

**Iraq**

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The death of Saddam Hussein's sons in a firefight with coalition military forces made headlines around the world, and rightly so: the deaths of these men, responsible for the torture, maiming and murder of countless Iraqis, make it clearer than ever to the Iraqi people that Saddam's regime is truly gone, and will never come back. Just as important for the future of Iraq, but largely overlooked by the media, is the steady, day-by-day progress being made to restore normality to a country ravaged by more than 30 years of Saddam's tyranny.

Two weeks ago, the governing council of Iraq was established. Its 25 members represent the full spectrum of Iraq's complex social structure - Shiites, Sunnis, Arabs, Kurds, men and women, Christians and Turkmens. The council exercises real political power, appointing interim ministers and working with the coalition on policy and budgets. At the same time, it is responsible for establishing a constitutional process - not just the drafting, but the actual debate over what should be in the constitution. Once that document is ratified by the Iraqi people, elections for a sovereign Iraqi government can be held. Not so well known, however, is that real self-government is already operating locally: the last two weeks saw the establishment of a Baghdad City Council, and now every large city and 85 per cent of the towns in Iraq have their own councils.

The conditions of everyday life are steadily improving. The public food distribution system is up and running. All of Iraq's more than 200 hospitals are again operating. The provision of basic utilities is improving daily, with much of Iraq near prewar service conditions for water. And oil production has surpassed one million barrels per day.

Though Saddam loyalists continue to obstruct and hinder recovery efforts, progress has been made on the security front as well. Large-scale looting has come to an end. Except for the central area -- an important area but a small one -- encompassing Tikrit and Baghdad, security throughout the rest of Iraq has improved. With 32,000 Iraqi police on duty, more than 80 percent of the country now lives in a more secure environment than before the war.

In Iraq as earlier in Afghanistan, it is worth recalling all those disastrous consequences which many predicted, and which have not come to pass. There is no food crisis. There is no refugee crisis. There is no health crisis. There has been no environmental catastrophe.

There is no denying that much work remains to be done. The most difficult problem we face is rebuilding a devastated economy, still based on 1950s and 1960s infrastructure that Saddam neglected for three decades while spending enormous amounts on the military and his own palaces. And we still face guerrilla activity and attacks on our troops. But these, we are certain, come not from a large-scale insurgency, but from the last remnants of the Baathist regime. They have no popular support in Iraq, and they will not return to power.

We continue to make progress on security, the economy, and the political structure. We have an action plan and intend to execute it. And as we do, we welcome the involvement of the international community. 19 countries are providing more than 13,000 troops in Iraq, and more than a dozen others are considering putting forces on the ground. More than

two dozen countries have already given money or made pledges for reconstruction.

We welcome these contributions, and look forward to seeing them expand in the months ahead, in order to achieve our common goal of a stable, democratic and representative Iraq, at peace with its neighbors, and free of weapons of mass destruction and terrorists.