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I'd like to spend the next few minutes with you discussing an issue of utmost urgency: the impending invasion of Iraq that the Bush Administration is planning.

This invasion would be unconstitutional.

It would be against international law.

It would violate the Christian doctrine of "just war."

It would further damage U.S. relations with its allies, relations that are already frayed by Bush's mindless unilateralism.

It would wreak havoc in the Muslim world, where there's plenty of havoc already.

It could shake the U.S. economy, which is trembling right now.

And most importantly, it could result in the deaths of thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of innocent people.

Worst case: It could end with the United States dropping a nuclear bomb on Baghdad.

President Bush acts as though he has the right to go attack Iraq anytime he wants to. That's false, and very dangerous for a democracy. Our founders gave the right to Congress and only to Congress to make the momentous decision of whether to take the United States to war or not. It's all there in Article 1, Section 8, of the U.S. Constitution.

The founders knew that to give the President such power would risk dragging the country and its people into one senseless war after another.

Sadly, since World War II, Presidents have usurped this power of Congress, and Congress has abdicated it. There has not been a Congressional declaration of war since December 1941, though there sure have been plenty of wars since then, most notably Korea, Vietnam, and the Gulf War, but also Panama, Grenada, the Dominican Republic, and myriad other nations the United States has assaulted directly or covertly over the last six decades.

To this extent, we have a lawless Presidency. And if we are to restore our democracy, we need to insist that the Constitution be followed. That means Congress, not the President, has the sole power to declare war.

In the current circumstance of Iraq, the President's apologists argue that he has the authority to wage war by virtue of two Congressional acts. First, in 1991, Congress gave the President the authorization to wage war against Saddam Hussein (though technically it did not declare war). But how open-ended is this authorization? Congress did not intend to give the President a blank check to wage war against Iraq forever, or anytime he happened to feel like it. The Congress did not grant the President the right to change the regime there more than a decade later.
The second Congressional act that Bush's cheerleaders cite is the September 14, 2001, use of force authorization, which allows Bush to attack any person, group, or country that he believes was involved in the attack of 9/11. Now the Bush hawks have been doing their damnedest to pin some of the blame for that heinous act on Saddam Hussein, but there's hardly a tissue connecting the two.

International law is quite clear: Country A cannot attack Country B unless Country B has already attacked Country A or is about to attack Country A. Iraq has not attacked the United States. And it's not about to. Saddam, as brutal as he is, loves to cling to power. He knows that attacking the United States would be suicidal.

Actually, under international law, Saddam Hussein may have a better case for attacking the United States today than Bush has for attacking Iraq, since Bush is threatening an imminent war against Iraq. But no one wants to hear that!

Furthermore, for the United States to take this aggressive action without the approval of the U.N. Security Council would be a violation of the U.N. charter, which the United States has ratified.

To get around this, the Bush Administration is hyping the danger that Saddam poses to the United States. Cheney recently called Saddam a "mortal threat." That's getting a little carried away.

The United States has a $400 billion Pentagon budget; Iraq's military budget is about $4 billion.

The United States has thousands of nuclear weapons; Iraq doesn't have one yet, much less the means to deliver it.

And even if Iraq obtained one nuclear weapon or two, would that present a "mortal" danger to the United States? Remember, the United States managed to survive for four decades against an enemy with thousands of nuclear weapons aimed at us.

The fact is, there is no justification under international law or under Christian "just war" theory for Bush to attack Iraq. Even the Archbishop of Canterbury has said so.