

Course correction: The U.S. needs help in Iraq

From the Editors in the [May 18, 2004](#) issue

While interviewing President Bush for his just-published book *Plan of Attack*, Bob Woodward mentioned what British Prime Minister Tony Blair had said about receiving angry letters from families who had lost loved ones in Iraq: “Don’t believe anyone who tells you when they receive letters like that they don’t suffer any doubt.” Upon hearing this, Woodward reports, the president stiffened and, with hardly a moment’s hesitation, said: “I haven’t suffered any doubt.” Woodward asked: “Not at all?” Bush said: “No. And I’m able to convey that to the people,” even to those who lost sons or daughters in Iraq.

“Resolute” is the way Woodward has characterized Bush. It is an admirable quality in leaders: standing firm on principles, not letting the polls dictate policy. Yet it takes an equal or greater amount of courage for leaders to admit mistakes or to change course when needed.

In an election year especially, it is perhaps too much to expect Bush to admit he was wrong in any way regarding the invasion and occupation of Iraq. But both people who supported the war and those who opposed it increasingly believe that the situation is reaching a crisis point. The dancing in the streets that greeted the fall of Saddam has morphed into Iraqis shooting at American soldiers and dancing in the streets to celebrate American deaths. The planned transfer of political power on June 30 will still leave the Americans as the occupying power whose display of force appears to be creating more enemies even as it fails to provide adequate security.

The president is correct on one point: the U.S. can’t abandon Iraq. The pottery principle applies here: if you break it, you own it. But as former Senator Bob Kerrey, a member of the 9/11 commission, has argued recently, the U.S. must admit that it needs help from the United Nations both with the transferring of power to Iraqis and with an international occupying force that might include Muslims (*New York Times*, April 11).

Kerrey also rightly contends that the war on terrorism has been ill-conceived. Terrorism is a tactic, he says, not an enemy. “The real enemy is a small group of radical Islamists who have chosen to wage a war on all infidels—military and civilian alike.” In the long run, that enemy can be overcome only by facing squarely the concerns of the Muslim world and the bitterness and despair that make terrorism an attractive option.

Woodward also asked Bush if he had ever consulted with his father about going to war against Iraq. Bush said he might have, but added, “There is a higher father that I appeal to.” What does the Heavenly Father advise regarding the chaos and violence in Iraq? We know this much, based on the witness of Jesus: he would advise doing whatever is most likely to lead to peace with the enemy and justice for the “just and the unjust.”