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Terror is Losing

As published in the New York Post, by Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, Friday, March 19, 2004.

After the horrific March 2 bombing that killed 170 at Shi'a shrines in Baghdad and Karbala, one Iraqi had an answer for those in the West who wonder if such tactics can work. His words speak to the horror of the events in Spain last week and in Baghdad on Wednesday.

His name is Ali and his Web log said this about the terrorists and their allies: "They are spitting in the face of the wind."

One of the interesting developments in post-Saddam Iraq is the appearance of amateur Web sites, where Iraqis are taking advantage of modern technology to give voice to their newfound freedom. One such site shows Iraqi women demonstrating against Resolution 137, passed by the Iraqi Governing Council, which threatened women's rights.

These women - who were exercising their right of free speech to demonstrate for women's rights - were dressed in very conservative Muslim fashion. Yet, as one of them put it: "We didn't wait all these years without the most basic rights to be denied them now."

An Arab reporter asked if she were Sunni or Shi'a. She snapped: "I'm an Iraqi citizen first and foremost, and I refuse to be asked such a question."

In increasing numbers, likeminded Iraqi women - and men - are making it clear they expect basic rights. People are listening. Not only did this pressure force the repeal of Resolution 137, but, when the new Iraqi interim constitution was signed March 8, it contained assurances of equal rights - and substantial representation - for women.

It also provides for other fundamental pillars of true democracy, including separation of powers and an independent judiciary, rule of law, fundamental civil rights and civilian control of the military. That's a significant step forward that came from heated and healthy political debate - debate that would have been impossible a year ago.

While such debates do show that Iraqis disagree among themselves, they demonstrate - more importantly - that Iraqis can debate those issues openly and democratically. Significantly, in a recent opinion poll of Iraqis, 56 percent said things were going better today than a year ago; 71 percent said they thought they would be better off a year from now.

Last March, Iraqis were suffering under the thumb of one of the most brutal dictatorships of the last

hundred years - a regime that industrialized brutality, tortured children to coerce their parents and raped women to punish their relatives. A U.S. Army commander in Iraq told me last July about the excavation of one mass grave where they discovered remains of 80 women and children - with little dresses and toys.

Today, Iraq's era of systematic savagery is over. Thanks to the dedication and courage of American and Coalition military and civilians, the support of the U.S. Congress and the American people, life in Iraq is improving steadily:

- * Electricity reached pre-war levels last October, and is on track to reach 150 percent of pre-war levels, despite an infrastructure devastated by Saddam.
- * Oil production has reached 2.5 million barrels per day, well ahead of projections.
- * Funding for public health care is up 26 times the level under Saddam.
- * All 22 universities, 43 technical institutes and colleges opened on time last fall.
- * Some 72 million new textbooks will go to primary and secondary schools by the end of this school year, so children will no longer learn arithmetic from books that say "2 Saddams plus 2 Saddams equals 4 Saddams."

One of the most important developments is the increasing role played by Iraqis in providing for the security of their country. Since Baghdad was liberated, Iraqi security forces went from almost none to the 200,000 who currently serve in various security roles.

Today, Iraqis who are fighting and dying for the "New Iraq" are numerically the largest member of the Coalition. While they are not as well-trained or equipped as American forces, they have many advantages because they know the country and the language. They're the "home team" and enjoy tremendous popular support - to the terrorists' frustration.

It is altogether appropriate that Iraqis should fight to defend their country, and it is heartening that they continue to volunteer in large numbers despite the enemy's attempts to frighten them.

A few weeks ago, after an attack on a police station in Fallujah, when the U.S. offered Iraqi Civil Defense Corpsmen help in subduing the attackers, they said, no thanks - we want to do this job ourselves so people will know we can.

Ali, the Iraqi blogger, put such attacks into a larger perspective: "Some people still wonder what would be the relation between the liberation of Iraq and [the] war on terrorism. I think that the fact that nearly all the terrorists are gathered on our land to fight so fiercely should be more than enough explanation." He added: "We are . . . showing [other Arabs] what they can achieve once they are free . . . I see these evil powers show their true and ugly face and play their last card - surer than ever that we are winning."

When 9/11 changed everything, it was that same determination that led America to take up our own fight against terrorists. Perhaps no one understands better than New Yorkers just how much changed that day. What happened in lower Manhattan, at the Pentagon and in Shanksville meant we could no longer allow the world's most brutal tyrants to traffic with terrorists - or allow the Middle East to breed terrorists on a massive scale.

Today, nothing is more important to world security than fighting these terrorists where they live. Or sustaining progress in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Winning in both countries is imperative. But it is only part of the larger war on terrorism. It won't be over with one victory in Afghanistan or another in Iraq - important as they are. It won't be over when we capture or kill Bin Laden.

The recent homicide bombings in Spain - a country that has taken a courageous lead against global terrorism - warn us that every free and open society is vulnerable. Free nations must remain united in fighting for freedom against a threat that is as evil and as dangerous as the totalitarian threats of the last century.

It's an enormous job. In Iraq alone, as the president often reminds us, it won't be quick and it won't be easy. Saddamist killers and foreign terrorists are doing all they can to stop progress. However, a recently intercepted letter from Abu Masab al-Zarqawi - a major terrorist mastermind in Iraq - to his al Qaeda associates in Afghanistan suggests that he is getting discouraged: The geography is unfriendly and Iraqis are too, the writer laments. Every time they mount an attack to drive Iraqis apart, they come together instead.

"Democracy" in Iraq, he writes, "is coming," and that will mean "suffocation" for the terrorists. Zarqawi says his best hope is to start a Shi'a-Sunni civil war by killing Shi'a.

Democracy is coming to Iraq. And we'll be there to see it. When sovereignty is handed over to Iraqis on July 1, our engagement will change. But our commitment will not. We'll stay in Iraq until our job is done.

Last July, an American Army colonel in the 101st Air Assault Division told me that he explained that job to his soldiers like this: He told them that what they're doing in Iraq is every bit as important as what their grandfathers did in Germany or Japan in World War II or what their fathers did in Korea or in Europe during the Cold War.

Those soldiers are changing history in a way that will make America and the world safer. Our soldiers are making it possible for people to build free and stable governments that will join the fight against terrorism - and our children and grandchildren will be safer for it.

Someday, Iraq will be one of these free and prospering nations. As Ali put it so well: "It's just a matter of time."



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