The Honourable John Howard MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
Canberra 2600

Dear Mr Howard,

I write to you in order to withdraw my support of the Commonwealth, the current Federal Government and yourself in all matters to do with the apparently imminent war in Iraq.

I do this so that when future generations of Australians look back in shame at our generation, who, if the war goes ahead under the present circumstances, will have led Australia into its first unprovoked war of aggression against another nation, they will know that some Australians at this time rejected what you and your government are doing on our behalf.

This is not to say that I do not support United Nations efforts to ensure the disarmament of Iraq in respect of biological, chemical and nuclear weapons. I do, and I also recognise the need of military backing of those efforts. I reject totally, however, the hasty move towards a war that can only be called ‘Bush’s War’.

Following considerable reflection, I am of the view that the war proposed at this time is unjust in most respects. It lacks legitimate authority both at the international level and also, particularly in Australia and the UK, at the level of democratic and parliamentary support for the war. There is immense confusion about Bush’s intentions, which seem to change from day to day. With such confused intentions and with inspections proceeding successfully, in the absence of actual aggression by Iraq, there are no grounds on which to claim just cause. Given the American way of waging war, we can expect great loss of life and severe damage to Iraqi infrastructure, which will result in further death and displacement, for gain that it is hard to imagine will be commensurate with this amount of human damage. Although one can expect that American forces will be successful militarily, we should be dubious about the ability of the US to put anything back in place of what they destroy, so that it is likely that the venture will be judged unsuccessful in the long run. War at this time will certainly be nothing like an act of last resort.

The war, I might add, will remain unjustified even if the US manages to bludgeon and bribe sufficient numbers of smaller states on the Security Council to accept a resolution pointing to war. Such a speculative adventure would need broad international support, not merely a forced accession to formality.

I do not make the distinction of opposing the war and supporting our service men and women. I oppose what they may be made to do, because I believe that it is immoral. I will, however, be prepared to support any who fall into my ambit after they come back knowing, as many of them already believe, that they have engaged in unjust war. They will have enormous burdens of conscience, and to that I will be compassionate.
Your own behaviour, Mr Prime Minister, has been extraordinary in this whole affair. There is a general perception abroad in the community that you have acted not as Prime Minister of Australia but as an agent of the United States. I think that that perception is correct. Whether you are hoping for some gain such as trade advantages or simply being on the side of the strongest power in an unsettled world or whether your mind has simply been captured by the murky and esoteric world of intelligence, I do not know. Your public statements and argument, however, are slippery and shallow and have failed to convince me and many others that Australia has any reason to go to war at this stage.

Yours sincerely,

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