



NOTE: The following commentary is written by an Iraqi member of the Gulf Region Division, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Public Affairs Office.

Let dogs bark, the caravan is moving

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BAGHDAD, Iraq - He who watches TV or reads newspapers will only see explosions - car bombings, suicide bombers - and mass killings targeting innocent people everywhere - in the local market, in the streets, in the schools, cafes, and universities day and night, but this is not the whole picture.

It is early in the morning, the terrorists target the gatherings of laborers and builders who go to work to participate in the reconstruction process, and every Iraqi expects death at any time; he might be targeted at home or at work by death squads or by mortar.

Observers from outside think that life in Iraq is impossible and one cannot leave home to go work in order to get his livelihood. Nevertheless, this will never affect Iraqis' will or determination to carry out their mission in life, which is still going on Iraq. When you look at the other side of the Iraqi scene, you see people are active and full of hope, determination and patience. They do their best to live their life like those in other countries.

In fact, I have never seen or heard of people in the world suffered as much as Iraqis. You see a worker going to a factory to produce, a student going to school to study, in order to become a doctor or an engineer to serve his country. You see a builder going to a site project to build, a teacher going to school to teach the kids, and the same as with soldiers and police men who chase the terrorists trying to stop Iraq progress and get it back to the middle ages.

All go and know they are targeted by the daily terrorist acts. There is one thing they believe in: Life must go ahead for a better future for their country. They believe that every night must be followed by a bright day.

Such endurance, determination and hope have enabled Iraqis to build one of the oldest civilizations in the world. The civilization witnesses that the old Iraqis were the first to teach people how to write. Hammurabi (1810 BC- 1750 BC) was the first king of Babylonian Empire. He is known for the set of laws called Hammurabi's Code, one of the first written codes of law in recorded history. Due to his reputation as a law giver, Hammurabi is portrayed in modern times on government buildings throughout the world.

If you read Iraq's history, you notice that what is happening these days is not alien to Iraqis. Baghdad was burned and destroyed many times, but it rose again every time to be stronger than before.

In 656 Hejri (the Islamic calendar), Hulako marched toward Baghdad, where he conquered the Caliph Motasim Billah, the last of the Abbassides State, and made him and his four sons prisoners, and put them all to death. He also slaughtered most the inhabitants of Baghdad. It is said hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children were killed in this massacre in addition, palaces, houses, book shops were demolished. The water of Tigris turned black because of thousands of books thrown into the river.

Under Saddam's regime, Iraq suffered much. Hee involved the country in an eight-year war with Iran, then he invaded Kuwait. As a result of the aggression, the Security Council imposed sanctions on the Iraqi people that lasted for about 13 years. That blockage cost Iraqis too much. While they were starving and looking for medicine, Saddam was building luxury palaces throughout Iraq, which was suffering in a terrible inflation.

A new stage in the life of Iraqis started when the coalition forces led by the United States rid Iraq of one of the worst dictators in the world. Iraqis began to feel freedom and democracy never felt before. Liberation operations freed them from a big prison under the last regime.

Iraqis held elections for the first time to vote for their candidates, who constituted the 275 members of parliament. They made their choices freely without any pressure or intervention from the transitional government.

An elected permanent government has come to power to compensate Iraqis for the sacrifices they made. All these achievements did not appeal to those who dislike freedom and democracy whether inside or outside Iraq; therefore, they did their best to hinder the process of progress taking place in Iraq. They started their wicked acts by bombing the U.N. headquarters in Baghdad and have continued to recruit the foreigners from outside Iraq to perform sabotage acts against innocent citizens in the markets, universities, schools, libraries and everywhere people congregate. All those have been taking place to spread fear and horror in the country, and get send it backwards. Places of laborer are targeted early in the morning in order to prevent workers from taking part in the reconstruction process, which continues despite all obstacles laid in its way.

In addition, teachers, scientists, barbers, bakers and cleaners in the roads are not excluded from the terrorist acts. The terrorists have tried to arouse a sectarian war in Iraq through targeting mosques, and the Sunni and Shiite people accuse one another of the killings.

The latest crime the saboteurs committed was targeting Al Mutanabi Street by a car bombing that killed more than 40 people, including a number of the educated - writers and poets - who usually sit at the café in the street. The person that I bought my daily newspapers from was killed. In addition, a great number of the book shops were burned with their owners inside. The following day, the prime minister condemned the crime and asked the mayor of Baghdad to clear the streets and to reconstruct what was destroyed as soon as possible.

The street was named after the famous Arab poet, Abu al Teib Al Mutanabi. There are many big book shops on the both sides of the street that are full of precious old references and books written by famous authors.

The world public opinion must know how barbaric and backwards those who attack a place like Al Mutanbi street, education institutions and healthcare centers are. In addition to facilities. journalists have also been targeted. To date, more than 90 have been killed.

Although the citizens still do not feel tangible change in the facilities they were deprived of for 35 years under the last regime, hundreds of schools, health centers, and water and electricity projects have been executed and hundreds are under way.

Reconstruction has not achieved its goals so far for the funds are not enough to meet the needs of all the provinces. Iraqis are expecting all the free countries, including the donor countries back up them to rebuild their country.

Politically, the Iraqi government has been a success. It held an international conference in Baghdad, and delegates from 16 countries, including the permanent Security Council members, attended. That happened after a tangible improvement has been achieved as a result of the security crackdown.

The conference is considered a good step in the right direction. The Iraqi in the street believe that the conference is very important since it is the first time a conference like this held in Baghdad with an Iraqi agenda. Iraq called for this conference to enlist regional support to stop sectarian violence that has racked the country, killed tens of thousands and driven about two million abroad since the fall of Saddam's regime. "Reconciliation initiative is the ship that will save us," said the prime minister in the conference.

National reconciliation between Iraq's Shiite and Sunni factions is the only way to sparing the country from sliding into all-out civil war. Recently, the prime minister visited some heated areas - Ramadi, the center of Anbar province, which is considered the bastion of the terrorist al Qaeda.

The Prime Minister spent the day in Ramadi in a visit described as historical. Maliki said during his meeting with Anbar mayor and some of local officials that Anbar is a challenged province. He praised Anbar tribes who gave wonderful example of tribes' power and nationality in Iraq. He renewed his commitment of continuing war against Qaeda organization. He promised to rebuild what was destroyed by the terrorists, such as hospitals schools and factories.

To support the government efforts, I believe, in combating terrorism, the lawmakers who represent different races, ethnics and parties must unify their word and work for the sake of Iraq as a whole, not for their races or political blocks. If they stay as they are doing now, each one accuses the other of betraying or collaborating with one of the neighboring countries, they will never succeed in their mission - which is serving Iraqi people.

The allies, including the U.S., of Iraq are also required to offer a firm stand and back up the government and not hear this or that from the Arab leaders who are always saying that the current government has biases to Iran at the expense of its own people's interest.

If the Iraqi government was beholden to Iran, then why is Iran, since the forming of the current government and the one before it, the main player working behind the scene to destabilize the security situation in Iraq through providing the insurgents with fund and weapons in Baghdad, Diyla, Kut, Aumara and Basra?

I cannot deny that a number of the lawmakers' sympathies are with Iran, especially those who lived for a long time there during the period of Saddam's regime. However, we must realize that Iran with other neighboring countries has individual interests, and politicians need to deal with this truth. They have to put their differences aside and lift the slogan, which says Iraq is the first.

Of course, those giving the chance for the current Iraq government to succeed cannot wait forever, but for a reasonable period to see what it can do. If my government fails, I am confident it will not be those countries, but the Iraqi people themselves, who will say their word.