

**Statement of the Tetuwan Oyate,
Teton Sioux Nation Treaty Council,
Against the United States Invasion of Iraq and
call for United Nations General Assembly Intervention**

In the fall of 1875, the United States government issued an ultimatum to a nation of people that stood in the way of their advancement across the North American continent. The Lakota people were given a few weeks to leave their own country and return to a reservation established by the Americans "*or be considered 'hostiles' subject to forced removal.*" The Lakota refusal to heed the ultimatum resulted in a war that included the charge of the 7th Cavalry under the command of Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer and his ultimate defeat on June 25, 1876.

On March 18, 2003 George W. Bush issued a 48-hour ultimatum to Iraqi President Sadaam Hussein and his sons to go into exile or face "*military conflict.*" Shortly after the world listened to the American president's demands, the assault and invasion by American troops began. Again, the 7th cavalry is advancing on a city of people living on their own terms in their own territory.

If America, or the world for that matter, wants to understand the American mind-set behind the war in Iraq, it's simple. Ask an Indian. The current invasion and planned occupation of Iraq is the latest chapter in the American colonial process. It is a process that hides behind the forced imposition of "*democracy*" and "*human rights*" as Americans interpret these terms. Usually that interpretation involves benefits for American interests whether those interests are land, resources, gold or oil.

In our nation, the Lakota Nation, it started about 153 years ago. Our territory was to be "liberated" by the Americans when gold was discovered in the Black Hills. The occupation of our land by foreign forces began shortly after the American discovery of these resources and, in violation of international treaties and conventions, has continued ever since. Our battle to eject the "infidels" has also continued.

The Tetuwan Oyate, Teton Sioux Nation Treaty Council, was founded in 1894, four years after the 7th Cavalry took its revenge for the loss at the Battle of the Little Big Horn when a peaceful camp of mostly sickly elders, women and children were massacred in the snows at Wounded Knee in present day South Dakota. The Teton Sioux Nation Treaty Council was established to enforce the provisions of our peace treaties lawfully made with the United States that guaranteed our sovereignty over our land, resources and culture. For over a century the United States has used every weapon in its massive arsenal to ensure that the

rights of the Lakota Nation are abrogated and that our people are held in servitude. Our elders and leaders have taken our battle from the Supreme Court of the United States to the institutions of the United Nations in order to preserve our right to our territory, our sovereignty as a nation and our self-determination over our own future. The Lakota Nation defends the sovereignty of all peoples, not necessarily the sovereign.

Today, watching the media reports on American television, we see the same history unfolding that our people have and continue to experience. As American troops open fire on vehicles filled with families escaping the horrors of the invasion of their territory, our genetic memories recall the massacres in our own country. Tony Black Feather, the Spokesman for the Teton Sioux Nation Treaty Council and the United Nations delegate of the traditional Lakota Nation in our international efforts, stated:

"This is the same history. We are watching history repeat itself again and again. This is not a war. It is a mass murder for oil and resources -- the same thing they did to us -- the same people are in Iraq that killed my Lakota people and stole our Lakota land. We are not involved in this so-called war because we are a nation that has treaties which separate us from the United States. We have always been a nation. We are saddened that the United States is using the wealth that they stole from our territories to make war on innocent people. We cannot condone the use of what are our resources under international treaties to support the [United States] invasion of Iraq. We sympathize with the people of Iraq. The United States is trying to put the Iraqi people under the same reservation and trust system that they have used against our people."

Support of Mr. Black Feather's assertion was provided in a *BBC* report on April 3, 2003, when the British Foreign Minister for the Middle East, Mike O'Brien, stated that the American post-war plans include the appointment of 23 American "ministers" who will be established in Baghdad. These "ministers" sound very similar to the Indian "agents" installed on reservations throughout the United States whose job is to represent the interests of the American government. Although Mr. O'Brien stated emphatically that the United States has no plans to "colonize" Iraq, the facts seem to dispute the denials.

In its colonization of Indian territory in North America, in violation of the United States constitution in which "*all treaties made, or which shall be made . . . shall be the supreme law of the land*"[1], the American government has gone to great lengths to give the appearance that our territory was never colonized in violation of these treaties. Indeed the myth has evolved into a romantic history in which the land never really belonged to anyone but the Americans. Plenary power, sovereignty, nation-to-nation, citizenship and Indian reorganization are all terms familiar to individuals aware of America's manipulation of the language of colonization.

Clearly, the same propaganda efforts have begun with respect to Iraq. At the beginning of the invasion, Donald Rumsfeld enumerated several objectives: the first was to topple Saddam Hussein and the second to locate and destroy Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction. President Bush, his team, and the Pentagon media sources now more frequently speak of "*freeing the Iraqi people*." This has replaced disarming Iraq as the main focus. Some analysts see the re-ordering of priorities and shriller language as a response to the realities on the ground in Iraq. Saddam has not used non-conventional weapons and U.S. and British troops have so far not found any to justify a war which much of the international community opposes. Many analysts, both in the United States and abroad, however, see the shifts either as a consequence of Bush's failure to making a convincing case for war or as

evidence of a hidden agenda in the Middle East.[2] For the leadership of the Lakota Nation, the American agenda is not so hidden, and many experts agree.

"The real target of the war is to make US supremacy prevail on a strategic oil-rich region, and to protect Israel's regional superiority and its monopoly over weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East," alleged British Middle East expert and journalist Patrick Seale.[3] *"I think the basic reasoning behind the policy, as far as most people around the world are concerned, is for oil and control of the Gulf region,"* said Li Jianying, vice president of the Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs.[4] Despite the rhetoric of the American, British and Spanish leaders, few outside of the United States seem fooled by the American motives in this invasion.

Official movement within the United Nations in opposition to the war is also growing. On April 1, 2003 Secretary-General Kofi Annan said there is *"lots of unhappiness"* at the United Nations about the war in Iraq and that Arab nations want the United Nations to do more to bring about a cease-fire. The 22-member Arab Group met with Annan and announced that it would push for adoption of a resolution in the General Assembly to show the strength of world opposition to the U.S. military campaign. The Organization of the Islamic Conference Group, with 57 member nations, also supported taking the issue to the General Assembly.[5] Based on our own history, the Lakota Nation supports these efforts in opposition to the American invasion and colonization, especially with respect to actions applying international law to an international situation. For our people, this is how a civilized, peaceful world is achieved.

During our long experience with American occupation, the Lakota Nation has seen the United States utilize its vast economic and military power to suppress opposition to its own agenda. In the same way, the United States has stubbornly ignored the overwhelming opposition to this war by the rest of the world. In a communication, obtained by Greenpeace, the United States urged countries to vote against or abstain from supporting a General Assembly meeting to discuss the war, adding it would be considered *"unhelpful and directed against the United States."* The United States further threatened that invoking the Uniting for Peace resolution [377] will be *"harmful to the UN."*

"This communication is nothing short of a thinly veiled threat. This is the last chance for the overwhelming majority of UN member states who are opposed to this war to stand up for the charter of the UN and the rule of law," said Greenpeace campaigner Mike Townsley. *"It's vital that UN member states reject US pressure to undermine their rights, and support the Arab League's resolution to call for an end to the ongoing invasion of Iraq which is costing more lives day by the day,"* he added.[6]

Within the United Nations system the Teton Sioux Nation Treaty Council of the Lakota Nation has been fighting alongside other Indigenous peoples for the passage of the Declaration on the Rights of the World's Indigenous Peoples. However, some powerful states, including the US, are opposed to many of its provisions on group rights, self-determination and the management of resources provided in the Declaration. It would appear that aspects relating to these same issues can be found in the current invasion of Iraq by the American regime. Undermining fundamental international law and human rights seems to be the current strategy of the United States government. At the latest meeting on the

Draft Declaration on Indigenous Rights at the United Nations in December 2002, the US was more vocal than ever, having had a State Department directive to basically prevent Indigenous peoples from anything other than US defined internal self-determination (which would give legitimacy to plenary power, abrogation of treaties, no control over resources, etc.) and other basic human rights.

"It was a fierce struggle with words between representatives of Indigenous peoples allied with some of the governments against a few of the very large states: the USA, Canada, and Australia, to name a few. The very fact that it is a struggle over human rights is appalling. Yet when the idea of recognizing the inalienable human rights of Indigenous peoples comes to the forefront, some of the largest and most powerful governments in the world begin to experience anxiety. Why? Because their domestic activities begin to see the light of day, and the world family starts to learn of abuses that go against the ideals and images those governments wish to portray. It is similar to when the abusive activities of a dysfunctional family start to be exposed for all the world to see. The abusers experience much anxiety and will try everything to maintain the status quo." [7]

On the next to the last day of the Draft Declaration meeting, the United States seemed to give the same thinly veiled threat that the Greenpeace communiqué exposed, stating that unless the Declaration was passed with the U.S. changes and the way they wanted it, they would consider it null and void in two years. [8] Again, the same tactics that are being used against the Lakota Nation and other Indigenous peoples by the United States are now being used by the United States against Iraq. The world family of nations must act now and together in order to strengthen the institution of the United Nations as a viable venue for peaceful dialogue.

Peace and justice are what the Teton Sioux Nation Treaty Council works for. In a prophetic statement before the United Nations 54th Session of the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva in March of 1998, Tony Black Feather spoke of the need for the United Nations to oppose the violation of the sovereignty of any nation by another:

"The threat to human rights, self-determination and sovereignty over our unique cultures cannot be tolerated at any level. No nation-state, despite its superior economic or military power, can be permitted to control the lives of the world's people. We believe the efforts by nation states like Iraq [this was said during the embargo that was going on in 1998 after the first Gulf War] to defend the sovereignty of their territory is a fundamental principle of international relations. Historically, tactics of divide, starve and conquer have been used against our people so we understand the use of embargoes and pressure from within and without. . . . While we cannot condone the oppression of ethnic groups within modern nations, we staunchly defend Iraq's right to protect its sovereignty." [9]

The Lakota Nation stands with UN member states that have called on the United Nations to reject moves by the United States to block a resolution in the UN General Assembly condemning the invasion of Iraq, calling for a ceasefire and a withdrawal of US and British armed forces. Human rights, sovereignty and self-determination are fundamental principles of both Lakota Natural Law and the United Nations Charter. Unilateral invasion and colonization is a violation of international human rights law and cannot be condoned or supported. By going to the General Assembly, where there are no vetoes, war opponents have a much better chance of winning approval for a resolution if they can draft a text with broad appeal based on these principles. "*It is certain that self-determination is now a human right in international law.*" [10] "Human rights can only exist truly and fully when self-determination also exists. Such is the fundamental importance of self-determination as a human right and as a prerequisite for the enjoyment of all the other rights and freedoms." [11]

Implementation and universal respect for these principles are the real battles and victory can be had if the world stands united against tyranny. The Lakota Nation and Indigenous peoples everywhere are aware of the devastation caused by colonization and the lack of respect for the right to sovereignty and self-determination. The example of Lakota history has much to teach a world in which one nation's intentions are to impose American values and interests upon the world's cultures and races until all that is left are American values and interests. The Teton Sioux Nation agrees with British Middle East expert and journalist Patrick Seale who said, "*whatever the military outcome of the battle of Baghdad, the Americans and the British have lost the war politically and morally.*"

In another 100 years, if the United States can survive, will it still be hiding its history of colonization and domination? When will Americans realize that the people who died on September 11th died for nothing if America refuses to examine its own role in the tragedy? When will Americans learn that their way is not the only way, and that peoples have cultures and histories that they are willing to fight to protect and preserve? The Teton Sioux Nation Treaty Council acknowledges that many American individuals are asking these questions and ally with us and we are grateful that diverse peoples can come together to stop American government and corporate interests in their unrelenting pursuit for domination.

The UN Charter and many of its conventions and standards are established in recognition of what Lakota people call Natural Law. That is why we have gone to the United Nations. We are hopeful that our world of nations will stand together against the abuser, the schoolyard bully, and the violator of international law. The Right to Self Determination in the preamble of the UN Charter applies to all peoples. Diversity is the cornerstone of Natural Law. It does not say that might makes right.

The people of the Lakota Nation pray for the peoples and nations (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) that have experienced and are experiencing the weight of American imperialism. We pray for true, sacred peace which includes true justice and stand with those states within the United Nations calling for an end to current American aggression.

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1. Article VI, United States Constitution.
2. "U.S. War Priorities Shift Away from Disarming Iraq," By Paul Holmes, *Reuters*, 1 April 2003
3. "British Mideast Expert: 'US, Britain, Heading to Disaster'," *Agence France Presse*, 29 March 2003
4. *Ibid.*
5. "Annan says Arab nations want U.N. to work toward cease-fire in Iraq," Edith M. Lederer, *Associated Press*, 1 April 2003
6. "United States Attempts to Block United Nations Peace Bid," Greenpeace, *Truthout* Statement, 1 April 2003
7. "Indigenous Peoples Struggle for Human Rights," by Charmaine White Face, 12/20/02
8. "8th Session of the InterSessional Working Group on the Draft Declaration on the Rights of the World's Indigenous Peoples," Report of the Tetuwan Oyate, Teton Sioux Nation Treaty Council, pp. 2-3.
9. "Report on the Commission on Human Rights," 54th Session, March 16-April 24, 1998, Teton Sioux Nation Treaty Council, pp. 1-2.
10. R. McCorquodale, "Human Rights and Self-Determination" in M. Sellers, ed., *The New World Order[:] Sovereignty, Human Rights, and the Self-Determination of Peoples* (Oxford/Washington, D.C.: Berg, 1996) 9, at p. 11.
11. H. Gros Espiell, Special Rapporteur, *The Right to Self-Determination: Implementation of United Nations Resolutions*, Study for the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, (New York: United Nations, 1980), U.N. Doc. E/CN.4/Sub.2/405/Rev.1 at p. 10, para. 59.

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