

Special Report: Prayer Delegation: Baghdad

JULY 24-31, 2007

Prayer and Peace Delegation led by the
CHRISTIAN DEFENSE COALITION

Delegation Members:

Rev. Pat Mahoney
Dr. Gary Cass
Troy Newman
Keith Ferguson
David Bradshaw
Kris Keating

Psalm 119:46

I will also

speak of Your

testimonies

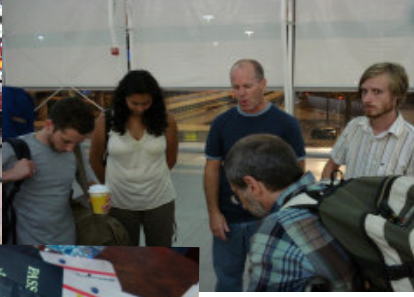
before kings

And shall not

be ashamed.



We presented the Prime Minister with the Ten Commandments and he gave us an important Iraqi painting. Our delegation met and prayed with Al Maliki for over one hour. (left) Rev. Pat Mahoney gives the Minister of Human rights a drawing made by American school children. We hope to exchange many more drawings with the Iraqi children.



Our delegation began in New York with prayer and remained prayerful throughout the trip

Flying into Baghdad was very difficult



Landing safely!



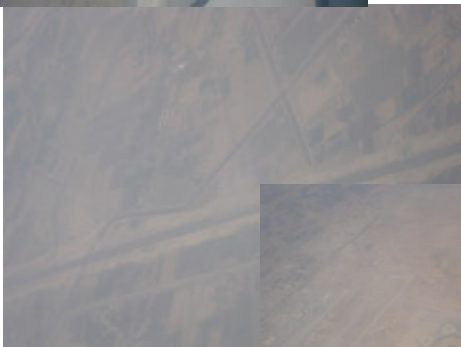
Pat pretends to vomit during the "Death Spiral"



Searches every 10 minutes in a warzone!



Jordan has the only commercial planes flying into Baghdad. The flight ended with a "death spiral" (left) into the airport to avoid SAMs.



It is hard to tell the pitch of the aircraft from these pictures but the plane literally dropped like a rock out of the sky; hence Death Spiral!

Psalm 121: 7-8

The LORD will protect you from all evil;

He will keep your soul.

8 The LORD

will guard your going out and your coming in

From

this time forth and forever.



This mural was painted on a cement bomb barrier. See the broken chains and the Iraqi woman with the purple finger? Iraqis are free for the first time in history!



We traveled from Baghdad International Airport to the greenzone in a convoy of armed vehicles. There were many check points. The green truck led the way with a massive gun turret mounted in the back. Each check point assured us that we were in a warzone.

**Psalm
147:14
He
makes
peace
in
your
borders**



Deadly Force Authorized in this Area!



Military everywhere!



This bomb exploded outside the green zone



Every home is a bunker!



The USA maintains air superiority



Former Baathist headquarters bombed out by America, yet reconstruction continues everywhere! Pray for the peace of Iraq, no child should live in a warzone!



Psalm 127:1
Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman keeps awake in vain.

SPECIAL REPORT
PRAYER TRIP TO BAGHDAD
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(Note: these are my personal notes I took while on the trip. They may or may not be the exact representation of what is going on in Iraq. We were hand-led by the government and therefore given the "party line," but I think my impressions of our trip will represent more of the truth than what we see on the nightly news. TN)

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History

Rev. Patrick Mahoney of the Christian Defense Coalition has been working with the Iraqi embassy since the Iraq elections. His intent was to build a relationship with the embassy and communicate a love for the Iraqi people that would translate into peace and an end to the war.

After the elections in Iraq, Rev. Mahoney presented the Ambassador with a Bible printed during the American Civil War. The Iraqi diplomats recognized the book as “holy.” Through Rev. Mahoney’s tireless efforts, the Prime Minister invited the Christian Defense Coalition to come to Baghdad to pray for the peace of the country. To our knowledge it is the first time a group of Christian ministers have been invited to pray in an Islamic country.

Travel Details

The trip to Baghdad was hastily executed for a number of reasons. The State Department refused to grant security and actually worked against the idea of us going to Baghdad, even though we were being officially welcomed by the Prime Minister. We were able to purchase our tickets into Baghdad through the competent staff at Hillside Mission and Kris Keating.

The airline flights took an amazing amount of time. We flew from New York’s JFK airport to Hamburg, Germany. We then flew on to Dubai where we caught about 3 hours sleep and a quick shower before flying into Amman, Jordan. Flights into Baghdad come only from Amman, and there are only two airlines that fly into Baghdad: Royal Jordanian (RJ) and Iraqi Airlines.

We boarded the RJ flight to Baghdad in 120-degree heat and sat on the tarmac for over an hour before they decided the plane was not fit to fly. We then transferred to the other plane (they only have two planes that fly into Baghdad). Again we sat on the tarmac for a couple of hours before they canceled the flight due to the fact that it was getting dark. The US Air Force will not allow anyone to fly into Baghdad after dark. As a result, we spent the night in Amman and had a great prayer meeting in our room that lasted several hours.

We awoke early and went back to the airport to use Iraqi Air, but they refused to allow us to board. We were finally able to secure a flight on RJ and took off to Baghdad. The “death spiral” was a pretty insane way to land the plane, but it was needed to prevent a surface to air missile from being launched against our aircraft.

After landing, we were met on the tarmac by the Iraqi government. They ushered us into their armor plated Land Cruisers and drove us to a very special part of the airport. We were met there by a special delegation from the Prime Minister’s office. We had tea and refreshments before we drove the “highway of death” into the green zone, which is approximately 9 miles from the airport. The road from the airport to the green zone is littered with burned out cars and blown up buildings. The check points are heavily armored and fortified. US troops are in control of that area and signs that read “deadly force is authorized” are placed frequently.

We were driven in a convoy of six vehicles. Our delegation was split into two armored Toyota Land Cruisers. We were accompanied by two Suburbans and one more Toyota filled with machine gun toting military. A Ford truck outfitted with a 50-caliber gun turret mounted in the bed escorted us. It was an amazing drive.

We went directly to meet the Prime Minister in Saddam’s former palace. Interestingly enough, the electric power cut off a few times while we were in the palace. I know the USA is working to establish a consistent power grid. We left the palace to meet with the Minister of Industry and Mineral, who is a Christian.

We then went to the Al Rasheed hotel, which is more like a bunker than a hotel. We could tell that the hotel was very nice at one time. We were told it was the nicest in the whole Arab world when it was built in 1979. Currently, the second floor is being renovated, because it was bombed two weeks before our arrival. As we experienced at the airport, the security at the hotel was very intense. We had to show our passports, get searched, and go through metal detectors prior to getting checked into our rooms.

After a nice lamb dinner, we met with the Minister of Human Rights. She is also a Christian. She lived at the Al Rasheed hotel for over eight months. In fact, it seems the entire Iraqi government has lived there at one point or another. Our host and assistant to the Prime Minister is living there now because Al Qaeda blew up his home. Our interpreter would not have his photo taken with us because the most dangerous job in Iraq is being an interpreter.

We returned to our hotel and prayed fervently for God to bring peace to Iraq. We awoke early and tried to get out on the first Iraqi Airline flight. They refused us passage because they do not take reservations or credit cards. Other factors also caused us to miss the flight, but we were able to get a spot on the RJ flight leaving at 3:30. The security detail arrived at the hotel to pick us up and we drove back across the “highway of death” to the airport. After much negotiation, we each had to pay an additional \$500 cash for the tickets, after which we were issued hand written tickets. Unfortunately the plane had a flat tire and some other issues, which meant waiting another 5 hours before the plane took off. We all cheered as the plane took to the air.

We landed in Jordan around 1:00 am, where we found a hotel and went fast asleep. The travel back to the USA took another 2 days, but I won't bore you with the details.

Key Meetings

Our first meeting was with the Prime Minister, Al Maliki. We presented him with a copy of the Ten Commandments and pictures drawn by American School children which will be delivered to Iraqi children. Each minister in our delegation was able to speak with the Prime Minister and ask him questions. The meeting centered upon Christian liberty in Iraq, religious freedom, the children of Iraq damaged by war and most importantly that America is praying for the peace of Iraq. The Prime Minister seemed very grateful that we would travel so far to pray for him and the Iraqi people. I personally greeted the PM in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Heartland Church and the American Missionary Association. I told him that the countries have a blood bond. Iraqis and Americans have died in this terrible war. What happens in America affects Iraq and what happens in Iraq affects America. Our Scripture says, “Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.” Therefore, we are united in prayer for the Iraqi people and for the peace of the nation. We agreed that the media does not give a fair rendition of the facts and it was important for Americans to see for themselves what the truth of the war in Iraq is.

Dr. Gary Cass led a fantastic and powerful prayer for the nation and the PM. We prayed in the name of Jesus within the palace of the PM and the entire Iraqi delegation honored our prayer by bowing their heads and agreeing in the Amen! We never shrunk back from the fact that we are Christian ministers. At the request of the Prime Minister we held a joint press conference

with the Iraqi media and posed for pictures. Again, we told the media our concern for the people of Iraq and our desire for peace in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. We also told them we expect to see religious freedom exercised in Iraq.

We then met with the Minister of Industry and Minerals, Fawzi Hariri. He is a Christian and expressed with much sincerity that the Christian community is in deep trouble. He hopes to see a grant from the American government to build an exclusively Christian community with their own security. He also said that Iraq would sorely miss the eradication of the Christian heritage. We all agreed and prayed again for him and the Iraqi people in the mighty name of Jesus.

Later we met with a pastor from Baghdad. He told us of the many persecutions of Christians in the city by the extremists. He warned America to be careful of the threat, (which is very real), posed by the aggressive nature of the radicals. We prayed for him and promised to bring his message back to the USA, and also to pray for the Iraqi people. His biggest concern is for security. There is so much violence in Iraq that the government, even though they say they want religious liberty, cannot protect everyone all the time. The pastor wanted private security, men who are Christians, but acknowledged it was very difficult. He said that as many as 50% of the Christians have left the country or fled to the North to escape the widespread violence and persecution.

We met with the Minister of Human Rights, Wijdan Salim in her home. She is a Christian. Her heart is for the children of Iraq. When we presented her with the children's drawings her response was, "American children draw the sun, trees and grass, but Iraqi children draw guns, bombs and dead people." She instructed us that Iraq has been in a war since 1980 (the Iran/Iraq war) and that the nation is missing hundreds of thousands of its citizens. She was clearly moved by our outreach for the Iraqi people. She wants to set up an "exchange" of children. Sending Iraqi school children to America for a few weeks at a time. There are many orphaned children in Iraq. When I asked about adoptions she informed us that Muslim countries do not allow for adoption, but she is very interested in getting medical care and treatment for the wounded children.

I was also able to meet several US military, private contractors, Iraqi government officials and ordinary people. My impression is that there are millions of good people in Iraq and they are very tired of the war. They want peace for themselves and their families. While there I met a man who is engaged to be married. He wants a family just like each one of us. He is committing his life (like some of the many others I met) to the future of Iraq. None of these people (aside from the military sub-contractors) are making much money. Their goals are ones of self-sacrifice, like our founding fathers, to build a nation that will be free from war. They all want to see their children grow up in peace and liberty and are very grateful for the US Military.

Security Concerns

As I mentioned earlier, Baghdad is a war zone. We were acutely aware of this at every moment. Flying into the airport was an intense "death spiral" to avoid surface to air missiles. For the drive to the green zone from the airport, we were escorted by 50 caliber machine guns and a small army of soldiers. The cannons, the check points, and the fear of snipers was a very

intense experience. Each building has its own security detail with bunkers and armed personnel. The Green Zone is green because of the endless check points and searches. They regularly have car bombs, sniper fire, attacks on convoys, suicide attacks, and mortars. Our hotel, the Al Rasheed, is under repairs. The second floor was mortared just two weeks ago. I have a picture of a tower of smoke from a bomb just a few miles from our hotel. Everyone carries a gun and many people have machine guns. There are signs everywhere that say this area has Deadly Force Authorization. Our host had his home bombed and now has to live in the Al Rasheed hotel. Many people who work with the Americans or are in the government are forced to live at the green zone for fear of their lives.

Personal Assessments

1. Progress on the War and the real combatants.

From all accounts the war is finally being fought in a way that seems to be rooting out the insurgents. We have been told that the last two months have seen some real progress. Tribal leaders that were once cooperating with Al Qaeda are now working with the US military. The Iraqi government is gaining strength to stand on its own. There are fewer casualties on both sides and the insurgents are loosening their grip. In Jordan, a major newspaper reported that the support for Al Qaeda has dropped to 20%, down from 56% just a few years ago. The people desperately want peace and see America as the vehicle to achieve that goal. One man told me that he is so proud of the American boys in their uniforms and heavy vests in 120 degree heat fighting for the peace of Iraq. The three major villains in the conflict are: 1. Al Qaeda, 2. Former Saddam followers and 3. Extremists that see an opportunity for power.

The majority of the population wants peace, even though they are Muslim. Only a small handful of extremists are responsible for the destabilization of the country. So is the “surge” working? It seems that it is. What is more important is that we are winning the hearts and minds of the nation. They are building it literally from the ground up. The Iraqis need the faithful friendship of America to overcome the people who want to see more death and destruction in Iraq. The neighboring countries see Iraq as a piece of pie and they all want a piece. Furthermore, if true democracy blossoms in Iraq, then the liberty that Iraq is feeling right now will expand to the whole region. These are oppressed people that deeply desire freedom and liberty. The Iraqis I have talked to love freedom, even though it has cost them a great amount suffering and for some people, their very lives. They do not want to go back to a dictatorship. They are relishing in their freedom. America must stand with Iraq and its people. This will benefit the world and will translate into less destruction. I also firmly believe that this is in the best interest of America. We are eradicating Al Qaeda on Iraqi soil which is far better than on American soil. We must love the Iraqi people.

2. Iraq’s neighbors.

It is worth noting that Iraq has 6 neighbors, all of whom Saddam had made enemies with at one point or another. Iran is a major factor. Nonetheless, I got the impression that Iraq is attempting to overcome many years of hatred by attempting to unite with Iran in friendship. It is certainly in their best interest to do so. There is no love lost for the extremists in Iran, but we must remember that Iran and Iraq used to be one country and that there are millions of

Iraqis in Iran. We must not look at Iran as a unilateral enemy. In fact many believe that Iran's current president is not fully supported by the people and in fact the seeds of a free Iraq may already be planted in Iran. One more note: It is the universal opinion of the people we met that Saudi Arabia is responsible for much of the terror.

3. The Iraqi people

The Iraqi people are amazing. In spite of war and massive destruction they are kind, warm and very friendly. They dress as formally as they are able. In spite of scorching heat they wear suits. They will give to their own hurt. They want peace for their children. They are sacrificial. They truly honor the Christians, (despite common misconceptions that would say otherwise) although they do not like to be evangelized. I believe that America must pray for the peace of Iraq and welcome the Arab people, not vilify them. They are created in the image of God. Although their culture is much different than the West, we have much in common. It was very interesting to see their great love for children. In the airports they have free strollers. Children are everywhere. They love to take them wherever they go; children are the center of their lives. The West would do well to learn from the Arabs the simple truths that children are a blessing from God.

The Next Steps:

1. Prayer for Iraq

Our mission to Iraq was not sponsored by the USA. We were a private delegation of ministers reaching out to the people of Iraq in the name of Christ. The Iraqi people we met were impressed that we would fly half way around the world at our own expense and at a risk to our safety to pray for them. I asked for forgiveness for not reaching out sooner. I believe that we must support and pray for our troops, but the prayer and outreach mustn't stop there: America must pray for the peace of Iraq. Individuals and Churches must realize that Iraq is full of people who have suffered a great deal of human loss and internal destruction. The pain and misery are real to the Iraqi people. Several people I met with said that God and prayer is their only hope in Iraq. With that in mind we are hoping to get the President and Congress to sponsor a national Day of Prayer for Iraq. I would hope that we would individually ask God in our devotions to ease the suffering of the Iraqi people and end the persecution of the Church in Iraq. Remember that it was Saint Thomas that started the first church in the region and it has not left in 2,000 years. Wouldn't it be great to see revival break out in Iraq? I pray it would be so!

2. Welcoming the Iraq People

It is our desire to see more delegations reach out to the Iraqis. Many are wounded physically and emotionally. We must form a bond of friendship with Iraqis. Even though our cultures differ greatly we mustn't fear them but welcome them in the name of Christ. We must minister to them through the great resources the Lord has given America. We can open our homes to them for short periods. We can send care packages. We can help with medical supplies – we can ease their suffering in many ways.

3. Reaching the Iraqi Children

We hand delivered hundreds of pictures created by American school children. It is our hope that we can bring hundreds of thousands more to Iraq with the hope of reaching the children with a message of peace. I hope you will join our effort to communicate with the children of a hurting nation. Someday soon they will stop drawing bombs and dead bodies, but as normal children that do not suffer the ravages of war, will again draw the sun, trees and grass. We also have hopes of bringing some of their children to America for short term camping trips. The Minister of Human rights wants to see the children relax outside a war zone, to enjoy a rest in America and see the love and compassion that America can give to them. Wouldn't it be great to love these children into the kingdom of God? I think there is real hope for the next generation, but we must reach them in love and compassion, showing them our kindness – not just in words, but in deeds as well. This will foster a long term relationship with people of Iraq. The dangers of avoiding a relationship are obvious. Radical Islam will recruit these children for their own purposes if we do not show them the love of Christ.

4. Trip to Northern Iraq

Rev. Mahoney has already been welcomed by the president of Iraq into the Northern part of the country. The Kurds in the North are already enjoying more peace than the south, yet we still want to connect with them in the same way that we are building relationships with others in Iraq. Sometime in the next 6-8 months we will be traveling back to Iraq to reach out to the people in the North.

Conclusion: We must not abandon the Iraqi people during their greatest need. Iraqi Christians are in peril and we must help them. The children of Iraq and many citizens are suffering the pains of war. We must commit as a nation, as the church, and individually to pray for the peace of Iraq.