

Caught in the crossfire: Imagine the fear the Iraqis have lived with

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Americans are fearful these days. September 11 snatched from us (forever?) a feeling of invincibility, a sense of being safe and secure from foreign invasion. Now we keep getting homeland security warnings about the probability of another terrorist attack. Besides that, a crazed sniper is on the loose around Washington, D.C. And yes, there's still Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, who may be capable of launching weapons of mass destruction on us in the not-too-distant future.

But what about the Iraqi people? How fearful are they these days? And how fearful have they been for many years? Americans should spend some minutes each day thinking about that.

In making his case for a preemptive strike against Saddam, President Bush insisted that "America is a friend of the people of Iraq." But James Jennings, president of Conscience International, has another perspective: "Try telling that to a friend of mine in Baghdad who walked out of his house following a U.S. bomb attack to find his neighbor's head rolling down the street; or to a taxi driver I met whose four-year-old child shook uncontrollably for three days following Clinton's 1998 'Monicagate' bombing diversion. Try telling it to the mother of Omran ibn Jwair, whom I met . . . after a U.S. missile killed her 13-year-old son while he was tending sheep in the field."

Jennings, whose humanitarian aid organization has worked in Iraq since 1991, adds: "Try telling it to the hundreds of mothers I have seen crying over their dying babies in Iraqi hospitals, and to the hundreds of thousands of parents who have actually lost their infant children due to the cruel U.S. blockade, euphemistically called 'sanctions.' Are the Iraqi people supposed to rejoice now that a new war is being forced upon them by their so-called 'friends'?"

The *Christian Science Monitor* sizes up the "friendship factor" this way: "Many [Iraqis] say they have nothing against Americans, and then bluntly state that they

hate the U.S. government.”

The Iraqi people have suffered enormously at the hands of Saddam, the despot. They’ve also suffered from the United Nations sanctions imposed after the gulf war. As one NGO worker said, “Every day [in Iraq] is an emergency.” Think what it must feel like now to expect the greatest military power on earth to unleash its lethal weaponry in your country. Think of what it would be like as a civilian to get caught in the crossfire between an invading force and a desperate and vicious military regime.

Americans should take some time to imagine themselves in the place of the Iraqi people, and think about what the future looks like to them, their children and grandchildren. After all, whatever the consequences of an attack on Iraq, it will be the Iraqis who will have to live with them every minute of every day.