

GI SPECIAL #161



BRING HIM HOME NOW: A U.S. Army soldier stands next to a destroyed car on a highway to the Baghdad's International airport, Dec. 26. U.S. soldiers on the scene said they suspected that explosives went off prematurely. (AP Photo/Muhammed Muheisen) **ALIVE!**

IRAQ WAR REPORTS:

A total of 11 U.S. soldiers have died from hostile action since Monday.

Mortar Attack On Baqubah Base Kills Two U.S. Soldiers

December 26, TIKRIT, Iraq (Reuters) - Two U.S. soldiers were killed and four were wounded during a mortar attack on a U.S. base north of the Iraqi capital Baghdad, a U.S. military spokesperson said Friday.

A spokesperson for the 4th Infantry Division said the attack occurred about 6:15 p.m. (10:15 a.m. EST) Thursday in the town of Baqouba, about 45 miles north of Baghdad.

Two More 4th ID Soldiers Killed by Bombs Near Baqubah

December 26 TIKRIT (Reuters) & By CHRISTOPHER TORCHIA, Associated Press Writer

Two U.S. Army's 4th Infantry Division soldiers were killed by bombs in two separate incidents in Iraq on Friday, a U.S. military spokesman said.

A roadside bomb killed one soldier and wounded another when it detonated by a convoy near Baquba, about 40 miles north of Baghdad, early on Friday.

In a separate incident in the same area, a soldier tried to defuse a homemade bomb, but it blew up and killed him, Captain Jefferson Wolfe said. Such bombs are a favored weapon of rebels, who leave them on roadsides and detonate them as military convoys pass.

Soldier Killed In Balad

By CHRISTOPHER TORCHIA, Associated Press Writer

Friday in Balad, north of Baghdad, guerrillas set off a bomb that killed one soldier, the U.S. military said. A soldier tried to defuse a homemade bomb, but it blew up and killed him,

Resistance Hits Ad Duluiyah Convoy; One Dead, One Wounded

HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND

December 26, 2003 Release Number: 03-12-24C

TIKRIT, Iraq – One Task Force Ironhorse soldier was killed and one was wounded during an improvised explosive device attack southwest of Ad Duluiyah in the morning of Dec. 26. The soldiers were treated immediately and were evacuated to 21st Combat Support Hospital. The deceased soldier died en route. The other soldier is in stable condition.

The soldiers were part of a convoy when the attack occurred.

The soldiers' names are being withheld pending next-of-kin notification.

As Death Toll Escalates, 1st Armored Division Brass Panic And Spin; (“Weak And Feeble” Minds At Work)

By Joseph Logan BAGHDAD (Reuters) December 26

The attacks overnight capped a Christmas Day in Iraq shaded with gloom by projectiles that slammed into Baghdad hotels used by Westerners, embassies and an apartment block, as well as near the headquarters of the U.S.-led occupation.

The Christmas guerrilla attacks in Baghdad were the most extensive since Saddam's capture on December 13

Guerrillas, extending the biggest insurgent attacks since Saddam Hussein's capture, *killed two U.S. soldiers in a mortar attack north of Baghdad and shot three others, the U.S. military said Friday.*

The U.S. Army's 1st Armored Division called the guerrilla attacks, including mortars that smashed into the Sheraton hotel where Western contractors and journalists stay, "weak" and "feeble."

Comment:

Five dead U.S. soldiers yesterday, and at least four more dead so far today, and these assholes sitting in their safe offices talk about “weak and feeble” resistance attacks!

How high a stack of dead U.S. troops does it take for them to move up a notch to “moderate” attacks?

“Hmmm, we got 25 dead soldiers today, shit, we can't call that ‘week and feeble’ but we can't say ‘strong’, and certainly not ‘severe,’ OK? We'll say ‘moderate,’ everybody got that? 25 dead is ‘moderate’ Don't want to piss off the General. And don't forget the bit about how they're losing and nothing but some die-hard remnants.” (Sound of explosion) “Colonel? Colonel? You there? Respond? Respond?-----Shit---Looks like a weak and feeble attack got the Colonel.”)

What do you think? Comments from service men and women, and veterans, are especially welcome. Send to the E-mail address up top. Name, I.D., withheld on request. Replies confidential.

Ironhorse Soldier Electrocuted In Kirkuk

HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND
December 26, 2003 Release Number: 03-12-23C

TIKRIT, Iraq – One Task Force Ironhorse soldier died from injuries sustained after he was apparently electrocuted in Kirkuk at 4:40 p.m. Dec. 24. The soldier was repairing wire on a communication tower when the incident occurred. Medical personnel attended to the soldier immediately after the accident but the soldier remained unresponsive.

The soldier's name is being withheld pending next-of-kin notification.

Polish Troops Hit, Two Wounded

By Joseph Logan December 26, TIKRIT, Iraq (Reuters)

Insurgents wounded two Polish soldiers in an ambush in southern Iraq, the latest in a string of attacks on the forces of countries which have answered Washington's call for troops to help it secure the country it invaded.

A Polish-led division of multinational troops said the Polish troops were attacked Thursday night with bombs and small arms fire near Mahawil, about 50 miles south of the capital.

"Their injuries are not life-threatening," a spokesman for the division said. "One soldier was wounded to the hand and another to the leg."

3 Wounded In Mosul Ambush

By Joseph Logan BAGHDAD (Reuters) December 26

In the northern city of Mosul, an army spokesman said three U.S. troops were wounded Friday in an ambush on their patrol. Witnesses said troops returning fire killed a taxi driver, but the military said it knew of no civilian casualties.

TROOP NEWS

Desperation: Command Grabbing Soldiers Medically Unfit For Duty

Daily News (New York) December 25, 2003, BY JUAN GONZALEZ

Despite their joy in their new granddaughter, Leida and Juan Hernandez of Brooklyn decided against having a Christmas tree at their Sheepshead Bay home this year.

"It hurts that our son isn't with us, that he hasn't been able to see and hold his only child," Leida Hernandez said yesterday.

The baby is named Olivia. She was born Nov. 12. Her father, Sgt. Juan Carlos Hernandez, has been stationed in Iraq since Easter with the 442nd MP company of the New York National Guard.

The oldest son, Juan Carlos, joined the Army National Guard. Before Iraq, he spent nine months on peacekeeping duty in Bosnia. Activated again after Sept. 11, he did several months of duty at Ground Zero in 2002.

But Juan Carlos' deployment in Iraq was extended in September for another six months. He was ordered back to his unit as quickly as possible.

Hernandez was ordered back even though doctors at Fort Dix were treating him for medical problems that would keep most soldiers grounded.

He was sent back because his commander could not spare a single soldier.

DoD Caught Lying About Experimental Anthrax Vaccine

<http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2003/tr20031223-1062.html>

Comments Below By Veterans For Common Sense
<http://www.veteransforcommonsense.org>

December 23, 2003, Pentagon Press Briefing by Assistant Secretary of Defense Health Affairs William Winkenwerder

Question: So you're saying that Judge Sullivan was factually wrong when he said that the vaccine is still in investigational drug.

Answer from Dr. Winkenwerder: **Absolutely.**

(Our polite suggestion is that Winkenwerder either learn how to read official DoD applications for investigational new drugs or he should find another job where he doesn't end up in jail for violating a court order by continuing to experiment on soldiers. Winkenwerder's lie is highly offensive to all veterans and soldiers subjected to needless DoD experimentation with this harmful vaccine. And by the way, will all the soldiers harmed now receive medical care? Will all the family members of the six known soldiers killed by the vaccine receive assistance from our Nation? And will those brave soldiers who stood up to Winkenwerder have their discharges upgraded to "honorable"?)

Do you have a friend or relative in the service? Forward this E-MAIL along, or send us the address if you wish and we'll send it regularly. Whether in Iraq or stuck on a base in the USA, this is extra important for your service friend, too often cut off from access to encouraging news of growing resistance to the war, at home and in Iraq, and information about other social protest movements here in the USA. **Send requests to address up top. For copies on web site see:** <http://www.notinourname.net/gj-special/>

IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP



UNCONQUERED, UNCONQUERABLE: Baghdad students demonstrate outside the coalition headquarters in Baghdad. (AFP/Patrick Baz) **TIME TO GO HOME.**

Uppity Iraqis Want Some Rights; Spoiling Occupation Plans For Their Future

By Edward Wong The New York Times 26 December 2003

BAGHDAD, Iraq, Dec. 25 — Leaders of Sunni Muslim groups across the country agreed on Thursday to form a council to speak with a unified political voice during the transition of Iraq from American rule to Iraqi governance.

The demands of the group, called the State Council for the Sunnis, could greatly complicate the transfer of power for the Americans and for other Iraqi religious and ethnic groups, especially the Shiite Muslims and the Kurds.

So far, Shiite and Kurdish groups have asked for political rights that are incompatible with the plans laid out by other Iraqi politicians and the American occupiers. The Sunni council could do the same, though a spokesman said the group would try to work with all parties in Iraq.

Meanwhile, the two governing Kurdish political parties in the north have said they intend to form a united government soon and demand that the entire Kurdish area be granted regional autonomy.

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

The Empire Has No Legs

Eamonn Fingleton November 18, 2003

http://www.unsustainable.org/view_art_un.asp?AID=291

How serious is America's trade crisis? The best way of framing the answer is that no great power since the last days of the Ottoman Empire has tried to project so much power abroad from such a weak economic base at home.

With the announcement of a worse-than-expected \$41.3 billion U.S. September trade deficit last week, the scene is being set for a major trade crisis. Certainly the trend is little short of disastrous and, all wishful thinking in the Bush administration to the contrary, there is virtually no hope of a turnaround before the 2004 election.

By all world standards, America's trade deficits are stunningly unsustainable. We have to go back to Italy in 1924 to find a major nation that, in percentage terms, has run a larger peacetime trade deficit.

In the short run, the question is whether President Bush can struggle through next year without suffering a disastrous run on an already weak dollar.

Such a run would raise the price of imports across the board, discomfiting American consumers and businesses alike. It would also drastically exacerbate America's problems in financing the Iraq reconstruction work and other huge foreign commitments. Perhaps most politically hurtful would be that it would almost certainly be accompanied by a shocking increase in American interest rates.

Eventually there will be a reckoning as the money runs out.

(For more see the article "Marx's Theory Of Economic Crisis," www.isreview.org.)

Bremers' Follies Roll On; Better Is Worse, War Is Peace; Reality Is Nowhere To Be Found

By Robert Fisk in Baghdad 26 December 2003 : (The Independent)

Something very unpleasant is being let loose in Iraq. Just this week, a company commander in the US 1st Infantry Division in the north of the country admitted that, in order to elicit information about the guerrillas who are killing American troops, it was necessary to "instill fear" in the local villagers. An Iraqi interpreter working for the Americans had just taken an old lady from her home to frighten her daughters and grand-daughters into believing that she was being arrested.

Try to explain that this treatment - and these words - offend the very basic humanity of the people whom the Americans claimed they came to "liberate" and you are met in Baghdad with the same explanation: that a very small "remnant" of "diehards" - loyal to the now-captured Saddam Hussein, etc, etc - have to be separated from the civilians whom they are "intimidating".

We are told that American troops are winning those famous hearts and minds with the spirit of Christmas. **There was a grim example of this - and the inherent racism that pervades even reporting of such events - on the Associated Press wire agency just this week.**

Describing how an American soldier in a Santa Claus hat was giving out stuffed animals to children, reporter Jason Keyser wrote that one 11-year-old child "looked puzzled, then smiled" as the soldier gave him a small, stuffed goat. Then the report continued: "Others in the crowd of mostly Muslims grabbed greedily at the box," adding the soldier's remark that: "They don't know how to handle generosity."

I don't doubt the soldier's wish to do good. But what is one to make of the "mostly Muslims" who "grabbed greedily" at the gifts?

It's almost as if the occupying powers want to look through Alice's looking glass.

This week, we had the odd statement by British General Graeme Lamb that Saddam could be compared to the Emperor Caligula. Now the good general was probably relying on Suetonius's Twelve Caesars for his views on Caligula. But if anything, the Roman was a good deal more insane than Saddam and even more heedless of human life.

All references to the ex-dictator as Hitler, Stalin, Attila the Hun or Caligula - like all suggestions that Tony Blair or George Bush are Winston Churchill - are infantile. And again, they will appear insulting to the Sunni Muslims of Iraq, the one community which the Americans should be desperate to placate, since it is the Sunnis who are primarily resisting the occupation.

But the looking-glass effect seems to have taken hold of US pro-consul Paul Bremer's entire authority. Like President George Bush, Bremer has now taken to

repeating the absurdity that the greater the West's success in Iraq, the more frequent will be the attacks on American troops.

"I personally feel that we'll actually have more violence in the next six months," he said a couple of week ago, "and the violence will be precisely because of the fact that we're building momentum toward success." **In other words, the better things become, the worse they're going to get. And the greater the violence, the better we're doing in Iraq.**

An even more peculiar habit has now manifest itself among spokesmen for the occupation authorities. When a tank drove over a prominent Shiite Muslim cleric in the Baghdad suburb of Sadr City three weeks ago, they claimed this was a "traffic accident", as if driving an M1A1 Abrams tank over a car and a robed prelate is the kind of thing that can happen on any downtown street.

A few days later, after a truck-bomber crashed into a car and killed 17 civilians, the occupation lads churned out the same rubbish again. It was, they said, a "traffic accident" involving a petrol tanker. But there was no tanker attached to the lorry.

The first American troops on the scene found the grenades intended to detonate the bomb and the victims were all blasted to bits - not burned, as they would have been if the petrol tanker had simply caught fire. Those of us who reached the scene shortly after the slaughter could still smell the explosives. But it was a "traffic accident".

Only yesterday we had an equally bizarre event. Jets, C-130 aircraft mounted with chain guns, and heavy artillery were all reported to be striking "guerrilla bases" in Operation Iron Hammer south of Baghdad. But investigation proved that the targets were empty fields and that some of the heavy guns were firing blank rounds as part of an artillery maintenance routine.

So let's get this right. Insurgents are civilians. Truck bombs and tanks that crush civilians are traffic accidents. And the "liberated" civilians who live in villages surrounded by razor wire should endure "a heavy dose of fear and violence" to keep them on the straight and narrow. Somewhere along the way, they will probably be told about democracy as well.

The occupying powers here only keep a daily count of westerners who have been killed. Strangely none of the bodies at the Baghdad morgue yesterday were brought in from the area of Khor Rajab, the Rajab Marshes, which were supposed to have been the centre of America's overnight anti-guerrilla raids. A drive through the slums and dirt fields along Highway 8 south of the city showed why.

There was little to be seen of the overnight battle save some churned up fields and a fortress where US troops were firing blank shells from heavy artillery pieces. "The Americans were attacked twice from the fields," a tea-vendor said at his shack beside the highway. **"They shot the place up later but didn't kill a soul. The men with the mortars had left long before."**

A group of trainees in the new Iraqi army, walking home from boot camp across the fields of Khor Rajab, confirmed that US forces were firing blank rounds. "It sounds good, doesn't it?" one of them said. So much then, it seems, for "Operation Iron Grip/Justice/Hammer".

OCCUPATION REPORT



Occupation Command Adopts Israeli Terrorists Tactics: Iraqis stand on top of a house destroyed by the U.S. forces Dec. 26, 2003 in Khalidiya, 60 miles west of Baghdad. **The house allegedly belonged to a suspected rebel leader who was arrested by U.S. forces a week ago,** locals said. (AP Photo/Khalid Mohammed)

Wartime Carnage Upsets Even Iraqi Collaborators

December 23, 2003 www.insidedenver.com

Last week, four members of the Baghdad City Council - Chairman Adnan Abdul Sahib Hassan, Sheik Dhari Khamis Al-Dhari, Dr. Riyadh Nassir Al-Adhath and Abdulghani Khudair Al-Hussainy - visited Colorado to observe democracy in action.

They visited the Rocky Mountain News. The four met with Editor and Publisher John Temple, Deputy Editorial Page Editor Thom Beal, Editorial Writer Linda Seebach, and reporter Ann Imse. They were accompanied by Amir Abdullah Abbas, who works for the U.S. Agency for International Development, and Peter Kenney, a former Clear Creek County Commissioner who has served as an adviser to the Baghdad City Council since September.

Al-Adhath: I'd like to start by saying something about the destruction of my district neighborhood by U.S. coalition forces.

Temple: You mean in the course of the invasion and bombing of Baghdad?

Al-Adhath: Yes. There was a lot of violence and destruction of property, including damage to homes and automobiles. **And the situation is not improving because U.S. soldiers are still damaging property and killing people in the course of their duties, especially when they conduct their neighborhood searches.** This newspaper is a messenger and you have to send this message to the higher authorities.

Al-Dhari: Now houses and cars are still being damaged, primarily by U.S. tank forces. We're still not losing just coalition forces but also Iraqi civilians. **In my district we've lost a lot of civilians - for every one U.S. soldier we're losing 10 Iraqis.** I myself have to attend some of the funerals of innocent people who have died and it is a very hard thing to do. Several things are happening, in my opinion.

One is that when coalition forces are attacked in neighborhoods they too often defend themselves recklessly, shooting everywhere, and the result is the loss of Iraqi lives.

The second thing is the presence of unexploded cluster bombs, which were dropped almost everywhere during the invasion but have yet to be cleaned up. The bombs fell in many fields we use for agriculture, and there are so many of these bombs out there that many of the fields can't be harvested. Many bombs fell near schools, too, so we've seen children killed because they don't know enough not to play with them. I think it will take years to complete a cleanup. **But so far there's no beginning to this and nobody seems to be paying attention to the problem.**

Temple: When you talk to U.S. authorities what do they say?

Al-Dhari: I work every day and night reporting these things and translating them into English and submitting them to the authority. But I hear almost nothing from them.

Beal: Is there a chance the Governing Council, once it has more authority, might deal with the issue of compensation in a way that is more to your satisfaction?

Al-Adhath: **This is very controversial, because it's complicated for one thing, and because we don't know if or to what extent the Governing Council will take a view independent from that of the Americans.**

Al-Dhari: We don't have a social security net like you have here in the United States. So we have these very urgent concerns about a lack of resources for people who, many through no fault of their own, were harmed during the war and have few prospects for the future.

Al-Dhari: We are losing tens of Iraqis to one coalition soldier.

Temple: So this is your message: The loss of life of Iraqis is not being recognized by either the American people or the American authorities in Iraq.

Al-Dhari: Yes, yes. **The commander of U.S. forces in my district came into my office several weeks ago shouting because he had lost several soldiers, though some Iraqi citizens were also killed. And he shouted, "I can't give any more blood for this." And I said, "You can't come into my office and talk to me this way." So I complained to General Dempsey and told him that I wish his commanders were as upset when innocent Iraqis were killed. These were six shoppers; that's all they were doing, shopping, and they were shot down. And that's the problem.**

**OCCUPATION ISN'T LIBERATION
BRING ALL THE TROOPS HOME NOW!**

“Reconstruction” Farce” Act 1 Bribery, Corruption And Faking Winning Bids; But US Official Admits Resistance Nationalist, Not Baathist

By Rajiv Chandrasekaran Washington Post Foreign Service December 23, 2003

RAMADI, Iraq -- When American diplomat Keith Mines wanted the bombed-out Baath Party headquarters here torn down, he began with contracting rules issued by the U.S. occupation authority. He posted an official notice soliciting bids. A week later, he accepted several sealed proposals, planning to choose the lowest bid.

Then Hamid Rashid Mahenna, an influential tribal sheik, heard about the contract. Mahenna wears suede jackets and a red-and-white headscarf, smokes Dunhill cigarettes, and owns a construction company. **His tribesmen had been helping U.S. forces in Ramadi -- and he figured it was payback time. After the deadline, he drove up in his white Mercedes and handed Mines four sealed envelopes. Inside, Mines said, were bids far higher than those from other Iraqi contractors.**

Mines, a 6-foot-5 Colorado native who is responsible for administering western Iraq, faced a choice. He could follow the rules and lose an ally, or make an exception to make a friend in one of Iraq's most hostile Sunni Muslim neighborhoods.

After receiving Mahenna's bids, Mines said he met with the sheik and began bargaining. Mahenna eventually got a contract worth \$35,000 -- about \$15,000 more than what the lowest bidder offered.

"He's been very helpful to us. He's a force for stability in this area," said Mines, a State Department political officer with gray-streaked hair whose prior assignments in

Afghanistan, Somalia and Haiti have left him with a sense of steadiness in the midst of postwar chaos.

Mines insisted that courting sheiks such as Mahenna remains his best -- and perhaps only -- option.

Anger at the occupation also has not abated. "The war is going to be won or lost here," **Mines said as gunfire of undetermined origin echoed across the city.**

If they're not satisfied with how things go in the next six months, they'll take the whole project down."

Ramadi is a city of boxy concrete buildings surrounded by date groves, farmland and barren desert. Home to scores of Baathists, it is rated by the U.S. military as one of the most dangerous places for Americans in Iraq. U.S. troops in the city are regularly the target of roadside bombs, rocket-propelled grenades and mortars.

In other places where he was posted, Mines said his best diplomatic work occurred outside his office. But in Ramadi, getting out has been difficult, if not impossible.

Security rules require him to live on a large U.S. military base and to drive with an Army escort. A head taller than most Iraqis and unmistakably Caucasian, he avoids walking around the city. On the rare occasions when he wants to travel without soldiers in tow, he tucks himself into the back of a taxi with tinted windows driven by an Iraqi man he trusts.

"I miss not being able to talk to people in the market," he said. "I want to ask them, 'What do you think of us?' You can't go bopping around. It's very limiting." (Gee, he can't figure out "what do you think of us" from the fact he has to go around with "an Army escort"? That might be a clue.)

On a recent morning, he sat on the sofa and met with a man who launched into a lengthy story about how his son was detained by U.S. soldiers after mistakenly colliding with a military truck. His hands clasped and his gaze intense, Mines heard the man out and then promised to look into the matter. (Now there's a powerful pledge of immediate action and justice that will no doubt bring the resistance to its' knees.)

But as he reclined on the sofa after the meeting and observed other interactions in the room, with Iraqis showing deference to uniformed soldiers, **Mines acknowledged that he was dealing with a selective group. The young men in the nearby market who praise the insurgents were not there. Nor were religious leaders who view the occupation as illegitimate.**

"I know I'm only getting a narrow slice," he said. "There's a lot we miss. There's no question."

Security restrictions also have kept American contractors from working in Anbar Province. Bechtel Corp. is not rebuilding schools here as it is elsewhere. The Research Triangle Institute is not leading democracy-building workshops here.

Anbar is a province the size of Wyoming that stretches from Baghdad's western fringe to Iraq's border with Syria and Jordan.

Mines said U.S. forces lacked "ground truth" on the dynamics of the resistance. More insurgent activity is driven by simple anger at the occupation -- instead of Baathist loyalty -- "than we'd like to admit," he added.

At a recent meeting between CPA staffers and Iraqi political leader Ahmed Chalabi, who favors taking a hard line against former Baathists working in the government, Mines was the only person in the room to suggest more emphasis needed to be placed on reconciliation, according to people who attended the session.

Mines said he had been forced to turn to the same coterie of elderly men upon which Hussein -- and Iraqi leaders before him -- relied: tribal sheiks.

Many of them have chosen to support the Americans now, Mines said, simply because they want American reconstruction contracts.

"I don't have a lot of other options," Mines said.

When Mahenna, who leads the Bu-Alwan tribe, heard that Mines was looking for a contractor to tear down the Baath Party headquarters and build a park dedicated to peace, the sheik swung into action. He had his construction company -- one of several businesses he owns -- draw up four sealed bids for Mines, ranging from \$75,000 to \$120,000.

As he handed over envelopes, Mines recalled him saying, "I hope you'll be fair to me." When Mines opened the bids, he was floored. Other contractors in Ramadi had offered to do the job for around \$20,000, he said.

"It was just way out of the ballpark," he said.

But Mines was reluctant to spurn Mahenna, a suave man with a physics degree and extensive political connections in Anbar. So Mines, who has the authority to issue contracts up to \$100,000 without higher approval, made an exception. Instead of choosing the lowest bidder, he called in Mahenna and began to negotiate. He finally bargained him down to \$35,000.

His decision pleased the American military commander in charge of patrolling Ramadi. "Keith has had a real eye-opener," said Lt. Col. Hector Mirabile of the 1st Battalion of the Florida National Guard's 124th Infantry Regiment.

"He came in with this American methodology of awarding contracts with a fair and impartial process. But when you have sheiks running the show, everyone wants their money."

Mirabile, **a major in the Miami police force**, said Mines had "become the consummate politician" since arriving in Ramadi. "He's been Iraqicized."

Mines formally awarded the contract to Mahenna on Thursday at a small ceremony in the reception room Mines built. Twenty-two other contracts also were handed out -- totaling nearly \$1 million.

After the event was over, Mahenna sulked. "This is not enough money for me," he said. "I was good to the coalition forces, but they didn't treat me in a special way. Keith must do more to reward the people who are helping him."

A few minutes later, as Mines walked downstairs, Mahenna followed, his red-and-white headdress flapping.

"Thirty-five thousand is nothing," Mahenna told Mines, in an openly complaining tone. "What am I going to tell my people?"

"You're going to tell them we have a park," Mines responded.

"It's not enough," Mahenna protested.

"The big contracts are coming," Mines said. "We're just getting started."

With that, Mahenna pulled out three envelopes from his leather folder. Inside were bids for other contracts. "These I want for me," he said, thrusting the envelopes at Mines. Then Mahenna got in his Mercedes and drove away.

"Dealing with the sheiks isn't easy," Mines said as he watched the car pull out of the parking lot. "But we don't have another choice."

GET SOME TRUTH: CHECK OUT TRAVELING SOLDIER

Telling the truth - about the occupation, the cuts to veterans benefits, or the dangers of depleted uranium - is the first reason Traveling Soldier is necessary. But we want to do more than tell the truth; we want to report on the resistance - whether it's in the streets of Baghdad, New York, or inside the armed forces. Our goal is for Traveling Soldier to become the thread that ties working-class people inside the armed services together. We want this newsletter to be a weapon to help you organize resistance within the armed forces. If you like what you've read, we hope that you'll join with us in building a network of active duty organizers. <http://www.traveling-soldier.org/>

“Reconstruction” Farce Act 2; Ground Truth: It’s About The Money

By Herbert Docena Dec 25, 2003

Herbert Docena herbert@focusweb.org is with Focus on the Global South. He was in Baghdad for the Iraq International Occupation Watch Center.

BAGHDAD - Even if the occupation were working perfectly well, it would still be wrong. This has become trite commentary among Iraqis who bitterly want the occupation of their country to fail but, at the same time, also earnestly hope that the reconstruction of their country succeeds. Still, no matter how hard the occupiers try to make the reconstruction go right, the US and its corporations still have no right staying here.

At night, most of downtown Baghdad is still in darkness, with only the blue and red police sirens lighting the streets and the only sound that of intermittent gunfire puncturing the silence - definitely not a picture of a festive, newly liberated capital. With most of Iraq suffering from power interruptions lasting an average of 16 hours daily, it's a little hard to party in the dark. How many US soldiers does it take to change a light bulb? About 130,000 so far, but don't hold your breath.

South of the city, a double-columned queue of cars up to three kilometers in length snakes around street blocks and crosses a bridge over the Tigris, before finally terminating at a barbed wired gasoline station protected by a Humvee and an armored tank. Come closing time, so as not to abandon the queue and line up all over again the following day, most of the car owners decide to leave their vehicles parked overnight, in a nightly vigil for gasoline in a country with the world's second-largest reserves of oil.

With many unemployed former university professors, engineers and civil servants choosing to become cab drivers instead, Baghdad probably has the most educated taxi drivers per square kilometer in the world. Strike up a conversation and the cabbies will most likely tell you what seems to have become the conventional wisdom today: not even Saddam Hussein could have screwed up this badly.

Not that they want him back, but neither could they have expected the occupation forces to completely bungle such simple tasks as switching the lights back on. The lack of power is most Iraqis' number one gripe, but the list is long: uninstalled phone lines, shoddily repaired schools, clogged roads, uncollected garbage, defective sewerage, a nonexistent bureaucracy, mass unemployment and widespread poverty - the general chaos that Iraq is still in today.

Iraqis are in broad agreement that life is deteriorating rather than improving. The prevailing sentiment is a complex mix of resentment and resignation, frustration and incredulity. On the one hand, Iraqis feel bitter about being occupied, and yet many are resigned to entrusting their day-to-day survival to the hands of the Americans. On the other hand, they could not quite believe how despite all the time and money, the world's sole superpower can't make the reconstruction process go right.

For it's part, the US says the Iraqis are expecting too much too soon. **"The bottleneck is sheer time," explained Ted Morse, the CPA's coordinator for the Baghdad region. "Wherever you have had a true conflict situation, there is an impatience in that people think it can be done immediately. It cannot."**

But Iraqis themselves have showed that it can. In 1991, after the first Gulf War and despite the United Nations-imposed sanctions, it took Iraq's bureaucrats and engineers only three months to restore electricity back to pre-war capacity, boasted Janan Behman, manager of Baghdad's Daura power station. **Now after almost nine months**

and despite the involvement of US giant Bechtel, builders of the Hoover Dam and some of the world's biggest engineering works, Iraq's power sector is still only producing less than 20 percent or 3,600 MW out of the 20,000 MW required. A daily power interruption of two to three hours would be acceptable after nine months, but 16 hours?

The occupation forces would not admit this, of course, but much of the problem could be attributed to the successful efforts of the resistance to ensure that nothing works as long as an illegal occupation stays in place.

The resistance has kept the authorities too busy dodging bombs to spare time for such trifling matters as providing Iraqis with jobs. With the resistance targeting not just combatants but also those profiting from the occupation, it's a little too much to expect contractors to go out of their tightly guarded bubbles and move around.

Bechtel employees, for example, only travel in military helicopters or armed convoys with at least one designated "shooter" in every vehicle. (1) Now unless they find a way of transporting the power plants to the trailer camps where Bechtel employees live - averse as they are from going to the plants themselves - nothing much would really get done.

A lot of the mess could also be attributed to the sheer incompetence and lack of experience of the people running Iraq. Much has been said about how the administrators housed in the Green Zone have little or no experience whatsoever in public administration. There have also been various reports about the confusion and lack of coordination among the different agencies involved.

But insecurity and incompetence, while part of the complete and complex picture, do not go far enough in explaining why the reconstruction effort has so far been an evident failure.

"If this is the system, then I have to follow," said Dathar al-Khshab, general director of the Daura oil refinery. It's the only way to keep things moving, then so be it, he said, echoing other utilities managers. Rank and file oil industry workers are likewise hesitant to shut down the refineries as a bargaining chip for negotiations and as a tactic to undermine the occupation. **On the one hand, they know that this could paralyze the Americans. On the other, they are afraid of its effect on the Iraqi people. But asked whether they support the coalition forces, Hassan Jum'a, leader of the Southern Oil Company union, was firm: "You can't hide the moon. Every honest Iraqi should refuse the occupation."**

The charge of incompetence is not completely convincing either because, for all the allegations of unfair competition and shadowy connections, it would be difficult to accuse Bechtel or Halliburton of not knowing what they are doing.

With projects scattered all over the globe, Bechtel is one of the world's biggest construction firms and it has achieved some of history's most awesome engineering feats. Halliburton, on the other hand, has been repairing oil wells and refineries around the world for decades. Even Iraqi officials readily acknowledge that, technically speaking, they should be in good hands with these American contractors. **As the**

grudging respect gradually gives way to disappointment, Iraqis are even more baffled as to how these corporations could fail their expectations.

Another popular explanation making the rounds alleges that sabotaging the reconstruction is a conscious and deliberate effort on the part of the occupation forces to make the Iraqis completely dependent and subservient.

The answer to the mystery of why the reconstruction has so far been botched could be less sinister.

A clue lies at the Najibiya power station in Basra, Iraq's second largest city located south of Baghdad. Sitting uninstalled between two decrepit turbines were massive brand new air-conditioning units shipped all the way from York Corporation in Oklahoma. Pasted on one side of each unit was a glittering sticker proudly displaying the "Made in USA" sign, complete with the Stars and Stripes.

It's just what the Iraqis don't need at this time. Since May, Yaarub Jasim, general director for the southern region of Iraq's electricity ministry, has been pleading with Bechtel to deliver urgently needed spare parts for their antiquated turbines. "We asked Bechtel many times to please help us because the demand for power is very high and we should cover this demand," Jasim said. "We asked many times, many times."

Two weeks ago, Bechtel finally came through. Before it could deliver any of Jasim's requirements, however, Bechtel transported the air-conditioners, useless until the start of summer six months from now.

But even if the air-con units become eventually useful, emphasized plant manager Hamad Salem, other spare parts were much more important. The air-conditioners, Salem pointed out, were not even in the list of the equipment and machine components that they submitted to Bechtel.

Ideally, said Jasim, it would be best to get the spare parts from the companies that originally built the turbines because they would be more readily available and more suitable for their technology. Unfortunately, Jasim pointed out, Iraq's generators happened to have been provided by companies from France, Russia and Germany, the very countries banned by the Pentagon from getting contracts in Iraq, as well as Japan. On inspection, it was clear that the turbines don't carry the Stars and Stripes logo. The dilapidated turbines in Najibiya, for example, still bore "Made in USSR" plates.

Why then have the required components not been delivered? Jasim replied dismissively, as though the answer was self-evident: "Because no other company has been allowed by the US government, only Bechtel."

Unlike those among the other banned corporations, Bechtel carries the requisite brand.

Awaiting urgent rehabilitation, Iraq's French, Russian, German and Japanese-made power infrastructure is slowly disintegrating. At the station, workers are trying to make full use of the turbines by cooking pots of rice on the surface of the

rusting hot pipes. If the stations are not rehabilitated any time soon, repairs will no longer be enough to keep them running, warned Jasim.

Incidentally, part of Bechtel's contract includes making "road maps for future longer term needs and investments". In other words, Bechtel is currently being paid to determine what the Iraqis will "need" to buy in the future, using the Iraqi and US taxpayers' money. According to independent estimates, Bechtel stands to get up to US\$20 billion worth of reconstruction contracts in the next few years. (3)

If Bechtel has grander plans for Iraq's power sector, however, their officers are not telling the Iraqis. The utilities managers interviewed said they are not being consulted at all regarding Iraq's strategic energy plans. Bechtel officials don't even bother to explain what's taking them so long to deliver the parts they need. "They just collect papers, said Jasim, head of Iraq's southern district oil ministry.

Iraq's power sector problem is illustrative of the bigger pattern. Iraqis spend up to five hours lining up for gasoline not only because of the sabotage of pipelines but also because there's limited electricity to run oil refineries that are crying for quicker action from Kellogg, Brown & Root (KBR), the Halliburton subsidiary and contractor for rehabilitating the oil infrastructure. **According to workers from the South Oil Company in Basra, which KBR is obliged to rehabilitate, they are not aware of any repairs KBR has actually undertaken.**

With Iraq's oil refineries still awaiting rehabilitation, Iraq cannot refine enough crude oil to meet domestic consumption. The US is instead exporting Iraq's crude oil and employing KBR under a no-bid cost-plus-fixed-fee contract to import gasoline from neighboring Turkey and Kuwait.

Just outside the Coalition Provisional Authority headquarters, a small unorganized group of employees of the former regime gathered and unfurled their banner: "We need our salaries now." They were demanding 10 months' worth of back wages. "We thank you because you saved our lives from Saddam. But we want to live so you should help us," their unofficial spokesperson Karim Hassin said indignantly, addressing the unresponsive 10-foot high wall protecting the compound. "Paul Bremer [CPA head] promised us salaries. We heard it with our own ears. What happened to these promises?"

Hearing about all these developments, it would appear that the occupation forces have come to liberate Iraq on a really tight budget. The common refrain of the Iraqis who have chosen to work with the US-installed bureaucracy is that there is no quid pro quo. **Pressed to explain the failure of his ministry to significantly increase power, for example, Iraq's electricity chief, Ayhem al-Samaraie, grudgingly admitted: "I have no money in my ministry at all."**

Indeed, a quick visual survey of Baghdad from the dirty streets, the aging machines and the raging workers to the unbelievably long lines for gasoline, makes this explanation for Iraq's reconstruction problems sound almost convincing. That the reconstruction effort is in shambles because there is no money almost seems plausible.

But it isn't.

Last November, the US Congress eventually passed George W Bush's \$87 billion request for Iraq with no fuss.

So there's money; it's just not going around. And here perhaps lies the solution to the mystery of how the world's superpower and the world's biggest corporations can't even begin to put Iraq together again after almost nine months: The reconstruction is less about reconstruction than about making the most money possible.

Firms like Raytheon, Boeing and Northrop Gruman will get their fair share of the \$4 billion that the US is spending monthly on military expenses in Iraq; but there will not be an extra dime for the New Iraqi Army recruits. Bechtel's useless Oklahoma-made air-conditioners will be paid for under the \$680 million no-bid contract; but there will be no money for the sorely needed Russian-made components for Najibiya's turbines. Halliburton and its sub-contractors creamed off \$61 million importing oil from Kuwait; but there will be no pay rise for Iraq's oil refinery workers.

While the US finds it increasingly hard to raise funds for the occupation, there is still enough money for the most critical aspects of the reconstruction. Those profiting from it, however, are determined to keep the biggest share possible to themselves. The bottom-line of the reconstruction mess is the bottom-line: little gets done because contractors cannot see beyond the dollar sign.

"The profit motive is what brings companies to dangerous locations. But that is what capitalism is all about," Richard Dowling, spokesperson of the US Army Corps of Engineers, the agency that contracted Kellogg, Brown & Root, explained. "If it takes profit to motivate an organization to take on a tough job, we can live with that. Yes, there's a profit motive but the result is the job gets done."

This war to liberate Iraq was never about liberating the Iraqis. Unsurprisingly then, the reconstruction effort is also not about reconstruction. In this occupation, the US and its allies' primary goal is not to rebuild what they have destroyed; it's to make a fast buck.

Contractors like Bechtel and KBR are assured of getting paid no matter what; that the power plants will eventually be constructed is just incidental. They will be built in order to justify the pretext for the profit-making: that a war had to be waged and that everything that was destroyed now has to be rebuilt.

As Stephen Bechtel, the company's founder, once made clear, "We are not in the construction and engineering business. We are in the business of making money."

For the post-war contractors, this is not a reconstruction business; it is a hundred-billion-dollar bonanza.

The US and its contractors are not even trying, for a simple reason: it's not the point. To assume that they are striving, but are merely failing because of factors beyond their control, is to presuppose that there is an earnest effort to succeed. There isn't. **If there were, there should have been a coherent plan and process in which the welfare of the Iraqis - and not of the corporations - actually comes first. Instead, the Iraqis' need for electricity comes after Bechtel's need for billion-dollar projects. The Iraqis' need for decent living wages becomes relevant only after Halliburton has maximized its profits.**

Indeed, if there were a sincere attempt to succeed, the US, as the responsible occupying power, should have had no qualms giving Iraqis what many emphatically say they need to finally make things work: the authority and the resources. "If only the money and spare parts were provided," electricity official Jasim said, "we could do a surgical operation."

"If I'm going to do it without KBR, I can do it," said al-Khshab. "We have been doing this for the past 30 years without KBR. Give me the money and give me the proper authority and I'll do it." But the US won't because who knows what the Iraqis would do? Ask the Russians to repair their power plants? Actually succeed in reconstructing their country without the involvement of Bechtel and Halliburton?

The US taxpayers are not parting with billions of dollars of their hard-earned pay to give away to some lucky Russian firm. US and coalition soldiers are not sacrificing their lives to protect the wussy French. The US did not liberate Iraq in order to let the long disempowered Iraqis rebuild their own country.

As the reconstruction process continues to disillusion Iraqis, the myth that the US is here to help is also steadily collapsing. With no light, no gasoline and no paychecks, more and more Iraqis are no longer just cursing the darkness. "If you want to live in peace, Americans, give us our salary," warned Hassim, the Iraqi protesting at the gates of the Coalition Provisional Authority. "If you do not, next time we'll come back with weapons."

Notes

(1) Steve Schifferes, "The challenge of rebuilding Iraq", BBC News October 21, 2003.

(2) Walter Pincus, "Skepticism about US deep, Iraq poll shows", Washington Post, November 12, 2003.

(3) Elizabeth Becker, "Companies from all over seek a piece of action rebuilding Iraq", New York Times, May 21, 2003.

(4) Christian Aid, "Iraq: The missing billions: Transition and transparency in post-war Iraq". Briefing paper for the Madrid donors' conference 10.23.03

Received:

M writes about his experiences with soldiers resisting the Vietnam War during the 1960's. For some, the breaking point was simple waste and stupidity:

"I BEGAN TO RESIST IN THE ARMY AFTER THEY TOLD ME TO DRIVE THE TANK THRU THE WHEAT-FIELD, 'WE'LL PAY THE (GERMAN) FARMER PLENTY OF COMPENSATION.'

I COME FROM MINNESOTA FARM, I SAID I'D DRIVE AROUND THE WHEAT, THEY SAID NO, BE REALISTIC. MANEUVERS GO THRU, NOT AROUND. I THOUGHT FUCK THAT, IT'S RIPE WHEAT... (VEBLEN WOULD HAVE LOVED THAT.

Another

"WE FLEW CHICKEN MISSION'S IN B-52S TO THE SOVIET SIBERIAN BORDER, THEY KEPT THE OLD B-46'S, B 47'S, IN ACTION, USED THEM FOR 'DIVE BOMBING' (NOT MADE FOR IT, WEAKENED WING STRUTS)

ONE, WE WERE GOING TO REFUEL, OVER BUFFALO, JUST FIRE-BALLED.

I GUESS WE COULD HAVE LOST BUFFALO.

ANOTHER B46 (OR 47 ?) WENT DOWN IN ALBUQUERQUE, WITH H BOMBS, ALMOST WENT OFF. AH WELL, THERE MUST BE A GOD"

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