

# Good Morning, Baghdad

**A report from the ground up,** where tensions between the U.S. military and the Coalition Provisional Authority mirror those between the Pentagon and the State Department.

**BY CARLTON SHERWOOD**

**A**FTER A BRAIN-NUMBING RACKET OF A FLIGHT, the Air National Guard C-130 cargo plane suddenly banked one wing almost perpendicular to the ground, plummeting hundreds of feet in seconds. The maneuver was designed to dodge surface to air missiles. On this day, mercifully, there were no missiles. Within minutes, the back ramp of the cavernous fuselage opened into the early morning heat and a sign could be made out: "Welcome to Baghdad International Airport."

I was part of a 15-member fact-finding group given full access to U.S. civilian and military leaders on the ground. Most of the group were so-called "TV Generals," or people you might see on the PBS *NewsHour* or *Nightline*—political appointees or policy advisers to previous White Houses. I'm a former newspaper and TV network investigative reporter, also a Vietnam veteran, a grunt Marine on







the DMZ in 1968, when U.S. killed in action topped 300 a week and wounded were in the thousands, myself among them.

At Baghdad Airport, I couldn't avoid a sense of *déjà vu*. The acrid mix of diesel fuel, Avgas and wood smoke from nearby houses hung in the stifling 115 degree air, then blended together in the helicopter prop wash to create a grimy witches-brew. "Sure smells and feels like Vietnam to me," I said to retired Col. Bill Cowan, a Fox News military analyst and the only other former Marine on the trip. "Yeah," he said, "a combat zone."

As we flew over Baghdad, as far as the horizon were TV satellite dishes. For an impoverished population, the Iraqis seem sufficiently well-heeled to have millions of TVs and the power to light them up. Likewise, the streets were jammed with people, cars, buses and trucks. True, many were wrecks, even some beat-up VWs Saddam bought *en masse*, distinguishable by the bright orange paint inexplicably slathered on the rear and front bumpers. But there were new BMWs and Mercedes sedans ripping up and down the boulevards as well. If this was a city caught in the clutches of war, terror and chaos, there were no outward signs.

Off in the distance, a column of thick black smoke rose a couple hundred feet in the still air. Later we learned it was U.N. headquarters—another suicide car bombing attempt, this one thwarted by a newly trained Iraqi policeman who died for his efforts. Reality returns. This is a combat zone.

At the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) headquarters in Saddam's main Baghdad palace, the one with the gold plated bathroom fixtures, we were met by the CPA's number two, Ambassador Pat Kennedy, a bookish man, and his aides, the only people wearing suits. They ushered us into six, maybe seven hours of non-stop, detailed briefings on everything from the terrorists' new weapon of

choice, homemade road-side bombs, to the Baghdad sewer, water, and electric systems, oil production, banking and currency, religious factions, media and communications, agriculture, education, mass grave sites of genocide victims, crime, law, human rights, military operations, troop morale, police, security forces and creating provisional and constitutional governments. Had I spent 18 hours in the air just to park in an air-conditioned palace trying to decipher diplomatic blather and military acronyms?

The conveniences we are accustomed to, said the briefers, basics such as phone service, cable, mail, roads, bridges, and water systems, had not existed in Saddam's Iraq. "We had to start with nothing. There was nothing to build on. Everything was jerry rigged, a North Korean generator, wired to an old Soviet pump, hooked to a Bulgarian fitting. It's a testament to the genius of Iraqi engineers that they keep any of these systems running at all. Saddam never put a

dime into the needs of his people." Now, we were told, many of those services and systems were "at or above pre-war levels." However, later that morning, when I sought the Palace men's room, I found that the marble inlaid, gold-plated fixtures were inoperable. A line of port-a-potties stood under the three 25-foot-tall granite heads of a jowly, helmeted Saddam.

**N**EVERTHELESS, the Coalition has made remarkable progress on nearly every front. Over 30,000 Iraqi police and security officers have been trained, equipped and put on the street, easily identified by their new blue uniforms. More than 1,000 schools have been refurbished and classes resumed, textbooks cleansed of Ba'athist propaganda. Hospitals are operational again and medical services are available to virtually all Iraqis, even in



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outlying regions that have never seen a doctor. Interim governing bodies have been created with great care taken to see that all religious and cultural factions are represented—Shi'ites, Sunnis, Kurds, Turkomen and Assyrians. The Coalition is "standing up" the new Iraqi economy, establishing an oil trust fund, promoting commerce and business opportunities and, since an estimated 30 percent of all Iraqi currency is counterfeit, printing new money that will have legitimacy in and out of Iraq.

U.S. military officials in Iraq, who tend to judge most things in numbers, have a simple answer for why such "success stories" aren't being covered by the media. "During the war there were 450 reporters and news technicians embedded in our units scattered across Iraq," one Army briefer explained. "Today, there only about 50, nearly all here in Baghdad. Their job, as they see it, is to keep score, to count the casualties, little else. There's nothing sexy about rebuilding bridges, restoring schools or reopening businesses."

Weapons of Mass Destruction are another matter. While there was "evidence of the existence of WMDs" in secret laboratories and elsewhere around Iraq, our briefers said sheepishly: "No smoking gun yet." Clearly, Saddam Hussein snookered nearly everyone with the threat that he had weapons of mass destruction and was more than willing to use them. And, just as clearly, our intelligence failed to accurately measure the top to bottom state of decay, the utter shambles Iraq had become. Perhaps, as the argument goes in Baghdad, Saddam himself was duped by subordinates.

Coalition forces had been counting on Saddam's former regime loyalists to spill the beans on Iraq's weapons programs, perhaps even lead them to some of the caches. But none of those in custody for months, people who designed and carried out most of Saddam's genocidal orders, has given us a shred of intelligence. Unspoken inside the room—so as not to offend the sensitivities of State Department diplomats present—was the obvious question: Why haven't we used tried and true methods to extract the information needed from these people, many of

whom qualify as war criminals? As one of the former generals in our delegation remarked out of earshot of our CPA hosts: "Give me one day, a little of Baghdad's electricity, and the CPA won't be able to shut those bastards up."

UNFORTUNATELY, many of Saddam's cabinet members were not apprehended, but surrendered following days, sometimes weeks, of negotiations. They set conditions, like asylum for their families and, of course, their own care and treatment. In some cases, Saddam's henchmen

demanding no handcuffs and at least one insisted on being addressed as "Your Excellency." "Made me sick to watch," a grizzled Army First-Sergeant from Chicago complained. "Even harsh language wasn't allowed. These scum-bags aren't going to talk, why should they? They hold out long enough; probably get a job with the U.N. running Iraq again."

Just about everyone I talked with in Iraq was adamant that the U.N. fiddled while Saddam slaughtered; at worst, they believe the U.N. acted as his ally. They want us to stay until they themselves can make sure nothing like him happens again. According to Baghdad CPA and military officials, that could turn out to be a very long time, two to five years. "The Iraqis have problems understanding, a

constitution, equal justice, first amendment, human rights, laws and courts....It's going to take a while," said a CPA briefer.

It's a short drive from the CPA palace through a maze of concrete barriers to the First Armored Division headquarters, located in another ostentatious Saddam palace, this one partially destroyed by a couple pin-point bombing raids. The distance between the civilian and military command posts may be small but in terms of style and substance, the two are worlds apart. Where State Department-trained CPA officials are circumspect, hesitant and devoted to the process, the military leaders we met were direct, action-oriented and made no bones about getting results, no matter what it takes. The

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culture clash was apparent, though both sides made every effort to veil it.

Brig. General Martin Dempsey, who commands the First Armored Division's 35,000 troops in and around Baghdad, made clear his primary concern was for the lives of the men and women in his care. He explained that the "face" and tactics of the enemy had changed. In June and July, Saddam loyalists and former members of the Republican Guard—Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's so-called "dead-enders"—ambushed mechanized columns with grenade launchers and rifles. Now religious fundamentalists, possibly from Syria and elsewhere outside Iraq, along with some Baghdad criminals, were using remote-controlled roadside bombs made from artillery and mortar shells.

Before going into hiding, Saddam had ordered his jails opened, releasing some 40,000 prisoners, among them some of Iraq's worst criminals, murderers and rapists. Now, the military believed these men had become "guns-for-hire," paid guerrilla fighters, who, for \$50 or \$100, would be more than willing to ambush American troops. At the same time the enemy tactics changed, however, individuals and citizens' groups began tipping off the Army about pending attacks and directing them to the would-be gunmen's hideouts. These tips have saved countless American lives. This filled some of the gap in human intelligence resulting from the refusal of captured Saddam loyalists to talk.

**W**HILE AT GEN. DEMPSEY's headquarters we also learned that two of the Arab world's leading TV news organizations, al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya, notorious for their anti-Western slant to news coverage, were about to be expelled from Iraq for allegedly encouraging violence against American troops and newly seated Iraqi officials. Privately, we were told the real reason for the expulsions was that camera crews for

both satellite TV stations were starting to show up at the scenes of terrorists attacks before they occurred. The suspicion was they were paying the terrorists for the advance notice—in effect, paying for the attacks. Alas, we learned that our CPA banned them from government offices and news conferences only for a month. A slap on the wrist. Our military was not happy.

If there is an arch-type for a modern general in this era of nation-building, it is Army Major General David Petraeus, commander of the vaunted 101st Airborne in the far northern reaches of Iraq. His "Screaming Eagles" were the soldiers who surrounded and killed the Hussein brothers, Uday and Qusay, in late July. Petraeus's headquarters are located in yet another Saddam palace, this one in Mosul, Iraq's second largest city.

After fighting the war, the 101st was assigned to this hard-scrabble region on the borders of Syria and Turkey. Without instructions or approvals from the CPA headquarters, Petraeus claims, he tapped part of the more than \$3 billion of Saddam's stashes found scattered around Iraq to revive the local economy. "Money is ammunition" he says, "and the surest way I know to make lasting friends, to earn trust and create peace is by

providing meaningful jobs, putting people back to work so they can feed their families." The 101st has underwritten everything from schools and playgrounds and hospitals, to road and bridge repairs, to reopening the first hotel in the region. Petraeus says that, on his own, he traveled to Turkey and Syria to trade Iraqi oil for surplus electricity. While Baghdad was still in the dark with no phone service, Mosul and the surrounding area were lighted and connected. Petraeus was also among the first to set up interim government counsels that included representation from the religious and ethnic factions in the area.

This General's attitude, while an inspiration to his men and fellow officers, doesn't sit well with the



On assignment in 115 degrees.

CPA in Baghdad. This is not ancient Rome. All the occupying military forces in Iraq are subordinate to CPA head Paul Bremer and his army of suits and ties. To the military, the CPA has come to stand for "Can't Provide Anything." In many cases, the military's decisions are reversed by career State Department wonks who rarely leave their air-conditioned offices in Baghdad. The tensions between the military and CPA in Iraq closely mirrors that of the State Department and Pentagon in Washington.

**A**S FOR AMERICAN TV, everywhere I traveled in Iraq, in military division command centers, mess halls, CPA offices, any place cable TV is available, Fox News or ESPN Sports were tuned in. In one Army division command center, there was a very tall Brit Hume up on the "big board" usually reserved for maps. Nobody seems to like Peter Jennings, Dan Rather, or Wolf Blitzer.

The TV wars too give a sense of *déjà vu*. The University of Maryland's Program on International Policy determined that "the more closely you followed Fox, the more misconceptions you had." I wondered, where had they got their news? Maybe al-Jazeera? When I returned from Vietnam following the 1968 Tet offensive, still recovering from wounds, I knew we had just won the most important, decisive battle of that war, decimating the North Vietnamese Army and wiping out the South's Viet Cong. I was stunned by "news reports" that claimed just the opposite. Everyone, even "the most trusted man in America," Walter Cronkite, said we had lost the war. What had I missed? Did morphine play tricks with my head? In fact we had won those battles. Unfortunately for America, many of the same forces that made the media spread disinformation about Vietnam now haunt Iraq.

In Iraq as in Vietnam, presidential politics is driving the news. This time, with a Republican in the White House, the media are even more willing to ignore victories in Iraq. The terrorists in the Middle East know what our enemies in Vietnam discovered in 1968: they have no greater allies than U.S. politicians with presidential aspirations and their willing dupes in the press.

CPA and military officials alike worry that, sooner or later, there will be an incident—coordinated car bombings or ambushes—that will kill dozens, perhaps hundreds of U.S. soldiers and, as a result, cause the American public to question what

it is prepared to pay for a war it has already won.

We should have learned from Vietnam to be wary of politicians who, after sending young Americans in harm's way, question the right or wrong of their being there. I vividly remember the sense of betrayal I felt in 1968 when, within days of soundly defeating the Vietnamese Communists, the architect of the war, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, resigned and President Johnson announced he would not run for re-election. Political cowardice at home repaid courage and self-sacrifice on the battlefield. Iraq is not Vietnam. But in the end, many of the same political issues that turned victory into shameful defeat nearly four decades ago are still present in Iraq and Washington today.

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He's on the winning side.



# The Sorcerer's Apprentices

**The U.S.** has a long history of bungling it in Iraq.

BY ANGELO M. CODEVILLA

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ODAY'S IRAQ, THE BIBLICAL LAND OF UR, used to interest Americans only as history and exotica—the Marsh Arabs at the mouth of the Tigris and Euphrates, north of the fabled location of the Garden of Eden, above that Baghdad and Mesopotamia, the land of Abraham, of Babylon, of Israel's Babylonian captivity, and of the Arabian Nights. There, in the third century B.C., Xenophon's 10,000 Athenians fought the anabasis up the Euphrates Valley, through the Kurds, and over to the Black Sea. After the Islamic conquest and the great Mongol invasion, the area was a sleepy part of the Ottoman Empire, until Woodrow Wilson broke that up. Modern Iraq was born of the Versailles settlement of 1919 that brought forth so many other botches.

Iraq was not a good idea in the first place. American and British Wilsonians decided to re-create something like the Babylonian Empire: Sunni Mesopotamian Arabs from the Baghdad area would rule over vastly more numerous southern Sh'ia Arabs, and Arabophobe Kurds. Why the ruled should accept such an arrangement was never made clear. But before a local Mesopotamian ruler could be found, the British made matters worse by "parachuting" in a foreign imperial client. During the War, Britain had fought the Turks in the Middle East largely through Lawrence of Arabia's alliance with the Hashemites—descendants of the Prophet and traditional rulers