



(U) Christmas in Iraq

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A SIGINTer deployed to Baghdad passes on her thoughts from the front. Ms. Rober is one month into a 4-month tour. (C)

(U//FOUO) Months ago as I sat at home watching the headlines filled with the latest casualties in Iraq, I, like so many other Americans, wondered why we were sacrificing our troops in a country that obviously didn't want us there. When the call came asking me to deploy to Baghdad, I was overcome with emotions but knew I had to do it for our troops. After just a few weeks on the ground I can honestly say we are doing it not just for our troops but also for the great people of Iraq who desperately want to regain control of their country and build a proud and free society.

(U//FOUO) I've had the opportunity to travel out into the IZ (international (green) zone) several times now, and I have to say that it is very encouraging to work with the locals and hear how thankful they are for our support and efforts. I have met businessmen who are putting their efforts toward rebuilding infrastructure and are excited every time there is a tenth of an hour of increased electricity available everyday. I have met Iraqis shoveling sand into sand bags to protect our living areas or cooking our meals who are educated as lawyers and accountants, anxious to get back to work but willing to do whatever it takes until that day comes.

(U//FOUO) These are people who every day have their lives and those of their families threatened because they are working for or with "the infidels." I still find it VERY disconcerting to enter areas with them and wait while they are all but strip searched. Meanwhile, we are standing there with body armor and fully loaded weapons, free to roam. It takes them from 1-3 hours just to get into the zone and then they go through multiple searches, even when escorted, at every internal checkpoint. Kind of uncomfortable for me, but they are so very gracious and say, "It is for your safety and ours."

(S//SI) As we drive through the streets, I see the bombed out hulks of Iraqi police stations and security force vehicles. These are the Iraqis who are willing to put their lives on the line daily to help their own countrymen. The same is true for those serving with the Iraqi National Intelligence Service SIGINT element who are at great risk every day as they go to work, putting out solid, valuable, actionable SIGINT that is saving innocent lives daily.

(S//SI) On Christmas Eve a small group of folks went out to the military hospital to sing carols and spend some time with our recovering soldiers. One of our guys was in a Santa suit. They had Iraqis -- adults and children -- coming up to them on the streets begging to have their pictures taken with Santa. They were repeatedly wishing our folks a very Merry Christmas and thanking them for being here. That is the kind of thing you won't see on CNN and yet that display of gratitude goes on every single day. On Christmas Day the head of the Iraqi SIGINT Element told some of our folks, "We are all working together for a common cause: the destruction of Global Terrorism. I am grateful you gave up Christmas with your family to make Iraq a free and democratic country."

(U//FOUO) It is now clear to me that the job we are doing is not to save the face of the US but to help our decision- and policy-makers do the right things for this potentially great nation of Iraq while protecting our own people and those Iraqis who are willing to give their lives to build a better nation. Our target is a subset of this population who are taking advantage and hiding amongst some really good people. Many are willing to expose them, many fear for their lives.

(S) Between some incredible SIGINT and an improving HUMINT effort, I believe we are getting

ahead. It is hard to judge how good of a job we are doing but I have to believe we are making a difference. I don't know that we will ever put a lid on it, but if we give the Iraqis a chance they may be able to bring some order into play. That is why we are here -- so we can get out of here and leave them with the potential for a happy, healthy, safe and prosperous future!

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