Try to remember: The dilemma is a human one

Joan Chittister | Jan. 15, 2007   From Where I Stand

Life is made up of hard decisions, some harder than others, they tell us. U.S. involvement in Iraq is one of those -- and it is getting harder by the day.

The mid-term elections of November, 2006, unclear on some issues, perhaps, were amazingly clear on another. The United States, voters told interviewers, is on the wrong course.

They wanted change. But wanting change and changing are two different things. The question now is how we'll change course. And to what?

That is no small problem.

That the country has become ever more impatient and intolerant of the U.S. invasion and drawn-out presence in Iraq is clear.

That we know how to stop it is not.

One option advised for Iraq by those who believe that military victory is both possible and necessary is, of course, simply to go on going on. It's a business-as-usual solution. But military forces find themselves in a situation where the security of Iraq, instead of getting better as time goes by, gets worse from news cycle to news cycle.

The problem with going on as usual is that it is not only a failed attempt at a solution -- surges have been tried before -- it is also part of the problem. As long as U.S. troops stay in Iraq where many do not want them, the Iraqis will never be safe.

A second option proposed to resolve the Iraqi situation is to simply cut our losses and get out. After all, thousands of U.S. soldiers have already been wounded or permanently disabled. But after five years of escalating failure in a contest once described as "a slam dunk", this proposal becomes a two-edged sword.

First, when those who oppose the war suggest pulling out, it's called a "cut and run" policy. Cowardly, in other words. Treasonous, even.

On the other hand, when those who believe in the war talk about leaving, it smacks of the worst kind of spin. They put a good face on a bad thing. They aren't leaving, they say, because we failed in what we should not have done in the first place. They say they're only leaving because we've already won. "We liberated Iraq," they argue. This war now, they point out, is "a civil war." meaning not "our war." A war we have had absolutely no hand in creating.

Oh, please.

Who, if not we, went into Iraq sure that all we had to do was to strike the wicked king with our magic wand and the world would be just as it should be.

Who left the whole country of Iraq in disarray, 52,000 civilians dead -- as many as 500,000, the Lancet report says -- its infrastructure broken, and our own country billions of dollars poorer for the doing of it, if not we?

Who created the circumstances that unleashed what may well have been an ages-old incipient civil war, if not we?

So now a third option: Send more U.S. troops to do what we have not achieved so far and send money with them to supply more weapons and, oh yes, with what's left over to rebuild what we've already broken.

This option presumes that a military solution -- if at all possible -- is the real solution to the situation in Iraq. This option exposes our ongoing unwillingness to cooperate with the rest of the Muslim world, as the Iraq Study Group recommends, in bringing stability to a major country in the Middle East.

So, the questions now are even more exasperating. Have we really changed course? Is the presence of more U.S. troops the solution or does the sight of them only fuel the problem? And if we simply leave the country to the mercy of its own competing forces will, as the scripture says, "The last error will be worse than the first?" Having eliminated one kind of demon will a thousand more simply rush in to take its place? If we leave now, do we then set the scene for an internal bloodbath of recrimination and vengeance?

Or to put it another way: If going in was immoral, is it possible that leaving now is just as immoral?

The new danger is that we may now be more mired in defending our own unwillingness to admit we were wrong -- dead wrong -- than in doing what's best for Iraq. We may not be nearly so determined to resurrect Iraq as we are to bury our own errors under a patina of false victory.

And, worst of all, how long will it take us to decide any of these things?

While the gears of the political world grind exceeding slow, the military mistakes multiply. More babies die, more civilians flee, more homes are destroyed, the economy crumbles, the innocent stand caught between forces not of their own making. And the world stands back and watches in judgment as one United States becomes another in their minds.

All the time we dither with purely military answers to human questions, mail continues to pour in from the people who cannot wait much longer. A woman director of a national aid group stays in touch. I am reproducing her letter in its original form: She writes:

> *Iraq and Iraqis were victimized. They were victimized by the successive dictatorships, poor leadership, interfered with for our OIL throughout history.*

> Still what is going on nowadays is far from being just victimized or a blood shed. It is a complete killing not of life only but the simple existence even! The political and strategic agenda of the whole Middle East is being formulated upon Iraqis bodies and future....everybody is fighting everybody in Iraq. ? Killing is increasing on a daily basis. Iraq is losing its people not because of the sectarian violence and killing only but because of the huge brain drain which sucked a major portion of the middle and intellectual class within our society. Iraq is the country that is bleeding

people fleeing their fancy houses to be refugees in other countries ? so we are bleeding with dead bodies in Baghdad's streets and refugee families!

Who will remain to get life back to Mesopotamia? ... That is the question?!

It's time for politicians to read the mail. For the people's sake, we must end this. We must do something more than send more military to solve what will forever be a political problem.

From where I stand, it looks to me as if it's time for politicians to stop escalating war and solve the human and political problems they created for all of us.