

THE U.S. AFTER THE WAR ON IRAQ:
BEATING SWORDS INTO PLOWSHARES

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Moment of Prayer

Thank you for inviting me here today, to your beautiful country. It is an honor to be with you.

Let us start with a moment of prayer. A moment of reconciliation. A moment of non-violence. A moment of peace.

Fill your heads with visions of Dr. King and Gandhi; fill your hearts with thoughts of peace and non-violence. Remember the words of the prophet Isaiah:

“And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”

The Global Peace Movement

Last February 15th, I had the privilege of speaking in London, to what may have been the largest antiwar rally in history, and certainly one of the highlights of the largest one-day global demonstration for peace in world history.

Millions of people, all over the world, all over Europe, on both coasts in the U.S., and in more than 600 sites around the globe, took to the streets to say no to a pre-emptive strike on Iraq. Literally millions and millions of people, many of them young people, put their bodies in the path of the war machine. 2 million in London; 500,000 in Berlin; 250,000 in Paris; 2 million in Rome; a million in Madrid, plus another million in Barcelona; 10,000 in the Canary Islands; 50,000 in Glasgow; half a million in New York, plus another quarter of a million in San Francisco. Hundreds of thousands more in Amsterdam, Athens, Hong Kong, and yes, Bangkok.

On that day, a new global peace movement was born. All over the world on February 15th, the people rose up for peace. It is our job to keep that spirit alive in the months and years to come.

Dr. King's Last Birthday

As I stood before that crowd in London, I thought back to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. When I was young, I had the honor of serving with Dr. King, one of the great peacemakers who ever lived. I was with him on his last birthday. Let me share with you how he spent that day, his 39th birthday, in 1968.

We met together to make plans for a 3-point agenda:

- (1) to pull together a multi-racial coalition with a commitment to mass action, to fight a war on poverty in the United States;
- (2) to make sure civil rights laws were enforced, and justice was done;
- (3) to end the war in Vietnam, choosing containment and negotiation over endless bombing and confrontation, to give peace a chance.

We chose minds over missiles.

We choose coexistence over co-annihilation.
 We choose negotiation over confrontation and intimidation.

I remembered that last birthday, as I spoke in Hyde Park in London. And so I appealed to the huge crowd—and to Prime Minister Tony Blair—to help stop the war with Iraq before it started.

To choose life over death, hope and healing over hurt and hostility.

President Bush drew a line in the sand. The President spoke of evil, of mushroom clouds, of terrorists; I spoke of peace. But it is not enough to choose sides—we must reconcile sides.

Because there are rarely winners in wartime. Young soldiers and civilians kill and are killed. Cities and ancient relics are destroyed. Water is made unclean, the air is polluted, disease and decay spread.

There is no future, no growth, no prosperity in that equation.

Instead, we must find a way to make lions lie down with lambs.

Retaliation or Reconciliation

When the United States, the world's superpower, searches for victory or retaliation rather than reconciliation, it ignores the consequences and global repercussions. It ignores the tragedy inflicted on the Iraqi people, defenseless in their homes. And it ignores the likelihood of “blowback,” circling back later to inflict more pain on our own people.

Invading Iraq began the battle, but it did not end the terror. And filling the air with threatening rhetoric from the Wild West only fanned the flames of fear and hatred and violence and reaction. The rhetorical war is a psychological war which has already created an ominous tension around the world.

After 9/11, the world stood on America's side. People were ready to fight the Taliban, because the whole world understood that they had enabled al Qaeda to make an unfair sneak attack. But only two years later, most of the world has moved away from the U.S. Most of the world does not put Iraq on the same team as al Qaeda. Saddam Hussein was not liked, but he was also not feared nearly as much as al Qaeda.

Then there is North Korea, desperate, destitute, and dangerous.

And there is the ongoing crisis between Israel and the Palestinians, where the supposed road map for peace now lies in tatters.

But the Administration fast-forwarded past all three of these very real crises—al Qaeda's survival, the North Korean nuclear arsenal, and the escalating cycle of violence between Israel and the Palestinians—to invade and occupy Iraq.

The world did not believe us when we said that the threat from Iraq was imminent, and so far the Administration's proofs have been totally unconvincing. The world saw Iraq as trapped in a glass jar, contained for the past 12 years, subject to no-fly zones, daily bombings, U-2 and spy drone overflights—Iraq was contained, weaker than ever, no threat to its neighbors unless attacked—and most important, Iraq had dismantled its weapons of mass destruction.

The world has never believed that suddenly the Bush Administration was intensely interested in the liberation of the Iraqi people. The world knows that we sold Hussein much of the arsenal he used to fight Iran, to gas the Kurds, to subjugate his own people—as one comedian put it, the reason we knew Iraq once had weapons of mass destruction was because we had the receipts.

The world believed that this war was about oil, not terrorism; about payback, not regime change; about destroying Saddam Hussein rather than destroying weapons of mass destruction; about empire, not democracy.

And leading figures in all religions have made it crystal clear that there was no moral foundation for a war for these reasons. We had no basis in Christian or other theology to fight a war to secure our right to drive big cars and bigger trucks.

In the arrogance to rush to war, the hawks underestimated the perils, the price, and the pain. To rush to war without fully counting the moral and physical and fiscal risks was arrogant; and arrogance precedes the fall. I made this point before the war ever started; I make it again now, when new crises loom while old ones linger unresolved.

The truth is that, even for a superpower, while the war may be short, the cycle of violence will go on. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth leaves everyone blind and eating mush.

Nevertheless, as I reminded the marchers in London last February, as a global peace movement we must not blindly rush towards unconditional peace without justice. We all know the rule—no justice, no peace.

Peace without security and accountability is naïve; it is just the absence of conflict—it is not the presence of justice.

No one can fruitfully search for victory in this conflict—there is another level. We must not choose sides; we must choose reconciliation; we must choose coexistence over co-annihilation; mutual development over mutual destruction.

An Appeal to Hussein

12 years ago, armed only with my faith, and the logic of choosing life over death, I took the risk of talking to Saddam Hussein, and the lives of 600 hostages were saved. I brought them out of Baghdad, back to their homes in Britain, France, Canada, and the U.S. I took the risk of talking to Hussein, and it worked.

So before the war started last winter, I wrote an open letter to Hussein, asking him to cooperate fully with the UN inspectors. I pointed out that this was the only way to save the women and children of Baghdad. My point was that secrecy would no longer protect him; only transparency could possibly avert war.

In England, I also appealed to Prime Minister Tony Blair, to please take a step back from this war. I reminded him that the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Pope, Desmond Tutu, Nelson Mandela—they all said the war was wrong, that it was immoral. I pointed out that this war would be his legacy, and that surely that is not what he most wanted to be remembered for.

I appealed to Tony Blair to use his incredible political talents, his intelligence, his undeniable charm, to reach out to Iraq. I suggested that Prime Minister Blair put his stamp of approval on an “Eminent Persons Commission,” empowered by Kofi Annan and the United Nations, perhaps headed by Nelson Mandela, to go to Baghdad and convince Saddam Hussein that open inspections and transparency were the answer. Tony Blair had the leverage back in February to make such an Eminent Persons Commission possible, to avoid war, while the inspectors and perhaps UN peacekeepers pulled us back from the brink of war.

Tony Blair stayed on the course of war, instead. I believe history will be unkind to that decision. Certainly it has hurt his poll numbers, his party, his legacy.

Just to try every avenue, I even appealed to President Bush, who has told us all many, many times that Jesus changed his heart. That Jesus, the Prince of Peace, saved him from his youthful mistakes and lack of direction.

Well, what would Jesus have done about Iraq?

As a preacher, as a student of the Bible, as a lifelong Christian, I cannot accept that Jesus' answer to the supposed weapons of mass destruction crisis would have been to launch the missiles on the women and children of Baghdad. That is not the Jesus I know in my heart. And I am presumptuous enough to suggest that most other religious leaders would agree with me. Certainly Dr. King would; Gandhi would.

The Moral Center

One of the big lessons that Dr. King taught me, that Mahatma Gandhi taught us all, is that times of crisis could also be times of opportunity.

Points of pain can turn into chances for change. At a time of unnecessary war, a global peace movement is reborn.

That is one reason why I often travel to points of pain. I believe peace is worth the risk, so I try when others say it is hopeless.

At times of crisis, I have gone to Syria—I tried, and a downed airman was freed. I went to Cuba, and took Castro to church—we talked, and the result was freed prisoners. I went to Iraq before the first Gulf War, when the bombs were about to fall, and got Saddam Hussein to agree that he should free a planeload of hostages. I even went to Serbia, and got Milosevic to free 3 captured soldiers—I tried, and they got to go home.

Points of pain are often chances for change.

The key to transformation, however, is that those oppressed must remain committed to non-violence, redemption, reconciliation.

The goal is not that the lambs overthrow the lions. The goal is that lions and lambs reconcile, and work out a new arrangement where everyone prospers.

In the American South, the firehoses and vicious police dogs of Sheriff Bull Connor in Birmingham led to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. And now we have a New South, where both Whites and Blacks are better off.

The head-beatings of civil rights marchers in Selma, Alabama, as they attempted to cross a bridge to challenge Governor George Wallace—those beatings led directly to America's Voting Rights Act of 1965. And now we have a broader, more inclusive Democratic Party, which has transcended its segregationist past.

When Gandhi marched to the sea with his masses of the scorned and dispossessed, suddenly colonialism became untouchable. Suddenly democracy in India became not just possible, but likely. Suddenly the downtrodden were elevated to a new level of dignity.

When women suffragists chained themselves to the palace fence, sexism crumbled, and women won the right to vote. And now women lead nations, run corporations, run the fast break in basketball, organize new unions, preach in our churches.

When workers sat down in the automobile factories in the 1930s, the corporations trembled, and trade unions were born. And an American middle class was created that helped lead the U.S. to decades of unimagined prosperity.

Dr. King and Gandhi recognized that politics could be redefined, society turned inside out and upside down, if people—poor people—working people—and especially young people—acted together, non-violently, on behalf of the moral center.

At certain times, history pauses at the crossroads.

At certain times, “soul force” can overcome armies, topple tyrants, knock down walls.

At certain times, a prisoner on Robbens Island becomes a prophet for the whole world, and apartheid is broken. Nelson Mandela spent 27 years in jail, but hung on long enough to free his jailer; together, we can change history.

At certain times, polar opposites can be reconciled, and societies can be redeemed.

With the rise of a global peace movement, this may be such a time.

A Better World Is Possible

During the Cold War, we used to say that the oppressed peoples of Eastern Europe were denied a voice. They were not allowed to speak.

Today in our Western democracies, the people are speaking with their feet. As millions marched in Europe and the U.S., the question became—will their leaders listen? The people are speaking—would they be heard?

One of the great theological principles is fairness. The concept of balance. The Golden Rule—to do unto others as we wish others to do unto us.

In the old stories of the Bible, the great cities were in balance, their height and breadth in proportion to each other.

But today’s world is not in balance.

Today, we have shining cities on the hill, with technological prowess and massive wealth and unimaginable creature comforts. That is 1/6 of the world, what I call the “surplus” cultures, the cultures of privilege.

And then we have the “deficit” cultures, the cultures of pain, 5/6 of the world.

Until we bring the world into balance; until we drain the swamps of poverty and disease and inequality which are the breeding grounds of terrorist recruiting; until we universalise the Golden Rule among nations—until then, we will not have peace. We will not have justice. We will not live up to the moral imperatives to feed the hungry, to heal the sick, to shelter the refugee.

We can do better than guided missiles, and misguided morals.

We can do better than policies which excite the surplus cultures, but depress or alienate the deficit cultures.

We can do better than letting 365,000 children die every single day from what the UN calls “conditions of starvation.”

Our religions, our morality, our deepest values call on us to do better than this world of growing inequality, where “the richest fifth of the world’s people consume 86% of all goods and services, while the poorest fifth are left with just over one percent.” The UN Human Development Report of 1999 also reported that “the income gap between the fifth of the world’s people living in the richest countries and the fifth in the poorest doubled from 1960 to 1990, from 30-to-1 to 60-to-1. By 1998 it had jumped again, with the gap widening to an astonishing 78-to-1.”

We can do better than our current habit of ignoring the 3 billion people around the globe who try to scrape by on less than \$2 per day.

We can do better than ignoring the obvious fact that global warming is now endangering future generations.

We could commit to rebuilding our world. My nation is the world's #1 arms dealer, and it pains me to say so.

We could waste less on weapons of war and mass destruction, and spend more on growing food, cleaning the air and the water, curing the age-old diseases that still torment the poor, fighting AIDS in Africa and Asia and Latin America and all around the world, ending child labor, ending childhood sex exploitation, inventing and distributing renewable energy technologies, building schools for our children.

A better world is still possible.

But to get there, we will have to find leaders willing to suggest policies that excite the deficit cultures, while upsetting many in the surplus cultures. From global warming, to the role of international institutions, to fairness in global trade, to lifting the yoke of debt relief on the poorer nations, the U.S. finds itself on the side of the privileged—and the rest of the world understands it better than we do.

We have come back full circle to a profound point that Dr. King made in April of 1967, when he spoke out against the U.S. role in the Vietnam War, at New York's Riverside Church.

Dr. King taught that “we must rapidly begin the shift from a thing-oriented society to a person-oriented society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights, are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered.”

Dr. King went on: “A true revolution of values will soon cause us to question the fairness and justice of many of our past and present policies...A true revolution of values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth...A genuine revolution of values means in the final analysis that our loyalties must become ecumenical rather than sectional. Every nation must develop an overriding loyalty to mankind as a whole in order to preserve the best in their individual societies...We can no longer afford to worship the god of hate or bow before the altar of retaliation...We still have a choice today: non-violent coexistence or violent coannihilation...We must find new ways to speak for peace...and justice throughout the developing world.”

A New Foreign Policy

With a true revolution in values, American foreign policy would not wander so far from our fundamental values. When I ran for President in 1988, I articulated 5 principles for a new American foreign policy:

- (1) respect for international law;
- (2) human rights;
- (3) self-determination;
- (4) economic justice;
- (5) consistency—measuring by one yardstick.

I believed then, and I believe now, that all nations must play by one set of rules. The fact that the United States is strong enough to ignore other nations, at least

in the short term, is not the same as saying it makes sense to do so, or that it is somehow moral to bully them, intimidate them, or bribe them into supporting our unilateral decisions.

The destruction and debasement of international institutions, the abandonment of international treaties, the tough talk about other nations, even our longtime allies like France and Germany—this is not good policy, and it is extremely damaging over the long term.

After all, the world is a rainbow of people. Even the U.S. is becoming more diverse with each passing year.

Remember: when President Bush and Prime Minister Blair get together to talk about Iraq, it's a minority meeting. They represent only 5% of the world, one out of every 20 people. As all of you know, half the world lives in Asia, with half of them in China. A billion people live in India, next door to their foe, Pakistan—and both are armed with weapons of mass destruction. One-eighth of the world lives in Africa, 1/4 of them in Nigeria, where AIDS, hunger, and disease are devastating the continent. The United States is not even a majority in its own hemisphere, where more people speak Spanish than English, and almost as many people speak Portuguese.

Here's a fact that you understand, but most Americans do not realize—that most people in the world are black, brown, yellow, young, female, non-Christian, and don't speak English.

We must learn to live together. If, as moral human beings, we want to end violence in the world, unilateralism is a dead end.

Multilateralism is a necessity. With development, not destruction. The United States must once again work hand-in-hand with its allies, with developing nations, with the United Nations. Cooperation is the watchword, not contempt.

The wealth of the world must be shared more fairly. The lost sheep of which Jesus spoke must be found, and fed, and healed. The bread and fishes that Jesus shared with the multitudes, must now be shared with Quito as well as Cleveland, Lagos as well as Los Angeles, Bangkok as well as Baltimore.

A better world is still possible.

Lions and Lambs

There will be no peace until lions and lambs lie down together. Until the strong and the weak mutually agree to reconcile.

But what would make an arrogant and powerful lion agree to lie down with a lamb? And what would make a weak and defenseless lamb agree to trust a lion long enough to lie still?

Only one thing—they have mutual interests. Coalitions of unlikely partners are built on mutual interests, common ground.

Both the lion and the lamb will be destroyed if the forests are set on fire. Both lions and lambs will perish if the air is warmed too much, and the ice caps melt, and the oceans wash up over our islands and shorelines, and the ecology of the jungle and the farm are forever altered.

Neither a lion or a lamb can exist while drinking polluted waters. Neither a lion or a lamb can survive a smart bomb—or, for that matter, a fundamentalist fanatic armed with a box-cutter or a suicide bomb.

Common ground leads to coalition. Talking together, and working together, and prospering together leads to reconciliation.

The Golden Rule has not been repealed—do unto others as ye would have others do unto you. This rule works for nations, as well as for neighbors.

Dr. King's lesson still lives: "The arc of history is long, but it bends towards justice."

Spirit and faith will always be tested; but faith can move mountains.

It's dark, but the morning comes.

As the writer told us: "If my people, who are called by my name..."

Faith helped Moses march out of Egypt, and across the Red Sea.

Faith helped Joshua bring the walls tumbling down.

Faith helped Jesus turn crucifixion into resurrection.

Faith kept Mandela alive long enough to liberate his own jailer.

Someday, swords will be beaten into plowshares.

Someday, lions will lie down with lambs.

Someday, justice will roll down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream.

Keep Hope Alive!