

Testimony
of
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Random Acts of Terrorism;
Random Acts of Heroism

Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today on the issues which we continue to face as the United States and its coalition partners continue to move forward in Iraq.

Let me first, point out for the record that approximately 100 different Members of Congress, Senators and Governors have visited Iraq since the fall of Saddam. You, Mr. Chairman, have visited on some five different occasions and on at least three of those trips your trip was not an official Congressional Delegation (CODEL) but as part of a private visit with one or more non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

It is one thing, sir, to do a fact-finding tour of Rome, or Paris. It is something else to do a fact-finding tour of Tikrit when you go under the protection of the United States Government traveling in up-armored SUVs and military helicopters and have a series of briefings on the military compound under the control of the 101st Airborne or a Stryker Brigade.

However, traveling as you often did, under the radar in civilian vehicles visiting with Iraqis and Westerners in their homes and offices solely for the purpose of getting the kinds of information – the ground truth – which can only be gathered in the method you

employed, should be recognized by your colleagues as the high act of government service and bravery which it was.

One of the endearing images I carry with me, Mr. Chairman, is meeting you and your colleague, Representative Frank Wolf, outside a Green Zone gate late last year as the two of you piled out of – not an armored vehicle in a military convoy with crew served weapons at the ready – but out of (although this is not accurate in its detail, it is accurate in its impression) what appeared to me to be a 1957 Opel sedan.

I have titled this presentation: Random Acts of Terrorism; Random Acts of Heroism with that vision in mind: Two senior Members of Congress, traveling – without fanfare – through a war zone looking for what truth there was to be found.

I was sent to Iraq to set up an operation which would provide “non-police-blotter” news to secondary and regional media markets in the US.

That is, my job was not to get stories on the NBC Nightly News, but to get stories on the local stations in New Haven.

It took about six weeks to get the theory worked out and the pieces in place. The theory was this: No one in New Haven cared if a new bank opened up in Ramadi or a school had re-opened in Hillah. Unless someone from New Haven was involved in the bank or the school.

Then, it became a great local story – not because of the bank or the school, but because of the local connection.

At the height of this activity the US military lent me six videographers (of whom four were broadcasters and two were combat camera personnel) and two still photographers. I had a retired master sergeant from the Missouri National Guard as my assistant and one civilian trained as a press officer as my deputy.

We would shoot “B-roll” – background footage of whatever the story was about; and then do on-camera interviews with the individuals who had been responsible for the activity.

These were edited and sent via satellite back to the Pentagon News Channel in Alexandria, Virginia where the tapes were delivered to the Pentagon for distribution to the appropriate markets.

In the period starting in mid-December, until I left at the end of April we had sent over 500 individual stories and packages back to the US. The project continues to this day with people smarter and more creative than I now pushing it forward.

We also had a project whereby we would ask people to do phone interviews with their home-town radio stations. Other than the top half-dozen markets in the nation, there was always at least one radio station which was locally-oriented. My instructions to the manager of this project was: See if they announce the school lunch menu during the morning show. If they do, that's our station.

At its peak, we were doing some 50 interviews per week utilizing everyone from senior civilians to junior enlisted military personnel.

At one point a young Marine asked if he could ask his girlfriend to marry him on the air. The local station set it up; he did; she agreed and it became a story in Stars & Stripes as well as a Valentine's Day feature on CNN.

By the time I arrived in Baghdad, at the beginning of November 2003, the security situation had already deteriorated. We were warned, at briefings in Kuwait, that on the ride from the airport to the Green Zone we should not open the curtains on the bus other than to peek out for short periods. This, so that we wouldn't draw the attention of terrorists who might be looking for a target of opportunity.

Filled with apprehension, I boarded the bus at the airport, put my ill-fitting helmet on my head and wrapped myself in my extra-large (because that was the only size they had) flak jacket and prepared myself for the ride into Coalition headquarters.

That first trip became my personal shorthand for just about everything we found in Iraq: "Don't bother with 'Plan B' because you don't know where 'Plan A' will fall apart. But be assured 'Plan A' *will* fall apart."

In the case of the ride in from the airport the advice about keeping the curtains closed was superfluous because there *were* no curtains on the bus and as we drove through afternoon

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rush hour traffic people in cars were pointed at us and clearly discussing us with others in their vehicles.

Everyone who came to Baghdad came with the same expectation: Whatever had been done was probably done with the best of intentions, but now that I/WE are here, things will improve.

This optimism of the newly-arrived was looked upon by seasoned veterans with everything from quiet amusement to open hostility, depending upon how the individual was dealing with their personal latest round of frustrations.

As an example: I thought it would be a good idea to provide senior Coalition Provisional Authority officials to be interviewed by television broadcast groups. My thinking was that an interview by one anchor of a group which owned 10 or fifteen television stations would be used by all of the stations in that group with a minimum impact on the CPA officials' time.

My mentor in all of this was a man named Dorrance Smith. Mr. Smith was a senior producer at ABC News and was in Baghdad to provide – at that time – guidance in dealing with the US television networks.

Mr. Smith warned me that there would be problems with this project – problems which I would not be able to identify and, quite likely, would not be likely to overcome.

I, like all new arrivals, thought he had been in Baghdad too long and all it needed was my special brand of “get-it-done” attitude and all would be well.

It will not be a surprise to you when you find out that no interviews ever happened. The number of obstacles which presented themselves would have been rejected by any Hollywood producer as too unrealistic even for a Ben Stiller comedy.

Another example: Through sheer force of personality, Dorrance Smith got a satellite link up and running between the convention center – which is where our briefings were held – and the Pentagon.

I got permission for my unit to utilize this link when it was not otherwise in use to save us the time and money of sending video back to Washington via commercial services such as DHL or Federal Express.

The unit did their editing on Apple laptop computers and transferred the finished product to a DVD. The idea was to take that digital imagery, put it on the satellite, and have someone in Washington transfer it to video tape for further distribution.

Under the Plan A/Plan B rule which I noted above, everything worked perfectly except that we needed some way to get the DVD signal onto the satellite which required, not surprisingly, a DVD *player*.

There was not a DVD player anywhere to be found, so we couldn't send our first night's output. Or the next night's output.

Two days later I mounted a mission to the Airport where there was a fairly large PX – at this time the PX in the Green Zone was literally a trailer. There I purchased, with my personal funds, a portable DVD player which was used for several months until a unit purchased with official funds in Germany finally showed up.

The reason the mission to the PX took two days was because it took that long to round up enough armed military personnel in the Strategic Communications organization who could spare the three-to-four hours such an operation typically took.

Strategic Communications – which sent young civilians out into the Red Zone every day to work with reporters and ministries – did not have a professional security detail until late February or early March. We provided our own security.

Layer upon layer of frustration was the norm in Iraq. It is a testimony to the gallantry and persistence of the Coalition civilians and military that anything ever got done.

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One of the questions the staff asked me to discuss is: Why did Coalition and U.S. Government public diplomacy efforts fail to reach the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people?

I don't know that this question is ripe quite yet. There are 27 million people in Iraq; most of them don't live in Baghdad, or Fallujah, or Najaf.

Five million of them live in Baghdad, but most of them don't live in Sadr City.

All of them, however, understand that Saddam is gone and a new era is dawning.

Most Iraqis are going about their regular daily routines – shopping, working, sending their kids to school, cooking and more recently, watching television sets which are connected to the world through a satellite dish on their roof.

Many Iraqis were shocked to find that the US forces could not instantaneously root out every terrorist – just as they were surprised to find that the industrial might of the US could not instantaneously restore power and water to every Iraqi household.

Even though – at least in Baghdad – there are dozens and dozens of newspapers available, and radio as well as television stations, the principal mechanism for Iraqis getting their news is through the local coffee shops.

There, news and rumor are mixed in the same way coffee and sugar are combined. And each consumer mixes each in the ratios he likes best.

Every rumor which I heard had one of three roots: (1) It was the Americans punishing us for [fill in the blank]; or (2) It was the Mossad; or (3) It was both.

Otherwise well-educated Iraqis would fall into this rumor trap. Every time the power went off in Baghdad or the water stopped running or a street was closed it was the Americans punishing the Iraqis or the work of the Mossad or both.

If it was ever the intention of the Coalition to “win the hearts and minds” of the Iraqis, it was a misplaced goal. We are reaching a different goal – the Iraqis getting used to the idea that they are in control of their own future – which is vastly more important.

I would ask this committee what they would think a better outcome twenty four months down the road: A parade of US military during which Iraqis waved little American flags? Or a parade honoring new Iraqi leadership during which Iraqis waved little Iraqi flags?

I believe we are getting closer, by the way, to that latter parade.

To other questions were as follows:

- (a) What events precipitated the change in Iraqi attitudes from jubilation over the fall of Hussein to a high profile insurgency against Coalition personnel?
- (b) What factors caused the security environment to deteriorate?

These are essentially the same question. While I am not in any way an expert in military or intelligence matters, I spent a great deal of time with coalition military personnel – notably Brigadier General Mark Kimmitt who is the briefer on behalf of the coalition military.

To understand the security situation in Iraq – at least prior to the outbreak of the al-Sadr militia activity in April – we should understand how very thin the veneer of civilization is anywhere on the planet.

Consider, if you will, the following: At 7:30 tomorrow morning someone sets off what we called an improvised explosive device (IED) on the side of the Beltway near the Wilson Bridge in Alexandria.

Let's say that the same person, on Friday morning, sets off another device on the Beltway near Wisconsin Avenue in Bethesda.

I think we would all agree that this region would shut down completely unless and until the public was assured that they were no longer in danger. People would stop traveling on the Beltway which would completely clog the secondary road system. Every accident involving a loud noise would be reported as another IED – rumors would rule the day. The multi-jurisdictional nature of the threat would further cause delays and confusion.

You can see how easily our region could disintegrate into chaos.

In fact, just a couple of years ago, two people randomly shooting out of the trunk of their car nearly brought the region to a halt – even though any individual’s chance of being targeted was no better than one in several million.

Now, consider that this isn’t happening just twice in one week; but twice or three times in any given day. And if you add in the fact that the local police agencies either don’t exist or are at their earliest stages of re-establishment so that the coalition forces are the principal investigators. And, if you add in that each attack fuels the rumor machine that the “Americans could stop this if they chose to, so they must be punishing us,” it is easy to see how difficult the situation became and how quickly it spun out of control.

However, most Iraqis do not see the violence on a daily basis and, having driven through Baghdad in a private vehicle at normal speeds, it is remarkable to see a city which, in large measure, has its people going about their normal daily affairs just as in any major city in the world.

That leads to the final question in the sequence which was sent to me:

To what extent has the United States Government succeeded in building Iraqi confidence in, and cooperation with, Coalition efforts to create social cohesion, democratic governance, respect for human rights, and economic well-being in Iraq?

The answer to that is easy: It is working.

Take the matter of the Moqtada al-Sadr activity in April as a jumping off point for this discussion.

It is clear to me, as an interested observer not an expert, that the ability of someone like Moqtada al-Sadr to build, train, equip, clothe, and deploy a 3,000 person militia without our knowing about it must be looked at as a failure of the military intelligence operations in the Iraq theater of operations.

But, having said that, it is also important to note that al-Sadr did not generate the kind of popular support he (and, one assumes, *his* intelligence advisors) had counted on. There was no outpouring – even from the slums from which he drew his militia members – to join his crusade. Nor, was there any support from the mainstream Shi’ite leadership. In fact, when the Shi’ite leadership announced its support for the interim government (no

small success in itself) they specifically and publicly did not contact al-Sadr nor include him in their announcement.

Remember, if you will, when we were told that the Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani was going to torpedo all of the Coalition efforts unless elections were held prior to the June 30 hand-over? We haven't heard much of that recently.

Remember, if you will, the reports of unemployment ranging upwards of 40 percent? We haven't heard much of that recently.

Remember, if you will, the notion that the Shi'ite majority was going to demand an Iran-like theocracy; and the Kurdish minority was going to demand a separate nation; and all of the other "sky-is-falling" scenarios which were absolutely going to befall our efforts in Iraq.

Almost none of them – perhaps absolutely none of them – has come true nor will they come true.

I taught a class in democracy to about 80 Shi'ite women outside Hillah in January. When I was invited to teach the class, I thought it might be populated with college-aged women, in western clothing, who were at the cutting edge of secular society in southern Iraq.

In the event the women were all in their 40's and older, all dressed in traditional robes, with their heads covered, and all were tremendously interested in their role in the governance of Iraq in which they were, without any question, planning to have full participation.

As the economy of Iraq continues to gather steam it will have the effect of helping to suffocate the terrorists. It is one thing to be unemployed and hear of a plot to blow up an electrical transmission tower; it is something else again to be employed in a factory or an office which depends upon that electricity and overhear the same plot.

The assumption must be that as the economy grows, more people will have a stake in an orderly society and, when some plot is being hatched, more Iraqis will be disposed to tell *Iraqi* authorities about what they have heard.

Finally, the who issue of the Transitional Administrative Law – the TAL – which was negotiated and signed by all the members of the Iraqi Governing Council is a model for progressive governance anywhere in the world, much less in the Middle East.

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While the TAL has not had the impact in the day-to-day discussions of the elite levels of Iraqi society we might have hoped, the mere fact of the TAL's existence and the fact that it will be the mechanism by which Iraq is to be governed over this transitional period is highly significant.

Iraq's neighbors have been introduced to the TAL through both US and Iraqi diplomatic channels and the notion of a document which clearly lays out the rights of individuals and groups who have traditionally been unable to fully participate in society is a major accomplishment of the Coalition Provisional Authority.

In conclusion, we should remember that the last time the US was an occupying power was in Japan. We defeated Japan in 1945. We did not return sovereignty until early 1952 – having signed the Treaty of San Francisco in late 1951.

We occupied Japan for just under seven years.

- Japan was a monolithic society – one religion, one culture, one history. Iraq is multi-religious, multi-ethnic, and largely tribal in its history.
- Japan is a series of islands, easily isolated. Iraq is surrounded by neighbors who are not particularly thrilled about a non-theocratic; at least semi-democratic; potential economic powerhouse building up right next door.
- We fought a war of attrition against Japan: A significant number of Japanese young men who could have continued the fight, had already been killed in the march across the Pacific. Iraq's military disintegrated in about three weeks and, indeed, we pointed with pride to our precision in military action in keeping enemy combatant deaths to a minimum.

In just 15 days from today – some 14 months after the fall of Saddam – we will be returning sovereignty to the Iraqi people.

We should take justifiable pride in that accomplishment and have an optimistic outlook on what the ripples and echoes of that accomplishment will mean to the future of the region.