

Over There: NYC High School Students Discuss War, Peace, and Democracy

Since 1985, New York City's Urban Academy has urged its students to tackle challenging topics, ask hard questions, and make their voices heard. In inquiry-based courses the faculty designs to match its expertise and interests, 120 students in mixed-grade 9 through 12 classrooms get both the tough intellectual push and the close individual scrutiny on which Urban Academy has made its name.

One finds here a level of intellectual and personal respect rare in a high school setting. "No personal attacks!" students loudly protest if a class discussion turns rancorous, echoing the school's guiding agreements that protect its ethos of "fairness, not uniformity." From their teachers they get the same respect. Most students have transferred from schools where they have not thrived; at Urban, they battle to learn new work habits and do well.

Recently What Kids Can Do sat in on a foreign policy class titled "The Yanks Are Coming" to see how the hard questioning Urban expects from its students is showing up in classroom discussions about war, peace, and democracy in the Middle East. The teacher is Harry Feder and this day's class features a visitor, Dr. Michael Walzer from the Institute for Advanced Studies at Princeton University. In preparation for the discussion, students have read a diverse collection of articles and prepared questions for Dr. Walzer.

The Post-Iraq War World and the Effect on US Foreign Policy: Assignment and Readings

On Friday, Michael Walzer will be in class to discuss his views on the war in Iraq and what it means for the future of US foreign policy, the Middle East and the world order. In further preparation for his visit, read and highlight the attached articles. The first one is an article he wrote as to why he thought going to war was not justified; the second is a critique by Robert Kagan of Walzer's position. The remainder of the packet discusses what the post-war world might be like and what effect the war is having and will have on US foreign policy, the prospects of democracy in the Middle East, and the view of the US in the rest of the world.

Using the articles in the packet, the reading you have done to date, and your own thinking to date about the war, the history of US foreign policy, and the proper role of the US in the world, write -five outstanding, well thought out questions to ask Michael Walzer.

Readings:

- "Inspectors Yes, War No" by Michael Walzer, *The New Republic Online*, 9/30/02
- "War and the Fickle Left" by Robert Kagan, *Washington Post*, Dec. 24, 2002 p. A15
- "The New Agenda: Go It Alone. Remake the World" by Richard Bernstein, *New York Times*, March 23, 2003
- "Iraq Invasion Would Reshape U.S. Foreign Policy" by Alan Elsner, *Reuters Wire*, August 22, 2002
- "The Rise and Fall and Rise of the Domino Theory" by Sam Tanenhaus, *New York Times*, March 23, 2003
- "A Modest Little War" by David Brooks, *Atlantic Online*, Feb. 2003
- "It's Democracy Like It or Not" by Todd S. Purdum, March 9, 2003
- "After Saddam" by John Major, *Wall Street Journal*, March 27, 2003
- "Even a Superpower Needs Help" by Chas. Freeman Jr., *New York Times*, Feb. 26, 2003

Urban Academy Classroom Discussion, April 4, 2003

Dr. Walzer begins by laying out the ways, short of war, that we could have responded to Saddam's threat, which he believes is real: Expanded no fly zones, reinforced embargo on military supplies, a strengthened U.N. weapons inspection system with soldiers and patrols, surveillance flights without warnings.

Walzer: Once the war began, however, the argument changes; we must consider what it would mean to stop the war before Saddam is defeated. If there were a ceasefire, Saddam would claim victory, which would produce many more deaths in Iraq than we would cause, as in 1991 when tens of thousands of Shiites were killed in the aftermath of their uprising. My position is that we should not have started this war, but once we did, it was

crucial to win it and to fight it as decently as possible. Once it's over, we need to commit ourselves to creating a decent Iraq, bringing in international forces that will command legitimacy in Iraq. How to do that is not clear. "Ius in bellum" and "Ius post bellum"—"justice in war" and "justice after war"—are the two most important questions now.

Karina: What would you like to see happen with the Kurds in Iraq?

Walzer: Unrealistically, I would like to see a Kurdish state created from parts of various countries, but I think the Kurds have made their peace that that's not going to happen. Realistically, some kind of deal or scheme that protects the Kurds in the north and the Shiites in the South can be worked out. We can't just create the U.S. in Iraq. I know there are factions that favor a solution, but I'm not sure they will win out.

Julien: What do you think the fate of the preemptive Bush doctrine is—will it die with this action or will it survive the war?

Walzer: If the war ends in the next weeks and casualties are limited, that will strengthen the Bush doctrine. I suspect this country won't support further wars against Syria or Iran; they won't have the stomach for it. North Korea is another story, and if the administration decides that North Korea is not capable of destroying Seoul in the first days of a war, I suspect they might use that doctrine to attack it first. But though they are very conservative, they are not crazy. I don't think they want to bring on an attack but to avoid one.

Julien: So are they moving back to "mutual assured destruction"?

Walzer: Yes, in some sense they may be moving back to that. The problem is that it makes everybody that much more nervous. The country that is most dangerous and frightening right now in the world, I think, is Pakistan. The most dangerous thing about attacking Iraq is that if Pakistan's government were to fall to another faction, they would want to attack India with nuclear arms, and we would have to do something about it.

Jarvis: It's hard to tell how the Iraqi people really feel about Saddam Hussein and the U.S. How can the U.S. prevent the uprising of a new dictator in Iraq after the war, without being imperialist and creating a Pax Americana?

Walzer: We are very much distrusted. Remember, in the 1991 war, the U.S. encouraged an uprising and then stood by and watched while Saddam destroyed the rebel Shiites.

Jarvis: They actually had in the paper today some U.S. pledge that "We will not deliver you to Saddam."

Walzer: I think a move toward elections supervised by the U.N. would be a move that would help, but the U.N. has to make a commitment to stay. It should be an American occupation, but it shouldn't look like one. There had better be lots of other countries involved.

Karina: Do you think that since we went to Iraq under the banner of disarmament, we now have a responsibility to go in and disarm North Korea, Pakistan, Libya, Syria, Iran, and all the other countries with nuclear arms, just to be consistent?

Walzer: You can make the case that Iraq is different because it started a war in Kuwait, because of its attacks against the Iraqi Kurds, and because of an eight-year war with Iran—Libya, Syria, Iran don't have that same record of aggression. So there would be a plausible and sensible case to make that we should now pursue their disarmament by diplomacy rather than military action.

Mica: What would be the best way to create a new government in Iraq?

Walzer: A lot depends on the nature of the U.S. victory, assuming that is what happens next. If there is guerrilla warfare, and terrorism, it won't be possible for the U.N. to be there without U.S. and British soldiers. If the fighting stops, it's best to put an Iraqi government in right away, with U.N. supervision. There is an Iraqi exile movement which has some support in the country, called the Iraqi National Congress, which has produced a document on the next steps toward a democratic, federal, demilitarized Iraq. But you don't really know what connections and support they have at home. If it turns out to command support, we should support it.

Claire V.: How do we know that when this war is won, we're not going to pick another Saddam Hussein to be in power?

Walzer: We don't know. Some Bush administration officials have this very much in mind. After the first strikes we immediately began negotiating with the next layer of Ba'athis generals. If we had succeeded, there would have been no war, or there would have been a new regime, which might have been just as bad. But that didn't happen, and so now there is a chance for something better.

Jarvis: In your article, you said there was a just and necessary war to be made against Saddam back in 1996-98. What do you think changed to make this current war not necessary?

Walzer: There was a system of U.N inspections in place that was being ignored, that was crumbling, and the U.N. backed off. If the U.N. had instead threatened or authorized a war, then I imagine we would have had much more international support than now, and we would have been able to succeed in disarming Iraq. . . .

Anabel: What do you think of this idea that the whole war is really about oil?

Walzer: I really doubt that oil is even an important consideration. We're paying market prices for the oil from the Gulf now, and when this war is over we'll go on paying market prices. It may be that US companies rather than French companies will be extracting the oil and getting some profit, though the major profit goes to Iraq still. But even that profit wouldn't come close to covering the costs of this war. Besides, people who know tell me that oil supplies in West Africa are soon going to dwarf Middle East supplies. It may turn out that Iraq's oil will enable it to pay for its own reconstruction. So the ambition of the Bush administration to remake Iraq may have been bolstered by that idea.

Julien: Do you think if we had gone to war in the '90s, when Saddam was ducking out of the weapons inspections, there would have been as many protests as there are now in America?

Walzer: No, if it had been a U.N. war, I don't think there would have been anything like that scale of protest here.

Mica: I was wondering what you would say is the top ranking and secondary reason why we decided to go to war with Iraq—not what [U.S. government] people say, but the real reasons.

Walzer: There's no such thing as a pure will or a singular motive in politics. It's a mixture of wills and motives. In this administration, there's a visible set of people with an ideological vision of remaking Iraq, but I don't think that vision is shared. There are a lot who just want to get rid of Saddam and get a regime more friendly to U.S. interests. There are people committed to the disarmament argument, like Powell, but the ideological vision has been one of the driving factors. Put in its best light: We were attacked on 9/11 by terrorists bred in the Arab world because of the awful governments there (including those we support). So if we want to protect ourselves we have to remake the Arab world, and Iraq gives us the chance, if we can succeed in turning it into a reasonably democratic region, we should.

Mica: So then do you in some ways believe in a domino theory—that creating democracy in Iraq will eventually create democracies throughout the Arab world?

Walzer: [laughs] In Vietnam I was very much against the domino theory. And I don't believe it now. But at the same time, if there is no U.S. occupation and if there is a decent government in Iraq, it may strengthen democracy in the region. But remember, the 9/11 terrorists came from Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

Julien: I've been hearing a lot about the supposed link between the Iraqi government and Al Qaeda, and you also hear that it is nonexistent. And you don't hear about the CIA belief that Al Qaeda has links with the Chechen rebels. Why don't you?

Walzer: I suspect that intelligence information that gets leaked to us is leaked for political reasons. It's hard for me to believe that Saddam Hussein is linked to Al Qaeda, and it didn't sound to me that Powell was persuaded of it himself in his U.N. speech. The argument has to be that a regime like Iraq's, if it has weapons of mass destruction, is potentially a destructor down the road.

Julien: Do you think the protests in the U.S. are because of strong anti-Bush sentiment or because of the war itself? In my opinion, if we still had our golden boy Bill Clinton, we might not have had such protests.

Walzer: Had Gore won not only the election but the presidency, there might still have been a war. But I suspect we would have fought it with many more allies, and the international protests and those here would have been much smaller. But a whole series of things this administration has done would not have been done. We would not

have withdrawn from the Kyoto treaty and the ABM treaty, we would have supported the International Criminal Court—and we would have had friends out there.

Julien: So you're saying the protests do go beyond this war and extend to protesting against Bush and his imperialistic policies in general?

Walzer: A better word is really hegemonic—look at Turkey's refusal and South Korea's refusal to follow U.S. policy toward the war. You don't say no to an imperial power! We have a leading role, but we're not an empire.

Zlotan: If all these other smaller countries we helped out are saying no, and European countries are saying no, and all that's guided by public opinion, then why is Great Britain saying yes, even though public opinion there is against it?

Walzer: Actually, Blair managed to turn public opinion around. It's impressive that he had to go get a vote the day before the war started, and if it was voted down his government would have been brought down.

Irina: You said the stuff that leaks is what they want to leak. What do you think is going on within the Bush administration that we're not seeing?

Walzer: There were a whole series of very intense arguments that were only quasi-reported in the press. The decision in September to send Bush to the U.N. to seek the resolution, there was fierce opposition to that. And there was fighting about the second U.N. resolution. I suspect there is a fight about reconstruction after the war.

Karina: How would you have dealt with the threat that Saddam poses to the world and not just to his own people? And what should be our place in responding to that threat?

Walzer: In the '70s, there were killing fields in Cambodia by a repressive regime, and the Vietnamese sent in troops to stop it, and they did it. The Indians did it in Bangladesh, in what is now Pakistan, and they were right to do that. The Tanzanians invaded Uganda and overthrew the murderous regime of Idi Amin, and they were right. The argument for whoever should do that is, "Whoever can, should." In Rwanda, someone should have stopped the massacres... It would be best if there were some international police force to do this, but there isn't. Right now the only possible intervention comes from states with armies... It's certainly best if responsibilities are shared by the international community, though.

Karina: Do you think that justifies a war? Could we have taken other means? Is war the only answer?

Walzer: War is never the only answer.

Irina: You were saying whoever can stop the massacres, should. But there are no massacres going on now—it's just Bush with his "preventive war." From that perspective, if there were another superpower opposing America, would it be justified for the U.N. or for another superpower to invade America?

Walzer: There does seem to be widespread sentiment in the world that the U.S. is a greater danger than Saddam. It's not my view. We should learn something from the state of the world today, which is that the balance of power between the U.S. and the Soviets made for a more stable world than a world with one superpower, a very ineffective U.N., and a lot of leeway for local tyrants.... I do believe that it would be better if there were a balance to America. Europe could do it with its size, population, etc, but they don't right now have the will to take that role. Even if they weren't capable, it is possible to imagine a division of labor, where we share the diplomacy and if necessary we share the fighting. That would be a better world. The Europeans are in a morally untenable position when they say, "we want [to make the decisions but not to help]."

Jarvis: We've been talking a lot about alternatives to the war, and one of the major ones seems to be a return to [weapons] inspections. But it seems to me they haven't been working. Iraq is the size of California. They obviously possess weapons of mass destruction—we sold them to it. How can we make that work?

Walzer: After the Gulf War, this regime of constraints was imposed on Iraq. We know it was not maximally effective--it hurt civilians, inspectors were there in inadequate numbers for six to seven years and then they were taken out. Yet nonetheless, Saddam is weaker now than before, and as for his closeness to having nuclear weapons, according to CIA reports, they are about where they were in 1991. So it looks to me that it was working to some extent. Why wouldn't it work better with more inspectors, and support troops, and surprise surveillance?

Jarvis: But that would only last as long as we stayed there!

Walzer: Yes, but we've had forces in Europe for 50 years!

Claire C.: For us to go and disarm a country with nuclear weapons, we say we have that right. Do other countries have the right to come in and disarm us, since we are hostile and going into other countries?

Walzer: We don't claim, and maybe we shouldn't claim, some kind of unilateral right to do that disarmament. The first Gulf War was fought with much more international agreement. So we are now enforcing a disarmament that the world community decided not to enforce; we're not acting without any authorization from the international community. Right now it's perfectly legitimate for Iraq to attack U.S. military targets anywhere in the world. But I don't think France, for example, has a legitimate right to do so.

Irina: I heard today on the news that we're not going to find any chemical weapons in Iraq. What happens then, are we going to lose the war then, because that's what we went in for? Or are we just going to stay until we find them?

Walzer: We have very good reason to think that they have chemical and biological stockpiles. The U.N. catalogued the weapons that Iraq had, and admitted to having, in the 1990s. One of the demands in U.N. resolution 1441 is that Iraq prove that those weapons were disposed of. Saddam would have made the war impossible if he had brought out scientists who documented their destruction. But he refused to do it, and so it's plausible that they still exist.

Jimmy: Since we didn't really get the U.N.'s approval for this whole war thing, do you think they're going to help us with the reconstruction, financially or in other ways?

Walzer: I suspect that they will, because the French and the Russians won't want to be left out of this reconstructive enterprise. But there will be a lot of resentment. And some U.S. administration people are opposed because they want them to be left out. In the end, I suspect there will be U.N. help. Whether there will be sharing of costs, I don't know.

Karina: You said we have to remake the Arab world. That sounds to me like democratic imperialism. Why do we have to do that, and why in Iraq?

Walzer: I didn't say that—I said there were forces in the administration that want to do that. But the argument is: We were attacked by terrorists who are being bred in the repressive regimes of the Arab world. Iraq is the most convenient starting point. . . . It has aspects of democratic imperialism but also of self-defense. 9/11 was very scary—don't underestimate its effects on U.S. politics. The thought was: If they could do that, what else could they do? Some of the answers are very scary.