

IRAQI WAR: AN ADVENTURE WITHOUT RETURN

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“As the generations pass they grow worse. A time will come when they have grown so wicked that they will worship power; might will be right to them and reverence for the good will cease to be. At last, when no man is angry any more at wrongdoings or feels shame in the presence of the miserable, Zeus will destroy them too. And yet even then something might be done, if only the common people would rise and put down rulers that oppress them”

-Greek myth on the Iron Age

The war with Iraq has begun and with it the loss of a great opportunity by the world to gain peace through diplomacy and dialogue. This war is not necessary. The world community is united in condemning any form of dictatorship that stifles the human spirit and any form of terrorism that destroys innocent lives. However, the ways and means of meeting these challenges in the face of terrorist threats and their state sponsors must be worked out jointly by the free world. War does not appear to be one of those means. It is in this regard that many people are still questioning the intentions of the Republican-led government of George Bush in the invasion of Iraq. Many Americans would have preferred another path towards realizing this end, which their President has chosen to attain through a military conflict. As Hans Blix said, in his last address to the Security Council, it was disappointing that a process, which would have led to the disarmament of Iraq in a couple of months, was short-circuited. It is unfortunate that the UN, which was used by the U.S to open up Iraq and to make it more vulnerable in the event of an attack, has failed to resist the unilateralism, which is the hinge-point of the ongoing U.S-led pre-emptive strike against Iraq. The whole process begun with Resolution 1441 was only a smokescreen on the real intention of the U.S to invade Iraq. This war then is not about the disarmament of Iraq, because that process was already underway before it was disrupted by the war.

This war is not a war against Saddam Hussein nor is it a war against the Arabs or Muslims. This war is not also a Christian Crusade against Islam; just as the attacks on 9/11 was not an attack of Islam against the U.S. This war must be understood in the wider context of what the people who started it want to achieve: their national interests without minding the evils that come in their bumpy way to realizing them. This is why the whole world is in a state of shock at the resumption of hostilities. The two main Christian leaders the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury have already made it clear that this war cannot be justified ethically. The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, has also said that the legitimacy of the war is questionable and violates the charter of the United Nations. The question really is: Who can stop the ‘coalition of the

willing' from going against the will of the world? Who can stop the world's only super power from using her power like a super power? If Saddam Hussein violates the resolution of the United Nations and another nation violates the Charter that founded the UN which of them is more culpable? It is a strange world with a strange logic. This war is all about power.

Indeed, the talk of liberating a people is only mere propaganda. There is no evidence of a successful liberation of any nation by U. S or any Western nation for that matter since the 20th Century. The only case was Japan but that was after the horror of Hiroshima. What kind of liberation can one enjoy after one's land and people have been permanently destroyed? Some of us Africans have seen the liberation of Somalia by the U.S or even the liberation of Panama and Haiti or even more recently the liberation of Afghanistan. It is often from the ashes of this kind of 'liberation', founded on a quaint reasoning that violence and hatred are sired in the hearts of the betrayed 'liberated' people. What, for example, prevented the 'coalition of the willing' from liberating the people of Rwanda when only a little effort could have saved the lives of millions wasted in the 1994 genocide? We would not be talking of liberating Iraq today if it was not the second largest oil producing country in the world. There is no hiding the fact that the invasion Iraq by U.S and Britain is not founded on any altruism. The lives of the Iraqis do not mean much to them as the lives of their citizens otherwise they would have exhausted all means before embarking on this military campaign. The hostility between Iraq and Kuwait, which led to the first Gulf War and which still persists is not unconnected with the redrawing of the map between these two sister nations by the colonial policy of the United Kingdom. This war if not properly managed would even worsen the condition of the Kurds and other minorities in Iraq, Turkey and Kuwait.

What is happening in Iraq is once more the case of the ordinary people suffering because of the entrenched interests of some of the big powers. This suffering may come from the ruling class of Iraq whose arrowhead is Hussein, and who does not respect the yearnings of her people or the leadership in U.S and the UK who do not respect the opinion of majority of their people or the mood of the international community. It is a class war writ large in the canvas of international injustice and disorder. Saddam Hussein is only a creation of the Western powers and his demise would also be an oxymoron of the kind of dialectical tension often created in the Third World between local leaders and their people on one hand, and the local oppressors and their Western patrons on the other. It is also interesting that France, Russia and China who all have a stake in the emergence of this crisis going back to their conflicting claims on Iraqi oil and even underground military support for Hussein are all sitting back and watching. In the battle between the major world powers, only the under-developed countries suffer. As one Arab commentator, Tariq A. Al-Maena, wrote: "So who would really suffer and die? People without names and faces to the media circus preparing to cover the news, but victims nonetheless, whose identities will forever be etched in the minds of their loved ones. Turn toward your family for a moment Mr. Bush. Would you welcome any acts of aggression toward your wife

or your daughters, carried out under the lofty pretensions of saving humanity? Or is it your belief that while an American life is significant and worthy, all others are not?"

After the deluge in Iraq and the rest of the Middle East, the big powers would find a way out of this and sit back over cups of tea and coffee to balance the economic equation in spite of the people of the Middle East. This was how the colonialism of Africa started in the Berlin Conference in 1878. There had already been wars among the European powers over the way and means of acquiring and ruling the rest of the world. This culminated in the Franco-Prussian war 1870-1871, which France lost. But it presaged the gradual settlement of the collective goal of the Western world and the beginning of a grand design to use other nations and races as means for the furthering of this goal. America was at this time in ferment, building up what half a century later would be an awesome military that would change the course of world history. It is significant that through out the colonial period in the last century, the U.S never joined in the shameful act of suppressing the right of many races and peoples to self-determination. America is a land of freedom and has known what it tastes like being under colonialism, slavery or discrimination. In all these, I think it was the American spirit that saved America. What is worrisome to many is why America thinks today that the spirit of the suffering people of Iraq or any other country that is suffering misrule would not save them.

The existence of the United Nations is to enhance the self-determination of nations and peoples upon the principle of "the sovereign equality of all peace-loving states." No nation should constitute itself a threat to world peace and where such a case is established against a nation, the United Nations Security Council would respond to that because it "has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security." It has the authority to investigate any dispute between nations, to recommend methods for settlement and if necessary preserve the peace through diplomatic and economic means. Where all these fail, the Council in its judgment should authorize "such action by air, naval, or land forces" to maintain and restore international order. At the time that this Charter was being written, no one envisaged the kind of terrorism that would give rise to the horrors of 9/11. ***Terrorism is a war without boarder unleashed upon peoples and nations, especially innocent people, by some faceless cowards whose main aim is to inflict maximum destruction and pain on those they hate or those who they think hate them.*** Their asymmetrical warfare appears to redefine the Christian tradition of just war. The concept of asymmetrical warfare has been developed by international terrorists organizations who though they depend on secret assistance from some governments do not owe allegiance to any, making it impossible for them to be tracked down economically, politically and militarily. In the face of this emerging scenario, there was the need to build a global network of solidarity against terrorists, whose complex network is very fluid and wide spread. Even though Americans have borne much of the sorrowful weight of international terrorism, the conquest of terrorism is a war that the U.S cannot

win alone no matter how resolute or nationalistic her leader may be. Indeed, wrong policies and actions by governments in their relationship either with their own citizens or other nations are the reasons for terrorism in the world. ***Terrorism is the consequence of injustice and poverty in the world. It is the cry from the hearts of the weak to the strong; it is only the external expression of inward frustration by a thin top layer of the massive sea of a frustrated portion of our restive world.*** Why do we have so much hatred in the world? Why are we having religious tensions within and between religions? The reason lies at the heart of the solution of the present conflict. We have failed to overcome our fear of one another: This primitive instinct of men and women along the ages, which has led them to kill one another. This instinct can only be overcome by love and understanding instead of through hatred and war. War could be inevitable sometimes but it must be a last resort. When the Catholic Church, for instance condemns this war in Iraq, it is not simply being pacific, nor is she trying to play into the hand of Saddam Hussein, she says rather that we cannot acquiesce to failure nor can we meet our enemies on their terms. Something greater than war can still bring peace to Iraq and the Middle East and that is a commitment to justice. The concept of pre-emptive strike in order to counter terrorism does not appear to square with Christian morality nor does it have any foreseeable positive results even in the short run. Iraq is only the guinea pig for pre-emption and the results are left to the mercy of chance.

As things stand now, this war, which is, a gamble founded on many “ifs” does not have any predictable end. This may yet be the process of the recolonisation of the Middle East. After the onslaught on Iraq the next port of call could be Iran and then perhaps Saudi Arabia. However, the architects of this plan must really do a reality test to realize that the future of men and women are never clearly defined nor are people’s response to violence no matter how well intentioned easily determined. How much confidence does the ordinary Arab have on the ‘good intentions’ of the United States? Why would the ordinary Arab not make a connection-albeit unfounded- between the presence of the Allied Forces in Iraq and the presence of Israeli tanks on the Occupied territories of Palestine? Already women and children are carrying the posters of Saddam Hussein on the narrow and shattered streets of Palestine. He appears to be the quintessential Arab leader who resists the ‘Christian West’. The war in Iraq is an adventure whose results would be unpredictable especially in a very volatile region. It is very unfortunate that in a civilized world such a terrible mistake as a war in Iraq should be allowed to occur when it could have been avoided.

The Iraqi people have suffered so much since the Iran-Iraq war, the First Gulf War, the Sanctions and the iron-rule of Hussein. However, seriously considered, the liberation of the people of Iraq like all changes must come from within. The liberation of one people by another is only another language for imperialism whether it is cultural, political or economic. It is a cultural arrogance that deprecates the values dear to another people. It is to say the least a violence to our collective humanity because it diminishes the mosaic of diverging

civilizations and traditions that give beauty to the world. As Hegel and the Christian paleontologist Chardin had postulated, every civilization grows from within, through the liberation of the inner spirit of the people. According to Hegel, the state is a “self-originating, self-developing, self-knowing and self-actualizing mind” which defines itself in the historical process in her constitution and in the mode of living of her people. Thus every state must pass through phases of decay, dictatorship and even war before it arrives at a synthesis of her collective goods built from her past history. Civilization is a hue build over many years going back like in Iraq to the eon of time.

Most countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America are in an ever-revolving chain of turmoil because of the incision made in the revolving synergy that their civilizations would have generated as it tumbles through the bumps and bends in the path to her full blossom. What is needed in most Muslim countries is an organic change, which Islam in its self-recreating process would achieve. ***Any religion which fails to answer the deepest need of freedom in the human heart would one day fall into irrelevance and become an archeology.*** The Western-type democracy may not finely suit into the understanding of Islam as a way of life. Any democratic model in any Muslim country must be founded on the understanding that the life and faith of any Muslim are bound together. There is no secularity strictly speaking in Islam. The Moslem must submit his whole life, political, economic, cultural etc to Allah and the promotion of this submission is the goal of the Muslim ***Ummah***. The breaking of this concept for the purpose of co-existence between non-Muslims and Muslims would help in the tolerance and accommodating spirit demanded by a new global ethics. Most Muslims find the will of Allah in their leaders hence the kind of loyalty that we see manifested by most Muslims to their leaders irrespective of their style of leadership. A kind of democracy that would weave finely the ideals of the Islamic state with the demands of freedom and human rights, would have to be worked out by the Islamic world themselves in the course of time and not any kind of externally imposed democracy. Turkey, which is the only Western type democracy in the Muslim world, did not need any foreign invasion to achieve this.

This war would never achieve any liberation for the Iraqis because the people of Iraq are no less under bondage as the people of North Korea or even the hapless citizens of Afghanistan or the abandoned men and women of Somalia and the scared citizens of Serbia or Chechnya. Indeed, Iraq could be said to be on the path of democracy if we consider the situation in some other Arab states. Iraq has a parliament and for a country that has only 3% Christian population to tolerate a Christian Vice President, is a wonderful reality that points to some kind of tolerance found in a democracy. We all know that perhaps the Iraqi democracy revolves around Saddam Hussein. This is unfortunate, but his demise would have come by an internal cataclysm the kind that led for example to the French Revolution. No people can live under repression forever. That was how communism fell. However the self-determination of any people lies in their hands. The civilization, which the world craves for today, is the respect for the

values of each people. No nation has the right to define the contours of the cultural map of another. Models should be projected which could be copied by nations. That is why the United Nations was established to articulate these models. There can be no liberty and peace in Iraq even after Saddam Hussein or in the Middle East unless there is a commitment to justice especially on the part of the Western world, whose selective treatment of the leadership of that region is often hypocritical, inconsistent and colored by economic interests. Is it not significant that those who today are massed against Saddam Hussein were the same people who armed him? Indeed, the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction by Iraq is only a survival strategy for his country, to be the leading Arab country that would defend the Arabs in the event of any military conflict with Israel, which possesses the greatest number of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East through the help of the U.S.

Saddam Hussein may not come out of this war. He would most likely prefer to be killed because his 'martyrdom' would achieve more in pushing more Arabs to a Palestinian-type revenge killings and other terrorist acts than his depleted forces could do in the present one-sided war. It may not bode well for the Middle East as the reality of the powerlessness of the Arab world in the face of this U.S led invasion comes home. Many Muslim groups would rise in future to challenge this emerging reality in many violent ways beyond our comprehension. How this could be contained in the U.S programme for the 'liberation' of Iraq remains unanswered.

At the onset of the menace of Hitler, a sick and dying Sigmund Freud wrote a small book, **Civilization and its Discontents**, in which he bemoaned the irremediable antagonism between the demands of the instinct and the restrictions of civilization. Whether it is the death instinct that moves men and women to aggression or their egoistic self-satisfaction, the truth is that we need some self-renouncement individually or collectively to be able to live together. As Freud wrote: "*The fateful question for the human species seems to me to be whether and to what extent their cultural development will succeed in mastering the disturbance of their communal life by the human instinct of aggression and self-destruction.*" This is the same thesis proposed by Erich Fromm in his book, **Anatomy of Human Destructiveness**, where he contended that the instinct of aggression is at the root of the failure of the human species to achieve real and healthy relations among themselves. This is an instinct, which we share with all animals, unfortunately, as N. Tunbergen wrote; "*On the one hand, man is akin to many species of animals in that he fights his own species. But on the other hand, he is, among the thousand of species that fight, the only one in which fighting is disruptive.... Man is the only species that is a mass murderer, the only misfit in his own society.*"

It is significant that no African country is involved in this war and that the African non-permanent members of the Security Council did not support the war. Our continent appears to be waking up to the fact that she must take a non-aligned position and concern herself with her own self-recovery in a world that

aggressively wishes to ignore her. Africa often comes into the picture to make up the numbers. Africa must begin to find a way to address the specific problems in her continent. Unfortunately, countries like Nigeria that should lead the way is finding it hard to define herself or to even conduct successful national elections. We still have meaningless fratricidal conflicts in many nations in Africa. Bad leadership, institutional collapse at all levels and dictatorships in many countries, plague the continent. Poverty is choking the life out of many people and HIV/AIDS continue to spread among the most vibrant section of the population. What is happening in Iraq is a pointer to the fact that what counts in international relation is the specific interest of the big powers, while the rest of the world has but a marginal relevance. Unless we Africans work out a development plan, and build on our God-given talents, we will continue to suffer and bear the sad prospect of recolonisation which makes most of us second class citizens in many developed countries, because we have failed to develop our continent.

The international community must not abandon the Iraqis to their fate. The presence of Saddam Hussein in the midst of the Iraqi people has been a mixed grill. He lifted Iraq up many years ago, and now he is sinking his nation. The message is however clear: ***No single person's destiny is higher than the collective good of the nation, just as no single nation's interest should transcend that of the global community.*** We pray that God would still bring good out of this evil. May justice roll down from the heavens and love scatter like the desert storm and pound on every doorstep on earth, opening the mouth of the world to speak the universal language of friendship and solidarity.