

Possible Iraq war draws opposition

Mark Pattison/CNS

WASHINGTON — The case for war against Iraq — laid out at the United Nations Feb. 5 by Secretary of State Colin Powell — has not convinced Scott Wright, who worked in El Salvador for eight years during the height of that nation's civil war in the 1980s, and visited Iraq for five days in January.

"I think he made the case better than President Bush, but I don't think he made the case for a pre-emptive, preventive war against Iraq," Wright told Catholic News Service.

Wright, a Catholic who lives in Washington, was one of a dozen Americans visiting Iraq Jan. 21-25 on a trip sponsored by Voices in the Wilderness. The Chicago-based organization has sponsored more than 50 such trips since the end of the 1991 Persian Gulf War.

While in Iraq, Wright and the others visited UNICEF, World Health Organization and U.N. Development Program offices in Baghdad. They also visited a pediatric hospital in the Iraqi capital, and a fallout shelter that was hit by two cruise missiles in the Gulf War. The attack killed 408 people.

"In war, the majority of people who suffer, are killed, are civilians," Wright said. "I knew that from my experience in El Salvador."

Wright does not doubt U.S. concerns over possible Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. "The concern that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction is a legitimate one. I think it's the concern of any nation," he said. "How do we stop them from being used? But I don't think he (Powell) made the case (for war)."

Papal pronouncements against war have become "almost a mantra" to Wright, he said, citing Pope Paul VI's "War no more. War never again" remarks at the United Nations, and Pope John Paul II's more recent "War is a defeat for humanity."

"I went to Iraq because I wanted to be a sign and a witness to our people and the Iraqi people for peace," Wright added. "I believe it is imperative upon Christians, upon Catholics, to be a voice in defense of the victims."

U.N. officials in Baghdad told the Voices in the Wilderness group that, since the "first Gulf War" — a phrase Wright used often during the CNS interview — their nation's infant mortality rate is higher than that of "any country in Africa affected by AIDS, or by Rwanda during the (1994) genocide," Wright said.

UNICEF officials told the group that, in the event of war, 5 million



Reuters/CNS

An Iraqi man holds an AK-47 rifle during a parade in the city of Mosul, north of Baghdad, Feb. 4. Thousands of armed volunteers marched in northern Iraq in defiance of U.S. threats to invade the country and oust President Saddam Hussein. Men and women in military fatigues carried weapons and chanted "No peace. No surrender."

Iraqis — 4 million children and 1 million nursing or lactating mothers — would need direct medical or food aid, and another 2 million would be internally displaced. "That's in a country," Wright said, "whose total population has been estimated between 21 million and 25 million." About 5 million people live in Baghdad.

Those numbers argue against the proportionality criterion of Catholic just-war theory, Wright said. The notion of a pre-emptive war, he added, would not meet the criterion of just cause. "I think it is a dangerous precedent to lift up pre-emptive war, and make the world a much more dangerous place," he said.

Wright said some Americans were planning to stay in Iraq, even if war were to begin. Staying on despite war was part of Wright's own mission during his eight years in El Salvador. "Archbishop Oscar Romero called it 'the pastoral work of accompaniment,'" Wright said.

In the Diocese of Rochester, meanwhile, the faculty of Nazareth College voted 73-27 on Jan. 24 for a resolution opposing the invasion of Iraq, according to Harry Murray, professor of sociology and an activist in the Catholic Worker movement.

The resolution, a copy of which was sent to President George W. Bush, outlined the following points

in its argument against an invasion.

- The faculty was "aware of no evidence that Iraq had any connection to the Sept. 11 (2001) attacks on the United States."

- Launching a war to effect "regime change" constitutes an unjust war in violation of the United Nations Charter.

- The principle of "preventive war" enunciated by the Bush administration, also violates the U.N. charter and is "unjust reason" for going to war.

In an interview with the *Catholic Courier*, Murray said that the seriousness of a potential Iraqi invasion warranted taking the faculty's pulse.

"Sometimes, issues arise that are so overwhelming that you need to take a collective stance as a faculty," Murray said.

However, Nazareth history professor Timothy Thibodeau, who described himself as ambivalent about a possible war, said he did not think it was appropriate for the faculty to take a public stance either for or against it.

"I think it's a leap of logic that 110 or 120 people in an educational institution possess this level of expertise on an international crisis ... " Thibodeau said.

Thibodeau disagreed with the notion that the Iraqi crisis is a uniquely important issue. For example, he said, some faculty members like-

wise might think partial-birth abortion — also known as late-term abortion — is such an important issue that the faculty should take a stand on it. He said it would have been more appropriate for Murray to distribute a petition to the president that faculty members could have signed if they so chose, rather than asking them to make a collective stand on the war.

Murray, however, stressed what he saw as a dangerous precedent being set by the Bush administration in enunciating a preventive-war theory, which he fears other nations could use as justification for beginning their own wars.

"I feel that preventive war is not a new idea, but is simply an

offshoot of aggressive war, something that we've known is evil all along," he said.

At a college forum last fall, Thibodeau said he noted that preventing Iraq from committing future evils was a case with some merit. He said that Europe failed to contain Adolf Hitler in the 1930s, enabling Hitler subsequently to start World War II. But Murray said Powell did not make a strong case linking anti-American terrorists to Iraq, and added that Americans have not thought about the long-term consequences of occupying the nation. He also noted that other countries have the kinds of weapons Iraq is accused of possessing, and that the United States could spend its money more wisely by ensuring that the weapons of the former Soviet Union don't fall into the wrong hands.

Murray acknowledged that Sadaam Hussein is a brutal dictator, but said the United States had never been concerned about the human-rights violations of dictators it has supported in such countries as Chile and Indonesia. Instead of invading Iraq, the weapons inspections process should continue, Murray said.

"There's no reason why there should be an attack now," he said.

Contains reporting by Rob Cullivan in Rochester.