

## Iraq's history

Henry Kissinger ("A political program to exit Iraq," *Views*, July 3) was in error when he referred to centuries of conflict between Iraqis.

On the contrary, despite the diversity of the Iraqi population, people have lived together in harmony in that part of the world for centuries. Although the population was often difficult to subdue by central government, real civil conflict, based on ethnic or sectarian animosities, was rare.

Most conflicts were between the central government, which indeed was frequently unrepresentative of the complexity of Iraqi society, and other equally unrepresentative political or religious sub-groups, depending on the historical moment.

The brutality of Saddam Hussein's regime against the Shiites and the Kurds intensified the differences among the Iraqi people.

The Bush administration is attempting to evade the responsibility for creating civil war conditions in Iraq.

The invasion of Iraq created a power vacuum in the country, which led to the spread of instability and chaos. The most important error committed by the occupation forces was their inability to secure the country and impose order after the invasion, which in turn has given rise to independent militias.

The second mistake was the dissolution of the Iraqi Army and all pre-existing security forces. The third source

of escalating sectarian differences in Iraq was the creation of the Iraqi Governing Council on ethnic and religious lines.

Undoubtedly, Iraq needs the assistance of the international community to restructure itself because the Bush administration has failed completely.

Iraq lacks a political culture of moderation and compromise that many see as a necessary condition for a power-sharing arrangement to work in a sustainable way.

If power relations between the groups change, leaders may not be prepared to renegotiate or compromise and the shaky ethnic and religious institutional structure will break apart.

The United States must make it clear to the Iraqi community leaders that it is their responsibility to reach compromise with responsible leaders of other ethnic or sectarian communities because the United States cannot remain in Iraq indefinitely, nor can it adjudicate Iraqi factional disputes.

American pressure may be needed to bring the parties together if they cannot agree on how to divide the cake and, if necessary, to enforce a compromise and raise the costs of defection.

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and Hasni Abidi, Geneva**

## The pope's reforms

Frank Flinn ("Turning back the liturgical clock," *Views*, July 11) says farewell to Vatican II, because he thinks the pope does just that. But, in fact, the

pope explicitly mentions the good fruits of the post-Vatican II liturgical reforms (in spite of the abuses).

The concession concerning the old rite aims at a reconciliation of the traditionalists with the core of Vatican II so as to be able to continue ecumenical and interreligious dialogues in proper unity and theological clarity.

The progressive side would do well to become somewhat more conservative and thus enable the conservatives to accept serious progress.

**Ben Hoffschulte, Leuven, Belgium**

## Commercials in Spain

Regarding the article "EU issues a warning to Spain over TV rules" (July 11): Despite the fact that Spain might infringe EU rules by broadcasting long blocks of commercials, I doubt whether this gives advertising companies in Spain an unfair advantage.

From my personal experience, living many years in Cordoba and Madrid, I know that these 15-20 minute intermissions are normally used by Spanish people to do all sorts of other activities such as preparing tapas, doing the dishes, walking the dog or taking a shower. People do not really watch these commercials.

I agree, however, that a limit of 12 minutes per hour for TV advertising would do Spain some good because sometimes the breaks are so long that you are left pondering what film or series you were actually watching.

**Jorrit Kamminga, Madrid**