"If you were President", a friend asked, "what would you do about Iraq?" A problem cannot be solved until its presence is sensed, acknowledged and its depth fully assayed. Both of the likely options in our national quest for 'leadership', seem utterly incapable of perceiving, admitting and responding to the fact that our very presence in Iraq is the result of a terrible succession of mistakes, each compounding the catastrophe of the previous. Unless and until we find or create a leadership sufficiently courageous, forthright and determined to accept, and bring our countrymen face-to-face with, the facts that in the last 20 months we have:

* conclusively demonstrated the invalidity of the premises on which we entered Iraq;
* unequivocally demonstrated our utter inability to control the Iraqi populace or bring civil order to either the urban or rural countryside;
* been unable to impose even a credible semblance of 'democracy' on either the local or national governance.

Unless and until we as a nation face our responsibility for the disaster we have perpetrated upon the Iraqi people, we cannot hope to begin to make meaningful and effective adjustments in our courses of action. We can accomplish no more of whatever it is that we in fact set out to do, other than the removal of Saddam Hussein by brute force.

Of the failings above, it is generally agreed the most urgent is the matter of civil violence and disorder. If we cannot bring order to this ravaged land, who can? Might a coalition of Arab, of Muslim, of Middle Eastern states put aside their selfish-interests and work as a community in the common interests of their nations to bring a resolution to the disorder and end to the violence? Has it been tried? Why not?

The imposition of 'democracy' is widely seen to be an oxymoron; democracy cannot be effectively imposed. It has to arise from the desires of the demos, the people, not from the wishes of alien overlords. As desirous an outcome as a democratized Middle East may be, that is for Middle Easterners to achieve by the sweat, and perhaps, sadly, blood, of their own people, even as our 'democracy', such as it is, was forged over two and one-half centuries of our history. What blithering arrogance, what vainglorious zealotry, what dumbfounding hubris was it that led this nation to back a scheme to impose our political way on an alien culture? Yes, it will take some time, if ever, for Iraq to conform to our standards of democracy, but that is for Iraqis to accomplish on their timetable, not that of the gangs in America's White House or Congress!

What is unspeakably, abundantly clear, however, is that we, not just our 'leadership', but the American people, sanctioned, however ill-advisedly and deceivedly, the invasion and rape of Iraq's nationhood, civilization and culture. As the aggressors, as the perpetrators of our crimes against the Iraqi people, as slayerers of Iraqi civilians - men, women and
children, born and unborn — we owe the Iraqi people, the Iraqi nation, a monumental debt of reparations, reconstruction and restitution, for all-too-real pain and suffering, to say nothing of punitive damages for our arrogant misappropriation of self-righteousness. And such reparations, owed unconditionally, should, must, be administered not by our hand, which is indelibly tainted, but by some external organization, NGOs, the United Nations, whomever the world community can find that can be trusted to do so fairly, equitably and with primary regard for the welfare of the Iraqi people, not America's corporate hierarchy.

Lastly but perhaps most importantly, America owes the peoples of this world an apology — a heartfelt, chagrin-based, self-effacing commitment to learn from the tragic history of our adventuristic past, to accept our responsibility to live and work in future within the community of nations as a law-abiding partner with the rest of humanity, not the outlaw, rogue state we have so vehemently accused other nations of becoming.

But to offer such a commitment would take the sort of mature, adult judgment and behavior we dare expect and demand of only our fellow citizens, not self-proclaimed superpowers. Wouldn't to do so be a step towards making this country really super-ior, at least with respect to the precedents of our historical past? Would such be a step toward the power that comes from the respect from other peoples, other countries, other nations, for our wisdom and maturity? Then what better super-power to aspire to than world leadership via acclaim, resulting from respect and admiration, rather than fear and terror? Is that too much to hope for, to aspire to?

What would you do?

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