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The Price of Freedom

by

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Again, the people of Iraq responded to the opportunity to take part in the shaping of their country's future by defying terrorist threats of murder and mayhem and taking to the streets to cast a vote on their country's very first constitution. There are those who will still belittle the significance of what took place in this war torn, struggling democracy on the 15th but the Iraqis thought it so important and memorable that many mothers carried their children with them to the polls so they could witness and be part of this important moment in their country's history.

Over 61% of eligible voting Iraqis, many in their finest dresses and suits, participated in the ratifying process necessary to put into place a document that would, hopefully, establish the law of the ethnically divided land, with the ultimate goal of bringing the diverse elements together as one. Over 9 Million Iraqi citizens once again showed the world and each other that they want a stable, democratic, government that will do away with the violence that has been so commonplace for the last 50+ years.

One supremely important happening was the enormous turnout by members of the minority Sunni contingent who had been all but absent in the January election of an interim body of representatives. In Saddam's hometown of Tikrit, over 90% of the eligible voters made their votes known. The Sunnis enjoyed a good life under Saddam's dictatorship and have been naturally reticent to trust the majority Shiites and Kurds, who have been lobbying for three separate governmental entities for months. If such a division were to happen the Sunnis would not be able to participate in the soon to come substantial oil revenues which will help underwrite the financial security of this potentially wealthy nation. However, the fact that many Sunnis chose to show their displeasure and to speak through the volume of their 'no' vote indicates that they would prefer the battle of the ballots rather than the battle of the bullets. I might add that the final vote will probably show that even a larger contingent of Sunnis voted 'Aye' in favor of the new Constitution, in order to establish the foundation they need to move forward to a true peace. Something the current residents of Iraq have never known.

It should be noted, again, that the threats of 'murder and mayhem of a magnitude unseen before' did not materialize. In fact, the terrorist attacks were fewer and less deadly than in January. According to printed reports, terrorists in Baghdad attacked 5 of the 1,200 polling stations resulting only in the wounding of 7 voters. That compares with over 100 attacks in January, killing more than 40 people. And, as usual, it must be remembered that even that number, in relation to the overall situation in the entire country, is miniscule. Over 80+% of the country is secure and pretty much violence free but all the main stream press reports on are those pockets of terrorist activities in the other 20%.

For you nay sayers out there who still haven't gotten hold of the terminology of "freedom fighters" and "liberators" as opposed to "occupiers" and "profit takers" sit back and remember the Revolutionary War where this country struggled for its independence from England. The fight didn't end with the war. Much like the three diverse factions in Iraq, the new America had 13 newly formed states (colonies) with individual views and goals that suggested separate and apart status rather than a joining together theory. James Madison of Virginia, a brilliant thinker and visionary struggled for months to think of ways of bringing everyone together with a "*strong central government to provide order and stability.*" The idea of a central government was not met kindly by all concerned and was even met with civilian insurrections led by former military men threatening to "*come to arms*" against such an attempt by anyone.

Madison felt it was very important to involve George Washington who was one man that was trusted and would be listened to by most everyone regardless of political leanings. Washington was invited to the first Constitutional Convention held in Philadelphia in May of 1787. At first Washington refused to attend for a variety of reasons, not the least of which was the fear that it would all be for naught because of the obvious infighting and diversity of those who would be in attendance. However, he did attend, was voted President of the Convention, and the U.S. Constitution was given birth as we know it.

Did it happen overnight? NO! In fact it took several months, in secret meetings with no reporters nor visitors permitted to attend; much wrangling; many ideas discussed and discarded; many heated arguments and debates by individual state's representatives protecting their interests; and down to the wire deadlines met and re-set. It wasn't until September 15, 1787 that a final draft was to be voted on by those in attendance who, by the way, did not include Thomas Jefferson, who was overseas at the time and Patrick Henry who was one of those who "*smelt a rat*" in having a strong central government with some powers over individual states, and refused to attend the Convention.

Benjamin Franklin, 81 years old at the time, and aware of all those on the outside who were hoping against hope that their efforts would fail, wrote the following speech hoping to garner support from his fellow delegates to vote for the Constitution: "*I think it will astonish our enemies, who are waiting with confidence to hear that our councils are confounded like those of the builders of Babel; and that our States are on the point of separation, only to meet hereafter for the purpose of cutting one another's throats.*"

As we know, the Constitution was accepted by the delegates and 10 months later, July, 1788, was ratified by the required $\frac{3}{4}$ majority of states and became the official United States Constitution, the law of the land. Two months later Virginia and New York added their names to the list of ratifying states. Was it perfect in every way... no... but that's why a little more than 3 years later, December 15, 1791, the Bill of Rights with its initial Amendments was ratified guaranteeing each state the ability to protect their rights even further by seeking changes in the future.

Will the Iraqi Constitution be perfect initially? No... but it will be a giant step down the path of a new democracy in Iraq, and even though many... *MANY*... are praying for its defeat and demise, it will succeed.

Many of the Delegates who forged our Constitution in Philadelphia over 200 years ago had no thought that it was a perfect instrument, but they knew they had done their best for the good of the United States of America. As James Madison grew older he wrote a letter, neither addressed nor sent to anyone, in which he declared a major truth about our Constitution but equally relevant to the newly ratified Iraqi Constitution. In it he declared that no government can be perfect, however, "*that which is the least imperfect is therefore the best government.*"

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