



Byliner on Iraq in the Frankfurter Rundschau
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Good news does not make headlines, as every journalist knows, and so it is not surprising that the good news in the first scientifically conducted public opinion poll in Baghdad, announced late last month by the Gallup Organization, received scant notice from the press. By more than a two-to-one margin, residents of Baghdad said that the ousting of Saddam Hussein was worth any hardships they have suffered since the beginning of military action. Two-thirds of those interviewed believe Iraq will be better off in five years; only eight per cent believe the country will be worse off than before Saddam was toppled.

Are these people unaware of all the problems reported so extensively by the media? Far from it. 94 per cent say Baghdad is a more dangerous place now than before; and most have experienced extended periods without basic services such as electricity (99%) or clean drinking water (69%). These Iraqis witness the daily violence, and endure the daily hardships -- and still they are optimistic, because they also see the numerous ways, large and small, in which their lives are slowly but surely improving.

What Iraqis see - and most foreigners don't - is local governing councils elected or appointed in 90% of Iraqi towns and villages, and a National Governing Council representing a cross-section of the population which has appointed cabinet ministers who for the first time participate in determining the country's annual budget. They see 80,000 of their fellow Iraqis, more than half of them police officers, already helping to protect their country. They see all of the country's 240 hospitals and 1200 primary health care clinics operating, with health care now available for all Iraqis, not just the elite.

Just last week, they saw 5.5 million students return to school in preparation for the new academic year, thanks to the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA)'s renovations in 1,500 of the country's schools. And notwithstanding the horrendous disrepair in which Saddam's regime left the Iraqi power network, they see that power generation capacity now exceeds the pre-war level, with major Iraqi cities now receiving electric power 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

This is not to underestimate the challenges in Iraq. Terrorists and regime remnants want to roll back these successes and stop the Iraqi people's transition to democracy and self-government. They will surely continue their attacks on coalition forces, and the brave Iraqis working with them, for some time. But coalition forces are dealing with the threat, and the security situation is improving. Indeed, the biggest threat in Iraq may come not from these attacks, but from the physical and psychological devastation caused by three decades of Baathist oppression and economic neglect and mismanagement. Iraq was liberated in May. Rarely in history has reestablishing independence made so much progress in such a short period. But the creation of an independent Iraq is a process that cannot be rushed or arbitrarily assigned a timeline. At the end of the day, it is for the Iraqi people to determine when they are ready to take the reins of government. The CPA and the UN can only advise.

The work in Iraq is difficult and costly. But it is in the interest of the entire international community to expand support for Iraq's stabilization and reconstruction. We are grateful for the contributions that numerous countries have made to date, and we welcome Chancellor Schroeder's offer to provide training for Iraqi police and other security forces. President Bush has asked the Congress to approve a supplemental budget request including \$20.3 billion for Iraq's reconstruction, intended to provide the basis for the U.S. pledge at the Madrid donors conference later this month. We hope that all donors,

including the EU and its members, will be as generous as possible in finalizing pledges for the conference.

The risks and the costs are worth it, because if we succeed, Iraqis will develop the institutions of self-government and reclaim their nation's place as a responsible member of the international community. And we will deal terrorism a powerful blow, because a democratic Iraq in the heart of the Middle East will be a defeat for the ideology of terror seeking to take control of that area of the world.

Chancellor Schroeder too has stated that "the international community has a key interest in ensuring that stability and democracy are established as quickly as possible in Iraq." For Iraq can then become a model for a successful transition from tyranny to democracy and self-reliance, and a friend and ally of the world's free and peace-loving nations. If that happens, not only Iraqis will be better off, so will all their neighbors in the Middle East, and so will all of us in Europe and America.