

Iraq – An Insider’s View

Comments by Brig. Gen. David Reist Commanding General, 1st Marine Logistics Group, Camp Pendleton

By Ari Bussel

The death toll is mounting in Iraq and the burden of taking care of the injured will take its toll on the US economy in decades to come. What is the solution? What are the options before us? Shall the US leave immediately? Shall we send more troops to Iraq? Why are we spending the money to reconstruct Iraq and not its Arab brethren? What does the future hold for Iraq?

The feelings are very strong. Democrats who previously voted to go to Iraq now believe it was a mistake. The WMD’s which we know were used by Saddam Hussein against his own people (the Kurds) went missing—was the intelligence wrong or would the stock piles be found one day in Syria or elsewhere?

While everything is available today 24/7 on TV and the internet, there is nothing more valuable than an insider’s look at what is happening on the ground. I was fortunate enough to be included in a briefing by a Marine Corps Brigadier General who provided just such a perspective.

A Marine Corps Brigadier General spoke last Friday to a group of business-people, lawyers, investment bankers and retired military officers at the monthly IMPACT ROUNDTABLE meeting in Century City. The topic this month was IRAQ – AN INSIDER’S VIEW.

Brigadier General David G. Reist is the Commanding General, 1st Marine Logistics Group, Camp Pendleton, CA. Holding a Master of Strategic Studies degree from the Marine Corps War College and a Master of Arts in National Security and Strategic Studies from the Naval War College, Gen. Reist is what one would call a military history “buff.” Gen. Reist’s command and staff assignments are varied and reflect three decades of committed service to our country.

Gen. Reist served on the ground in Iraq for almost two years, during three separate tours, returning from the last one in February of this year. Between 2002 and 2004 Gen. Reist was the Commanding Officer of the 1st Transportation Support Battalion (re-designated Transportation Support Group during Operation Iraqi Freedom and Combat Service Support Group-11 during Operation Iraqi Freedom-II), and from 2004 to 2005 he was the Chief of Staff of the 1st Force Service Support Group (FSSG, providing combat service support for the I Marine Expeditionary Force). In July, 2005, he was promoted from Colonel to Brigadier General and arrived in the Province of Anbar in Iraq on February 8, 2006.

Stressing that the thoughts he presented were his own, he shared the following main lessons:

- 1) We are playing a THREE LEVEL CHESS game in Iraq—it is complicated;
- 2) We absolutely cannot afford to lose this war;
- 3) If we lose this war, Fundamentalism will take it somewhere else—like a bully on a playground: If you give your lunch money to a bully, everyone else will take it, too;
- 4) This is a hard, cold war. The nature of war is that it is cruel, blunt and violent;



Brig. Gen. David Reist during a lecture on Iraq.

5) We are about results, the process must yield the necessary results;

6) “A hand alone cannot clap”: Security and Economic Growth together are needed;

7) It is not about money, IT IS ALL ABOUT MONEY. Economics is the answer—business is being conducted where money can be made. We need stability in the region to get commerce;

8) It takes more forces to hold than to take;

9) We are in Iraq for the stability of the world. We must watch the rise of Fundamentalism. We must reach out to each religious leader around the world and work together. Reaching out to religious leaders is an example of exercising all lines of operations.

Gen. Reist’s area of responsibility in Iraq was Al Anbar Province, which encompasses one-third of the land mass of Iraq. Ramadi is the capital and Fallujah is one of the Province’s major cities. Provincial Anbar is in the west of Iraq, bordering with Syria and Jordan. It is dominated by the Euphrates River which runs from the North to the Southeast of the Province. One million two hundred

often perceived as arrogant. Gen. Reist advocates a golden rule: “Just be a kind person.” He notes that if someone is rude in America, he will be rude in Iraq, Japan and elsewhere.

Winning the hearts and minds of the local population is less effective in this part of the world. If we give something, they want more: “You are a rich country,” they say, “we can take from you.” Also, some individuals will not be seen with Americans since one day we will leave and they will not want American “stink” on their hands.

Iraqis want us gone – but the dichotomy rests in the parallel desire that we not be gone just yet! In some cases the resistance fighters view that Al Qaeda may be a bigger threat than U.S. forces are an inconvenience.

In November, 2005, many sheiks, imams, and businessmen came forward in Ramadi to meet with coalition forces. In the western part of Al Anbar (Al Qaim) in 2005, the tribes in conjunction with coalition forces, joined to push out Al Qaeda. This also happened in early 2006 in an area of central Anbar (Bagdadhi). In both these instances, police recruit-

incurs 20% of the shame right back. In most interactions or negotiations, the desire of both parties is to make sure to get 100% of the honor! This is an interesting observation, given that in the West we tend to interpret what is happening in the Middle East through our own looking glass.

In February of 2004, the Marines were assigned Al Anbar Province as their area of operations. At the same time the Coalition Provisional Authority decreed “de-Baathification” throughout Iraq. This added to unemployment as the former soldiers were now out of work. The Baath-led army had a large Sunni component. The closing of state-owned enterprises and the supporting manufacturing plants added further to the unemployment.

With 50% unemployment among the Sunnis, it became clear that governance and economics must go hand in hand. In the spring of that year, a private conference was held in neighboring Amman, Jordan. Emerging from that conference was the formation of the Anbar Business Association which plugged into opportunities to provide for potential economic growth in the region. A subsequent conference scheduled to be held in Dubai with some 200 Anbar businessmen attending was canceled due to the Battle in Fallujah.

Gen. Reist returned home four months ago. He says, “anyone who travels abroad learns to appreciate the feeling that there is nothing like returning home to the United States of America!” Gen. Reist was asked about our men and women coming back in body bags—more than 3,500 from Iraq alone—and about those injured and maimed coming back and having to be taken care of for the rest of their lives. A Vietnam veteran asked about the burden on our country of this ever-growing number, as well as other problems that are arise to encounter in the future (such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) as a direct result of the prolonged service and multiple tours of duty in Iraq.

I asked what we can do to show our support. While the Marines seem to be taking care of their own (with exit interviews, periodic follow-ups and a volunteer organization that all help to care for those who served), we can each donate to the Injured Marine Semper Fi Fund (www.semperfund.org). The Fund offers financial aid (grants) to injured Marines and their families. The grants help with immediate financial needs such as travel, childcare, lodging or problems resulting from lost wages. Assistance is also given for the long term needs such as modified homes and vans. But Gen. Reist adds that “free handouts is a dangerous thing and the last thing to which a proud man or woman would resort.”

From the packages and letters our men and women overseas are receiving, said Gen. Reist, it seems that the support of the American People is “off the page.” Moreover, the quality of those opting to join the service is ever on the increase although the Corps is spread thin due to the demands put on it. “We are still doing something right,” he added.

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thousand Sunnis live in this province, with 95% of the population along the riverbanks. Only approximately 20% of the capacity for agriculture is utilized today.

The United States faces major obstacles in the Al Anbar Province, including both insurgency and resistance. The insurgency is made up of fighters that will do everything to kill us; therefore, they must be dealt with in drastic ways: “they just need to be dead: hunt them down and kill them.” Resistance fighters are those who oppose the U.S. presence for a variety of reasons. One reason may be that we are simply “in their backyard.” Another, Americans are

ment surged in the areas. In Ramadi, Al Qaeda was starting to get a foothold and the locals knew they needed help. After the meeting Al Qaeda embarked on a very effective campaign of murder and intimidation. They targeted eight key people and promptly assassinated each of them, making a powerful point not easily lost on the local population.

We might wonder why cooperation and a non-zero-sum game would not be the Iraqis’ default choice as it is often ours. The reason lies with the local culture’s view of shame and honor as a zero-sum game. In the course of negotiating a transaction, if one party gives up 20% of the honor, that party immediately

Why there is no Palestine

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3. Because neither side is willing to abide by peace agreements.

Each side has banks of researchers assembling evidence that the other side consistently violates the explicit terms of signed peace accords. The evidence, on both sides, is conclusive.

4. Because we are, all of us, better at vengeance than we are at forgiveness.

For both sides, it is the first rule of politics: Peace is politically dangerous, if not lethal. War, or at least talk of war, is the safer default setting.

This is similar to, but not the same as:

5. Because we love our extremists too much.

Both sides exhibit a sentimental attachment and quiet fondness for those in their midst who take the exact actions and promulgate the exact policies that act to foil a two-state solution.

6. Because the policies of both sides play directly into the hands of extremists

on the other.

Hamas is Hamas because of Israel. And no group in the Holy Land has done more to bolster the Israeli far right than Hamas.

7. Because the Muslim world wants its Palestinians to suffer.

The Muslim world grants the Palestinians fortunes in lip service, and little else of value. The Palestinians are much more valuable to Muslim leaders abroad as valiant symbols of victimhood, channeling anger toward Israel.

8. Because the West now sees them as terrorists.

Thanks in large part to its own exposure to suicide terror, the West has changed its definition of Palestinian resistance, from defense of the innocent, to targeting of the innocent.

9. Because Arafat lied to them.

While Yasser Arafat was signing agreements with Israel, he was letting his people know in hints and winks and exhortations that they would in the end have everything they wanted. Refugees would return

to their homes in Israel proper. Jerusalem's Old City would return to Muslim sovereignty. The armed struggle would tip the balance.

There is also the lie inherent in the rule of corruption that Arafat fostered, sapping critical resources, undermining public confidence, and crippling efforts at responsive governance.

10. Because they cannot stop themselves.

There is no one to put an end to civil war. There is no spiritual authority, there is no governmental authority, there is no military authority.

11. Because some of the best people in Palestine are leaving.

And because some of the people who cannot leave, cannot think about anything else.

12. Because each side takes it for granted that it is clearly, morally, objectively in the right, and that the other side is nothing but wrong.

A fool's paradise turns out to be better

than no paradise at all.

13. And because the Holy Land is the world capital of wishful thinking.

Deep down, both sides secretly believe that they will get what they have wanted all along, whether it's Greater Israel or Greater Palestine, complete sovereignty over Jerusalem or the right of return.

After a century of struggle, the Palestinians deserve better. The Palestinians deserve a nation. But after a century of struggle, they now face their worst test since 1948.

Their ship of state needs a painful refitting, and a radical and perhaps terrifying change of course. As a people, the Palestinians are now facing their matriculation. If they can address their long list of problems head on, they can return to the path of independence. But skip the problems, or get the problems wrong, and Palestinian nationhood may be just one more dream ground into the dust in Gaza.

Your dream home with a garden – on sale now at a kibbutz near you

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"Four years ago there were about 20 expansion neighborhoods in kibbutzim," recalls Motti Vizel, the owner of a research and real estate strategy-consulting firm bearing his name. "Now there are about 100 expansion neighborhoods in the North." These expansion neighborhoods are in various stages of planning and development, and anyone who has always dreamed of living on a kibbutz, but did not want the socialist life can realize that dream now.

The opportunities are there, and the public is responding enthusiastically. In many cases the homes literally sold like hotcakes. Last summer, despite the war in the North, 56 housing units in Kibbutz Magal, being built by Ampa Real Estate, sold in one evening.

"The advantage of expansion neighborhoods like the one in Magal is that they offer double benefits – the quality of life of a kibbutz and proximity to the center," says Benny Keret, CEO of Azimut Advertising and Marketing Research.

Most of the expansion neighborhoods, however, are in the periphery, in the North and South, but are still attracting buyers.

"Close to 80 percent of potential buyers in the expansion neighborhoods I am marketing come from the central region," says Vizel.

Quality of life

People looking for quiet, green surroundings are not joining the kibbutzim on which they are buying a home.

"The new residents become members of the municipal association, but not the

agricultural association," explains Eyal Fanian, who markets real estate projects. "They have a say in decisions affecting services in the community and can join the cultural or school committee, but are not members of the kibbutz."

This partnership is an inseparable part of living in the expansion neighborhoods. Life there revolves around the community, so anyone who shies away from others or does not want to a committee to decide things that affect him and his family, should take into account that in most cases the new community members are expected to assume active roles and contribute their energies and talents to the others. On the other hand, there is a big advantage in the proximity to all the services families need.

"For many kibbutzim, particularly in the periphery, the expansion neighborhoods are an existential necessity. Some of them are crying out for demographic renewal," explains Dori Leibowitz, of Dorel, a rural project developer. "There are places in which no children have been born for years, and the average age is 60 or more, but all the infrastructure is there: preschools, a swimming pool, the public spaces and more."

This situation is different from the cities or completely new neighborhoods, in which buyers have to search for a suitable nearby preschool or school, and this is not always easy. Thus the expansion neighborhoods are good for both the buyers and the established neighbors, for whom the rejuvenation of their community is necessary not only to preserve the services in their locale, but also the infrastructure. One of the jobs assigned to the developers who receive permits to build the new neighborhoods is to improve the access road, the electricity and the rest of

the infrastructure.

Even so, Ra'anon Aloni, CEO at Ampa says that the old infrastructure in the original residential section of the kibbutzim is not upgraded, as most of the investment is in the new neighborhood.

Buying a house and becoming integrated into a new neighborhood is different from what happens in the city.

"After choosing a location, the potential buyers sign a registration agreement with the developer, and are then screened by an acceptance committee," explains Vizel. Much has been said about acceptance committees and many complaints aired regarding discrimination and inequality, but they play an important role for the expanding community. When the Israel Lands Administration decided to permit the expansion of the kibbutzim, the decision stated that the building lots would be allocated by the ILA to recommended persons, on the condition that they are individuals with no eligibility for a homestead or land in any other rural community. The body authorized to recommend potential buyers is the acceptance committee appointed by the kibbutz or moshav.

"Interested persons are usually sent for compatibility testing," says Fanian. The committee examines their reasons for choosing that community and whether they have sufficient finances to cover the cost of the house they plan to buy or build."

Every committee has its own criteria, based on the community's needs. "Mitzpe Netofa, for example, is a national religious community," adds Keret, "and families interested in moving there must first spend a few of weekends visiting the community, to check their compatibility, because community life is particu-

larly important there."

Usually the communities are looking for young families, in which the parents are between 30 and 35. This age group also constitutes the majority of applicants for homes in rural communities and kibbutzim, after they have tired of city life. "Older people can also be accepted," says Fanian. "After all, the communities want to be rejuvenated, but also to maintain a demographic balance, and every community has different wants and needs."

"Most places usually prefer to accept complete families, but there are some communities that are less picky, accepting single-parent families, divorcees and singles," says Vizel. "Most applicants have some prior connection to the vicinity: They either grew up there, served nearby while in the army, or like to take day trips in the area."

After receiving a recommendation from the acceptance committee, buyers are sent to the ILA, where they sign a long-term lease on the land, which belongs to the ILA. They also sign an agreement with the kibbutz or moshav, and a contract with the developer. Some expansion neighborhoods are already built, while others are designated for private construction, with the buyers paying for a lease on the land.

"As time goes by, the building lots allocated to the buyers have shrunk, and are now 330-500 square meters," notes Fanian.

Most of the expansion neighborhoods so far have been built in the North, with a few in the central region. One region that has not yet been heavily marketed, but which developers are expecting to gain momentum, is the Jezreel Valley.

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Gen. Reist noted that he joined the service 29 years ago, in 1978, when the mandatory draft no longer existed. He said "we are hired and paid to fight wars, to kill people." He believes in an all-volunteer force, the type of service we have today. Pointing to his aide, First Lieutenant Brandon Koble, who was sitting in the audience, Gen. Reist says that the men and women today are more educated, more capable than ever before, and that if he had to begin service today, he is "not sure he could compete."

Gen. Reist also praised the reservists, whom he calls "priceless" for the skill sets they have acquired outside the service and brought to Iraq. He noted a number of situations throughout his presentation of reservists who had brought investment banking or other talents from their civilian lives to the process of rebuilding Iraq.

Gen. Reist also believes there is too much "taking" and not enough "giving" and that everyone should serve the country in one of many forms of "national service" such as working for a period of time at the TSA, or with the Peace

Corps, or in the military, etc..

Gen. Reist told those in attendance: "We need the best minds in business that our government has who can reach out to the Iraqis on behalf of our nation. We need YOU to serve. You have a vested interest." He noted that Mr. Paul Brinkley, Deputy Under-Secretary of Defense (Business Transformation Agency) currently is leading a task force in theater to re-vitalize the Iraqi economy. In doing this, he is focusing on getting Iraqis back to work (in the State Owned Enterprises) and exposing investors to Iraqi goods and services.

Postscript:

For the Israeli officers who were present in this briefing as well as all those in attendance, it was indeed absolutely humbling to have Gen. Reist as the speaker. We were very fortunate to have the unique opportunity to talk with a senior officer in the Marine Corps, who recently returned from Iraq and was willing to share his personal experiences and his views of what is unfolding there. The military should have many more speakers like Gen. Reist to educate and engage the American public.