

Christian Leaders Spar Over Iraq War

Prophetic leaders disagree on President Bush's resolve to remove President Saddam Hussein

National Christian leaders including some key prophetic voices are offering differing viewpoints on President Bush's resolution to use military force if needed to attack and disarm Iraq and remove President Saddam Hussein from office.

Several Christian organizations have directly pressured Bush not to attack Iraq. Others have stated their support for the move. According to the Bush administration, Hussein has maintained a stockpile of chemical and biological weapons in violation of United Nations restrictions and seeks to develop nuclear weapons. The religious community's dialogue heated up in October just as the House voted 296-133 and the Senate voted 77-23 to authorize Bush to attack Iraq if Hussein refused to give up weapons of mass destruction.

A more interesting point of the religious debate arose among prophetic ministry leaders. Some support a war against Iraq while others oppose it. But each side claims divine support for its point of view.

Steve Shultz, publisher of The Elijah List, an Internet mailing of prophecy reports, issued a call for "crisis prayer" for Bush, who, Shultz said, will listen to godly counsel. The Elijah List has gathered statements by several prophetic leaders who are warning of "disastrous results" if the United States attacks Iraq now.

Shultz provided statements by Paul Cain, a traveling prophetic minister associated in the early 1990s with Mike Bickle's Metro Christian Fellowship of Kansas City, Mo. Shultz said Cain told a church in Oregon he had visited with Hussein and had urged Christians to pray that the United States would attempt diplomacy before it started a "cowboys and Indians" fight.

Graham Cooke, based in the United Kingdom, told conferencegoers in Frederick, Md., that Hussein allows Christians to evangelize and to operate churches as a way of keeping Islam in check. Cooke warned that if Hussein falls, devout Muslims will bring "a bloodbath" and that "every Christian in that nation will likely be killed because they are on somebody's list right now."

"No matter what you think about it, [Hussein] is the only one standing between the church and Iran and Iraq and a bloodbath," Cooke said. "We need him alive because thousands upon thousands of people are getting saved in the country. There is a move of God there."

Cindy Jacobs, who with her husband, Mike, leads Colorado Springs, Generals of Intercession, agrees that God wants to liberate Iraq so the gospel will go forth, but she said the Lord showed her that Hussein's "cup of judgment is full" and that the United States should not be afraid to remove him.

Jacobs claims that before Bush began clamoring to remove Hussein God had shown her last April the United States would be invading Iraq and that it may be in the winter months of early 2003. She qualified her prophetic leanings by saying only prophecy in Scripture is unconditional and that today God often provides prophetic warning so people will pray for a

better outcome.

"I believe it could be the warning from God that if you don't pray, there could be a big bloodbath with Saddam coming out," she said. "I don't think it's Armageddon or the end of the world. I think if we're not careful, we could end up with a Y2K fear thing breaking out over this. I do believe God is calling us to pray and that it is a very solemn time."

Jacobs has scheduled a meeting of world church leaders in Washington, D.C., Jan. 16-18 to pray for God's will and His timing with the Iraq situation. "If we pray, I think God wants to break open the Middle East for the gospel. If we do it right, the Iraqi people will look on us as liberators," she said.

Asked why God would tell one prophet to oppose an attack and another to support it, Jacobs said God doesn't want dueling prophets. She said she respected Cain as a man of God. Of Cooke's statement, she said God provides all the perspectives so that Christians will know how to pray and leaders will know what's at stake if they decide to embark on such a drastic measure.

"I am not negating the prophecy of Graham Cooke. There is always more than one side to a prophetic word," Jacobs said.

In other moves, the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), which represents at least 10 million charismatics, Pentecostals and other evangelicals in some 51 denominations, supported Bush's campaign against Hussein as a proper step to halt terrorism and evil. NAE Vice President for Governmental Affairs Richard Cizik qualified the organization's support by

saying Bush should continue a good-faith effort to meet with Congress and the United Nations to exhaust diplomatic means before using military action.

But a key leader of the 16-million member Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) offered no such qualifier for removing Hussein. Richard Land, president of the SBC's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, said religious leaders who oppose Bush's stance are "well-intentioned and naive" and said he supports whatever military means are necessary to remove Hussein and his government.

The National Council of Churches (NCC) asked Bush not to attack Iraq. The NCC was founded in 1950 and comprises mainline denominations in the United States that include Protestant, Anglican and Orthodox groups.

NCC leaders participated with others in an October event in Washington to press for alternatives to war. They held a prayer vigil on the lawn of the United Methodist Building at Capitol Hill.

United Methodist leaders, members of Bush's own denomination, have expressed opposition to war in Iraq. America's Roman Catholic bishops told the president they have grave reservations about a unilateral U.S. strike against Iraq and urged him to use the U.N. to pressure Hussein.

-Billy Bruce