In February 2003, nearly 4 years ago to the day I spoke to the congregation about the impending war with Iraq. In the shadow of the 9/11 terrorist attacks 2 years prior and with the conflict in Afghanistan changing form boiling over to a low simmer, our nation turned its concern toward the government of Iraq, its leader Saddam Hussein and his quest for Weapons of Mass Destruction.

I spoke that evening of the Jewish view of war, I walked the congregation through the two primary definitions of war in Jewish Tradition, a Milchemet Mitzvah or Madatory War and a Milchemet R'shut or Elective War.

In a sermon entitled "War is Not the Answer", a sermon by the way that is on our website, I expressed great reservations about the legitimacy of the impending conflict in the view of Jewish law. It did not fit easily into either category and really hinged on one very important definition. The question confronting our tradition, "Was Saddam Hussein a *Rodef*?

A *Rodef* is defined as a person perusing you to do you hard and it is the Talmudic justification for pre-emptive self defense. The idea explains that if a person is perusing you with the intent of causing you harm, you must first warn them, and if after warning them they do not stop and continue to pursue you to cause you harm you may do whatever is necessary to stop them even if that ultimately means that you must take their life to prevent them from taking yours. The Talmud says, "When someone threatens your life, kill them first" (Berachot 58a)

Based on what we had all be told about his quest for nuclear, chemical and biological weapons I felt Saddam fit this definition, but since one does not make war against an individual person, rather an entire nation I questioned in my sermon of 4 years ago whether sending 100,000s of troops to invade Iraq was the most effective way to deal with the problem of this one madman. I used the analogy that it was like using a sledge hammer to squash a bug, effective but resulting in a lot of collateral damage. Which is why the sermon was titled as it was, "War is Not the Answer"

Yet, as Rabbi David Saperstein wrote in his recent essay on the conflict, "Whatever the reasons for overthrowing Saddam Hussein and his regime, any discussion of Iraq must begin with this: The war has created and abetted ominous new threats to both the United States and Israel… To paraphrase Madeleine Albright, while our venture into Afghanistan eliminated the terrorist class of 2001, our war in Iraq has created the terrorist class of 2007.

And so the question before our country is, to paraphrase the lyrics of the great punk band The Clash, "Should we Stay or Should We Go, if we stay there will be trouble if we leave it could be double?"

The answer from our tradition is I think actually much more clear in this regard than it was in the case of Saddam's suspected weapons of mass destruction. Where the conflict

began as quest to stop one man from his insane pursuit of WMD it has now become the battlefront of an entire people intent on the destruction of our way of life.

Rabbi Saperstein continues, "One alarming legacy of the Iraq War is the large number of battle-hardened insurgents and terrorists it has created. Having developed effective new techniques and technologies to attack the infrastructure of civilian populations and the forces that protect them, it is not likely that these insurgents will be returning, like Cincinnatus, to productive work [at the end of the conflict]. After Iraq, where will their acquired skills most likely be aimed, if not at the United States and its allies, first and foremost Israel?

The War in Iraq has become what it perhaps never was but yet undeniably is now a *Milchemet Mitzvah*, A Mandatory War. Concerning a Mandatory War our tradition speaks with a clear voice. Historically a Milchemet Mitzvah is fought for one of three reasons,

1. To purge the land of idol worshippers whose practices may be enticing and lead our people away from their faith.
2. Against the Amalakites, history's first terrorists who attacked the Israelites from the rear with no apparent reason as we left Egypt, we are to blot out any memory of their existence lest a new generation take up their mantle and methods
3. To defend the land of Israel whenever it is under attack or under the threat of imminent danger.

In all three of these instances Jewish tradition teaches that any campaign against the enemy must be total and complete. We are to give them no terms of surrender, provide them no safe refuge. Maimonidies explains that the entire nation must fully and completely engage in the conflict. Where in an Elective War, the unmarried, newly weds and those who have just built a home are exempt; "in a Milchemet Mitzvah everyone goes out [to war], even a groom from his chambers and a bride from her wedding canopy." (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Melakhim 7:4)

My answer to the question should we stay or should we go is actually both, we must <u>stay</u> and if we are to stay we must <u>fully go</u>. Not to prove a point, not to support some failed policy or ill conceived mission. But because a war that may have begun as folly is now quite real. The threat is real, the danger for Israel and American influence around the world is real. The only thing that appears unreal, or unrealistic is our measure of commitment to this conflict. We cannot have guns and butter? We cannot wage war, and not hold our leaders, military and civilian accountable for how it is being waged. We cannot not send young men and women off to combat to fight a war without body armor and supplies, while the rest of our nation equips itself with every kind of personal gadgets and convenience. We cannot ask others to sacrifice their lives and lifestyle, without demanding at least some sacrifice from those who remain behind.

Our nation is unprepared for the reality of this conflict and what it will take to win it. Indeed when we contemplate its reality we may wish we never entered it in the first place. We should think about that next time - before we go marching off to war to solve a problem we might have solved by other means. But that too is not a luxury we can

enjoy. We are in it, by our own actions, by our own choice, by our elected leaders, maybe by our complacency in the face of all of those. But our tradition teaches quite clearly when you go to war, you go totally and completely, everyone of us, and we go to win totally and completely so that we blot out the memory of those who would seek to do us harm so that future generations will not have to face what we failed to confront. So that our troops can come home.