

Chapter 1

Shooting Straight

Extra! Extra! Read all about it! Three American soldiers were killed and a dozen wounded in Baghdad. A car bomb sends shock waves across the Iraqi capital as it explodes near an Allied checkpoint. The Iraqi people applauded the terrorist efforts, as many cry out for the Americans to leave. One Iraqi cries out, “The United States government are the real terrorists in Iraq.” The Bush administration puts out a press release insisting we must stay the course despite poll numbers suggesting otherwise.

If one listens to the American media, one might conclude that nothing positive ever takes place in Iraq. According to reports, our troops are being put in harm’s way and accomplishing nothing in the process. Of course, it is easier for the nay-sayers to blame the chain of command than it is to blame the troops. To quote one infamous Senator from Massachusetts, Ted Kennedy, “This clearly is George Bush’s Vietnam.”¹

There are, however, two sides to every story. The negative aspects of Operation Iraqi Freedom is the side that Kennedy, the majority of the news outlets, Al Qaeda, and every pacifist on God’s green earth want the world to hear. They hope to bring the war to a crashing end for whatever reason. For some it’s political gain. For some it is easier to report the negative instead of the positive. For some, it’s living under the delusion that one can negotiate with terrorists. For others, to reference Osama bin Laden, “This Third World War ... is raging” in Iraq. “The whole world is watching this war.” It will end in, “Victory and glory or misery and humiliation.”²

They want the world to forget the fact that Operation Iraqi Freedom is an ongoing success. They want the world to forget how much the Allies and the majority of the Iraqi people have accomplished in health care, education, business opportunities, transportation, electricity, clean water, sanitation, women’s rights, the elections, improvements in the security forces, and the on[-]going change in the attitudes of the average Iraqi. Here are just a few of the many feats we are accomplishing in Iraq.

Health Care

In the fall of 2004 an 8 year old girl was bitten by a poisonous snake that could have

taken her life. She was not in the United States to receive the quick treatment that we as Americans often take for granted. However, the girl was luckier than a high roller in Vegas. Her royal flush came in the form of the United States doctors coming to her aid. Doctors from Elmendorf Air Force Base, located in Anchorage, Alaska treated the girl from their current Tallil, Iraq Air Base. The daughter's father was extremely appreciative to the soldiers for saving her life, not knowing what he would have done without them.³

The ability to get treatment on demand has not always been an option in Iraq. Under the iron fist of Saddam Hussein the average health care spending was 68 cents per person. Today it is around \$40. Under Saddam mortality rates nearly tripled for pregnant mothers, children, and infants. The life expectancy even since the first Gulf War has dropped by 8 years, from 67 to 59.⁴

So what has been done about Iraq's health epidemic? The answer is more than anyone could imagine. Over 3 million children have been vaccinated under the age of 5. Seven hundred thousand pregnant women have been vaccinated which includes monthly immunization days. Iron folate supplements have been given to 1.6 million woman of child bearing age. The list goes on: Vitamin A was given to 1.5 million lactating mothers and 600,000 children under the age of 2. High protein biscuits have been supplied to over 450,000 children, and 200,000 pregnant or nursing mothers. There have been five million sachets of oral re-hydration nationwide provided in treating for diarrheal dehydration.⁵

Healthcare has not only improved in the supplementation of vitamins and minerals, but in the infrastructure and training aspects as well. To date over 2,500 primary health care providers have upgraded their technical skills to improve their performance. Not only that, but 110 primary health care centers have been renovated to expand their care.⁶ The plans eventually call for the renovation of 19 hospitals, and the building of 150 primary healthcare centers.⁷ These are just a few of the multitude of improvements in the health sector that can not be ignored.

Education

A rock band entertains the masses on campus. Several leaders of the nearby town attend the event. The kids in attendance move to the music and immensely enjoy the beat. If you guessed this is the scene from any college campus in America you guessed wrong.

The band was the First Infantry Division, Task Force 1-18. The stage was a small town near Tikrit, Iraq called Al-Alam. The audience was a group of students, more than a 100 at that.

The campus was a primary school. The leaders in attendance included the mayor, among others. The concert provided a time out for soldiers during which they were handing out school backpacks to more than 2,000 children in the area. The enjoyment for the students was best stated by Staff Sergeant John Imperato. “The kids loved it. They were on their feet dancing and clapping the whole time. There were smiles everywhere.”⁸

Such handouts to students by the military is common place in Iraq. It has helped set an environment for learning in Iraq that is growing by the minute. In fact it could be debated that the greatest accomplishments in Iraq are being performed in the field of education. Iraqi education has come along way since Operation Iraqi Freedom began but there is still much that needs to be done.

Consider the following: In 2003 it was estimated that only 40% of the Iraqi population could read. To make matters worse, only 24% of Iraqi women were found to be literate. Estimates also show that only half of the children that attend school move on to secondary education. In rural areas up to half of all females have never even attended classes.⁹ Who could blame them, as the United Nations estimates that half of all school bathrooms did not meet basic hygienic standards in 2002.¹⁰ One report by the U.S. First Infantry Division reported of a school with a roof on the verge of collapsing. To show how horrific school infrastructure has deteriorated in Iraq, to quote Captain Andrew McConnell of the 426th Civil Affairs Battalion, “Schools have not been maintained in this country in 30 years.”¹¹

In dealing with the problems in the educational sector the Iraqis, with the help of the Allied Forces, have been proactive. Over 3,300 schools have been renovated since the liberation.¹² Nearly 33,000 secondary teachers have received advanced educational training. Also with an ongoing campaign to encourage girls to attend school, the female registration rate has gone up to a remarkable 96%. Soldiers have passed out 1.5 million backpacks with multiple school supplies to students across the country.¹³ The Iraqi Ministry of Education is also in the process of handing out 72 million textbooks with over 600 titles available with the Saddam propaganda removed.¹⁴ The list goes on, and on, and on in the improvements in the educational sector.

The Business Sector

The Stock Market is on a high never seen before. The value of the dollar continues to soar. Salaries in certain fields are a hundred times what they were just a few years ago. Inflation for the first time in years is in a downward spiral. The telecommunication sector continues to have unheralded growth. Jobs are being built by the minute. Private businesses are not only encouraged, but are provided help through various government grants to get them started on the right foot.

If you asked an American when and where this unparalleled job growth took place, the answer would vary depending possibly on their political leanings. For those who want to live in the 1990's and adored the 42nd President of the United States, they would say it happened under the Bill Clinton administration. This answer, as any left leaning political pundit would say of the Bush Administration, is wrong, wrong, wrong!

The answer unequivocally is Iraq. As of January 2005, over 21,000 Iraqi companies had registered in Baghdad.¹⁵ Along with new business comes multiple Iraqi companies, many of which are becoming a household name on the Iraqi stock exchange. As of July 2004, only 27 companies were listed and trade was low.¹⁶ Trade has increased immensely, for example one day in March of 2005, 7 billion dinars, or the Iraqi dollar, were traded.¹⁷ According to the Iraq Capital Markets Report, 114 companies are now listed on the Baghdad Stock Exchange. The executive manager of the Iraqi stock market, Taha Ahmad Abedelsalaam, said that 85 of these companies boast over 151 billion shares. This might be small change to New Yorkers, but it does show unheralded growth in less than a year's time for a nation on the verge of getting back on its economic feet.

If that is not enough to get one's attention, then how about the growth of money. The dinar, or Iraqi dollar, has appreciated by about 30% since 2003.¹⁸ The success of the exchange in the dinar from under Saddam to now has been something to behold. Taking the face of Saddam off the bill, and making more rates of exchange on the bill has made the dinar more profitable. It took only 3 short months, twenty-eight 747 aircrafts, carrying roughly 100 tons each, to transport the 4.5 trillion dinars and put them into circulation.¹⁹

Another monumental aspect that has blown the minds of some has been the increase in the salary of the average Iraqi. Take for example teachers who received \$5 to \$13 a month under Saddam. Their salary now can be as high as \$100 to \$300 per month.²⁰ Physicians who had made only 20 dollars per month under Saddam, have now cashed in to make the equivalency of \$700.²¹

While these numbers might seem small to the average American, one has to take into account that the cost of living is much smaller in Iraq than in the United States.

With the results of higher salaries, comes more of a desire to spend it. TV's, air conditioners, washing machines, satellite dishes, and mobile phones are becoming hot commodities, as few owned them in the era of Hussein.²² Mobile phones alone have reached over 1,660,000 users.

With the onset of new markets come new businesses. The push for small to medium size businesses is on. It is estimated that 90% of businesses in the Arab region are small to medium sized.²³ To help Iraqis get their businesses up and running, multiple organizations, from the government and the private sector are being put together. One example of this is how the United States government is teaming up with Citigroup to provide over \$92.8 million to a lending facility to help the Iraqi middle class obtain much needed capital.²⁴ Along with the starting of businesses, new jobs are popping up throughout Iraq. Just in the Iraqi reconstruction program alone, America has provided over 159,000 jobs.²⁵ Nationwide there have been more than 500,000 new jobs created. That's over half a million jobs created in a relatively short period of time.²⁶

These are among the hundreds of examples on how the Iraqi economy is booming through out most of the country. In fact Dr. Fa'ik Ali Abed-Elrasoul, former deputy of the Iraqi ministry of planning predicted a 15% growth rate in 2006, and possibly a 6% growth rate for 2007. With this unparalleled growth it is safe to say that Iraq has a long way to go until they have to worry about hitting their glass ceiling.

Reconstruction

Drinking water with a gooey substance that floats to the surface of the local watering hole. Garbage and human waste run rampant in the pond where the drinking water is fetched. Feces and animal remains line the trail to the pond. This type of water was a good share of what the Iraqi people were forced to drink during the reign of Saddam, but in this instance it is the Ad Duluiyah community, located an hour north of Baghdad.¹¹

The situation in Ad Duluiyah shows the great need for reconstruction efforts to run at a record pace throughout the Iraqi country side. This is exactly what is happening in this Persian Gulf nation.