

The ballot paper for the Iraqi elections is a monster form. It measures an incredible 2ft by 3ft and lists more than 250 choices. That's 250 people and parties who are laying their lives on the line to participate in elections that they see as a step forward for their country. Other Iraqis are urging a boycott. They argue that the vote is flawed and will simply result in a puppet government with America pulling the strings.

They may well be right, though it is hard to see how this situation is going to change and this seems to be the opinion of the Iraqis living in the UK who registered to vote last weekend.

However, both the boycotters and the participants have a common goal. It's just the means of achieving it over which they disagree. Both camps want the US-UK forces out a.s.a.p. They don't speak of them as liberators, as George Bush would have them cast, but as occupiers.

This is the problem with Bush's inaugural speech. It's "democracy our way whether you like it or not" that he pledges to bring to the world's oppressed and that isn't democracy. But his hypocrisy goes much deeper. What of the democratically-elected governments that the USA has undermined or the dictators from General Pinochet to the Shah of Iran and Saddam Hussein that it has supported? The USA acts in its own self-interest and justifications are sugar icing tales that could have been scripted by Walt Disney.

Bush's speech also failed to mention the most pressing issue of our times: climate change. The USA - responsible for a quarter of the world's emissions of greenhouse gases - has refused to sign up to the Kyoto Protocol, the main global instrument for tackling this threat.

A report released yesterday from the pressure group International Climate Change Taskforce concludes that we are due to reach a point of no return on greenhouse gases in just 10 to 20 years time. After this point, whatever we do, we will fail to avert the consequences of climate change.

The taskforce's scientific advisor was Dr Rajendra Pachauri, the chairman of the United Nations' panel of climate change scientists. He already believes that the point of no-return has been passed - and he is no scaremonger. He was the US's favoured candidate for the post as it thought the previous occupant - Robert Watson - was too dire in his warnings.

What can we do? Support the boycott of Esso, whose parent company Exxon was Watson's chief critic. Lobby the British government. It is trying to coax the US into action, but at home its own actions are wanting. Not a single home, shop, office or factory should be constructed without built-in renewable energy generation. Bikes, buses and trains must take precedence over cars.

Stephen Byers, who was Transport Secretary, admits that he didn't take climate change seriously enough when in government - an astonishing admission considering that was only two years ago and one which shows how this government still has its head stuck in the sand.