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My Year in Iraq: The Struggle to Build a Future of Hope

By L. Paul Bremer III



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As the American diplomat chosen by President Bush to direct the reconstruction of post-Saddam Iraq, L. Paul Bremer arrived in Baghdad in May of 2003. For fourteen danger-filled months, he worked tirelessly to realize the vision he and President Bush share of a free and democratic New Iraq.

MY YEAR IN IRAQ: The Struggle to Build a Future of Hope is a candid and vital account of this world-shaping task and the daunting challenges lying in wait. With his unique insider perspective, Bremer takes us from the ancient lanes in the holy city of Najaf to the fires of a looted and lawless Baghdad; from the White House Situation Room to the Pentagon E-Ring; from making the case for more U.S. troops to helping Iraq's new leaders write a liberal constitution to unify a traumatized and divided Iraqi people.



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Editorial Review

Review

"Rife with behind-the-scenes machinations at the highest levels of the administration." -- *The Los Angeles Times*

"A compelling story of the labor pains of a nation in the throes of rebuilding." -- *San Antonio Express News*

"Bremer details the treacherous, sweltering days, the obstacles and the historic achievements." -- *National Review*

"[An] excellent memoir. . . . It is candid, precise, lucid, and honest." -- *Star Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN)

About the Author

Ambassador L. Paul Bremer III, a career diplomat, was the Presidential Envoy to Iraq from May 2003 to June 2004. During his twenty-three years at the State Department, he served on the personal staffs of six secretaries of state and on four continents. In the 1980s, he was Ambassador to the Netherlands and Ambassador at Large for Counter Terrorism. After leaving government, he was Managing Director of Kissinger Associates. In December 2004, George W. Bush awarded Bremer the Presidential Medal of Freedom for his service in Iraq.

Malcolm McConnell is the coauthor of the #1 *New York Times* bestseller *American Soldier* with Tommy Franks and *My Year in Iraq* with L. Paul Bremer III.

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Chapter 1: Chaos

Monday, May 12, 2003

Baghdad was burning.

As the Air Force C-130 banked above the curve of the Tigris River, I twisted in the sling seat and stared out the circular window of the cargo bay. The capital of Iraq stretched north beneath the right wing, dusty beige, sprawled in the shimmering heat. Dark smoke columns rose in the afternoon sun. I counted three, five...seven.

Beside me, my colleague, retired ambassador Hume Horan, was saying something. But his voice was swallowed by the engine roar. I took out the foam earplugs the crew had distributed when we'd boarded the plane that morning in Kuwait.

"...government buildings," Hume shouted over the howl of the turboprops. "...Baath Party offices." He pointed toward the smoke rising above the arc of the river. "Most of the ministries were concentrated in that district. Saddam liked to keep a close eye on his people."

Ahead in the open compartment, Air Force General Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and his entourage also peered down at Baghdad. Over the weekend, my small staff and I had flown nonstop with Dick Myers aboard a huge C-17 jet transport from Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland to Doha,

Qatar, on the Persian Gulf. From there, we'd taken this C-130, first to overnight in Kuwait, and then this morning to Basra in southern Iraq. We'd been traveling almost forty-eight hours.

The smoke below in Baghdad held all our attention.

Clay McManaway, another retired ambassador, my old friend -- and now my deputy -- was seated nearby. "Industrial-strength looting," he yelled. "After they strip a place, they torch it. Lots of old scores to settle."

Hume nodded in agreement as I replaced my earplugs. He was one of the State Department's leading Arabists, had spent much of his career in the Middle East, and knew Baghdad well. I did not.

Among my own assignments during almost three decades as an American diplomat, I'd been Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's chief of staff and ambassador-at-large for counterterrorism under President Ronald Reagan, jobs that had taken me to almost every capital in the region. Every one but Baghdad. While Francie, my wife of thirty-seven years, and I had served at the American Embassy in Afghanistan long ago, this was my first trip to Iraq, the country where I was about to face the biggest challenge of my life.

Less than a month before, I'd been just another former ambassador living happily outside Washington, working in the private sector. I ran the crisis management division of a large American company, Marsh & McLennan. Francie and I didn't miss the political pressure and crushing workload of high-level diplomacy. We'd recently bought an old farmhouse in New England where we hoped to vacation with our children and grandkids.

But on this hot afternoon above Baghdad, I was eight thousand miles away from suburban Washington and the mountains of Vermont. I was also back in the government, the recently appointed administrator of the newly formed Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). Some press reports characterized me as "the American viceroy" in occupied Iraq.

As the senior American in Baghdad, I would be President George W. Bush's personal envoy. My chain of command ran through Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and straight to the president. I would be the only paramount authority figure -- other than dictator Saddam Hussein -- that most Iraqis had ever known.

Being a civilian, I would have no command authority over the 170,000 Coalition troops spread thin across Iraq, a country the size of California with a population of more than 25 million. But the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) -- the Coalition's military arm, headquartered in Tampa, Florida -- had orders from the president and Rumsfeld to coordinate their operations with the CPA and me.

The Coalition forces that had toppled Saddam after three weeks of intense combat were mainly American soldiers and Marines, but included more than 20,000 British and a much smaller number of Australians, as well as troops from NATO countries, including our new Central European allies.

The terrain they occupied was as varied as Iraq's human landscape. Coalition troops held positions in the marshy Shatt al-Arab delta of the Tigris and Euphrates, in the river towns and holy cities of the south where the Shiites, 60 percent of Iraq's population, were concentrated. Five hundred miles to the north, there were Coalition outposts on the pine-covered ridges in the homeland of the Kurds, non-Arabs who comprised about 20 percent of the population. And our units were also dotted across the flat, baking desert of central and western Iraq, the heartland of the minority Sunni Arabs who made up the 19 percent of Iraqis and had dominated Iraqi society for centuries.

The plane's whining engines dropped in pitch, and the bank angle increased to the left. A young crewman in a desert-tan flight suit strode through the swaying cargo compartment, flexing the fingers of his right hand.

"Five minutes," he called, "five." He then made a sharp cinching gesture at his waist to remind us to tighten our red nylon seat belts.

This model of the workhorse C-130 transport was called a Combat Talon and normally carried Special Operations Forces on low-altitude parachute drops or steep assault landings deep in enemy territory. We'd flown up from the southern Iraqi city of Basra at an altitude of only 200 feet, flashing above the mud-walled villages and date groves among the ancient skein of irrigation canals that had made Mesopotamia the Fertile Crescent for millennia.

The purpose of flying fast, "down on the deck," had not been to provide sightseeing for VIPs but to minimize the risk from ground fire. During the invasion a month earlier, automatic weapons and small arms had mauled U.S. Army attack helicopters passing over these sleepy farming compounds. Although President Bush had declared the end of "major combat operations" eleven days before, Deputy CENTCOM Commander General John Abizaid had conceded that the country was not yet fully pacified when he'd briefed us at CENTCOM's forward headquarters in Qatar.

In less than five minutes we'd land at Baghdad International Airport. Pulling my seat belt tight, I stifled a yawn and thought back over the events that had brought me here.

It was mid-April and Francie and I were leaving the Hartford, Connecticut, airport in a rental Ford Taurus, en route to Vermont to choose furniture for our farmhouse. Francie had bought one of those sticky buns at the airport and the smell of cinnamon filled the car as we pulled onto Interstate 91.

She seemed happy and turned to me. "Honey, I always feel I'm in good hands with you."

I glanced at her smiling blue eyes and hated to spoil that contentment. Not only does Francie have fibromyalgia, which often keeps her bedridden, but she had recently popped two discs in her back, which sent hot twinges down her sciatic nerve along the right leg. Still, she was temporarily free of pain and excited about furnishing our vacation home.

But I had to tell her what was weighing on my mind, and I had to tell her now. Washington couldn't wait any longer.

"We need to talk," I said gently. "About a job I may be offered."

"What job?" she asked quickly, the bun halfway to her mouth. Francie and I are so close that we sense each other's moods instantly, and the atmosphere in the car cooled at once. "What job?" she insisted. "Last time I checked you had a job."

She was right, of course. Running Marsh & McLennan's crisis management division for eighteen months had been engrossing work. But Francie knew I was eager to draw on my experience to help our country some way, any way, in the global war on terrorism. I had been fighting this battle for almost twenty years, most recently as chairman of the bipartisan National Commission on Terrorism. In our report to President Bill Clinton in June 2000, the blue-ribbon commission had predicted mass-casualty terror attacks on the American homeland "on the scale of Pearl Harbor." As with most such panels, our recommendations had been largely ignored until the attacks of September 11, 2001, proved our point.

And after that disaster, even at the age of sixty-two I just couldn't stay safe on the sidelines. Members of the Bush administration had discussed several jobs with me in the past months. But whenever the topic arose, Francie had opposed the idea, vehemently.

"I need you too much," she'd say. "I depend on you too much." And I knew she had a point.

Now as we drove north from Hartford, I raised the subject again. "This time it's a job where I can really make a difference. In a way, it uses all the skills I've acquired over a long career...diplomacy, insight into other cultures, management, and stamina..."

"What job?" Now she was curious. I knew Francie; if I could hook her intellect I'd be halfway there.

"Helping to put Iraq back together." Only a few days before, we'd sat in our suburban Washington home watching the CNN coverage as deliriously happy Iraqi men and boys had beat their shoes on the decapitated head of Saddam Hussein's statue that the victorious American Marines had just toppled.

"You?" She became quiet and just looked at me while I studied the road ahead with my heart pounding. I wanted this challenge. At least I wanted the chance to try. But I wouldn't do it without her blessing.

Slowly, as we drove north through the greening hills, we worked our way around the subject. I told her that I had been contacted by Scooter Libby, Vice President Dick Cheney's chief of staff, and by Paul Wolfowitz, deputy secretary of defense. The Pentagon's original civil administration in "post-hostility" Iraq -- the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance, ORHA -- lacked expertise in high-level diplomatic negotiations and politics. And, contrary to most media accounts, the White House had never intended ORHA's leader, retired U.S. Army Lieutenant General Jay Garner, to be the president's permanent envoy in Baghdad. I had the requisite skills and experience for that position.

"They're interested in my being considered for the ...

Users Review

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