



Thank You, American Soldier

Ala'a Ghazala

Ala'a Ghazala was born in Hilla in 1963. After training as an engineer and service in the Iraqi army, he worked as a civil engineer before opening his own newspaper upon the liberation of Iraq in 2003. He subsequently worked as a media advisor in the U.S. Embassy-Baghdad before emigrating to the United States under a special program that offers refuge for Iraqis who are too closely identified with the U.S. presence to safely remain in Iraq.

PHOTO: GEN Martin Dempsey receives a thank you gift on behalf of TRADOC from GEN Aboud Kanbar Hashim in his office on 6 December 2010. GEN Aboud, speaking through an interpreter, also promised to share Iraqi lessons learned so that TRADOC could "learn something from our experiences as well." (Angelica Golindano)

WESTERN MEDIA HAVE noted that Iraqi politicians failed to agree on thanking the American military in appreciation of its efforts to liberate Iraq from tyranny and for establishing democratic principles to replace the dictatorship and slavery that the Iraqi people had suffered for more than four decades. Those sources added that Iraqis, thus, are "ungrateful."

No, for God's sake, we are not ungrateful. We're not opportunists fishing in dark waters. Although some of us rang the war bells, advocating division in an attempt to gain power, we're peaceful people. We've endured oppression and deprivation for a long time, so all we want is to move on in building our country. Since you came, American Soldier, we started to see the light of hope after almost losing it forever.

You came uninvited, no question, but you don't have to leave unthanked. Though your leadership sent you over, putting its mistakes on you, we know that you did your best to avoid making more mistakes and to correct the first strategic fault: coming here without a solid plan, or international cover from the UN Security Council.

But do we have to recall why you came, and what resulted from that? Maybe. Let's go back in time. Let's go back to the day the tyrant decided to invade Kuwait. Before that he carried out eight years of devastating war against Iran. Yes, we were invaders once. The Security Council responded by commissioning the Allies to remove the tyrant's forces "by all means." He refused to yield to that resolution, leading the country into a losing battle, even from the day it started. Consequently, the Iraqi people felt humiliated enough to overcome their fear of the dictator's punishment. A broad revolution spread all over the country. There was a declaration of rejection that the regime never experienced before. On the contrary, the regime had been accustomed to listening to long poems of praise in luxurious palaces.

The oppressor spared no effort to extinguish this uprising. Have you heard of the mass graves? Yes, the ground is still weeping over hundreds of them, praying to Allah for mercy on those who were buried alive; their only fault

was refusing to obey the tyrant. The dictator was not reluctant to use his whole arsenal, including chemical weapons, to put down the uprising. Do you know about Halabja? Alas for the children, the men, women, and old people burned by a blaze of fire from the sky with no refuge to be found. Those who were supposed to protect them sent those flames.

Yet all these tragedies didn't satisfy the dictator. Hoping to extend his reign, he went on confronting the international community, forcing them to extend sanctions. As a result, the country's infrastructure was destroyed and reached the brink of collapse. The people were exhausted trying to provide for their basic needs of bread and medicine. Due to the regime's policies, Iraqis became the poorest people in world despite their rich natural and human resources.

The day when aching mothers saw the rope around Saddam's neck, after you captured him and brought him to justice, they prayed to Allah to protect you, American Soldier, and to light the road before you. Your road was gloomy from the time you came to our country until your efforts were assisted by the determination of the Iraqi security forces and finally overcame the forces of darkness. The road was dark because the enemy of freedom smashed its lights. Each sacrifice you made was a candle piercing that darkness. You walked and we followed your lead. There were times we ran past you, then slowed down to wait for you. You were confused but patient. Thank you for your patience and for your kind sacrifices.

Thank you for putting your soul into fighting the insurgency, which had made the Iraqi people and government its enemy before making an enemy of you. Thank you for training the Iraqi security forces, making them strong enough to defend the

country. Thank you for spending vast amounts of money to reconstruct the collapsed infrastructure in my country. Thank you for leading the Iraqi people to freedom. Thank you for exposing corruption in your ranks. You were not shy about announcing it and apologizing publicly. You even insisted on prosecuting and putting behind bars those who had been jailors themselves.

Thank you, Sergeant Christina, for standing guard late at night to protect a police station that took fire from unknown gunmen. Thank you, Lieutenant Mark, for leading your platoon to arrest dangerous wanted groups. Thank you, Major Greg, for helping Iraqi judges in prosecuting criminals. Thank you, General Adams, for commanding your division to patrol the towns and villages in your area day and night. Thank you, diplomat Chuck, for faithfully and seriously communicating with both the local and the national government, proving them with the guidance and advice they needed most. Thank you, men and women who left mothers, spouses, and children behind. Your families barely slept, fearing the worst for you. Thank you for refusing to give up and for walking the road all the way to the end. You eventually handed Iraq back to its people as proud as it was and will be forever.

Pardon us. The Iraqi people are not ungrateful, just afraid. We still fear that the magic will turn back on us, returning us to the darkness that you, with the help of almighty Allah, saved us from. We have learned to overcome our fears, however. We promise we will not make you regret what you gave us. We will keep building our country, protect it, and safeguard our freedom so you'll be proud of us.

Thank you, American Soldier, as you go back home, and God bless you. **MR**