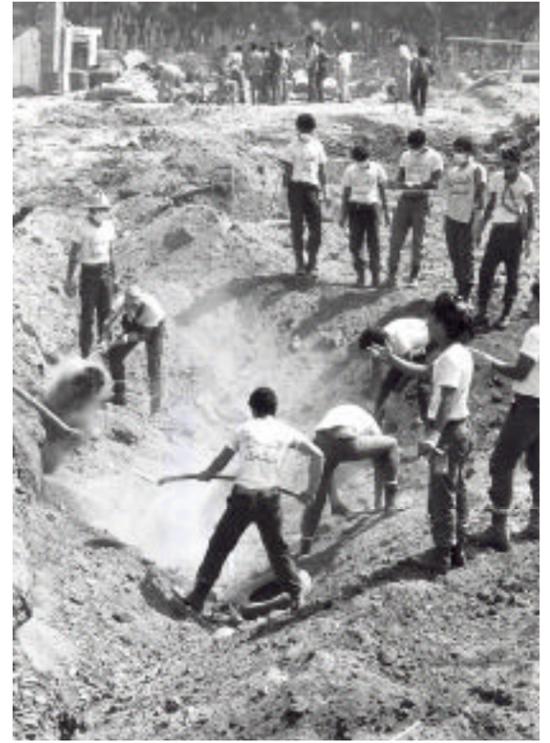
The question about demonstrations in the US. This is the first time in modern history that there has been such a wide spread set of demonstrations and protests in the US before war begins. There's a very widespread feeling on the part of the population that this is an unnecessary war, that it's being waged for obscure and constantly changing purposes, that the war on terrorism that we were supposed to be fighting in Afghanistan has been forgotten, and that we are now in a state of war based on pre-emption (the new military doctrine of the US) that most Americans refuse. The demonstrations are serious and important and not to be underestimated in their effect on government in the long run. What's so important about them is that people are being asked to choose between being a rogue power acting out of enormous strength, obduracy, and a kind of blindness to everyone else, or acting like a member of the world community. And most Americans, like most people everywhere, want the latter: to be part of the world community bound by the laws of war and the conventions of the UN, etc. We are too small a world, and now because of the systems of modern electronic communication, no part of the world is distant or without its effect on any other part. So I think there's a dawning consciousness among vast numbers of Americans, certainly among the young.

As a result of the outrages of September 11th there has been an atmosphere of repression increasing over time in the US, with alarm shown

by the civil liberties communities, and especially communities of Muslims, Arabs and people of colour, for whom preventive detention, racial profiling and invasions of privacy have become routine. Many thousands of Americans and resident aliens in the US are invidiously discriminated against simply on the basis of their race, religion and country of origin. There is a mass hysteria, an atmosphere symbolised by the Terrorism and Patriot Act which makes it a crime, in a way, to be an Arab. There are many incidents of people sitting on planes and buses reading Arabic newspapers and being asked not to do so, or to leave, or being taken into custody because they disturb the other passengers. And people are picked up simply on their name, taken aside at airports and other public places because of this fear. I've seen the deliberate identification of Islam with terrorism which has occurred at least since the Iranian revolution of 1979. A foreign devil is very important to the foreign policy of the US—Islam and Muslim people are the foreign devil. Plus the fact that the Israeli government has waged an unceasing war against Palestinians under the rubric of fighting terrorism, which they were very clever to adopt as their policy. So there's a sense of justified vigilance and pre-emptive punishment which has caused wide sectors of the American public to be alarmed at the loss of civil liberties, the suspension of due process—for example the case of prisoners in Guantanamo Bay, and many others throughout the US who have been picked up, not allowed to see lawyers, not charged, detained for three months at a time and then maybe re-detained. The atmosphere is such that people have to be careful of what they're told, what they say. There's a McCarthyite atmosphere on some American campuses where criticism of Israel and US policy in the Middle East is immediately equated with anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism.

I don't want to conclude on an entirely negative note—most people have been aroused in this country to the dangers of abuses to the constitutional rights and privileges that every American ought to enjoy. Which is one of the great prides of this country. But these rights are threatened. The government is deeply conservative, reactionary, and it wants submission and docility, rather than a democratically active, participating citizen. And it is the duty of intellectuals to try to remind people of our rights and our heritage as a people in search of more freedom, freedom through community and common goals rather than through the assertion of power and force. That the US is a capitalist society which has recently gone through tremendous revelations of corporate greed and corruption, plus the fact we're in the middle of a very severe economic recession, have awakened people to the abuses of which this system is capable—the fact that we don't have health insurance as you do; that the so-called welfare safety net has been removed due to neo-liberal policies beginning with the Clinton administration but certainly continuing now; the state of public education is disastrous, especially in large cities like New York, Baltimore, Los Angeles. A hopeful sign is that there is an awakened public consciousness now, that we needn't be patriotic, patriotic being one of the supreme US virtues towards everything that the President and his coterie of advisers want us to do.

As to the question of non-violence, I would prefer to use the phrase 'mass action', here and in the occupied territories. Every liberation movement has tried to protect itself from injury, killing and abuse of the kind that is heaped on Palestinians each day by the Israeli Army. There are instances of peaceful marches broken up by soldiers using live ammunition where 30 or 40 people are killed, or bulldozers demolishing houses with people in them, or the razing of the Jenin refugee camp in which many people lost their properties but also their lives. The Israeli army is not shy about using all its enormous weaponry, which includes weapons of mass destruction. Israel has an estimated 200 nuclear warheads plus biological and chemical warfare capabilities, and has not signed a non-proliferation or nuclear treaty. Against all that, one has to talk about organised mass action



in which large numbers of people impede, at great risk to their lives, the processes of segregation, property destruction, above all land expropriation. That's beginning to emerge as the principle means of struggle in Palestine. Most people feel that suicide bombing—which I've opposed from the very beginning—is counter-productive. It's of course an expression of desperation and a kind of terminal frustration, but in the end it brings nothing but more reprisals, more punishment and more suffering. There is now a search for democratic participation in mass protest. What we have is the slow emergence of national initiatives in the Occupied Territories, of people coming together to perform self-help and protest actions, actions that engage and mobilise Israelis, because you can't talk about self-determination in Palestine without also talking about the participation of Israelis in the same process. It's two people in one land, and that reality means that they have to share not only in each others' fate but in each others' troubles. There are all kinds of hopeful signs that will expand the struggle against militarism, for example young Israeli reservists who refuse to serve on the West Bank and Gaza.

The point I made in my article on submissive Arabs, please don't misunderstand. I was talking about the Arab regimes, which are unrepresentative, undemocratic, maintained by repression and force—every country in the Arab world (to a greater or lesser degree) is ruled by the secret service and the military. Most countries, including some of the most liberal in appearance like Egypt and Jordan, have very severe press laws where freedom of expression is highly circumscribed, and where the powers of the government—like the Israeli and US governments—claim to be fighting Islamic terrorism and have imposed very harsh measures on the population, making them isolated from their people. It's these governments that I was talking about, that now cringe in submission. They realise that their continuation in office depends on the patronage of the US and therefore will say nothing in public that might upset the US, for fear that after the war protection will be taken from them and they will fall prey to their people's desires and wishes. What I'm really talking about is the need for Arab intellectuals—writers, film makers, philosophers, journalists, the women's movement and human rights movements—to continue to mobilise as many Arabs as possible to enter the political struggle and not sit back waiting for an American military government to redesign the whole area. The great danger we face as a people, that all people face, is the imposition of government and power from above—whether from globalisation or military power of the sort the US wields—and the resultant depoliticisation. Informed in part by the internet, mass media and satellite channels like Al-Jazeera—some Arab channels have a wider range of discussion and opinion, and because they're satellite are not so liable to censorship and control by the government—there's a general movement towards mobilisation and a feeling that

if we don't take our fate in our own hands and become responsible for our future, it's not going to be done by the ruler and it's certainly not going to be done by the Americans.

There was an item in today's paper about a group of Iraqi opposition people who only two weeks ago were deeply impressed with how President Bush was committed to civilian democracy in Iraq, since then they have had meetings with the real people whom they're going to have to deal with (people like General Tommy Franks, the Pentagon and State Department Planners who are in charge of post war, post-Saddam Iraq) and they finally realised that the US administration's only interested in securing its interests in Iraq, in oil, and, as for the Iraqi people and the opposition, they can go fly a kite. That's the fallacy most people believe when they rely on and ally themselves with Imperial powers who they think will drive them gloriously into a liberated country. What is happening now is an awakening in the US, the Arab States and elsewhere in the world, that announcing a war and going at it with flimsy purposes and without fairness or justice are unacceptable policies. We live on a planet where people want to live together and not be subject to the enormous power of the last remaining super power like the US, and the people that rule it.

**Question:**

What are the likely consequences of the re-election of Sharon in Palestine and Israel?

**Edward Said:**

It seems to me his government, for all the appearance of strength and determination it tries to exude, is a troubled government. The most likely scenario is that Sharon will continue what he's doing, and under the cover of affairs of war in Iraq perhaps be able to do it with a little more impunity and more damage, but it's likely also that an election will be called, that his government will fall sooner rather than later. But I'm quite discouraged by the Israeli peace movement, the so called liberals, who claim that they were really defeated by the Intifada, that they were betrayed by Arafat's refusal to accept the Camp David suggestions in 2000. That's simply unacceptable hand wringing. First of all there's no reliable record of what was offered at Camp David, and if Arafat and his people refused it they must have known, having accepted so many preposterous things in the past, that this would not be acceptable to their people. And whatever we now know about the plan, it was that Israel was willing to return a percentage of the land (a very high percentage according to them) but it would be divided land, cantonised, with Israel controlling the spaces between. When Israeli propagandists in America—like *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman—keep saying the Palestinians were offered 95% and they turned it down, it's like saying prisoners run 95% of the jail, but of course the guards and wardens control the walls, exits, windows, water and electric supply. So the Israeli protest movement withdrew from the struggle against their own government's depredations, policy of occupa-

tion, demolitions and settlement building. There is no way anybody should be convinced by so-called liberal Israelis saying "we want peace but the Palestinians aren't doing their part." The thing to remember is, that if there is a military occupation, the burden is on the occupier and its citizens to end it, not on the oppressed people to stop resistance. The problem is to get rid of the occupation and the only people who can do that—aside from the Palestinians who are fighting it—are the Israeli citizens themselves. It is the Israeli government that has been committing crimes against humanity, against the Palestinian people.

*This is an edited transcript of a live video link-up from Columbia University, New York, to public meetings called by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and Globalise Resistance, on 14/2/03. It was directly followed by a live video link-up from Gaza with Mrs Al-Durrah.*

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*Participants and sites included: Edinburgh University, University of Sussex, Durham University, Napier University; Augustine United Church, London School of Economics, Ullapool, University of Dundee, University of Teeside.*