



Straight Talk

By Muriel Sluyter

A New Age of Freedom? One Can Hope

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Greetings, Gentle Reader,

Iraqis are giddily excited about having voted. They proudly hold up blue fingers for the whole world to see. Yet terrorists from the entire Islamic world are converging to fight against them and against the establishment of democracy in Iraq. They know the only way to stop the runaway freight train of freedom is to slaughter Iraqis in large numbers and in horrifying ways.

It seems impossible to pampered Americans that any people could stand up to this kind of pressure, this kind of horror, but Iraqis lived for decades under a regime that tortured and butchered them by the thousands for sport, for entertainment. They have a different mind-set than we, because the things the terrorists are doing to them are no worse than the things Saddam did to them. Even those who escaped imprisonment, torture, dismemberment, or death knew disaster could strike at any moment. Saddam made sure of that. It was the weapon with which he cowed them, and every day they struggle desperately to overcome the instinct to submit, the fear of fighting back.

President Bush thinks Americans will be safer in a world that is free, that free people are less likely to attack us. He's right. We no longer have to fear Japan or Germany. They are free countries, and they will remain free.

Now we have to see whether we can help nations filled with potential attackers struggle toward freedom, thereby guaranteeing us a greater level of safety.

It's a tall order, because totalitarian governments are not about to become docile and benevolent, just because we want them to do so. Nor are religious fanatics willing to free captive populations to mollify us. Power is intoxicating, and these fanatics have enough power to keep them fat, happy and thoroughly intoxicated for life. And they intend to keep it that way, whatever the cost.

A democratic Iraq is no military threat to them, so what's their problem? It's simple. It's not just that power is intoxicating and they don't want to give it up, but freedom

is contagious. That's the real threat.

Look at the world: Eastern Europe is the newest block of liberated peoples. When the Soviet Union fell, the people wanted freedom. The winds of liberty became an unstoppable hurricane in that benighted part of the globe, and, a few nations at a time, they attained the freedom they so intensely craved.

Afghanis have voted for leaders and achieved a degree of liberty and self-determination. Egyptians, closely watching Iraq, are asking pointed questions about voting, about democracy, wanting it for themselves. Young Iranians want freedom from their oppressors, the mullahs who control every facet of their lives. Palestinians want peace and self-determination, and voted accordingly.

Citizens of other Middle Eastern nations are pushing for liberty, and their oppressive rulers know it. They know freedom is contagious, and it scares them to have their people agitating for it, because they know it could become a tidal wave that would sweep all monarchies and abusive governments before it.

In truth, none of these governments can afford to let Iraqis become free, yet they don't know how to stop them, because Iraqis have both the sweet taste of freedom in their mouths and the bit in their teeth, so to speak, and they know President Bush won't let their neighbors force them back into slavery while they're still weak.

The winds of freedom are beginning to blow in captive nations around the world, and if we can keep them blowing, we will usher in a new age of liberty for all people. It is a heady concept and one that will die aborning unless we both see the vision and seize the moment. May we do so.

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