

**Select Committee on Foreign Affairs Written Evidence****Memorandum from the Public Affairs Unit, Church of England**

1. The terms of reference of the Church of England's Public Affairs Unit (PAU) require it "to co-ordinate the thought and action of the Church in matters affecting the life of all in society". The PAU reports to the Archbishops' Council and, through it, to the General Synod.
2. The PAU warmly welcomes the decision by the Foreign Affairs Committee to hold an inquiry into "The Decision to go to War in Iraq". The PAU recognises that the focus of the inquiry is to consider whether the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and the Government as whole, presented accurate and complete information to Parliament in the period leading up to military action in Iraq, particularly in relation to Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. The decision to launch this inquiry reflects the considerable Parliamentary and public unease as to the validity of claims made by the Government in its dossier to Parliament in September 2003.
3. The following submission does not evaluate whether Parliament was presented with accurate and complete information. Instead, it suggests that the current controversy surrounding the legitimacy of the war, fuelled by the present lack of post-war evidence for the existence of WMDs in Iraq, highlight the moral and political dilemmas intrinsic to the concept of pre-emptive military action. If governments intend to use pre-emptive defence as justification for military action then further thought needs to be given to developing clear and transparent rules underpinning its use. In the absence of a clear and imminent threat to international peace and security, pre-emptive military action inevitably raises particular ethical questions as to just cause, last resort and right intent.
4. From an ethical perspective the justice of a pre-emptive attack requires demonstrable and compelling evidence of the hostile intent and capability of a perceived aggressor. Moreover just war theory requires that other less belligerent means of averting the threat must have been considered and found wanting for good cause. Pre-emptive action can itself be destabilising to and a breach of international peace. As a result it is crucial that states considering pre-emptive action have more than probable cause to believe they must attack. Otherwise, questions will always be asked as to whether a pre-emptive attack was itself nothing more than an act of aggression.

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5. It is noted that similar public and Parliamentary anxiety existed as to the legitimacy of armed humanitarian intervention in Kosovo. The Prime Minister sought to allay these fears by setting out his "Doctrine of the International Community", in a speech to the Economic Club of Chicago on 22 April 1999. Regardless of whether it was morally or politically right or wrong to intervene in Kosovo, the existence of such criteria provided a framework through which judgements could be made as to the legitimacy of that and future interventions.

6. The similar articulation of criteria regarding pre-emptive military action would have been welcome with reference to Iraq. The absence of such criteria contributed to the public's sense of unease about the motives and justification for the action taken against Iraq. The current inability to locate Iraq's WMDs merely heightens this disquiet.

7. No matter what conclusions the various inquiries make as to validity of the evidence presented to Parliament, and regardless of any future discovery of WMDs in Iraq, clearer guidelines need to be established concerning the use of pre-emptive military action. Such guidelines are important both for the credibility and authority of government and for public trust and confidence. It is to be hoped that the Committee will give this issue further consideration in the future.

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June 2003

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