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## American Naiveté

*The Prize, The Epic Quest for Oil, Money and Power* by Daniel Yergin, is one of my favorite books because not only is it well written but it is about a fascinating subject that is at the heart of Venezuela, Black Gold, a.k.a. The Excrement of the Devil, at least by the father of OPEC, Pedro Pablo Perez Alfonzo.

I consult the book quite often and this morning I came across a passage that is pertinent to the present difficulties with Iraq. Before citing the book, let me introduce the scene and the actors.

Since 1934 the oil of Kuwait had been exploited by BP and Gulf through a joint venture, the Kuwait Oil Company. In 1974 Kuwait acquired 60 percent participation in the Kuwait Oil Company and in March 1975, Kuwait announced that it was going to take over that last 40 percent and not maintain any special links to BP and Gulf.

*Once the deal was done, the two international companies still assumed that they would retain preferential access. That assumption was much in the mind of Herbert Goodman, the president of Gulf Oil Trading Company, when he was dispatched with a small team to Kuwait City to put the finishing touches on the new relationship, or so he thought. Goodman quickly found out how much had really changed. Not that he could ever be accused of being naive. Goodman was one of the most experienced oil supply men and traders in the world; indeed, his career embodied the extraordinary development and expansion of the international oil companies in the decade of the 1960s. A former U. S. Foreign Service officer who had joined Gulf in 1959, Goodman had earned his place in any oil hall of fame; during four years in Tokyo, he had the distinction of selling over a billion barrels of oil in a series of long-term contracts with Japanese and Korean buyers. The 1960s were the glory days, both for an oil man and for an American abroad. "There was a tremendous cachet to being an American businessman then, enormous entree everywhere." Goodman was to recall. "You learned to*

*take it as your due. People paid attention. There was a respect for your credibility, clout, power. Why? It was trade following the flag -- the enormous credibility and respect enjoyed by the United States. The American passport was truly laissez-passer -- a safeguard. Then that began to fade. I could feel it everywhere. It was the ebbing of American power -- the Romans retreating from Hadrian's Wall. I tell you, I could feel it everywhere." Then came the oil embargo, the price increase, Nixon's humiliation and resignation, and the abrupt American withdrawal from Vietnam. And now Goodman found himself, in 1975, sitting in Kuwait City where the Kuwaitis were also insisting that an era had ended.*

*The Gulf men could not help but notice how differently they were being treated from past days. "We would go from our hotel to the ministry, day after day, and wait," said Goodman. "Sometimes, a junior person would come. Sometimes not." At one point in the discussion, Goodman tried to remind a Kuwaiti official of the history, at least as he understood it, of all that Gulf had done for Kuwait. The Kuwaiti became very angry. "Whatever you did you got paid for," he said. **You never did us any favors.**" Then he walked out of the meeting.*

*"For the Kuwaitis, it was the overthrow of the colonial power," Goodman reflected afterward. "There was this misunderstanding. Here was the conceit of the Americans the we were loved because we had done so much for these people. This was the American naiveté. We thought that we had good relations. They saw it from a different point of view. They had always felt patronized. They remembered it. In all these relationships, there's this love-hate thing."*

The American naiveté, at least, that of the peace marchers, is to think that the way to "make friend and influence nations" is by being humble and by doing good deeds. That might work between individuals but not between nations. Where is the love and gratefulness of France and Germany? Gone with the missing assertiveness of America. Think back just a few years ago when Japan took on Detroit, where was the love and gratefulness of Japan? Where is the love and gratefulness of Venezuela with Chavez in power?

Nations, specially superpowers, have to learn to be assertive. Assertiveness is good in interpersonal relations and it is essential in international politics. When you fail to be assertive you suffer consequences like the Iran hostage situation which went on for well over a year with Jimmy Carter wringing his sweaty hands but not taking any effective action to end it.

I want to remind my pacifist friends that there is a huge difference between being colonial and overpowering and being rightfully assertive.

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