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Armageddon or Brave New World? Reflections on Hostilities in Iraq

BYLINE: Reviewed by Joan Ullman; Joan Ullman is a psychologist and journalist who frequently reports on civil and criminal trials.

BODY:

One year after the start of the Iraqi war, and with the presidential campaign already in full swing, this brief and passionate book could not be timelier. In it, C.G.

Weeramantry, a former judge of the International Court of Justice, and a law professor in Australia, warns that our preemptive and controversial war in Iraq could lead us back to the law of the jungle.

If it does so, writes Mr. **Weeramantry**, the Iraqi war will have dealt another "twin towers of destruction," devastating the United Nations and the foundations of international law.

And the damage will have been done by the two superpowers universally known for their commitment to domestic law.

The well-known jurist has previously written on issues that range from apartheid to the impact of the world's religions on law and human rights and third world legal problems.

Before the war, Mr. **Weeramantry** wrote, spoke and even addressed the British Parliament against the war. "Armageddon" is an elaboration of some of these writings.

While it is clearly a case of preaching to the choir, his book is a refreshing reminder that there is a broader perspective than the overheated, shuttered, black-and-white view that is mainly available in the U.S. media.

Nor is the book solely of interest to the legal community in which he has so long been an integral part. In "Armageddon," the author strives to reach a much wider audience. He tries to render his esoteric subject into relatively simple, non-legalistic style that even school-aged children can comprehend.

"Armageddon" opens with a brief historic overview of our system of international law. The author addresses this subject from a dual perspective of war and peace: the universal expression of war and its expansion into ever more lethal forms of weaponry, and the slow, halting development of more humane treatment of prisoners of war, such as through the Red Cross or the Geneva Convention.

It was not until the 20th century that the first peace movement to abolish war took shape, Mr. **Weeramantry** writes. Ironically, however, this century, which should have been one of peace, became the bloodiest in history, he notes.

It took the failed League of Nations and two world wars before war was officially declared abolished in the charter of the newly founded United Nations.

Mr. **Weeramantry** points out that to this day, even in the civilized world, the emotional and financial appeal of war continues to outweigh the repugnance felt against it. War's attractions run a gamut from fostering patriotic zeal to fueling advances in medicine, science and weaponry, along with bestowing wealth and power on many of the elite, he notes.

Mr. **Weeramantry** views the war in Iraq as one that has led us to a crossroads, one with "the potential to turn back for centuries the clock of human progress" in the advancement of the international rule of law.

He devotes a central portion of his book to 10 key principles of the U.N. charter, which he says are violated by the allegedly illegal Iraqi war:

We had no right under the U.N. charter, to use force except in self-defense against armed attack, and we should not have done so before all diplomatic efforts to resolve the dispute had been exhausted. We were in violation of the charter by interrupting the inspectors who appeared to have been making progress. We did not have the right to instigate a regime change of another nation under the U.N. charter. And we also violated the U.N. charter by failing to protect the Iraqi civilian population once we launched our preemptive war.

Those who remember U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell's now largely discredited address to the United Nations in which he justified the use of force against Iraq will find the section in "Armageddon" devoted to this speech especially interesting. The author analyzes how Secretary Powell managed to justify our preemptive war based on Iraq's alleged violations of three three-decades-old U.N. resolutions: # 678, #687 and #1441, cited in Powell's speech.

Mr. **Weeramantry** asserts that Secretary Powell's arguments were bogus since only the second resolution, #687, had any specific bearing on the situation in Iraq in 2003. The first resolution, #678, authorized force to evict Iraq from Kuwait. One year later, in 1991, the Security Council passed Resolution #687 ---- the only resolution that could still be considered relevant to the current situation ---- ordering Iraq to peacefully disarm and rid itself of its weapons of mass destruction.

The next year, in 1992, the Security Council passed Resolution #1441, which warned Iraq that "serious consequences would result if it failed to comply with inspections and its obligation to disarm." The author points out that it was a stretch to argue that this resolution authorizing "serious consequences" would still be in effect 12 years later when we entered Baghdad to oust Saddam Hussein. Serious consequences, he says, did not mean an all-out war and the death of innocent civilians.

Mr. **Weeramantry** marshals his arguments with clarity and force. He quotes a dazzling number of experts, including John Locke, Benjamin Franklin, Machiavelli and

Mahatma Gandhi. But within the tiny publication ---- 173 pages counting the index -- -- repetitions abound. The 1956 farewell address in which former President Dwight D. Eisenhower famously warns the country to beware the military industrial complex is one such example. As is his over-citing of former Attorney General Ramsey Clark.

Mr. **Weeramantry** is at his most compelling when describing the deadly effect of cluster bombs that were used in the Iraq war. The injuries from unexploded bombs, which children tend to mistake for soda cans, are described in graphic, gruesome detail.

He is less compelling when he suggests ---- without offering any specifics ---- that we focus not on the clash of civilizations, but on their confluences. Indeed, although the author does concede that the U.N. General Assembly is in need of "strengthening" to make it more effective, his book, despite its many arresting insights is apt to strike U.S. readers as more utopian than practical.

Some would say the Bush administration's policies of late have spread hate and distrust throughout the world. But Mr. **Weeramantry's** solutions would not seem apt to prove very popular, either. In his view, the United States would have to abandon its doctrine of first use of nuclear weapons, commit itself to total universal disarmament and radically modify its pro-Israeli policy.

In our closely divided nation, these are policies neither Republicans nor Democrats are likely to endorse.

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