



Letter to editor, Toronto Star re. Canadian military involvement in Iraq

*The following is an article submitted to the Star a few days ago, and not yet published.
(Feb. 3, 2003, forwarded by Joe Vise, Science for Peace)*

WHY CANADA SHOULD NOT JOIN WAR AGAINST IRAQ REGARDLESS OF A UN RESOLUTION

By Joanna Santa Barbara

In the next few days or weeks, the Canadian government will decide whether to join a US attack on Iraq. There are good arguments against doing so, whether or not the UN Security Council gives a permissive mandate to attack.

There should be no attack at all by anyone.

There are no legitimate reasons for this war. The UN Charter gives two circumstances which justify the use of military force as a last resort. One is self-defence against an actual or imminent armed attack, and the other is when the UN Security Council authorizes use of force to maintain or restore international peace and security. There is no question of imminent attack here, nor of disturbance of international peace and security. If the actual possession of nuclear, chemical or biological weapons were to be considered such a disturbance, the United States would clearly be the world's prime disturber, as the possessor of 10,000 nuclear weapons. It has threatened to use them on Iraq. The International Court of Justice has ruled such threats unlawful. In Iraq, on the other hand, says Mohamed El Baradei of the International Atomic Energy Agency, reporting to the Security Council on Monday, "No prohibited nuclear activities have been identified."

Regime change is not a legitimate goal. Many analysts consider that the goals of this planned war are to secure US control of Iraqi oil and dominance of the Middle East. These are illegitimate goals.

The International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, convened to determine when it might be justified to interfere with state sovereignty on behalf of protecting a suffering population, agrees to last resort use of military force in cases of genocide and ethnic cleansing. Intervention to protect Kurds when Saddam Hussein was attacking them in 1988 might have been justifiable under this framework, which so far hasn't been ratified by the UN.

The planned attack is likely to cause enormous human suffering. Projections suggest hundreds of thousands will die; injuries and epidemic illness will affect many hundreds of thousands and be beyond Iraq's capacity for medical response. Half of the affected population is under 18. My own moral test is: Are the reasons for this armed attack of sufficient humane worth that you would be prepared to sacrifice your own child in the line of fire? If not, you have no right to recommend a course that would sacrifice one child of another parent.

Canada should not join a US attack outside the UN system.

This would be tantamount to supporting the US in its attempted demolition of international law and international structures, the UN in particular. It would be in the interests only of a servile goal - to please the US and to avoid its potential to punish us for noncompliance. It is gravely disturbing that our prime minister continues to speak of the possibility of such action. It is glaringly clear that most Canadians do not want this.

Canada should not join a US attack on Iraq even if the Security Council gives a permissive mandate. It is clear that the US is using the UN Security Council for convenience only, to increase legitimacy and resources for the war it will wage for its own reasons. It is generally known that the US carries out a system of reward and punishment to secure votes it wants on the Security Council. Canada should not be party to these processes. Security Council condoning of this attack would deeply damage the UN, most especially in the eyes of Moslem communities. It would contravene the UN charter. It flies in the face of the Nuremberg Principles which state that it is a crime against peace to plan a war of aggression or a war in violation of international treaties. This is clearly a war of aggression.

Canada should promote alternatives to war.

Canada should support the inspections process, as requested by chief inspector Hans Blix, by Mohamed El Baradei, and by UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan. Blix made a telling comment on Monday, saying that the inspections process had removed more weapons from Iraq than the previous full- scale war.

Canada should renew its efforts to lift economic sanctions.

Whether under attack or not, children are dying every hour. Canada, before, during and after the war the US evidently intends, should raise ways of furthering a regional solution to the problem of regional security in the Middle East. Who could have imagined, viewing the murderous relationship between France and Germany in the first half of the 20th century, that they would be pillars of the peaceable European Community in the second half? The process by which this was achieved has relevance to the Middle East.

Canada has worked hard for global nuclear disarmament. It should make clear that while the US insists that nuclear weapons are "essential" for its own security, that other

countries will see them as desirable for their security. Verifiable global nuclear disarmament is the only answer to this problem.

What about Saddam Hussein? The communicating international community of nongovernmental organizations has assisted in the overthrow of a number of tyrants from within countries. They need to find ways to help Iraqis win democracy and human rights.

The US does not need Canada's military resources. They need Canada's moral legitimacy. Our country should not squander this precious commodity on an illegitimate war.

* * * * *

Joanna Santa Barbara is a Hamilton psychiatrist and teaches in the Peace Studies programme at McMaster University. She is president of Physicians for Global Survival (Canada).