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Home thoughts on a distant war

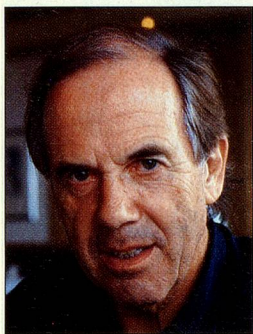
Dear Andreas

What a surprise it was to hear from an old friend who is now a Swiss Abroad! Your e-mail from Florida, in response to an article of mine in the "Swiss Review", brought back many fond memories of our student days. I wrote back telling you about the mass demonstrations in Europe and Switzerland against the imminent war in Iraq. I stressed that the people here were protesting against US policy rather than expressing anti-American sentiments, but admitted that people throughout Europe were against this war, and that a reputable military expert had called it a colonial war whose objective was oil and power in the Middle East. This e-mail must have infuriated you: the attitude of Europeans must have reminded you of the policy of appeasement towards Hitler. Since then I have not heard from you.

As I write these lines now, we are facing the prospect of the first war of the 21st century. Perhaps, dear friend, you might be interested in the mood here at home. According to a survey, almost 90 percent of the population is against this war, and 75 percent remains opposed to it even if a UN mandate permits the use of force. On the UN Security Council our country is committed to the peaceful disarmament of Iraq due to humanitarian considerations. For neutrality reasons the Federal Council has refused permission for overflights by US planes on military missions.

War will result in massive unemployment in Switzerland, due to the rising value of the Swiss franc, the drop in demand for equipment, and increasing oil prices.

"The Iraq war threatens to violate the humanitarian right to peaceful resolution of international relations."



Rolf Ribi

Switzerland's greatest concern, dear Andy, is for the people of the land between two rivers. The embargo imposed by the UN has destroyed social structures and resulted in the death of 50,000 children a year. Two thirds of the Iraqi population is dependent on UN food aid, more than half of them have no access to clean drinking water, and hospitals are unable to perform even the simplest operations due to the lack of oxygen for anaesthesia. The United Nations anticipates 1.4 million refugees as a result of the war. Our courageous new Foreign Affairs Minister Micheline Calmy-Rey convened a humanitarian conference in Geneva "to draw world attention to the fate of the civilian population."

Added to this, the entire affair has had three regrettable outcomes: the Iraq war threatens to violate the humanitarian right to the peaceful resolution of international relations; the US government has made a laughing stock of the United Nations, created after World War II to maintain international peace and security; "Old Europe" is mocked, recklessly dividing NATO's trans-Atlantic partnership. What's more, the military assault on Iraq is fraught with inestimable risks. The public outrage of Arab nations will be directed towards leaders in neighbouring countries, threatening to tear the entire region apart. More fuel will be added to the fire of militancy and international terror, and old conflicts will be rekindled between different nations and religions. Plus: Arabs will never accept the humiliating prospect of an American occupying power in the oil-rich Middle East.

In the view of Lebanese poet Abbas Beydoun, "The conduct of the USA towards Iraq is an act of aggression fuelled only by power." And according to the writings of Kamel Shayyaa, an Iraqi intellectual living in exile in the West, the Americans "are not destined to bring democracy, human rights and justice to the Arab world."

The wages of war, dear Andreas, are destruction and death. May the blood-spilling in Mesopotamia be over when you read these lines.

Rolf Ribi



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Nostalgia sharpens the aesthetic senses. When you live abroad you often begin to appreciate things you paid no attention to back home. A Swiss accordion can become a symbol of the home country for those suffering from homesickness. The picture shows Emil Gross from Dulliken.

COVER: Patrick Lüthy

SWISS REVIEW

Swiss Review, the magazine for the Swiss Abroad, is in its 30th year of publication and is published in German, French, Italian, English and Spanish in more than 25 regional editions. It has a total circulation of over 360 000. Regional news appears four times a year.

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