

Letter to the people of Iraq hopes to explain our goals

I'm not anybody special, just another American with an opinion about the war. And I suppose my opinion doesn't matter much. I've never been to Iraq, never served in the military, and I can count the number of Muslims I know on one hand. I don't make foreign policy, I don't speak for those who do. Still, I've always believed that more speech is better than less, speaking up is better than silence, and giving up in despair is never an option.

I'm trying to say something on behalf of the majority of Americans who supported the war when it began, but are now wondering when the stable, democratic and prosperous Iraq we all wanted is going to show up. I'm wondering if you've been listening to the wrong people.

Some of you may not like America, because you've heard America wants a global empire. True, there are a small number of Americans who are infatuated with the idea of global rule. These people are historically ignorant of America's brief experiments with empire, and the terrible consequences for all involved. They belong on the margins of American society.

Most Americans have no appetite for conquest, no taste for empire, and no hunger to rule. How else could you explain why we want our soldiers home? If we wanted conquest, why are we not rallying in the streets, demanding to send more troops overseas?

Maybe you have heard this war is religiously motivated, a re-enactment of the Crusades in a war against Islam. Fortunately, the overwhelming majority of Americans find this view repugnant.

If we don't want empire, and we don't want to Christianize the Middle East, what do we want? We want you to make it on your own.

If your country falls apart, it will become a staging ground for al-Qaida and other terrorist organizations to launch attacks on America, and from there the entire civilized world. No American president will let that



OPINION
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happen. America is powerful enough, has soldiers brave enough, and values the lives of her citizens enough that she will do what it takes to ensure this does not happen. Terrorists believe that we Americans value our lives too highly, and that is our greatest weakness. They are wrong. It is our greatest strength.

It's easy for me to sit here in my garden, typing on my laptop, and tell you what to do. As a professional, well-educated American, I live more comfortably, more securely, and more peacefully than 99.999 percent of the people on this planet.

Thanks to the soldiers who now patrol your streets, I've never known war and never lost a loved one to violence. You can tell me that I simply don't understand what life is like for you. You'd be right.

But I do understand that there is no reason why your country can't have the same blessings we do. People don't have to remain poor, live in fear, or slaughter one another in the name of God. It simply requires ordinary, decent people to do ordinary, decent things.

If the good people of Iraq can decide to stand up for the rule of law, to participate in the government even if they don't always agree with it, to set aside differences between Sunni and Shi'a, to join the army, police and security forces, to fight al-Qaida and all those who seek to send Iraq back to the Stone Age, then your country can become peaceful and prosperous, too.

But you have to help us out. We can't do it for you, and we want our troops home.

I'd like to thank my good friend and colleague Dr Salah Hammoud for translating this week's column into Arabic, and for his assistance in helping me reach an Iraqi audience. The Arabic version will be up on my Web site, www.faginfamily.net/barry/bio.htm, shortly.

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