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War of Words Project

Veterans Report Progress In Iraq

**Press Conference held by Americas Majority
at the National Press Club, Washington DC**

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John Altevogt:

I'm John Altevogt. I'm the communications director for Americas Majority.

The project we call "The War of Words" predated its formal sponsorship by my organization. It was the spontaneous reaction of veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom who came home, turned on their television sets, and were treated to a war that was as foreign figuratively as literally:

- a war in which U.S. soldiers were oppressors rather than liberators.
- a war in which chaos and carnage were daily features, but from which cooperation was absent.
- a war in which American soldiers were routinely accused of atrocities against innocent civilians,
- a war in which the criminal exterminations of defenseless non-combatants by jihadi serial killers and Ba'athist thugs were reported as acts of national liberation.
- above all, a war that America was losing.

This reporting was so far removed from what they had seen in Iraq, and what they had done there, that these soldiers could not keep silent. Men like Lieutenant Lawrence Indyk, Corporal Richard Gibson, and Sergeant J.D. Johannes started giving talks anywhere they could regarding the abyss separating the war they fought from the one that they saw on TV. From their varied vantage points within the conflict,

- they spoke of their pride at having liberated the Iraqi people from Saddam's murderous tyranny.
- they talked of the restraint of American arms – of casualties taken to avoid exerting the overwhelmingly superior kill-power that U.S. troops brought to the field.
- they talked of the signs of gratitude and cooperation that they experienced among

Iraqis, even as they navigated the pitfalls of a passionate, but narrow, insurgency.

- They talked of the emerging democratic will of the Iraqi people, expressed both in their elections, and in the negotiations of the Iraqi factions.
- Above all, they talked of their amazement that the war that they, along with Iraqi patriots, were clearly winning, should be regularly portrayed as a quagmire, or another Vietnam.

Americas Majority has brought together dozens of these citizen-soldiers who are proud not only of their service, but of their mission: Making America safer by making the Middle East more democratic. We have produced, and begun to air, broadcast spots that defend the role of American arms in the ongoing war against terror. I urge you to go to our web site, AMERMAJ.com, to see for yourself what these young patriots are saying about their service. That's A-M-E-R-M-A-J-dot-com.

Today, several Iraq veterans are going to give their perspectives on America's war. Lieutenant Lawrence Indyk will describe the metrics of success – the progress of Iraqi civil society in the post-Saddam era. Marine Corporal Richard Gibson, who experienced the invasion at its spearhead – on the front line with the 3-5 Marines – will describe the evolving security situation. And finally, former Marine Sergeant J.D. Johannes, who covered his old unit in Iraq as an embedded reporter, will discuss today's combat troops and today's war correspondents from his unique vantage point in both worlds.

After the presentations have been completed, we will be happy to entertain your questions.

Our first speaker, Lieutenant Lawrence Indyk, spent most of his active duty in Iraq as the leader of the chemical platoon of the 3-2 Striker Brigade combat team. This war almost killed him twice – once before it began. In September of 2001, he drove his sister to New York University, where she was enrolled, and lingered for a bit of sight-seeing. He planned to visit the World Trade Center the morning of

September 11, in order to take in the best possible view. But on September 10th, a friend, suddenly arrived from Europe, persuaded him to change his plan. He did not keep his appointment at the twin towers. And consequently, he did not die.

Instead, he enlisted. Lawrence went through basic at Fort Sill, then officer training school in Fort Benning. In Iraq, his principal posting was at Talifar, a city of 250,000 roughly 80 kilometers equidistant between Mosul and the Syrian border.

Lieutenant Indyk's second brush with death, for which he earned a Purple Heart, occurred during an action on May 29, 2004. That day, a roadside bomb upended his Fox vehicle as he was driving security for a convoy headed from Talifar to Mosul.

It is my pleasure to present Lieutenant Lawrence Indyk.

Lt. Lawrence Indyk:

First, I'd like to thank Rich Nadler and John Altevogt, and the rest of the staff at Americas Majority for bringing this together – for giving me and other veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom a big microphone in our nation's capital, the seat of American Democracy. Most of the guys who fight America's wars never get that. But a lot of us wish for one.

You won't find an Iraqi veteran who doesn't have strong opinions about his service, and whose opinions aren't colored by his particular experience. I'm no exception.

I was stationed in Northern Iraq - in areas that were primarily Kurdish. And that colors how I think about the war. Ever since the US imposed a no-fly zone after the first Gulf War, the Kurds, under the curtain of American air cover, have been developing their own vigorous democracy. They respect American arms. Many of them consider us liberators. They've prospered under our protection. And they were pleased at the fall of Saddam, who had destroyed so many of their villages, and expropriated or executed so many of their kin.

But the "Kurdish North" of media fame is quite a bit more complex. Anyone who has read the Old Testament knows that since the days of Sennacherib and the "Ten Lost Tribes," the rulers of the Tigris-Euphrates basin have displaced conquered peoples, and replaced them with groups loyal to the government. Saddam did this on a large scale, just as the Turks did in a previous age. The result is a highly heterogeneous population – predominantly Kurdish, but with many Arabs, Assyrians, and Turkmen as well. Some of these groups enjoyed special favor under Saddam's rule, and are therefore ill-disposed to the American-led coalition that destroyed the old order.

Other factors affect the complex relations between Iraqis and Coalition soldiers. Americans have done a lot of construction and reconstruction, including schools, hospitals, water, and sewage facilities. Private contractors were building electrical facilities and cell phone towers. And we were doing some public relations work as well – building soccer stadia, swimming pools, and community centers.

The biggest non-Kurdish concentrations were in the cities. These were potential havens for insurgents. And anywhere insurgents were based, Americans were resented – more for the attacks we might attract than for what we might do. So to summarize my personal experience: Attitudes toward US troops varied, from overt friendliness in the Kurdish rural areas of the North to thinly-veiled hostility in the Sunni Arab sections of Talifar and Mosul.

I can't minimize either attitude. I saw gratitude, and I saw violence – up close and personal.

But this war isn't about my personal experience. Iraq is a big place. A lot of people will tell you, truthfully, a lot of different things. So how do we assess the truth?

U.S. policy in Iraq aimed to replace an ultra-aggressive, terror-harboring tyranny with a constitutional democracy, at peace with its neighbors. And to assess our progress on that track, we need metrics that are not personal:-- criteria we can measure.

One set of metrics is material. How are Iraqis living? How much do they earn? Are vital services, like health care, transportation and education, improving or declining? And what of the infrastructure – electricity, water supply, and, yes, oil?

Another set of metrics is institutional. The express intent of U.S. policy is to create the civic institutions of democracy – a constitution, a free press, political parties, minority rights, and democratic elections. I would also include security in this set – safety from crimes against person and property, including crimes of terror. But I will leave this for Rich Gibson to describe a little later.

A final set of metrics is subjective. What do Iraqis think about their situation in the post-Saddam era? How do they evaluate the material aspects of their lives? How do they evaluate their new institutions? It is one thing to create the trappings of a democracy. But do Iraqi people want it? Do they like the new ways, or do they yearn for the old?

This last set of metrics is particularly important for anyone who wants to know the truth about Iraq, because it provides a cross check on the others. If material and institutional circumstances are really improving, then that fact will show up in the attitudes of the Iraqi people themselves. The polls will either confirm what the official statistics tell us, or they will contradict those statistics.

Let's take a look at the objective metrics first.

The World Bank and International Monetary Fund report that per capita income has more than doubled since the war year of 2003. But more to the point, it has risen 30 percent in chained dollars from 2002, the year before the war.

In 2005, Iraq real Gross Domestic Product – that's growth above inflation – increased 3.7 percent. The World Bank projects Iraqi GDP growth in 2006 at 16 percent, largely because of the decline of the insurgency in most of the country, and the upsurge of business activity.

More than 30,000 start-up enterprises have registered with authorities since the war, and no

one knows how many small businesses are unregistered. Business is booming. Iraqi entrepreneurs report massive increases in the sales of farm machinery, computers, washing machines, refrigerators, freezers, and air conditioners.

The number of automobiles in Iraq has more than doubled from pre-war days. Household cell phone ownership rose from 6 percent in 2004 to 65 percent in early 2006. The means that the speed with which transactions are accomplished has accelerated by an order of magnitude.

The number of household that access satellite TV reached 86 percent at the end of 2005.

An important factor in the economic rebound is the solidity of the new Iraqi dinar, which is trading against the dollar at a street rate above its official exchange rate – a phenomena unheard of in the Third World. This is in marked contrast to the two radical depreciations of the dinar under Saddam – the first during his extended aggression against Iran in the 1980s, the second following his truncated aggression against Kuwait in the 1990s.

This is an important point. Economically, the “Land of the Two Rivers” is one of the most blessed pieces of real estate on earth. Its fertile agriculture made it a cradle of civilization. Its oil reserves are second only to those of Saudi Arabia, although its exports, at peak, were less than half of what they might have been.

It is a fact that Saddam Hussein assassinated not only his political opponents, but his nation's economy. The 1990 Ba'athist Constitution was explicitly socialist. It prohibited private ownership of natural resources and means of production. Foreign investment was discouraged by prohibitions on the acquisition of land, buildings, and factories. Saddam's perpetual wars and personal extravagance assured an unsustainable level of debt. He sought to allay this debt two ways: by inflation, which confiscated wealth from Iraqis, and by aggression which confiscated wealth from his neighbors.

Internally, Ba'athist Iraq was among the most over-regulated states in the world. Saddam parceled out monopolies over hiring and management to favored tribal chieftains in sector after sector, guaranteeing the triumph of bureaucracy, and the futility of merit.

The new Iraqi constitution, approved by 79 percent of Iraqi voters, tore down the walls prohibiting investment and accumulation. A stable currency stimulated the industry of the Iraqi people, and the interest of foreign investors.

A reliable store of value is essential for democratic reform. It enables ordinary Iraqi families to accumulate wealth and goods, and thereby validates the new regime. The material indices of the economy indicate that this is occurring rapidly.

The oil industry still lags its pre-war level of production – but not by much. In 2002, prior to the war, Saddam's rickety, poorly maintained oil infrastructure was pumping roughly 2 million barrels of oil per day. By late 2005, despite sabotage, Iraq was pumping 1.9 million barrels. But the spike in per-barrel prices more than compensated for the decline in production. Iraq earned roughly \$17 billion in oil revenues in 2005 – roughly twice what it earned from oil in 2002, before the war began.

Here's another aspect of oil production. It is widely assumed in the west that oil sabotage is a revolutionary act of crazed jihadists attempting to bring down the government. Well, some of it is. But much of the sabotage is perpetrated by common thieves, who siphon oil to sell it. Saddam stopped this by saturating the oil infrastructure with security personnel – an option unavailable to the new government until recently. But as the numbers of security personnel available to protect the infrastructure increased, the attacks decreased. And in fact, assaults on oil industry assets declined 31 percent in 2005.

It is a common complaint that the coalition has failed to bring electric power to its pre-war levels. This may seem true to a Baghdad-based press corps. In parts of the capital, electricity was indeed more plentiful under Saddam, who

diverted electricity there from other parts of Iraq's under-maintained grid. But the U.S.-led coalition has increased electrical power overall, adding some 1,400 megawatts of supply. This has given electric power to an extra four million Iraqis who lacked it before the war.

To summarize: Iraq's objective indices of economic well-being are trending decisively upward. Per capita income, business formation, consumer purchases, utility access, transportation, and even oil revenues – all are improving.

What about the institutional metrics of democracy?

Iraq has 14 million adults. Eight-point-five million of them voted for the interim government in January of 2005. That's a 61 percent turnout.

In October, 2005, 10 million participated in the election for a new constitution – one that protected free speech, private property, and the rights of women and religious minorities. That's a 71 percent turnout. Among those who voted, seventy-nine percent supported the new framework – a decisive majority of the entire electorate.

Roughly three hundred parties and coalitions registered for the December election, which elected a 4-year parliament. Eleven million Iraqis voted – over 78 percent of those eligible.

During these elections, Iraqis chose thousands officials for their cities and provincial governates as well.

Another institution vital to the democracy is an indigenous security force capable of protecting persons and property. Despite the systematic targeting of Iraqi police and soldiers by the insurgent groups, the numbers of both are rapidly increasing. Rich Gibson will describe the many-faceted significance of this trend later. But here I'll just mention that the number of Iraqi security forces surpassed the number of American troops last March. There are currently some 238,000 Iraqi soldiers and police. Seven police academies graduate 3,500 cadets every ten weeks.

Another statistical measure of the progress of democracy is the growth of the institutions that promote free speech. Today, reporters for over 100 newspapers service a very, very free press. Iraq has 44 commercial TV stations, and 72 commercial radio stations. Under Saddam, the broadcast media was publicly controlled and heavily censored. State-free TV and radio is a post-war phenomenon – a gift of the Coalition to the people of Iraq.

I mentioned earlier that survey data of Iraqi public opinion enables us to cross-check our objective metrics. It's one thing to say "real per capita GDP" is up. It's another to ask a pita vendor in Mosul if he's doing better under the new regime. Its one thing to record that hundreds of schools and hospitals have been built. It's another to ask a mom in Talifar whether education and health care have improved.

The largest and most scientific polls of Iraqi opinion are the National Surveys of Iraq supervised by Oxford Research International in February of 2004, and again in November of 2005. The demographically weighted poll, conducted by Arabic speakers, interviewed 4,363 Iraqis from all major demographic groups, regions, and religions.

The polling reaffirms the objective metrics of coalition progress. Post-war Iraq is undergoing a remarkable renaissance. Prosperity is spreading. Security is increasing. Services are improving. And faith in democracy is intensifying.

Let's take these one at a time:

In their broadest self-descriptions of well-being, Iraqis compare the post-war era favorably to Saddam's reign. By 52-to-29 percent, they consider their own lives better now. By 69-to-11 percent, they expect things to improve in the country overall within the year.

Asked about the availability of, quote, "basic things you need for your household", Iraqis prefer the current regime to life under Saddam by 43 percent to 26 percent. Asked about the their family's overall economic situation, 43 percent said it had improved, compared to 24 percent who said it had gotten

worse. These same respondents expected their family economic situation to improve over the next year by a whopping 76 percent-to-4.

Iraqis' overall satisfaction with the material aspects of regime change is better understood through the Oxford survey's detailed questions.

- By a 6 percent margin, Iraqis said that the availability of clean water had improved compared to the prewar years.
- By an 8 percent margin, they said their local government had improved.
- By a 16 percent margin, Iraqis said that medical care was more accessible now than under Saddam.
- And by a 26 percent margin, Iraqis said that schools were better now – a reflection of the coalitions efforts to improve both school infrastructure and teachers salaries.

One of the most amazing findings, to American ears, is that, while security remains the number one concern of Iraqis, they feel safer now than under Saddam. Rich Gibson will explain these findings – both the numbers and their significance -- a bit later in our presentation.

What the polling results tell is that the objective metrics don't lie. Material conditions are improving in Iraq, and the people who live there say so.

But as impressive as these numbers are, they pale before the expectations Iraqis hold for the future. Between 73-and-77 percent of Iraqis expect life to improve over the next year in the following areas:

- overall security
- safety from crime
- the availability of jobs
- the supply of electricity
- the availability of clean water
- the availability of medical care
- the quality local schools
- the quality local government
- the availability of basic household necessities, and

- overall family prosperity

Only 3 percent of Iraqis expect these factors to get worse.

How do Iraqis feel about the second set of metrics: their new institution? They have democracy now, but do they like it?

Well, we've already seen that they think their local governments have improved, and that services are better. In February of 2004, the institution in which Iraqis expressed the most confidence was their religious leadership. But by late 2005, two institutions commanded greater confidence: the new Iraqi police and the new Iraqi Army.

The January 2004 survey results on Iraqi democracy were somewhat confusing. The Oxford pollsters asked Iraqis what they sought in their leadership. Did they want leaders who were strong, or religious, or democratically elected? Well, in truth, they wanted all three, and said so.

But the follow-up poll at the end of 2005 was much clearer: I will cite the question in full – Quote –

"There can be differences in the way government is set up in a country, called a political system. From the three options I am going to read to you, which one do you think would be best for Iraq now? And which one of these systems will be best for Iraq in five years' time?" – close quote

The three options listed were:

- First: "Strong leader: a government headed by one man for life"
- Second: "Islamic state: where politicians rule according to religious principles." and
- and Third: "Democracy: a government with a chance for the leader or leaders to be replaced from time to time through elections."

Here are the results. For the present, Iraqis prefer democracy to one man rule by two-to-one, and they prefer democracy to theocracy by a margin of four-to-one. But five years out, they prefer democracy to totalitarianism and

theocracy by four-to-one and ten-to-one respectively.

Democracy is Iraqis' clear preference now, and their overwhelming preference for the future.

So let's go back to our initial question: What do the metrics – the statistical measures – tell us of Coalition progress toward our policy goal of a safe, prosperous, and democratic Iraq?

In terms of the pollsters' classic "right-way/wrong-way" question, Iraqis obviously think they've turned the corner: things are appreciably better now, and will be far better in the near future. Democracy is good now, and will be better in the future.

Now, if Iraqis listened to American media, they'd hear that their economy is wrecked and that their services are in shambles. They'd hear that they are less safe now than before the war, and that they are religious fanatics who demand a theocracy.

But they don't get their news on Iraq through the Western media. They live there. And they say the opposite.

Thank you for your attention.

John Altevogt:

Thank you, Lt. Indyk. Our next presenter, Marine Corporal Richard Gibson, is currently enrolled as a voice student at the Music Conservatory of the University of Missouri in Kansas City. He is perhaps the only operatic bass-baritone in the country trained in anti-terror combat tactics.

Rich joined the corps just out of High School, in June 1999. He went to the Camp Pendleton School of Infantry, where he trained as a mortar man. Then he was assigned to the Marine Security Forces School in Chesapeake Bay VA.

Following stints in Bahrain and Okinawa, Rich was stationed in Kuwait prior to the launch of Operation Iraqi Freedom. As a 3-5 Marine, he was at or near the front lines from the beginning of the invasion through the overthrow of the Ba'athist regime. His unit fought its way

up to Samara, and was back in Baghdad in time for the first suicide bombings.

I'm pleased to present Corporal Richard Gibson.

Richard Gibson:

There is one point on which advocates and critics of the Iraq War agree: We cannot succeed unless the Iraqis are safe in their persons and in their possessions.

The Oxford Research International survey found that ordinary Iraqis rated security as their major concern. Thirty-eight percent considered it "bad" or "very bad." And 33 percent called it the number one problem to be tackled in the upcoming year.

But 63 percent of Iraqis consider themselves safe in their neighborhoods, and 61 percent of Iraqis consider the security situation good overall. A 6 percent majority said that overall security had gotten better, rather than worse, since the days of Saddam. and a 15 percent majority said that their families were better protected against crime now than under Saddam.

The Iraqi opinion that their nation is safer now, so odd to American ears, wasn't unique to this poll. An even larger survey taken in February of 2004 – closer to the war – found the same thing. Most Iraqis consider their personal security situation pretty good.

But the optimism does not end there. An overwhelming majority of Iraqis – 77 percent-to-4 percent – think that security is headed in the right direction, and that it will improve in 2006.

So we have four findings to reconcile – First, that security is Iraqis' biggest worry; second, that most consider their personal security good, third, that a plurality consider it better now than under Saddam; and fourth, that a majority expect it to be a whole lot better in the future.

And yet every night we turn on the tube, and hear that another 25 Iraqis have been killed in bombings.

The reason Americans have a tough time reconciling actual Iraqi attitudes is that nothing in our experience describes how fearful life was in Ba'athist Iraq.

During the Anfal operation, Human Rights Watch calculates that 100,000 Kurds were killed. The Documental Center for Human Rights in Iraq has compiled histories of over 600,000 civilian executions under Saddam. Then, there are the 500,000 who perished during Saddam's mindless assault against Iran in the '80s, and the slaughter of Shi'ites after the First Gulf War – In stateside newscasts, you see these mass graves being excavated now and again. Iraqi stations cover it more.

International Body Count, an anti-war organization that has tallied Iraqi civilian deaths since January 2003, gives a low estimate of 25 deaths per day, and a high estimate of 28 deaths per day. Dr. Stephen Cass, an Iraqi historian at Oxford, estimates the average regime-caused civilian death toll in Saddam's era at between 70 and 125 deaths per day.

So now we can see why Iraqis think security is a problem – there's still a lot of violent death. And now we can see why they call this precarious situation an improvement. A lousy day under the coalition yields a body count routine under the Ba'athists.

So if we hypothesize that the average Iraqi knows more about his life than the average American newsmen, then we must conclude that the security situation in Iraq is better now than it was under Saddam – not for American newsmen, but for Iraqis.

This correlates with what we objectively know about violence under Saddam. That violence was painstakingly documented by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and The Documental Center for Human Rights. In Baghdad today, a terrorist may kill you with an ill-timed I.E.D., but the Makhabaret no long comes to your door, herds your relatives to a cell, tortures and shoots them, then bills you for the bullets. All apologies for Abu Ghraib, American soldiers are neither torturers nor serial killers.

When surveyed, Iraqis' main complaint about American troops is that when insurgents target us, they often get hit. Asked point-blank by Arab pollsters at the end of 2005 "What makes you feel unsafe?", 54 percent of Iraqis answered, "Terrorism." Only ten percent answered "Coalition troops." Today, the most popular shows on Iraqi TV are those that feature Iraqi cops bringing insurgent Baathists and al Qaeda to justice.

Insecurity in Iraq is also regional. Under Saddam, mass killings occurred in the northern governates, where the Kurds are concentrated, and in the southern governates, where Shi'ites predominate. Today, most residents in these areas feel a lot safer, and say so when pollsters bother to ask.

So now we know why most Iraqis consider security a problem, and why they consider their own security somewhat better. What remains to be explained is why they are so wildly enthusiastic about the security situation going forward.

And the answer is fairly simple. Two tipping points were reached in 2005 – junctures that are decisive indicators of Coalition victory over the insurgency. Most Iraqi understand them. Most Americans do not.

The first occurred last March, when the numbers of Iraqi security forces on the ground surpassed those of Coalition troops. The Coalition and the elected government now have the capacity to "clear, hold, and build," as the generals put it.

The second tipping point occurred on December 15, when Iraqis elected their first national four-year legislature, with a turnout in the Central and Western governates – the majority-Sunni areas – exceeding 60 percent. This obviously strengthened the government. But more subtly, it splintered the insurgency.

Let's look at some of the numbers associated with each of these tipping points.

First: boots on the ground. Iraqi security forces are now 238,000 strong. Whatever capacity the insurgents had to capture territory in 2004 dissipated in 2005. The Iraqi army and the Coalition have broken insurgent strongholds

in Mosul, Najaf, Samara, Tal Afar, Fallujah, and many of the western Anbar towns bordering Syria.

The Coalition doesn't need Iraqis to capture these areas. Believe me, I was in the first wave of the invasion. The old Iraqi army was no match for what the Marines had to offer, and the insurgents aren't either. But today the Iraqi government holds areas that have been cleared. The reason is simple: The operational size of the force squared off against the insurgents has more than doubled. The Iraqi army includes 120 operational battalions.

At an earlier stage of the conflict – in fact, in the days when I was active-duty – U.S. troops would clear an insurgent area. But we wouldn't garrison it. The politicians wanted us to leave a small footprint, so that an Iraqi government could assume security functions in a credible way. We were not there as conquerors. And we had no intention of replicating Saddam's style of terror.

America gets a lot of blame for our slow start in training Iraqi security personnel. But a lot of America's hesitancy reflected the disputes among Iraqi democrats. To rebuild around the security forces of the old regime was broadly unacceptable to any representative Iraqi government. But to exclude them meant to start practically from scratch.

I'm not here to debate the choices that were made – only to tell you that today, the job is getting done. Mosul, Najaf, and substantial parts of Baghdad are now patrolled by Iraqi government forces. Iraqi forces now man most of the nation's traffic control points and perimeter guard posts.

And Iraqi soldiers do a lot more than garrison duty. Forty of their battalions perform at Level Two. This means they can lead in a ground fight, given logistic and air support from the coalition. At present, roughly a quarter of military operations against insurgents are conducted exclusively by Iraqi troops.

Iraqi troops operate jointly with ours in another 50 percent of operations. As an example: In Sept of 2005, 11 Iraqi battalions

joined 5 from the coalition in the successful battle to clear, occupy, and hold Tal Afar.

During 2004, you used to hear about insurgents capturing police stations. That hasn't happened since January of 2005. There are now a lot more police. This includes 20 provincial SWAT teams that can reinforce any station under attack. Seven Iraqi police academies graduate 3,500 new cadets every two-and-a-half months.

Are these metrics administration propaganda? The Iraqis don't seem to think so. From fall of 2003 to the fall of '05, confidence in Iraqi army increased from 39 percent to 67 percent. Over the same period, public confidence in the Iraqi police rose from 45 percent to 68 percent.

Other measurements highlight the increased effectiveness of the security force we've trained. Most obviously, our own casualties are down. According to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, U.S. troop deaths declined from 714 in 2004 to 673 in 2005; and U.S. wounded declined from 7,990 to 5,639. That's a 27 percent decrease in U.S. casualties over a one year period.

You'd never guess that from the nightly news. But it's exactly what you'd expect if Iraqis were taking more of the exposed positions at checkpoints, or in combat, or in security and stabilization operations.

Does this mean that the terrorists are simply killing Iraqi police and soldiers in our stead? Well, that was indeed the insurgents' strategy. But it's not working. Monthly deaths among Iraqi soldiers and police peaked in July of 2005. Since then, they've declined by 33 percent.

Other soft targets are also working out poorly for al Qaeda. As Lt. Indyk indicated, the security of oil facilities is directly related to numbers and competence of the security forces guarding them. That's how Saddam cut down on siphoning. That's how the coalition has cut down on attacks. There were 146 assaults on the oil infrastructure in 2004. In 2005, that number declined 31 percent, to 101.

The "soft targets" left for the insurgents was the flesh of their fellow citizens. Today,

that is what they chiefly attack. And it has cost them dearly.

As I said earlier, the second tipping point was the election of December 15, when Sunni Arabs of the central and western governates participated in the election of a national government in record numbers.

The two primary insurgent groups have different political goals. The Ba'athist recidivists simply want power. They hoped to wait the coalition out, then reassert the tradition hegemony of the Sunni tribes of Central Iraq over the Shia and Kurds. But Al Qaeda in Iraq, under the leadership of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, wants an Islamic theocracy under Sharia law. The jihadis' list of enemies starts with the coalition – but it doesn't end there.

As long as the coalition remained the primary target, Baathists and al Qaeda could operate together. But that has changed with the growth in the numbers and competence of the Iraqi security forces. The insurgents are no longer dealing with an occupation army, but with the security forces of an elected government. And these forces are extremely popular.

This new fact on the ground has generated a sharp strategic bifurcation. Al Qaeda wants an all-out sectarian war, which ostensibly would rally the jihadist forces of the Sunni world first to Iraq, then to the rest of the Middle East. It therefore attacks unarmed Shi'ite men, women, and children, and, more recently, Shi'ite holy sites.

For the Ba'athists, always the most numerous insurgent force, this policy is lunacy. It not only strengthens popular support for the government, but threatens to turn that government into a blunt instrument of retribution against them. The inclination of the Sunni center, from the tribal leaders to the Ba'athist loyalists, is to parlay their proven capacity for violence against the government into a negotiating point for their peaceful participation in it.

The symptoms of the breach in the insurgent coalition were clear on December 15, when the major Sunni groups summoned their

partisans to join the political process. But the change had been a year in the making. In March of 2005, the government and the coalition received 483 intelligence tips from Iraqis. This rose to 3,300 in August and 4,700 in September.

Al-Qaeda in Iraq is being dismembered by a TIPS hotline.

As an example: The western press duly noted the bombing of the al-Askar shrine, a Shi'ite holy site in a Sunni area. Our pundits predicted, for the hundredth time, an imminent civil war. But they took scant note of the slew of raids against major al Qaeda operatives in the days that followed. Tips led to 487 arrests, including the Syrian al Qaeda operative Abou al Farouq, widely credited with running the financial and operational details of insurgent bombings in Baghdad.

It is fascinating to contrast the triumphant face of the insurgency in our nightly news to the assessments of its leaders in their intercepted correspondence. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi bemoans the popularity of elections, the declining quality of his decimated staff, and the unreliability of his Iraqi allies. "Our enemy is growing stronger day after day," he wrote, "and its intelligence information increases. By God, this is suffocation."

The assessment I've presented differs little from his.

As Lt. Indyk noted earlier: If we want to cross-check trend data, we need to compare our hard numbers against our polling numbers, to see if they line up. I have argued today that the tipping point in the counter-insurgent war of Coalition soldiers and Iraqi patriots was reached last year -- and that it passed unnoticed in the western press. But it didn't pass unnoticed in Iraq. In a November 2005 survey, 71 percent of Iraqis polled said that Iraqi security forces were winning the war; only 9 percent judged that the insurgents were winning.

An interesting side effect of America's war in Iraq has been a massive decline in the popularity of terrorist leaders and terrorist tactics throughout the Islamic world. A 2005 multi-nation poll chaired by Madeleine Albright

– no friend of this administration, or its Iraq policy – found that support for Osama bin Laden has tanked. So has support for terrorist tactics, particularly suicide bombings.

Jihad is clearly losing its luster. Over a two-year period, assent for "Terrorism in defense of Islam" dropped from 73 percent to 26 percent in Lebanon, from 40 percent to 13 percent in Morocco, and from 41 percent to 25 percent in Pakistan.

Jihad's loss is democracy's gain. In Iraq, 80 percent of citizens surveyed now want democracy. And in Morocco, Lebanon, and Jordan, more than 80 percent of respondents now believe that democracy could work well in their own countries.

I will close as I opened: the success of our mission hinges on whether American arms can bring peace and security to a troubled and dangerous region. Both before and after our invasion, Iraqis have lived in an environment far removed from anything that we Americans would call security, or peace. But whether we consider the trends on the ground, the words of the insurgents, or the opinions of the Iraqi people themselves, the conclusion is inescapable: both we and they are headed in the right direction.

John Altevogt:

Thank you, Rich. Now I'd like to introduce Sergeant J.D. Johannes. J.D.'s versatile career has included stints as a news photographer, a documentary producer, and a news director. In politics, he has served as an aide to Kansas Senator Sam Brownback, and as a special assistant to Kansas Attorney General Phill Kline.

J.D. joined the Marines one week out of high school in 1991. He took one of those peculiar military aptitude tests, and learned, much to his surprise, that he was a journalist in the making. His superiors sent him to combat correspondent training, then to military journalism school at Ft. Benjamin Harrison, Indiana.

During JD's active duty career, he served as a Public Affairs Officer, a combat correspondent, and a platoon leader with the 24th Marine Regiment out of Kansas City. He was transferred to the reserves in 1994, and discharged as a Sergeant in 1999.

As the second Gulf war approached, JD finagled his way back to his old unit as an independent newsman, providing feeds for KSNT in Topeka Kansas, KRCG in Jefferson City Missouri, and KYTV in Springfield Missouri. By March 15 of '03, he was in Iraq, covering the 24th Marines out of Camp Fallujah. JD accompanied them on ambush operations, ordnance searches, snatch and grab, and security and stabilization operations. He was also present in Baghdad as the members of Iraqi national assembly finalized their new constitution.

He is planning on returning to Iraq this fall for a five month tour with another Marine infantry unit. I present Sergeant J.D. Johannes.

JD Johannes

One year ago this week, I left my life behind and traveled to Iraq as an embedded reporter.

I spent 5 months living with a Marine infantry platoon. Walking the streets of places like Karmah, Amiriya, and Ferris. I spent days and weeks outside the wire, baking in the sun, sleeping on the dirt, those nights and days punctuated with the call to prayer.

I drank tea and smoked cigarettes with sheiks and Imams. I sat down and ate with men who led villages and families. I bartered with shop keepers for sodas and cigarettes, played soccer with kids. And, I spent a lot of time getting sun burned.

There were a few occasions for furious action. But most of the time the Marines chatted up the locals, gathered intel and chased leads.

I even watched a little satellite TV news with a family. And I was fortunate enough to watch the Arab press in action.

Everyone knows that the history of war is written by the victors. But the war in Iraq has shattered that truism. In Iraq, history is being written by the losers.

It is my thesis that an unconscionable amount of what we in the press have been feeding the American public regarding the war in Iraq is dictated by the propaganda arms of our enemies. Baathist kidnappers and Jihadi bombers are planning their operations not to win the war in Iraq, but to win it in America. To that end, they are assessing what American reporters are willing to cover, and what American news organizations are willing to risk. As an immediate result, many of the primary feeds on the nightly news are coming from sources that are either hostile to American arms, or non-professional in their journalistic standards.

And I am not the only one with a similar thesis. Researchers with the Center for Strategic and International Studies also think the insurgency is intentionally gaming the U.S. and Western media.

As a long-term result, the American public is broadly misinformed on a war that Coalition arms and Iraqi democrats are, in fact, winning.

Let me begin by summarizing the metrics that Lawrence and Rich have presented so well. Iraq is progressing toward democracy, prosperity, and security, as assessed by international economic institutions, by the Coalition military men prosecuting the war, by the insurgents opposing them, and by the Iraqi people themselves.

The sole involved group that believes the Coalition is losing is the press. They believe this by a ratio of roughly two-to-one – an assessment roughly opposite that of our professional military.

If the press believes America is losing the war, they are duty bound to report it that way. And report it they do.

In October of 2005, the Media Research Center published a comprehensive review of all 1,388 Iraq news stories broadcast during the first nine months of that year on the CBS

Evening News, NBC Nightly News, and ABC's World News Tonight. They found that pessimistic assessments dominated, 61 percent-to-15 percent. Moreover, the pessimism increased during the year – the same timeframe in which the Oxford Research polls recorded a move toward broad scale acceptance of the new regime among the Iraqi people.

Over 40 percent of these stories focused on terrorist attacks. Even the reports focusing on Iraqi democracy were largely negative.

I have a personal perspective on this. I was actually in attendance at the Iraqi National Assembly while the factions hammered out the final draft of the Iraqi constitution. And let me tell you: I didn't have much Western company.

In August of 2005 I was passing through Baghdad, through the International Zone while the Iraqi National Assembly was hammering out the drafts of the constitution. I watched as the delegates milled around, lobbying, gossiping, chain smoking. On the landing of the second floor, I saw delegates sitting around on rugs and pillows doing what politicians do.

In the afternoon, the press started showing up. More than a dozen cameras formed a semi circle around a podium filled with microphones. The reporters, producers and photogs swapped gossip. This could be the big announcement!

Then the politicians started coming out. I only speak a smattering of Arabic, but I have seen enough political press conferences in my time to understand what was going on. And the press frenzy was on. The pit of reporters were grilling these guys. And you know what? Spin sounds the same in every language.

But two things struck me as I stood there:

First, five years earlier, the concept of the media questioning Iraqi politicians was unthinkable. Asking Saddam a tough question was a once in a lifetime event for an Iraqi journalist. The journalist would ask the tough question, and then he would be killed. But these reporters -- men, women, Sunnis, Shia, Kurds, and Arabs from across the region -- were grilling these politicians!

The second impression was that I only picked out one other American in the press pit -- a reporter for the L.A. Times. An hour after the press conference was over, CNN showed up for a live shot.

After I saw the Iraqi press doing their thing and the politicians doing theirs, I knew the Iraqis understood democracy. Much was made regarding the political battle over the Iraqi constitution. But even after 230 years, the U.S. still wages heated political battles over Supreme Court Justices.

Iraq's new constitution is a bit lumpy in some areas, rather like our own Articles of Confederation. But as a signpost of democratic progress in the Mideast, it is a masterpiece. It protects freedom of speech, minority rights, due process, and even religious diversity -- all this in a country where four years ago, you could be shot or tortured for insulting the government in public.

This constitution was ratified in an election in which 71 percent of the Iraqis who could vote, did vote. And 79 percent of those voters ratified the new Constitution.

The *Washington Post* put that story on page 13, headlined: "Sunnis failed to Defeat Iraq Constitution: Arab Minority Came Close." On page one, the Post ran: "Military Has Lost 2,000 in Iraq."

Before I tear into my fellow war correspondents, let me offer a word or two in their defense. Our enemies in the war on terror are quite cognizant of the fact that their main battlefield is America. They don't stand a chance against the Coalition in Iraq. But in the U.S.A. their odds are considerably better.

To win in America, they must convince the American public of an utter falsehood: that they are winning in Iraq. And to do that, they must convince the press that they are winning.

This is not hard as hard as it might seem. Journalists are like anyone else. We are the centers of our own universe.

The terror groups target journalists. That keeps them hunkered down and cloistered. It

forces them to depend on non-professional stringers for their information.

To the extent that the terror groups own, suborn, or terrorize these stringers, they can pretty much dictate the kind of feed that goes to Western news sources.

A lot of the stories our enemies retail feed the ideological propensities – the culture, if you prefer – harbored by our major media. I won't emphasize that point here, as it is obsessively covered elsewhere. In this town, no one seems to believe it. But back in Kansas, where I live, it's pretty much a truism.

Finally, the terrorists can depend on bureaucracies that control newsmen to "lock down" their own news organizations. These bureaucracies impede the natural inquisitiveness of reporters, which might otherwise challenge the narrow range of news acceptable to enemies of the Coalition. The guilty parties in this regard are the news organizations and their insurers on one hand, and – I blush to say it – the U.S. military on the other.

I have described this chain of miscommunication as a whole. Now let's look at each of its links.

Cloistering.

When I was running around the Fallujah area with the Marines, I only saw four reporters outside the wire. I saw one NBC news crew, who left after a day because things were kinda boring. Bob Hight, a news anchor from Tampa who was a Marine Combat Cameraman in Vietnam, and a team from Pacific coast Video making a cable TV movie. I would hear that a crew had come in for a day or two while I was out with the Marines, but I actually met more radio talk show hosts in Fallujah than major reporters. The only reporter I met who spent a lot of time outside the wire was Rick Steele, an extremely talented photographer from Zuma news service.

You see, most reporters will do fly-ins. They spend most of their time in a hotel-turned-into-a-bunker, then fly in, get a predetermined story – for instance, 'Fallujah six months later' was very popular -- then fly out.

Sometimes, I would get to see those fly-in reports and wonder if we were seeing the same Fallujah. Then I realized. While I was out in Fallujah for days at a time, they only saw it for a few hours.

The most striking example of this happened on April 2, 2005, when Al Qaeda in Iraq attempted to assault Abu Ghraib prison. I was the only reporter there. The unit I was with was patrolling the area as part of a week-long op, and caught the tail end of the assault. The Marines didn't think much of it. The next day, when the sun came up, we saw the v-beds that didn't even make it off the highway and the remnants of so-called 'lions of taweed.' No one really thought much of it.

It wasn't until we were back in base, watching TV in the chow hall that we discovered that the failed assault was "BIG NEWS" and reporters were showing up after the fact. Two-to-three days after the fact.

As a Marine Colonel told me. Al Qaeda lost that fire-fight in Iraq, but they won on CNN.

Stringers.

Because insurgent groups have generally restricted the ability of Western reporters to cover news first hand, our press corps has become increasingly dependent on the kindness of strangers.

We depend more than we should on feeds from Al Jazeera and other Arab news sources, with all their ideological baggage and terrorist sympathies. We depend on stringers whose standards of facts and evidence may be considerably less than we expect in the West.

We depend more than we should on sources who may be outright plants of the terrorists. And we often depend on Iraqi civilians who may, along with their families, be subject to the most gruesome intimidations.

To the extent that terrorist groups control the Arabic language feeds that Western media accept, they effectively cast the war to fit their agenda. It is an irony of the current conflict that while our intercepts of the jihadis' internal correspondence shows them filled with despair,

their public face in the west remains, compliments of our own press, one of triumphant will.

Ideology.

I promised to leave this alone, in part because the problem, as I see it, exists more in our opinion pages than in our news rooms. Maren Dowd, Frank Rich, Bob Herbert, et al, are entitled to their opinions. But, to give one flagrant example: on January 25, 2005, five days before Iraqis elected their first transitional government, media critic Arthur Chrenkoff located, and 357 stories on U.S. anti-war protestors, 887 stories regarding Coalition prisoner abuse, and 7 hopeful stories about the impending balloting.

I have often thought the media should put a voluntary disclaimer on all commentaries about Iraq stating whether the writer has been to Iraq, how long they were there, the places they visited. That way, when a writer says they have been to Iraq, but spent most of their time in the International Zone or Camp Victory, the reader would have a clear idea of their first hand knowledge.

Bureaucracy.

The final problem that impedes balanced reporting in Iraq is bureaucracy, both in the media and in the military.

A lot of reporters complain about embedding -- that it prevents reporters from getting the whole story, or that it is some kind of brainwashing because after spending a few days with Marines you can't help but like them. But we rarely hear about what the brass, the MSM brass, does to keep its own reporters bottled up and out of touch.

A while back I was contacted by a News Director for a local affiliate. He knew what I did in Iraq and was hoping I was still there because an employee of the station is deployed to Iraq with a National Guard Unit. The News Director contacted their national parent to see if they could get some video of him and feed it back for a series of stories or, at least give them information about how the local station could send a reporter there.

The news director told me about the response from the network. First, he learned from the network that their staff do not leave the hotel. Second, he learned that the network had no idea how the embed process worked. After I explained how simple it really was, he let me know how, um, disappointed he was with the network.

Let me explain. To earn a living working in Iraq as a combat reporter, you need to know how to send email. Beyond that, all you really need is a passport, your own body armor, and a willingness to go outside the wire. It's amazing that more American journalists don't do it.

But the journalists and the networks aren't the only ones to blame. Our military also bottles up a lot of reporting on the scene for no particular reason. I've been a reporter and a Marine, so I understand why this is done. Deception is a major part of war. People are told about operations on a need-to-know basis. One of the primary objectives of battle is to deceive the opponent. That way, he's easier to kill.

Telling a reporter something, or letting a reporter tell something to someone 5,000 miles away, just isn't part of the job description. This is war, not "Truth or Dare." And in war there are real, live, consequences.

The result is that there are literally thousands of acts of heroism and tactical success that are never reported. Most aren't reported because there's no one but soldiers there to see them. A few aren't reported because they'd damage the security of ongoing operations. And some aren't reported just for the hell of it -- because the officer in charge just can't see any dang reason why they should be.

The military could be more open. If it was, the case for what we're doing in Iraq would be strengthened rather than weakened.

What I've just outlined is an explanation of why the war Americans hear about diverges so strangely from the experiences of our soldiers, that of the insurgents, and that of the Iraqi people.

But allow me to clarify one potential misunderstanding of this critique. The problem

with our war reporting is not that it is negative. War sucks. In war, bad things happen all the time.

The rationale for war is peace. The administration has set goals whose purpose is peace – peace and prosperity for the Iraqi people, peace for Iraq’s neighbors; freedom and democracy for those traditionally oppressed in that troubled land – and peace for Americans, too, from terror-sponsoring groups and states.

In failing to report America’s measurable progress toward these goals, so obvious to those on the scene, our press is failing not only the truth, but its own ideals.

Thank you.

John Altevogt

Thank you, JD. this concludes our presentations. If you are interested in what you’ve heard today, I suggest that you go to the America’s Majority home page at: A-M-E-R-M-A-J-dot-com. That’s A-M-E-R-M-A-J-dot-com.