SEEING THE FACTS CONVERTS A CRITIC

By DONALD E. WALTER

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September 25, 2003 -- In mid April, I got a call from the Justice Department asking if I would be willing to go
to Iraq for up to three months to evaluate the justice system and make recommendations.
I was in Iraq for fewer than 40 days, in Baghdad for a little over three weeks and in the three provinces of the
far south for two weeks. I am limited in what I saw and heard. I want to make it clear that, initially, I
vehemently opposed the war. In fact, I only changed my mind after my trip.

The team of 12 that went to Iraq was to assess the judiciary and to make recommendations for the future.
During the first two weeks, we talked to a few hundred Iraqis and interviewed about 60 judges.

Despite my initial opposition to the war, I am now convinced that, whether we find any weapons of mass
destruction or prove Saddam Hussein sheltered and financed terrorists, we absolutely should have overthrown
the Ba'athists - indeed, we should have done it sooner.

What changed my mind?

When we left in mid June, 57 mass graves had been found, one with the bodies of 1,200 children. There have
been credible reports of murder, brutality and torture of hundreds of thousands of ordinary Iraqi citizens. There
is poverty on a monumental scale and fear on a larger one. That fear is still palpable. I have seen the machines
and places of torture.

Terrible things happened with the knowledge, indeed with the participation, of Saddam, his family and the
Ba'athist regime. Thousands suffered while we were messing about with France and Russia and Germany and
the United Nations. Every one of them knew what was going on there, but France and the United Nations were
making millions administering the Food-for-Oil program.

I submit that just because we can't do everything doesn't mean that we should do nothing. We must have the
moral courage to see this through, to do whatever it takes to secure responsible government for the Iraqi people.
Having decided to topple Saddam, we cannot abandon those who trust us.

I fear we will quit as the horrors of war come into our living rooms. Look at the stories you are getting from the
media today. The steady drip, drip, drip of bad news may destroy our will to fulfill the obligations we have
assumed.

We are not getting the whole truth from the news media.

The news you watch, listen to and read is highly selective. Good news doesn't sell. Ninety percent of the
damage you see on TV was caused by Iraqis, not by coalition forces. All the damage you see to schools,
hospitals, power generation facilities, refineries, pipelines and water supplies, as well as shops, museums and
semi-public buildings (like hotels) was caused either by the Iraqi army in its death throes or Iraqi civilians
looting and rioting.

The day after the war was over, nearly zero power was being generated in Iraq. Forty-five days later, one-third
of the total national potential of 8,000 megawatts is up and running. Downed power lines are being repaired and
were about 70 percent complete when I left. There is water purification where little or none existed before, and
it is available for everyone.
Oil is 95 percent of the Iraqi GNP. For Iraq to survive, it must sell oil. All the damage to the oil fields was done by the Iraqi army or looters. Today, the refinery at Bayji is at 75 percent of capacity. The crude pipeline between Kirkuk and Bayji has been repaired, although the Ba'athists keep trying to disrupt it.

By my sample, 90 percent of Iraqis are glad we came and the majority don't want us to leave for some time to come.

We visited the law school in Basra; it has some 300 students, about 10 of them female. The law students were the finest example of hope that I encountered. They told me that the future was theirs and that they needed and wanted our help. I believe we should be paying more attention and giving greater effort to restoring higher education.

These law students are the immediate future. When we met with them a week later, they had formed a protective association, secured a bus for transportation, found a disused grammar school for classes and got their assistant dean to round up some professors who were teaching them.

Our soldiers, God love them and keep them; they smiled every time I got a chance to talk to them. They want to come home, but I did not hear one word of complaint nor a question as to why they were there.

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