

A Letter to the Troops

9 April 2009

To All of Our Troops,

Today marks the six-year anniversary of the fall of Saddam Hussein—his fleeing and the Iraqi people pulling his statue down with their bare hands. You or one of your many brethren has been here helping the Iraqi people and Iraq. It has been six years of sufferance and six years away from your homes and families. I would like to thank each man and woman that has served in the country of my birth.

I do not want a single Soldier to doubt what they have done in Iraq because of the news—American or from any country. Too many times, the news doesn't reflect the truth of our accomplishment. The news seems to use political wants instead of facts in their stories. It is a fact that we have profoundly helped Iraq and its people. It is a fact that because of your sacrifices, Iraq has a chance at true democracy.

I was born in Iraq and lived here with my family until after my college. I saw firsthand how Saddam Hussein destroyed this great country and fractured its people. In 1993, I moved to the United States, where I worked with the mayor of Louisville, Kentucky, on the international affairs committee and served as a Louisville Public Library speaker on Iraqi and Middle Eastern culture. In February 2006, I returned to Iraq to work as a bilingual-bicultural advisor with the U.S. Department of Defense at Camp Bucca.

Iraq is a country with a history of higher learning reaching back to the Middle Ages. Baghdad was a place that European scholars traveled to learn. In the 1950s and 1960s, 82 percent of Iraqis finished high school and advanced to some form of higher education. After the damage from Saddam Hussein and his regime, 12 percent of Iraqis managed to enter high school in 2003. Today, high school attendance has jumped to 36 percent. In the time the United States has been here, it has increased more than 300 percent.

The Iraq of today now sees teachers well-paid and a focus on the importance of education it had in the past. When we came to this country, the teachers and professors made \$3 to \$5 dollars a month; today's teachers are one of the highest paid professions in Iraq, making well over \$500 to \$700 a month. Before the fall of Saddam Hussein, the children in Iraq were taught mostly how great Saddam Hussein was and were taught propoganda; now Iraqis are learning about math, literature, Arabic language, and real history with a renewed pride in their country.

Because of your dedication and efforts, women's issues and rights can be discussed by Iraqi women. Women have a say in their parliament. Iraqi women have a say in their government. Until we toppled Saddam Hussein, there was one lone "yes" woman in his bogus government. Now, there are many women elected into Iraq's government with a provision pending to have 25 percent of the parliament women. Iraq today may not reflect the women's rights of America, but it is beginning to reflect the women's rights before Saddam's regime.

In today's Iraq, the families' and each person's standard of living has increased substantially—less unemployment, greater job opportunities, a higher quality of life, and opportunities to travel. Until the fall of Saddam Hussein, the average Iraqi couldn't even get a passport until they were 75 years of age or they just wanted to travel to Mecca. Now, I watch as my brothers travel to places and see sights I never thought they would have the opportunity to see. Imagine how different Iraq will be by just having the

experiences of seeing how the rest of the world lives and governs itself. None of this would be possible if it weren't for each of our Soldier's service.

Iraq has a new sense of religious freedom. Until the fall of Saddam Hussein, no Shi'i Islam could celebrate or openly practice their religion. While Muqtada al-Sadr speaks against the truth, until the fall of Saddam Hussein, neither he nor his family could speak of something as simple as Ashura (a religious Islamic festival). Though he uses his speech to hurt instead of help, the Iraqi people are beginning to see right through men who are using religion as a vehicle for power instead of a vehicle for faith.

Just in reading Iraq's newspapers and television channels, we see that we have given them the inalienable right of free speech. Before we came to help the Iraqi people, there were only two television channels, which were state-controlled. There were no satellites allowed in any home. The people of Iraq had no right of free speech and assembly. The simple fact that they can hold a protest and voice their opinion is proof above all else that we have made a massive difference in the life of each Iraqi.

While Iraq is still growing and will face many challenges ahead, each of you can be proud of the foundation and hope we've given Iraq to find itself. While I am sure that mistakes have been made, I am also sure that the heart of every decision was to help Iraq and its people. While I am sure that there are some Iraqis who hate Americans, I am sure that the majority of Iraqis thank us each day for the hope we have given them. While we have not pleased every country in the world by helping Iraq reach freedom, I know that each Soldier serves his or her country because America has always been the beacon of hope for all who are suffering injustice and tyranny. Americans have always come to the aid of those who need us because that is what it means to be American.

I wanted to thank each of you for what you have given, for the lives you have touched, and for the sacrifices you have made. As you go about your day, please don't watch the news and be disheartened. Whether our news in America calls this the "not good war," each of you know that everything you and your comrades have given was for the good of thousands. As you see the scenes of protestors in Iraq, realize that their right to protest is just another sign of our victory to free Iraq. If you are browsing a Web site of Iraqi newspapers, realize that their freedom of speech is only because of the never-ending determination of our Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps.

I hope that each of you know in your heart that there are far more Iraqis who are thankful than those who are resentful. Tomorrow, I hope you hear the appreciation as much as you hear the protests. As an Iraqi by birth, I thank you. As an American by choice, I am proud of you. And as a human, I feel in awe of your sacrifices for this good and noble cause.

Respectfully,
Salah Al-hindawy

Mr. Al-hindawy was born in Iraq in 1966. He graduated from the University of Baghdad with a major in Arabic language. He came to the United States in July 1993 and currently works as a U.S. Department of Defense bilingual-bicultural advisor at Camp Bucca, Iraq.