

Bishops: 'Step back' from war with Iraq

Patricia Zapor/CNS

WASHINGTON — The U.S. bishops Nov. 13 urged the United States to "step back from the brink of war," saying they "find it difficult to justify the resort to war against Iraq."

The bishops said they agree with the Holy See and bishops from the Middle East that resorting to war under current circumstances "would not meet the strict conditions in Catholic teaching for overriding the strong presumption against the use of military force."

The statement was approved after an hourlong debate by a vote of 228 to 14, with three abstentions. It prefaced its conclusions by explaining that the "grave choices about war and peace, about pursuing justice and security," are not only military and political choices but also moral ones involving matters of life and death.

"Traditional Christian teaching offers ethical principles and moral criteria that should guide these critical choices," it said. Instead of primarily pursuing a course to war in Iraq, the bishops said, "it is vital that our nation persist in the very frustrating and difficult challenges of maintaining broad international support for constructive, effective and legitimate ways to contain and deter aggressive Iraqi actions and threats."

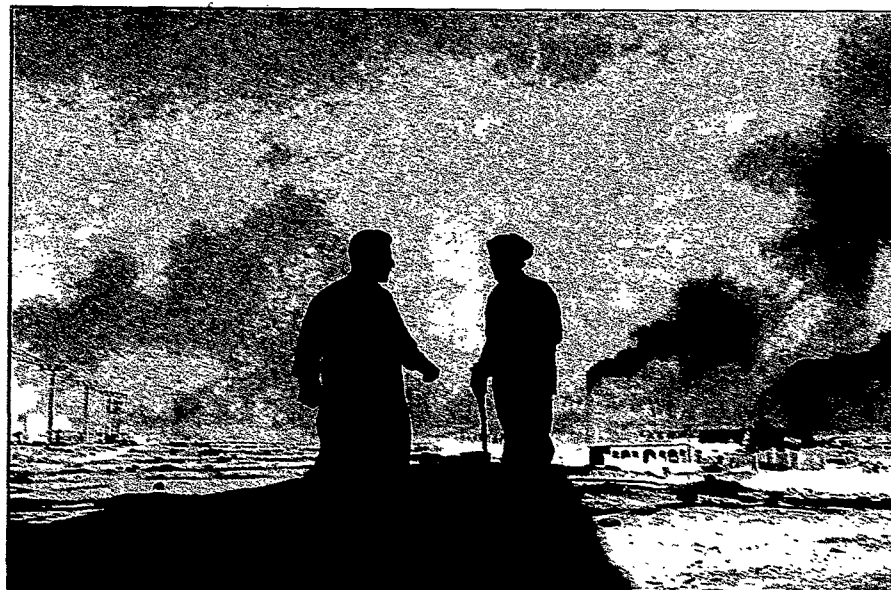
At the urging of several bishops, the statement was careful to note that "there are no easy answers" and acknowledge that "ultimately, our elected leaders are responsible for decisions about national security." However, they "hope that our moral concerns and questions will be considered seriously by our leaders and all citizens."

They said, "We have no illusions about the behavior and intentions of the Iraqi government. The Iraqi leadership must cease its internal repression, end its threats to its neighbors, stop any support for terrorism, abandon its efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction and destroy all such existing weapons."

Toward that end, they said, they support "effective enforcement of the military embargo and maintenance of political sanctions." They called for more carefully focused economic sanctions "which do not threaten the lives of innocent Iraqi civilians."

The bishops said they welcome the fact that the United States has worked to win the U.N. Security Council's support for calls to Iraq to disarm or face military intervention.

They acknowledged that "people of good will may differ on how to apply just-war norms in particular



Reuters/CNS

Two Iraqi workers walk through the factory town of Nahawan, 37 miles outside of Baghdad. On Nov. 13, U.S. bishops approved a statement to reiterate just-war principles in response to a possible U.S. attack on Iraq.

cases, especially when events are moving rapidly and the facts are not altogether clear."

However, they said, "based on the facts known to us, we continue to find it difficult to justify the resort to war against Iraq, lacking clear and adequate evidence of an imminent attack of a grave nature."

The bishops said they are especially concerned about recent efforts to expand the traditional definition of a just cause for war "to include preventative use of military force to overthrow threatening regimes or to deal with weapons of mass destruction."

It noted that the "Catechism of the Catholic Church" limits the choice to go to war to cases where "the damage inflicted by the aggressor on the nation or community of nations (is) lasting, grave and certain."

Decisions to wage war with Iraq should "require compliance with U.S. constitutional imperatives,

broad consensus within our nation and some form of international sanction," the bishops said. Recent actions by the U.S. Congress and the U.N. Security Council are important toward that end, they said.

"As the Holy See has indicated, if recourse to force were deemed necessary, this should take place within the framework of the United Nations after considering the consequences for Iraqi civilians and re-

gional and global stability," they said.

Also to be considered are the probability of success and proportionality, the statement said.

"We recognize that not taking military action could have its own negative consequences," the bishops said. "We are concerned, however, that war against Iraq could have unpredictable consequences not only for Iraq but for peace and stability elsewhere in the Middle East."

"The use of force might provoke the very kind of attacks that it is intended to prevent, could impose terrible new burdens on an already long-suffering civilian population and could lead to wider conflict and instability in the region."

The agenda for the bishops' annual meeting did not originally include any international policy issues. On the first day of their conference, however, several bishops proposed they quickly draft and approve a new statement about Iraq, taking into consideration the recent actions by the Security Council and Congress.

They asked that it update and build upon a Sept. 13 letter on the moral issues at stake in a decision to go to war, which the bishops' Administrative Committee had authorized to be sent to President Bush by the president of their conference, Bishop Wilton D. Gregory.

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The Solemnity of

CHRIST THE KING

Sunday, 24 November 2002

FESTIVE EUCHARIST
at 11:30 AM
(Plainsong Mass "Orbis Factor" • Haydn: "Sing to God")

EXPOSITION OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT
from 12:30 to 5:00 PM

VESPERS & SOLEMN BENEDICTION
at 4:00 PM
(Plainsong, Anglican chant, works by Haydn and Mozart)

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