

But I also write to you knowing this: If I had been approached, say in the year 1975, when Pinochet was at the height of his murderous spree in Chile, by an emissary of the American government proposing that the United States, the very country which had put our strongman in power, use military force to overthrow the dictatorship, I believe that my answer would have been, I hope it would have been: No, thank you. We must deal with this monster by ourselves.

I was never given that chance, of course: The Americans would never have wanted to rid themselves, in the midst of the Cold War, of such an obsequious client, just as they did not try to eject Saddam Hussein 20 years ago, when he was even more repressive. Rather, they supported him as a bulwark against militant Iran.

But this exercise in political science fiction (invade Chile to depose Pinochet?) at least allows me to share in the agony created by my own opposition to this war, forces me to recognize the pain that is being endured at this very moment in some house in Basra, some basement in Baghdad, some school in Tarmiyah. Even if I can do nothing to stop those government thugs in Iraq coming to arrest you again today, coming for you tomorrow and the next day and the day after that, knocking once more at your door.

Heaven help me, I am saying that if I had been given a chance years ago to spare the lives of so many of my dearest friends, given the chance to end my exile and alleviate the grief of millions of my fellow citizens, I would have rejected it if the price we would have had to pay was clusters of bombs killing the innocent, if the price was years of foreign occupation, if the price was the loss of control over our own destiny.

Heaven help me, I am saying that I care more about the future of this sad world than about the future of your unprotected children.

Ariel Dorfman, a native of Chile, teaches at Duke University. His latest books are "Exorcising Terror: The Incredible Unending Trial of General Augusto Pinochet" (Seven Stories Press) and "In Case of Fire in a Foreign Land: New and Collected Poems From Two Languages" (Duke University Press).

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Such sympathy for your cause does not exempt me, however, from asking a crucial question: Is that suffering sufficient to justify intervention from an outside power, a suffering that has been cited as a secondary but compelling reason for an invasion?

Despite having spent most of my life as a firm anti-interventionist, protesting American aggression in Latin America and Asia, and Soviet invasions of Eastern Europe and Afghanistan, during the 1990s I gradually came to believe that there might be occasions when incursions by a foreign power could indeed be warranted. I reluctantly agreed with the 1994 American expedition to Haiti to return to power the legally elected president of that republic; I was appalled at the lack of response from the international community to the genocide in Bosnia and Rwanda; I applauded the Australian intervention to stop the massacres in East Timor; and, regarding Kosovo, though I would have preferred the military action to have taken place under the auspices of the United Nations, I eventually came to the agonizing conclusion that ethnic cleansing on such a massive scale could not be tolerated.

I am afraid that none of these cases applies to Iraq. For starters, there is no guarantee that this military adventure will, in fact, lead to a "regime change," or peace and stability for your region.

Unfortunately, also, the present affliction of your men and women and children must be horribly, perversely, weighed against the impending casualties and enormous losses that the American campaign will surely cause. In the balance are not only the dead and mutilated of Iraq (and who knows how many from the invading force), but the very real possibility that such an act of preemptive, world-destabilizing aggression could spin out of control and lead to other despots preemptively arming themselves with all manner of apocalyptic weapons and, perhaps, to Armageddon. Not to mention how such an action seems destined to recruit even more fanatics for the terrorist groups who are salivating at the prospect of an American invasion. And if we add to this that I am unconvinced that your dictator has sufficient weapons of mass destruction to truly pose a threat to other countries (or ties to criminal groups who could use them for terror), I have to say no to war.

It is not easy for me to write these words.

I write, after all, from the comfort and safety of my own life. I write to you in the knowledge that I never did very much for the Iraqi resistance, hardly registered you and your needs, sent a couple of free books to libraries and academics in Baghdad who asked for them, answered one, maybe two, letters from Iraqi women who had been tortured and had found some solace in my plays. I write to you harboring the suspicion that if I had cared more, if we all had, there might not be a tyrant today in Iraq. I write to you knowing that there is no chance that the American government might redirect to a flood of people like you the \$200 billion, \$300 billion this war would initially cost, no real interest from those who would supposedly liberate you to instead spend that enormous amount of money helping to build a democratic alternative inside your country.

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The Urge to Help, The Obligation Not To

By Ariel Dorfman

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I do not know your name, and that is already significant. Are you one of the thousands upon thousands who survived Saddam Hussein's chambers of torture, did you see the genitals of one of your sons crushed to punish you, to make you cooperate? Are you a member of a family that has to live with the father who returned, silent and broken, from that inferno, the mother who must remember each morning the daughter taken one night by security forces, and who may or may not still be alive? Are you one of the Kurds gassed in the north of Iraq, an Arab from the south displaced from his home, a Shiite clergyman ruthlessly persecuted by the Baath Party, a communist who has been fighting the dictatorship for long decades?

Whoever you are, faceless and suffering, you have been waiting many years for the reign of terror to end. And now, at last, you can see fast approaching the moment you have been praying for, even if you oppose and fear the American invasion that will inevitably kill so many Iraqis and devastate your land: the moment when the dictator who has built himself lavish palaces, the man who praises Hitler and Stalin and promises to emulate them, may well be forced out of power.

What right does anyone have to deny you and your fellow Iraqis that liberation from tyranny? What right do we have to oppose the war the United States is preparing to wage on your country, if it could indeed result in the ouster of Saddam Hussein? Can those countless human rights activists who, a few years ago, celebrated the trial in London of Chilean Gen. Augusto Pinochet as a victory for all the victims on this Earth, now deny the world the joy of seeing the strongman of Iraq indicted and tried for crimes against humanity?

It is not fortuitous that I have brought the redoubtable Pinochet into the picture.

As a Chilean who fought against the general's pervasive terror for 17 years, I can understand the needs, the anguish, the urgency, of those Iraqis inside and outside their homeland who cannot wait, cannot accept any further delay, silently howl for deliverance. I have seen how Chile still suffers from Pinochet's legacy, 13 years after he left power, and can therefore comprehend how every week that passes with the despot in power poisons your collective fate.