



April 7, 2004

The Liberation and Reconstruction of Iraq: One Year Later

Executive Summary

- April 9 marks the one-year anniversary of the liberation of Iraq.
- In conducting Operation Iraqi Freedom, the U.S. and its allies freed 25 million Iraqis from Saddam's regime, defended the will of the international community, removed a threat to US and allied security interests, changed the dynamic in the Middle East by destroying a terrorist incubator, and set Iraq and the region on a path for democratic and free-market reform.
- 211 Members of Congress have traveled to Iraq to witness firsthand the extraordinary efforts the coalition forces and Iraqis themselves are making to reconstruct Iraq.
- Despite the terrorist attacks and violence that has befallen Iraq, a recent public opinion poll found that 56.5 percent of Iraqis believe things are better in Iraq than they were one year ago, and 71 percent of those polled believe that things will be better in Iraq one year from now.
- On April 5, the Iraqi Governing Council issued a statement condemning recent acts of violence and calling on Iraqis to continue working together toward democracy.
- There are more Iraqis protecting their own country than there are Americans protecting Iraq.
- For the first time in Iraq's history, the people of Iraq will be governed by the rule of law, will be able to vote for elected officials, and will have a say in how their country will be governed.
- The defeat of Saddam Hussein's regime is the second major victory in the War on Terrorism.
- The debate over Iraq did not begin with the inauguration of President George W. Bush.
- The Bush Administration recognized the threat that Iraq posed to U.S. and allied security interests; that international resolve was failing; that it had a responsibility to enforce 17 UNSC resolutions that Hussein repeatedly violated; and that it was obligated to carry out the will of Congress as enumerated in U.S. law by the enactment of the 1998 Iraq Liberation Act.

Introduction

April 9 marks the one-year anniversary of the liberation of Iraq. With the symbolic toppling of Saddam Hussein's statue in Baghdad, three decades of tyrannical rule, corruption, suffering, terrorist support, and deceit came to an end. In conducting Operation Iraqi Freedom, the U.S. and its allies freed 25 million Iraqis from Saddam's regime (the largest U.S. military liberation since World War II), defended the will of the international community (which had, for more than a decade, demanded accountability from Hussein), removed a threat to US and allied security interests, changed the dynamic in the Middle East by destroying a terrorist incubator, and set Iraq and the region on a path for democratic and free-market reform.

During the past year, 211 Members of Congress (nearly 40 percent) have traveled to Iraq to witness firsthand the extraordinary efforts the coalition forces and Iraqis themselves are making to reconstruct Iraq and provide hope to millions of people. Progress in Iraq is noteworthy. An interim constitution has been adopted, infrastructure is improving, municipal councils have been formed, newspapers are operating, independent courts are functioning, schools are supplied and teachers are educating students, hospitals are open and treating the sick, and the economy is rebounding. Notably, regular Iraqis are volunteering for and serving in Iraq's police, security, and military forces to both maintain public order and to ensure that those violently opposed to the establishment of democracy in Iraq fail in their quest.

It is true that much transition and reconstruction work still needs to be done. However, some vocal Bush Administration and war critics argue that the Iraqi people and the world are not better off, claiming that chaos and violence reign throughout Iraq, and that terrorist attacks against innocent civilians throughout the world are the result of the U.S. and allied war effort against Iraq. Moreover, critics such as Richard Clarke and Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-MA) contend that President Bush was obsessed with going to war with Iraq since January 2001, and that the Administration's actions to liberate Iraq were a "diversion" in the greater war on terrorism.

Perhaps the most compelling evidence that the Administration's efforts in Iraq *are in fact an integral part of the War on Terrorism* comes from a memo written by Al Qaeda operative Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi. The undated memo shows the impact the U.S. and its allies are having on Al Qaeda and terrorist operations in Iraq. In the memo, Zarqawi notes a concern that the *mujahidin* may lose its foothold in Iraq stating, "There is no doubt that our field of movement is shrinking and the grip around the throat of the *mujahidin* has begun to tighten. With the spread of the army and the police, our future is becoming frightening." Zarqawi questions what strategy of the *mujahidin* will be required as Sunnis take on more police roles in the Sunni Triangle—either to fight Sunni police and risk losing support in the region or "pack up and leave and look for another land."¹

¹ Text of undated letter by suspected terrorist leader Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, intercepted by Coalition forces and first reported Feb.12. Accessed at:

http://www.centcom.mil/CENTCOMNews/news_release.asp?NewsRelease=20040236.txt

Iraqis Are Better Off

Violence Not Affecting Iraqis' Perception of Liberation and Security

Despite the terrorist attacks and violence that has befallen Iraq, a recent ABC News/BBC/Oxford Research International public opinion poll found that 56.5 percent of Iraqis believe things are better in Iraq than they were one year ago. And 71 percent of those polled believe that things will be better in Iraq one year from now.² It should also be noted that ordinary Iraqis are not attacking each other or coalition forces. It is an extreme, radical Iraqi minority, along with foreign fighters who are seeking to disrupt the development of democracy in Iraq and to affect the perception of America's and Coalition reconstruction efforts in Iraq. On April 5, the Iraqi Governing Council issued a statement condemning recent acts of violence and calling on Iraqis to continue to work together toward democracy.

The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) states "there are more Iraqis in Iraq today protecting their own country than there are Americans protecting Iraq."³ As testament to the Iraqi people's desire to be responsible for their own security, Iraqi police, army, and security force recruitment has not been negatively impacted by terror attacks; in fact, each month, more and more Iraqis are volunteering to join these forces. According to CPA, during the past year, 75,000 Iraqi police officers have been hired. 35,000 Iraqis have joined the Iraqi Civilian Defense Corps, and another 5,000 have begun serving in the new Iraqi army.

Government Functioning under Iraqi Control

For the first time in Iraq's history, the people of Iraq will be governed by the rule of law, will be able to vote for the elected officials, and will have a say in how their country will be governed. In fact, self-government has already begun. During the past year, municipal councils and local governments have been established and are making local decisions.

On March 8, the Iraqi Governing Council approved the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL), Iraq's interim constitution. The TAL, which was agreed to by a diverse group of tribal and ethnic leaders, includes a historic Bill of Rights that is unprecedented for Iraq and the region. It guarantees the basic rights of all Iraqis, including freedom of religion and worship, the right to free expression and to peacefully assemble, to organize political parties, and to form and join unions – all banned by Saddam.

The handover of sovereignty from the CPA to the Iraqi people will take place on June 30⁴. As of July 1, Iraqis will have greater say in how the future will be determined, and will be able to show the world that Iraq can become a normal, functioning nation-state with respect for human rights and democracy.

² Oxford Research International, "National Survey of Iraq, February 2004."

³ Coalition Provisional Authority, "Iraq: One Year's Progress on the Road to Democracy," April 6, 2004.

⁴ Coalition Provisional Authority, "United States Firm on Iraq Sovereignty by June 30," February 18, 2004, press release accessed at: http://www.cpa-iraq.org/pressreleases/20040218_US_firm.html.

Economy and Infrastructure Improving

Thirty years of stealing from the Iraqi people by the Hussein regime is over, and today, Iraq's economy is rebounding and key infrastructure is improving. Capacity building in the oil industry has increased Iraq's average annual oil revenue from \$9 billion to \$16 billion since June 2003, and put it on schedule to produce an average annual oil revenue of \$20 billion by January 2005.⁵ Iraq's telecommunications network has been modernized with 20 cities being connected to Baghdad and nearly 70 percent of the population with phone service. Water and sanitation services have been restored through much of the country.

More than 2600 schools have been rehabilitated, and teacher salaries have increased by more than 1000 percent.⁶ More than 5.5 million children went back to school in 2003 free from Saddam's repressive regime and its teachings. Approximately 3,900 secondary schools have received brand new equipment and supplies, and 8.7 million textbooks have been distributed to primary and secondary schools ? one book for every two students, compared to one for every six students prior to the conflict.

All 240 hospitals in Iraq and more than 1,200 clinics are open. More than \$210 million was approved in 2003 for the Iraqi Ministry of Health for pharmaceutical supplies and equipment and power generators for hospitals. Saddam's regime spent only \$16 million for health care in 2002. Public health spending is 26-times higher than the amount spent during Saddam's reign. More than 90 percent of all Iraqi children now receive routine immunizations.⁷

Personal Freedoms Realized

After more than 30 years of being denied the most fundamental freedoms, all Iraqis today are free to exercise basic liberties and religious expressions as provided for in a democratic society. More than 170 independent newspapers are currently operating throughout Iraq. Today, religious holidays can be celebrated by all religious groups.

Government-directed human rights abuses, torture, and unlawful imprisonment no longer occur. In fact, just the opposite exists in Iraq: more than 600 Iraqi judges preside over more than 500 courts that operate independently from the Iraqi Governing Council and from the CPA. Through the adoption and enforcement of the rule of law, a healthy civil society is taking root in Iraq.

⁵ CPA, April 6, 2004.

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The World Is Safer

Since the attacks on 9/11, President Bush has mobilized more than 80 nations to join in the War on Terrorism. In a speech at the White House commemorating the one-year anniversary of the launching of Operation Iraqi Freedom, President Bush stated that America and its allies were “united against a common danger, and joined in common purpose. We are the nations that have recognized the threat of terrorism, and we are the nations that will defeat that threat.”⁸

The defeat of Saddam Hussein’s regime is the second major victory in the War on Terrorism. With that defeat—and ensuing capture of Saddam Hussein—an intolerable threat to regional stability in an area of vital U.S. national interests has been extinguished. Hussein was a known terrorist supporter, WMD user, and aggressor. U.S. and coalition justifications for action against Hussein have been reaffirmed by the Iraq Survey Group’s findings that reveal Hussein pursued illegal missile development, biological and chemical weapons capacities, and even tried to get nuclear technology and expertise from North Korea via Syria.

Today, one year after the fall of Baghdad, the U.S. and its allies are still uncovering the Hussein regime’s links to terrorist states and organizations. The governments are investigating illegal financing chains linking Iraq to major terrorist organizations, lending institutions, and others involved in supporting the Hussein regime. In addition, the U.S. is still uncovering information relating to Al Qaeda’s connections to and presence in Iraq.

As a result of U.S. resolve in Iraq, there have been tremendous strides made in the battle to control WMD proliferation. During the past 12 months, the Administration announced the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), which has attracted the active support and participation of 11 nations with the goal of interdicting WMD anywhere in the world. Both the European Union and the G8 issued statements last May and in early June announcing that they viewed WMD proliferation as a serious threat and would use force, if necessary, to halt the proliferation of such weapons.

In recent months, Libya, Iran, and Pakistan, recognizing the resolve of the U.S. and its allies, admitted to pursuing, developing, and/or selling WMD programs and expertise. Libya agreed to give up its program; Iran agreed to allow additional IAEA inspections (should be viewed as being cooperative, however, its behavior and statements have remained inconsistent); and Pakistan has agreed to halt the spread of WMD knowledge and expertise—all steps that have helped make the world safer, at least in the short term. The cumulative effect of these three developments is that the world is now paying attention to the seriousness of WMD proliferation and the fact that more needs to be done to penalize WMD proliferators.

Coalition action in Iraq also had two other direct effects: It demonstrated to the governments of Saudi Arabia and Syria that the United States was serious about winning the War on Terrorism and that both Riyadh and Damascus needed to crackdown on terrorists operating from their respective soils.

⁸ President George W. Bush, “Remarks by the President on Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom,” March 19, 2004.

Iraq was Part of, not a Diversion in, the War on Terrorism

Iraq as Bush Administration Policy

The debate over Iraq did not begin with the inauguration of President George W. Bush. In fact, for the entire eight-year period of the Clinton Administration, that administration, Congress, and the intelligence community were in complete agreement about the threat Hussein's WMD posed and the necessity to remove this threat ? with force if necessary.

Recognizing the inability of the international community to gain cooperation from Saddam Hussein, Congress made clear with the passage of the Iraq Liberation Act (ILA) that the policy of the United States was "to support efforts to remove the regime headed by Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq and to promote the emergence of a democratic government to replace that regime."⁹ President Clinton signed the Iraq Liberation Act into law the very same day – October 31, 1998 – that Saddam Hussein kicked out UNSCOM inspectors. However, upon the final withdrawal of the inspectors from Iraq, the Clinton Administration in reality pursued no Iraq policy other than containment of Hussein.

In January 2001, President George W. Bush inherited the policy of regime change without a clear strategy to achieve it. The situation was characterized by a lack of human intelligence on the ground to assess what Hussein was developing or hiding. It was known at the time that Hussein was a significant supporter of Palestinian terrorists and the intifada—to include the fact that he provided cash rewards to the families of successful suicide bombers. He also maintained close relations with Syria, a known terrorist state.

At the same time, international sanctions against Hussein were crumbling. Specifically, the Oil-for-Food program was not meeting its objective of aiding the Iraqi people because Hussein's regime was hoarding and selling the food in order to acquire weapons, build palaces, and to enhance its own riches. Moreover, Iraq was bypassing the sanctions and selling oil to Syria and other countries on the black market as recently revealed by the IGC. Had sanctions been formally lifted against Iraq, Hussein would have had the ability to reconstitute his WMD production.

Meanwhile, there was dwindling application of pressure on Hussein by the international coalition. The only containment of Iraq was being conducted by the United States and the United Kingdom. In December 1998, Operation Desert Fox was launched to inflict military punishment and destabilize Hussein's regime. The campaign was supported by a coalition of three—the U.S., U.K, and the Netherlands. Arguably, Hussein probably believed that he had beaten the coalition after expelling weapons inspectors in 1998, and thus emboldened him to order the frequent firing upon coalition jets patrolling the no-fly zone. During 2000 alone, Iraq fired 1600 times on allied jets patrolling the U.N. fly zones.

⁹ Iraq Liberation Act of 1998, P.L. 105-338.

Thus, given all these facts, the Bush Administration recognized the threat that Iraq posed to U.S. and allied security interests AND recognized that international resolve was failing. The Administration also recognized that it had a responsibility to enforce UNSC resolutions that Hussein violated for a decade, and to carry out the will of Congress as enumerated in U.S. law by the enactment of the Iraq Liberation Act.

Iraq as Part of War on Terrorism

In an interview on Feb. 8, 2004 on “*Meet the Press*,” President Bush was asked by moderator Tim Russert whether the Iraq war was “a choice or out of necessity?” Bush replied that, based on the intelligence and evidence he had about Hussein’s regime and intentions, he had no choice but to act and protect U.S. vital national interests. He was right. He had no choice, not because he wanted to wage another war, but because he needed to enforce the will of the international community to remove a threat facing the world in the War on Terrorism.

Hussein was a terrorist supporter, a danger to the international community, and a destabilizing factor in the Middle East. Ridding the world of Hussein, was in fact part of the War on Terrorism. In taking action against Hussein, President Bush demonstrated leadership. He understood that the United States is at war against terrorism, and that this war is complicated, not black-and-white, and by its very essence, a protracted undertaking that sometime requires taking preemptive action in order to defeat a threat before it has metastasized.

President Bush's consideration of timing had to do with the calculus of winning the War on Terrorism. He recognized the need to change the dynamics on the ground in the Middle East. (There is a list of countries, each with their own dynamics, each that provide their own challenge in the War on Terrorism, and each that must be dealt with if the U.S. is win the War on Terrorism. Countries include Syria, Sudan, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq.) The question was how to deal with Iraq. As proven by previous experience with the dictator, it could only be done militarily because of Hussein's violations of UNSC resolutions and continued support of terrorists groups. Military action couldn't be justified in any of the other countries as they have not grossly violated international law. However, one by one, the other countries in the region are being dealt with and removed as a source of terrorism.

Beyond the effects of military action in Iraq, the democratization of Iraq is already having a profound impact on the region – for the War on Terrorism is ultimately a war of ideas. Vice President Cheney recently stated that the democratization of Iraq “is part of a forward strategy of freedom that we are pursuing throughout the greater Middle East. By helping nations to build the institutions of freedom, and turning the energies of men and women away from violence, we not only make that region more peaceful, we add to the security of our own region.”¹⁰

The development of democracy in Iraq is not progressing unnoticed in the rest of the region. Jackson Diehl recently stated in the *Washington Post*, “The most underreported and encouraging story in the Middle East in the past year has been the emergence in public of homegrown civic movements demanding political change. Two years ago they were nonexistent or in jail. Now they

¹⁰ Vice President Richard B. Cheney, “Remarks by the Vice President at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum,” March 17, 2004.

are out in the open even in the most politically backward places in the region: Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria...These people weren't created by George W. Bush. They are the homegrown answer to a decadent political order, and they ride a powerful historical current. But they will tell you frankly: The new U.S. democratization policy, far from being an unwanted imposition, has given them a voice, an audience and at least a partial shield against repression -- three things they didn't have one year ago.”¹¹

As individuals recognize that it is possible to have a stake in their government – and a stake in a free future – simple acceptance of the status quo of repressive regimes or the reactive resorting to violence and terrorism, will begin to fade as the dominant idea in the Middle East. As democracy takes hold, the future of the War on Terrorism will shift in favor of modernity and liberty. The Bush Administration understood this great challenge, and refused to allow the region to continue along the path that bred September 11th.

Conclusion

The one-year anniversary of Iraq’s liberation should be celebrated. As a result of U.S. and allied actions, Iraqi people are taking control of their lives and their country and U.S., and regional allied security is far less threatened with the removal Hussein.

Congress should be proud of its support for Operation Iraqi Freedom and the post-Hussein reconstruction efforts. Without America and its brave coalition partners, and with Saddam Hussein still in power, the Iraqi people would still be suffering under a brutal regime. Not only has the war liberated Iraqis, but it has liberated the region from Hussein’s belligerent and destabilizing tendencies. It is clear that had President Bush not demonstrated leadership in galvanizing American resolve and allied support in launching a second front in the War on Terrorism to remove Saddam Hussein from power, the world would be far more dangerous, U.S. vital national interests would continue to be threatened, and a major supporter of international terrorism would still be killing innocent civilians.

¹¹ Jackson Diehl, “Listen to the Arab Reformers,” *Washington Post*, March 29, 2004.