



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**IRAQ**

**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 19 March 2003**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

---

## SPEECH

**Date** Wednesday, 19 March 2003  
**Page** 12926  
**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Bishop, Julie, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Ms JULIE BISHOP** (Curtin) (2.56 pm)—The House has been presented today with the opportunity to act to defend our national and international security, to endorse the government's contribution to the coalition presently assembling in the Persian Gulf region and to bring to an end the threat posed by a rogue state's development of weapons of mass destruction. The appearance of transnational terrorism committed by stateless terrorists, who nonetheless enjoy the support offered by rogue states, coupled with the very real possibility that these murderers will acquire, in short order, nuclear, biological or chemical weapons from regimes with a propensity to acquire and use them, has become the central security threat of the 21st century. As British Prime Minister Blair said yesterday in his address to the Commons, that threat is chaos—and there are two begetters of chaos: tyrannical regimes with weapons of mass destruction and extreme terrorist groups.

On an occasion such as this and given the extraordinary character of the times in which we are living, I am loath to attempt historical comparisons. Nonetheless, these words written by Sir Winston Churchill as a historian in *The Gathering Storm* resonate in the moment:

Still, if you will not fight for the right when you can easily win without bloodshed; if you will not fight when your victory will be sure and not too costly; you may come to the moment when you will have to fight with all the odds against you and only a precarious chance of survival. There may even be a worse case. You may have to fight when there is no hope of victory, because it is better to perish than live as slaves.

Churchill's words speak to us across the generations. We ought not subscribe to the idea that free people should be passive in the face of rogue states defiantly holding weapons of mass destruction, nor ought we be passive in the face of the evil of terrorism. The time for temporising is past.

Like all members of this House, I had hoped that the United Nations, through the membership of the Security Council, would not evade its responsibility to the nonmembers of the council and to the men, women and children who may be the future victims of chemical, biological or nuclear weaponry. I had hoped that the council—aware of the seriousness of the threat presented by a WMD capable regime that sponsors terrorism, cognisant of the failure of 17 previous resolutions and mindful of the shameful inadequacy of the organisation that it succeeded—might cement its place in future international security considerations with decisive and far-sighted deeds. The disappointment is all the more grave because the Security Council was offered an opportunity to speak with one voice to warn forcefully the Iraqi regime. That opportunity was not the result of necessity or chance. It was a deliberate offer on the part of those council members who realised the dangers presented by Iraq's weapons of mass destruction development—and it was an offer extended more in hope than in expectation.

But the point is moot. No 18th resolution is required for this danger to be expunged. Attempts have been made to rewrite the history of United Nations Security Council resolution 1441. Those attempts cannot obscure the truth. That resolution was passed unanimously by the council in lieu of immediate military action by the United States. It was a resolution that offered one final opportunity for the Iraqi regime to comply with the demands of the council and the terms of the Iraqi surrender after the 1990 invasion of Kuwait. That final opportunity cannot be said to have been taken by the Iraqi regime. The serious consequences stipulated by the resolution will be. By its very terms, resolution 1441 envisaged the use of force. The action to be undertaken by Australia is well within international law as exemplified in resolutions 678, 687 and 1441. I have read the legal advice on the use of force against Iraq provided by the government's senior legal advisers, and I agree with it. There are some who have attempted to make the case that pre-emption and, for that matter, regime change in Baghdad may be a transgression of the notions of national sovereignty. Yet the transgression has already occurred, with Iraq's sovereignty already compromised by the extensive no-fly zones imposed by the United Nations as a result of Iraq's own past aggression.

Conflict is never simple. There is no foregone conclusion to this action. Yet it behoves this parliament to consider the likelihood that the military action will be over quickly and the Iraqi regime that has so traumatised its own citizenry will be abandoned and in flight. What next? What does the future hold for a liberated Iraq? Just

as the coalition of the willing has an obligation to undertake this action, so we have an obligation to contribute to the moulding of a free, prosperous and peaceful Iraq. Those critics of action—and there are very many of them nationally and in my electorate who must be acknowledged—ought to take up the responsibility of holding this government and the American, British, Spanish and other governments to account on this score, for we must help persuade the United Nations to aid the people of postwar Iraq, even if it was unwilling to assist in their emancipation. We must hold President Bush to the words of his address yesterday and to the noble principles he articulated in a recent speech when he said:

The nation of Iraq—with its proud heritage, abundant resources and skilled and educated people—is fully capable of moving towards democracy and living in freedom. The world has a clear interest in the spread of democratic values because stable and free nations do not breed ideologies of murder. They encourage the peaceful pursuit of a better life.

At this moment, the need for security has converged with the desire for liberty. Our principal mission may be to disarm Iraq, but we also ought to bring to the darkness of the Middle East the light of the democratic model. The Arab peoples, so culturally rich, deserve the chance to live lives free from tyranny, servitude and kleptocracy. Liberal democracy offers the only real opportunity for the emancipation of individual human beings, the maintenance of international peace and the growth of material prosperity. Surely the people of Iraq deserve that opportunity as much as we do. Let us, in short, win the peace as well as the war. We have a useful example to follow—the 1991 Gulf War was a lesson in losing the peace after victory. There are mitigating circumstances, of course. We tend to forget that in 1991 we still lived in a Cold War world. The Berlin Wall may have fallen but there were still Soviets in the Kremlin. The first President Bush was understandably reticent about regime change and liberation. We now know that this hesitancy has brought great cost, most pointedly to the Iraqi people.

We know that the present Iraqi leadership is a critical factor in the threat posed to the Iraqi people, Iraq's neighbours and the rest of the world. There is general agreement that Hussein is a murderous tyrant. Geoffrey Robertson QC, referring in his book *Crimes Against Humanity* to various acts of unmitigated evil throughout the ages, rated Hussein's gassing to death of over 8,000 Kurdish civilians in Halabja in March 1988 as one of the worst single crimes against humanity ever committed. For peace to be secured, Saddam must go, whether under his own speed and in line with the ultimatum given to him or by force.

Listening to the debate today, one could have been forgiven for imagining that some opposite believe American hegemony poses more of a threat to the free nations of the world than does a rogue Iraqi state with weapons of mass destruction and close ties with international terrorists. The United States is one of our closest allies and oldest friends. I am an admirer of the United States and her international ideals of democracy and freedom. The United States is paramount to our security considerations and those of the free world. The truth is that, even had the UN sanctioned military action against the Baathist regime—had France, Russia, Germany, Cameroon, Guinea and the rest of them sanctioned military action—it would have been up to the United States to take the lead. It would have been, in the main, American troops and resources called upon to enforce the UN resolutions in any event. As it stands now, we and our allies—the United States, the United Kingdom; in fact, some 30 countries in total—are committed to the disarmament of the Iraqi regime. I pray for the men and women of Australia's defence forces, particularly the officers and men of the Special Air Service Regiment, who I am proud to call my constituents. My thoughts are with them and their families. I commend the Prime Minister's motion and call upon members of this House to offer their support. (*Time expired*)