

War with Iraq: Risks and consequences

Renowned scholar on the Middle East speaks at church

By Amy Faith Lionheart

Despite inclement weather, local residents crowded into a classroom at the Reformed Church on Pondfield Road last Wednesday night to participate in a lecture on the risks and consequences of going to war with Iraq.

Led by Dr. Fawaz Gerges, professor of Middle Eastern affairs at Sarah Lawrence College and a regular commentator for ABC News, the discussion focused on the need for the Bush administration to change gears and work on a more unified human rights

approach to Iraq.

According to Gerges, America needs to invest in an option other than war. "We need to build international alliances, start coalition building and seek a more inclusive vision."

Others in the audience agreed with those sentiments.

"Americans can't keep the notion that we are all powerful and we are stronger than (other countries) so we will just beat (them) into submission," said Rozsa Gaston, a Bronxville resident.

Gerges emphasized the importance of nation building and promoting education within foreign lands, while not taking actions to promote support for terrorist networks.

"How do you humanize America? How do you reach the young and give

them hope? We need to reach out to them, make a commitment to them, and educate them because a change has to come from within," said Gerges. "By going into Iraq, we are supplying ammunition for people like Osama bin Laden. The war against Iraq will more likely bring more Anti-American sentiment than support from Middle Eastern countries."

"Are we sure that if pushed to the corner, Saddam Hussein will not try to attack Israel and the United States?"

Gerges continued by saying that al-Qaida and other terrorist groups may gain strength if the U.S. military decides to oust Saddam Hussein. He highlighted potential pitfalls such as continued anti-American sentiment and the possibility

of attacks on Israel and the U.S.

Bronxville resident Juli Jackson agreed with Gerges' position. "If confirmed for me a lot of the things that I've been reading and worrying about in the last few months, I don't understand what the push for attacking Iraq is and I think Gerges made a very persuasive case against it."

Others were concerned about the notion that military action has severe reverberations to Americans living abroad.

"I have friends who are living abroad and I'm very reluctant to get on a plane. There is this haired of Americans these days and it just makes you want to try and stick close to home," said Jackson.

"This is a very complex situation," said Gerges. "It is no wonder that al-Qaida's anti-American message resonates powerfully in the Arab and Muslim political imagination. It pro-

vides the fuel that powers the terrorist engine and keeps it running."

According to Gerges, this war will never be won on the battlefield. More than 60 percent of Iraq's population is in their 20s and they want to be assured that they will have political freedoms in the future.

Other questions Gerges said must be considered before any potential attack are:

"How do you democratize a country that does not have the building blocks to stand on its own? Do we have the staying power to invest 20 years in the reconstruction of Iraq? Are the American people willing to take casualties if there is a civil war in Iraq?"

Although the forum didn't provide answers to these questions, Gerges says they must be acknowledged before the military enters the country.