



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**THE SENATE**

**IRAQ**

**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 19 March 2003**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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# SPEECH

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**Speaker** Ridgeway, Sen Aden

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**Senator RIDGEWAY** (New South Wales) (3.59 pm)—In continuation from earlier today, I wanted to mention that the American *Atlantic Monthly* magazine has also said that the US is spending so much money on Iraq it might as well make it the 51st state. Most conservatives in that country would rather that money be spent in America than in a country 7,000 miles away. Likewise, for us here in Australia, with the impending budget being handed down soon, I think all Australians would rather see our money being spent here on the much needed vital services of health, education and housing.

It is right that many Australians are questioning whether our involvement in the gulf at this time really is in the national interest, because clearly a lot of other courses of action are more immediately related to our national concern. The clear message of the government's motion is that it believes that it has built the case to go to war against Iraq. I simply do not agree with that. It is an indecent, unlawful and morally indefensible proposition. It is a decision that represents a turning point in US foreign policy which seeks to solidify the idea that the United States, or any other nation, can legitimately attack another nation that is not threatening now but may at some unforeseeable time in the future.

It throws to the wind our understanding of the basic idea of self-defence and may do irreparable damage to our relationship with our neighbours in a way unforeseen or never imagined. The President of the United States, Mr George Bush, said as much in his speech yesterday when he said that America has the sovereign right to protect itself anywhere, at any time in the world. I want it stated for the record that I oppose the US becoming the policemen of the world. This is not their job. This is the job for the entire international community, and it certainly is not the job of those that call themselves the coalition of the willing.

This is a day that Australia, in my view, has somehow lost its innocence, with the government jockeying to position itself to win all favours from its great and powerful friend. War always results in the loss of innocent lives, and I now only hope that this war is swift and quick, that there be no loss of life and that our own personnel return safely. The government has made no case for war. The policy of containment—and I put up all the facts earlier this morning—is working. There is no necessity for war. There is no UN authorisation. The government has failed to properly acknowledge the moral and ethical questions that an attack on Iraq will inevitably entail and the human consequences. I will not support the war, and it is a badge of honour for me to join the 'Australian mob opposed to war'.

I would have hoped that the government's decision is the consequence of wise men and women following noble goals. But even that is not good enough because, whatever your wisdom and your goals may be, the only thing that really matters at the end of the day is your actions. I cannot judge anyone on the government side of the chamber by their thoughts any more than they can mine, but I can judge them by the actions that are being taken. This seems to me to be one of the West's and, in particular, the US's problems: we know that we have good intentions; we start out with good intentions; but the rest of the world judges us by our actions. If you look at what we do and the consequences of what is done, it is easy to understand why so many in those countries of Islamic faith tend to hate us or to have doubts about our credibility in relation to promoting the common good.

In the case of Iraq, the US and Britain are about to attack Iraq against the wishes of the Australian people and the United Nations. That will make us, the United States and Britain aggressors as well as liars, because no amount of talking or arguing can change this simple reality of our actions. It is a sad day for this country, because the principles we hold dear are being sacrificed on an issue as insubstantial as Iraq. When all is said and done, Iraq will indeed be a ruined country, not a military superpower threatening our very survival. I want to finish on this occasion by echoing the words of Martin Luther King Jr, which I think people need to take heed of:

If we do not act, we shall surely be dragged down the long, dark and shameful corridors of time reserved for those who possess power without compassion, might without morality, and strength without sight.

'Action' in this situation ought not mean war.