

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS : Foreign Affairs, Iraq

Mr ANDREN (Calare) (9.31 p.m.)—Hopefully, today's announcement from Kofi Annan that Iraq has agreed to a resumption of weapons inspections is a genuine offer from Saddam. Hopefully, it will lead to the destruction of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. Saddam has been devious and dishonest in the past, but he has no mortgage over lies, subterfuge and noncompliance. The US reaction—that regime change is still the goal—suggests that war is still a very real option. **While the screen jockeys talk of the impact of any war on the equity markets and the price of oil, who is talking about the likely impact on the innocent adults and infants of Iraq or on our service men and women?**

It is a constitutional anachronism that, under section 61, the power to declare war and peace in this country lies with the British monarch, vested here in the Australian Governor-General. To all intents and purposes, this power lies with the executive. In other words, historical convention still dictates that a representative democracy like ours does not make its most important decision—to commit Australians to war—within the representative context of the parliament. For this reason, and in the absence of a constitutional authority, I move:

That all words after “That” be omitted with a view to substituting the following words:

“while the House commends the Government for its strong condemnation of terrorists and their activities and its encouragement of Iraq's compliance with United Nations resolutions the House believes that Australian Defence Forces should not be involved in any action in Iraq that is not carried out under a United Nations' Resolution”

The danger posed by Saddam Hussein's regime needs to be taken care of, but not through unilateral action by the United States. That would give carte blanche for any country to adopt the same tactics—for example, Russia in Chechnya or China against Taiwan. The defiance of UN resolutions alone is not enough to justify a unilateral invasion of a country.

Let me remind the House of the resolutions that countries apart from Iraq have defied. In the case of Israel, UN resolution 242 requires the withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from occupied territories and the acknowledgment of the territorial integrity and political independence of every state in the area. Resolution 338 calls on all parties to cease all firing and terminate all military activity. In the case of Pakistan—also led by a military dictator—that country is in defiance of two UN resolutions. The first, 47, has existed since Britain left the Indian subcontinent. It calls on Pakistan to secure the withdrawal of tribesmen and Pakistani nationals who have entered Kashmir for the purposes of fighting. Resolution 91 calls on both India and Pakistan to cooperate in the demilitarisation of Kashmir, while resolution 47 also calls on India to hold a plebiscite on the future of Kashmir. But these nations, despite having the ultimate weapon of mass destruction—the nuclear option—are apparently less threatening to US interests than is Iraq.

Those interests are two: oil and Israel. Israel of course also has nuclear capability, but that is apparently okay, is it? It does not have any destabilising effect in the region, does it? From a purely Western perspective that may be the case, but I wonder what the Palestinians, the Lebanese, the Syrians, the Iranians and indeed the Iraqis might think of that Israeli capacity—as Iran worries about both Iraq's and Israel's capabilities. At last count, Israel was estimated to have anywhere between 100 and 200 nuclear weapons. On top of that, Israel also has a massive arsenal of weaponry that should fairly be described as weapons of mass destruction.

The US has adopted a three wise monkeys approach to Israel's nuclear capability, at least since 1958, when U2 spy flights first established the construction of the Israeli Dimona nuclear plant. By 1965, the CIA had determined the Israeli nuclear weapons program was an established and irreversible fact. US inspectors visited Dimona seven times in the 1960s, but were unable to get a full picture of the activities carried out there. The Israelis installed false walls and control panels and bricked out stairways. There was no UN resolution then. After the 1967 Six-Day War, the US placed a ban on gathering intelligence on the Israeli nuclear program and, by 1973, Israel had the bomb—allegedly assembling thirteen 20-kiloton atomic bombs when fearing defeat in the 1973 Yom Kippur War. That is something of the Israeli nuclear capability. What about their other weapons of limited mass destruction? Middle East correspondent Robert Fisk, writing in the *Independent*, said:

In Lebanon ... 150,000 men, women and children were killed in 16 years; 17,500 of them—almost six times the total dead of September 11, and almost all of them civilians—were killed in just the summer of 1982, during Israel's bloody invasion of their little country, an invasion to which the US had given a green light.

There is inconsistency after inconsistency in the US approach to this Iraq fixation—indeed, to its Middle East and foreign policies generally; policies which I firmly believe have led to the hatred and distrust of the US in many quarters and the festering of extremist individuals such as Osama bin Laden and groups like Al-Qaeda. Notwithstanding our horror at the events of September 11 last year, terror and horror of far greater proportions have been visited upon other countries with the direct or implicit support of the US and its allies—and indeed members of the UN Security Council who will now deliberate on Iraq's fate. It is a rat's nest of complicity and disingenuous behaviour stretching back over decades.

The slow breaking of Iraq-gate from the late eighties is yet another example of US complicity in creating its own international relations nightmares. In the same vein as Iran-Contra and its Central American meddling, Iraq-gate revealed the Reagan and George Bush Sr administrations had placed much importance on improving Iraq-US relations and that they had engaged in open and clandestine financial and trade deals designed to achieve this end right up to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. This support came despite US knowledge of Saddam's crimes against his own people and his use of chemical weapons in the conflict with Iran and US awareness of Iraq's complex procurement networks of holding companies to obtain equipment and technology for its chemical, biological, nuclear and ballistic missiles. Whether in Iraq, Afghanistan, South America or Vietnam, the US has a sorry record of bungling and opportunism, and then expecting the rest of the Western world to help

it clean up. We cannot and should not always march to Dixie and forever be repaying a debt from World War II. Where was the UN intervention to protect the Kurds from the brutal chemical assault by Saddam in the late eighties? Why wasn't the US prosecuting that case? It did not suit the times and it was a long way from Manhattan.

The war on terrorism is a dangerously general catchcry for a US administration that now needs a tangible target post September 11, and Iraq is that target. But unless we target all weapons of mass destruction held by the US, China, Russia, Britain, Israel, India, Pakistan and France, how can they or any of us in the world community logically or credibly dictate that no more countries are to join the sinister club? Once, in the not too distant past, Australia had an opportunity to play a leading role in making a more peaceful world. We could well have played a role, perhaps with New Zealand and the Scandinavian countries, as an independent nation in helping to broker peace in the Middle East. That opportunity has gone out the window, along with any belief among many Middle Eastern countries that we are a fair and objective country, particularly after our treatment of Middle Eastern asylum seekers, of whom we will surely have more should war break out.

My bottom line and that of the vast majority of Australians is the same as that of Major General Alan Stretton, former Army chief of staff in Vietnam. He recently said:

If our reason for sending our Defence Force to Iraq is because Iraq has broken an agreement with the United Nations, then any involvement should not be undertaken without United Nations approval.

That is the tenor of the amendment I have moved to this motion. In the absence of any higher earthly authority than the UN Security Council, we supported action against US-nurtured Saddam in 1991. I supported that with the kinds of misgivings I have outlined. But in doing so again, I would ask: which members of the UN Security Council are not seriously compromised in agreeing to action against Iraq through oil, arms, religious or political considerations? The sad thing is that even a UN sanction or resolution is these days stained by self-interest—but it is the best we have.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. I.R. Causley)—Is the motion seconded?

Mr Windsor—Mr Deputy Speaker, I second the motion.