

Thoughts on Iraq

By Susan Agel, Oklahoma City

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My husband, Eli, is from the Middle East. A Christian from Syria, he has been a naturalized citizen for 20 years now and is an American in every sense of the word.

As I write this, we're in the thick of battle in Iraq. Many opinions are now being expressed, from the idiot at the Oscars who still denies the Bush election, to those who honestly question the need for war, to those who fully back the president in his actions. Eli and I believe that the U.S. has a moral obligation to stop the tyranny in Iraq.

Until just within the past several years, both of Eli's sisters lived in Iraq. They had married Iraqi men years ago and moved to that country, where they raised their children. They were living in Baghdad during the Gulf War. One family now lives in the U.S. and the other is in Syria.

I don't think we Americans can truly appreciate what it is like to live in a repressive society such as that. Fear covers everything like a suffocating blanket. When Eli would call his sisters on the phone, he had to be careful about what he would say, fearing that someone would be listening. After the call, he'd try to guess what unspoken messages they may have tried to get across. We knew that letters would run the risk of being read by censors first and couldn't count on sending them money or anything else in the mail, because it could be taken in the process.

Inflation is higher than we can imagine. When his sisters and their families left Iraq, salaries had fallen so far behind that a dozen eggs cost the equivalent of one month's pay. Without rations provided by the government, people would starve. One of our young nieces died of a liver ailment several years before the Gulf War, with little medical treatment available even before the embargoes.

Say what you want about the division of church and state. However, our lives are so structured upon our culture of freedom and belief in God, we don't have a clue what other societies are like. For example, our financial system depends on trust. We put money in the bank because we trust the bank to keep it for us. We loan money to others because we trust them to pay us back. These days, of course, we require all sorts of proof regarding ability to pay and legal contracts, etc., but the entire process is built on the old system when two men could shake hands on a deal and know they could depend upon the other's word.

Iraqis can't even trust their government not to gas them.

Our government operates on a set of laws that were basically intended to codify the absolutes of wrong and right. Granted, some laws don't meet that goal at all, but generally, that's the underlying system. Imagine living in a system where everything depends upon the whim of a dictator. There are no absolutes, except absolute fear and the knowledge that an individual's life is worth nothing.

Our troops in Iraq have an incredible job ahead of them. Some have lost their lives and more will. With the sacrifices they are making, it is ours to make a commitment to more than just living in relative wealth and luxury in the most prosperous country in the world.

God grant us the ability to recognize evil when we see it and the courage to stand in its way.