

## **Listening to the “Voices of Iraq”**

I've been having a tough time reconciling the gloomy media reports of chaos in Iraq with the overwhelming support of the war by our fighting troops. I searched for and found two convincing first-hand accounts that I think everyone should consider.

The first is “Voices of Iraq”, a unique documentary produced by three Americans who handed out 150 video cameras to ordinary Iraqis and asked them to film whatever they wanted and pass the camera to someone else. The two former MTV producers and Marine veteran condensed hundreds of hours of video down to a 90-minute stream of glimpses into daily life in Iraq.

Jeff Jacoby of the Boston Globe says the result is “heartbreaking, exhilarating and inspiring... things are looking up in Iraq as the Iraqis themselves will be happy to tell you. All someone had to do was ask.” Variety says: “a film has emerged whose purpose is not to address American politics but the Iraqi people.”

I was impressed with how “normal” the activities of the Iraqis appear - graduations, weddings, shopping, working out – all in sharp contrast to the headlines of American papers appearing at the time. Anti-Western sentiments are plentiful, but the smiles, pride and hope of the Iraqis far outweigh the anger and resentment. The film made me optimistic about the opportunities for democracy and women's rights in this troubled region. I am now, more than ever, proud of America's role in eliminating the cruelty, greed and threat of Saddam.

The film has played in theaters in major US cities since October, and is available for rental from Netflix. Find out more at [www.voicesofiraq.com](http://www.voicesofiraq.com).

My other source of perspective and encouragement was the book “American Soldier” by General Tommy Franks, Commander of the US forces in the Middle East. This inside account of how we won the campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq reveals how our military has recovered from years of neglect, why fewer troops are needed and other insights into modern warfare. Franks praises President Bush and Secretary Rumsfeld as strong, engaged leaders who wisely delegated front line decisions to the commanders in the field.

After watching “Voices of Iraq” and reading “American Soldier”, I strongly support our efforts in Iraq. We depend on the media to probe and question our actions, but enough already of the armchair quarterbacking, anecdotal arguments and political agendas. There have been surprises and some bad news is sure to follow, but we need to demonstrate unity and resolve in order to defeat the enemies of peace in this world.

There are plenty of successes and reasons for hope, if you dig a little and listen.

Rick Maier