

IRAQ – Who are the Bad Guys?

By

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Just a few days ago, a naive and innocent young Japanese traveler paid a terrible price for his curiosity. Tragically, his parents, kinsmen and friends must mourn his death for the rest of their lives. His death deeply affected me because my youngest daughter just returned safely from one year in Iraq.

Barbarians, no one else, are responsible for the young man's brutal murder. The murderers are barbarians because their brutality knows no bounds. They put their political goals before all else, even others' lives. They have no respect any race or nationality, and do not live according to any religion or philosophy. These barbarians try to exploit humanity's natural compassion for other human beings by murdering, torturing and terrorizing people. Sadly, their brutality prolongs the agony of all humanity, especially the Iraqi people.

Fortunately my youngest daughter survived Iraq. She came home physically healthy, but mentally she will always carry sad and frightening memories of her life in Iraq. Like the young Japanese traveler, she went to Iraq full of curiosity, excitement and innocent determination to help the Iraqi people. But now her attitude has changed completely. I urged her tell her story to journalists, but she is concerned that the US Army might get angry with her even though she is not in the regular army. As her father, I believe I have a responsibility to tell other parents about the danger in Iraq.

First, let me explain how she ended up as a US soldier in Iraq. After graduation in the top of her class from Stanford University, she joined the U.S. Army reserve to earn a scholarship for graduate school. But in March 2003, she was called to active duty and received several months of training in "civil affairs," which included the study of Arabic. "Civil affairs" soldiers are especially trained to improve relations between regular American soldiers and the Iraqi civilians.

For two months she was assigned to a combat team that looked for "bad guys" in the Sunni Triangle near Samarra. Each night the American soldiers went into town to raid certain houses looking for "bad guys." The soldiers surrounded a house, broke down the front door and ran into the dark house waving their guns and yelling in English for everyone to lie down. Sometimes Iraqi interpreters accompanied the American soldiers, sometimes there were no interpreters.

All Iraqi men were put in handcuffs and taken outside. Women and children were gathered in one dark room. There was much confusion and yelling. Everyone was terrorized. If any weapons were found, the men were arrested and taken to jail. My daughter's duty was to try to calm the women and children and pay US dollars for all damage to the house.

Most of the time, neither “bad guys” nor weapons were found. But every raid convinced more young Iraqis to become “buy guys.” None of the raids won Iraqi friends for the American soldiers.

My daughter was greatly relieved when her unit was sent to the northern city of Mosul, Iraq’s second largest city. From March to July she negotiated and supervised \$2,000,000 worth of reconstruction of schools, hospitals and the city’s sewage system. She met and made friends with many Iraqis, especially interpreters, teachers and children. She was proud of her work because she believed it improved the quality of life for the Iraqi people and improved relations between the American soldiers and the Iraqis.

Paradoxically, the efforts of her civil affairs team were too successful. The “bad guys” did not like friendly ties between Iraqis and Americans. The situation became much more dangerous in August 2004. First the Iraqi interpreters and other friendly Iraqis stopped coming to work with the Americans. The “bad guys” threatened to kill any Iraqi who worked with the Americans or helped them in any way. Then the car bombs started exploding and killing and wounding hundreds of Iraqis and some Americans.

By September, the “bad guys” were firing mortars into her compound several times a day. At first, the mortars were aimed to damage buildings and vehicles, but then they began landing near the living quarters and the dining hall in an attempt to kill the soldiers. By mid-October when she left Iraq, several of her friends had been killed or wounded. Fortunately, she escaped injury.

My daughter left Iraq a sad, discouraged and frustrated young woman. She had hoped to share her humanity with the people of Iraq, but the “bad guys” destroyed her dreams and her work. Instead of Iraq becoming a safer and more democratic country one year after the American invasion, it has become much more dangerous. In the beginning, the Iraqi people had favored the American presence, but now they either fear or avoid Americans.

I asked her, “Who are the bad guys?” She looked at me with sad eyes and answered, “They are the people who kill and terrorize other people. The Iraqi people must stand up against the ‘bad guys.’ No longer can the Americans help the Iraqi people. The longer the Americans stay in Iraq, the more they become like the “bad guys.”