

Why Canada should declare war

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Bill Graham, Canada's Foreign Minister, does not want Canada to declare war on Iraq. But Mr. Graham has not come out against war itself -- just against Canada declaring war. He wants diplomats at the United Nations, not Canada's elected Members of Parliament, to make that decision.

Our pusillanimous European allies have shown that there are many arguments against declaring war - some of them legitimate. Fear is the most common reason the Europeans seem to express when they speak in opposition to an invasion of Iraq: fear of military casualties, fear of a backlash from the tens of millions of Arabs who now live in Europe, fear of a new, U.S.-oriented Middle East displacing European influence. Another common excuse, favoured by the UN's Kofi Annan, is the naive hope that Saddam Hussein's ambitions can be appeased without war. Lack of military preparedness is another reason to avoid a war -- and not an unjustified one for most European countries and Canada, too. And then there is simple, unvarnished anti-Americanism, the dominant foreign affairs ideology of the European Union.

But Mr. Graham's rationale is surely novel. Even if Iraq refuses to abandon its nuclear, chemical, biological and ballistic-missile weapons programs, even if Saddam continues to bankroll terrorism around the world and practise it himself domestically, the toughest reply Mr. Graham will muster is this: "The repercussions are, we could go to the [UN] Security Council and say, now the peace and security of the world is at stake here," he told reporters this week.

Even when Mr. Graham's own limits of appeasement are exceeded, he insists we continue to abdicate to others the decision to attack Iraq.

"If they [Iraq] are going to refuse to let inspectors in, then I think it is going to be up to the Security Council to revisit exactly what we are going to do," Mr. Graham said. But Canada is not a member of the Security Council, so the "we" in Mr. Graham's sentence does not refer to what the UN is going to do. It refers to what Canada is going to do. Mr. Graham no longer sets our country's foreign policy. The UN Security Council does, stacked as it is with such moral beacons as Syria, China and Cameroon.

Just as there are many legitimate reasons for which Canada should not declare war, there are even more, and more persuasive, reasons why we should. Rooting out a murderous dictator is one reason, the same one Canada cited when we attacked Slobodan Milosevic. Answering the call of the United States, our closest ally, is another reason, as much an act of political self-interest as one of nobility. Pre-emptively destroying Saddam's weapons is another. But jumping to fulfill an edict from the UN is not.

The UN was conceived as a meeting place for nations' diplomats, a clearing house for national interests. It has no democratic mandate or legitimacy of its own. If Mr. Graham feels that a certain UN vote is also in Canada's national interest, then that is a happy coincidence. If our interests are not the same, then Canada's sovereignty -- especially over a declaration of war, the gravest decision a government can make -- must trump Mr. Graham's utopian adherence to the latest diplomatic fad. Section 91 (7) of Canada's Constitution grants sole jurisdiction for the "Militia, Military and Naval Service, and Defence" to the Canadian government. Our Constitution makes no mention of the United Nations.

If this government's recent foreign affairs misadventures are any predictor, it is likely that Mr.

Graham's rhetoric of one-world anti-Americanism will be replaced, at the eleventh hour, by hard-headed self-interest after all. That is how it was in the days after September 11, when Canada's official response -- cool ennui -- prompted a pro-U.S. backlash across the country. That is how it was again when the United States invaded Afghanistan -- when months of official Liberal pacifism were replaced by a surprisingly large dispatch of troops.

Doubtless, Mr. Graham's opposition to an Iraq attack will be turned into grudging support in the face of a combination of behind-the-scenes diplomatic carrots and sticks from Washington combined with the inevitable surge of Canadian public support for the liberation of Iraq.

It will not be a democratic decision, certainly not one treated to a debate or vote by mere Canadian MPs. But at least it will be a decision made in Canada, not one made at the UN and followed obediently by Mr. Graham.

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