

Speech and notes: Iraq Forum, 18 March, 2003

Thanks Michael,

I need to start by saying that I am a former delegate of the International Committee of the Red Cross – I am not a current employee. The International Committee of the Red Cross is a neutral, impartial humanitarian body that can not engage in political debate, hence the views I am about to express are not those of the Red Cross, they are personal, intensely personal.

One:

In 1997 I was in northern Serbia attending a summer camp for refugee orphan children who had escaped the war in Bosnia. Each of the children played around a camp fire, toasted marsh-mellows and generally joined in the spirit of the occasion. All of them bar one, a little 12 year old girl named Maria.

Maria did not communicate in any way. She did not speak, laugh or cry. Something had happened to her during the war that caused her to lock all her emotions deep inside. On this night she sat under a tree on her own: - and then, out of the blue, she walked to the fire, sat beside me, put her head on my shoulder – and cried.

It is still, to this day, the most emotional moment of my life.

Over the next few months we worked hard to re-unite her with her family. And on one summer's afternoon 18 days after the reunion with her mother, Maria showed off her new swimming skill in the river. On return to the shore she placed her hand on the sandy bottom to leave the water and inadvertently engaged the trigger mechanism of an anti personnel landmine.

18 days after the reunion and 18 months after the war had stopped, the conflict killed again, removing the upper torso of a little girl as her mother looked on.

In Rwanda I stood in a church in Ntarama, south of the capital, Kigali. 5,000 rotting human corpses, the smell of which remains today on every breath I take, surrounded me. On top of the pile was a baby's head, no body, just the head.

The empty eye sockets shot the accusation – “Why did you let this happen?”

Why, indeed.

I am no supporter of war – I know its effects, I know the results of it, I have been to five conflict zones and have no desire to visit another.

I hate war and am no supporter of it. In war, terrible things happen such as rape, murder and torture.

But neither can I support a terrible peace.

Two:

Last Monday week, 37-year-old mother of eight Nazif Mamik Tofik approached the border station between Iraqi controlled northern Iraq, and Kurdish controlled northern Iraq.

She carried a 10 litre plastic container of fuel in each hand that she hoped to sell for a few dollars to feed her kids. The boarder guards, in search of entertainment, punctured the containers, doused Nazif with fuel, and set her alight like a human torch.

Iraq is not a nice place to live. It is a country where unspeakable acts are performed by the regime Saddam Hussein runs.

Those of you here who are parents of boys, close your eyes. Think now of your sons. Think of their faces and your feelings for them.

Think now of a pair of pliers crushing their testicles – as this is how Hussein's men get fathers to talk.

You who are parents of girls, close your eyes. Think now of your daughters, Think of their faces and your feelings for them.

Think now of them violated by a broom stick – as this is how Hussein's men get parents talking.

Torturing children gets parents talking.

Like it or not, if you oppose intervention by the US you help keep this man in power – you allow his torture, you allow his murder and you allow his rape. (permit)

Over the last 10 years Saddam Hussein has killed between 500,000 and 1 million of his own people.

Let's take the lower figure. 500,000. That is an average of 137 per day over 10 years.

I now ask the front row of people to stand, for that is how many are killed on an average day in Iraq, perhaps today. Now the next row, you represent tomorrow. And the next, you are the day after.

How many more rows must stand before we stop this man.

Since September, when we began debating Iraq again, perhaps another 28,000 people have been added to his death lists.

How many more?

Three:

I want Saddam out, but there are two problems:

First, there is no law to throw him out. There is no law that allows one to stop a tyrant killing his own people. Without a threat to international peace and security the UN SC has *no authority to act*.

Some have asked ‘why not Libya, or why not Zimbabwe?’

The answer is simple, a tyrant can do what he likes to his own people. So long as it is short of genocide and causes no threat to international peace and security, then there is no lawful mechanism to act.

To remove Saddam Hussain you MUST break the law.

Second, the US is not giving ‘humanity’ as a reason for their actions – partly because there is no law, but mainly because this war is about a bigger picture, bigger than people, bigger than Iraq, and yes, bigger than oil.

This war is about geo-politics and whose cultural agenda sets the tone for the future of global governance – the US, Europe or China.

So I want Saddam Hussain out, but there is no law, I don’t like US foreign policy and I don’t like their reasons for the war, but is that really good enough for me to allow the rape, murder and torture of the Iraqi people to continue?

Four:

The two greatest foreign policy failings during the last 20 years at the geo-political level are not interventions, but *non-* interventions. Bosnia, and Rwanda.

In the case of both Rwanda and Bosnia the US were told by the Europeans, and more particularly by the French and Germans, not to be cultural imperialists, not to be the world policeman and to keep out.

History shows that the Europeans failed to solve Bosnia without the US and 250,000 died. In the case of Rwanda the US kept out, the UN pulled out and 100 days latter up to 1 million people were dead.

The French and Germans are again telling the US to keep out, but no-one is telling me how to stop the killing and torture of his terrible peace.

Five:

Gillian Triggs is right, there is no legal authority to throw someone out for ‘mere’ human rights atrocities – but there should be such a law.

If this action inspires debate to reform the Security Council mandate, to set up structures and precedents for humanitarian intervention, then that would be a good thing. But for that to happen part of the reasons for intervention needs to be humanitarian.

As John Stuart Mill once wrote: “War is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things: the decayed and degraded state of moral and patriotic feeling which thinks nothing worth a war, is worse.”

To that extent I believe the human rights lobbies and peace groups have missed the compelling need to wage war as an act of humanitarian reform.

If intervention against Saddam Hussain is not justified by the terrors of the current peace in Iraq, then I ask these peace activists: what ever would justify intervention or must it be peace at any cost?

I became involved in this debate because I wanted people to make informed decisions. War is an evil prospect that should only be supported if its evil is outweighed in the great scale by the cost of no war. Yet good hearted and well-meaning people have marched the streets demanding ‘no war’ with many thinking, somehow, that there is no cost to ‘no war’.

The opposition to intervention keeps Saddam in power. He can still kill, still rape and still torture, and if the US pull out, and the no fly zones (which are illegal) are removed, that killing will only escalate.

It is easy to justify doing nothing by saying ‘if there is a war then its proponents will have blood on their hands’. But if there is no war then the blood of the innocent who will die whilst Saddam Hussein remains in power, is on the hands of those who would not intervene.