

100314 Iraq Memorial Speech (from Bruce Wallace)

A big thank you to Douglas and Lynne Mackey, and all the volunteers who share the belief that we should not forget; should never forget.

And to you, who chose to brave this rain of tears...What rainy-day words can pay respect in a memorial to those who died? Perhaps a good tribute is one that honors the survivors.

A recent Thomas Friedman op-ed in the New York Times was titled "It's Up to Iraqis Now. Good Luck". He seems to say, "They had their elections. We're done." What an easy answer! Oh, yes, he speaks of progress, and acknowledges the cost in human life, and then urges us to move on, conveniently avoiding two important issues: America's responsibility to Iraqis, and our post-military role.

We have a responsibility that can be measured in lives lost, infrastructure destroyed, culture decimated, and over 4 million innocent Iraqis displaced from their homes. We owe a great debt to those Iraqis who survived the horrors we engendered, and the price of ignoring our responsibilities would be great and lasting.

The notion of just wiping our hands clean and forgetting about the devastation is tempting, but this will be perceived by many as proof of our callous international agenda. It will serve to fuel the anger against the U.S. that was born of our occupation, and has been used so successfully to recruit terrorists around the world.

America must face the truth. We broke it and we ought to help fix it.

We spent some 8 billion dollars every single month of 2009 on occupying Iraq. But we only spent about 2 billion dollars for the whole year in non-military aid; and that aid was apportioned among Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, the West Bank, and Gaza.

As we draw down our military and, thank God, bring our troops out of harm's way in Iraq we will be freeing up billions dollars each month. What to do? What to do? Well...for example, we could take about 40 million of that and build a Government Financial Accounting system to help them run smoothly. There are so many examples of aid that would help; from building structures for re-housing the displaced, to rebuilding schools, orphanages, and medical facilities destroyed over the past 7 years.

We could spend a few billion on electricity and water. Parts of Baghdad were without water for the past three days.

You know there is only one city in Iraq that gets electricity 24 hours a day; Kirkuk, in the North. The rest of Iraqis have power between 6 and 10 hours each day; especially hard in the heat of summer. [[[We did build 2 power plants in Iraq recently. Unfortunately they were built with the blindness we have shown so often that we are laughed at. They were designed to run on gas, but Iraq doesn't have enough gas to run them. So they run on fuel oil, and therefore are much less efficient.]]]

But enough of examples... this is all words. To redirect war-money to aid money we need congressional action, and that's where you can help; directly. Oh, it may take you some 15 minutes to get your message to your representative by letter, or email, or phone call. That's not a lot of time to take to make a difference. Make your voice heard. Don't let the deaths of thousands of our soldiers and the deaths of hundreds of thousands of innocent Iraqis be in vain. Speak for them. Speak loudly, and speak often. Convince your brother or sister to do the same. Talk to a friend about our responsibilities to the Iraqi people.

And here are some words from the heart of a brave medical student in Baghdad. Her name is Lubna, she is in her 20's, struggling to keep hope alive, and she survives:

My dear brothers and sisters, [SHE WRITES]

Salaam from my Baghdad, the city of pain, hope, and magic tales... Well, what can I say?

These days we mark the 7th anniversary of the US-led invasion of my Iraq. That's right! Seven years full of so many crucial events that have managed to change a lot on so many levels...

First let me say that getting rid of Saddam Hussein was an absolutely fantastic thing, he was an evil dictator and a cruel criminal and thank God that he and his brutal regime aren't ruling our Iraq anymore... BUT

The so many mistakes committed by the American occupation authorities in my Iraq that have followed the over-throwing of Saddam Hussein were grave and totally inexcusable. And the consequences of those mistakes have had so many horrific ramifications that have managed to negatively affect every single aspect of day to-day life in my Iraq till the very moment that I am writing this message... Today you guys remember and pay your respects to every single innocent life that has been lost as a consequence of all of this continuing mess and madness, while we down here in my Iraq have never forgotten our loved ones whom we lost over the years.

And that's why every single day of the year, to us, is Iraq memorial day, because for us the agony and tragedy are continuous...

And yet we're sticking to hope and optimism because despite everything we do still believe in something better, yes, we do still have faith in our tomorrow, and one day this darkness that may seem now so eternal will go away and the sun will rise once again over my Mesopotamia, the birth-place of the very first civilization ever known to mankind... With my love... Yours forever, Lubna in Baghdad.

So, let's not leave the Iraqis to struggle alone. Let us reach out and help. Let us make something good come after these 7 long years.

Shukran

Bruce Wallace

And here is Nisreen, who in 2004 bravely helped build the network of students-talking-to-students that continues to this day. Sister Nisreen: