

## Listen to the Voices of Iraq

An interview with Dal LaMagna

<http://democracyrising.us/content/view/731/151/>

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By Kevin Zeese

One set of voices rarely heard in the United States are the voices of Iraqi's, what do they think about the U.S. military presence in their country? What do they think should be done about the U.S. staying in Iraq? How do they see this conflict being resolved? What do they think about dividing Iraq into three countries?

Dal LaMagna\*, a businessman and political advocate, recognizes the importance of listening to Iraqi voices. He feels that most Americans do not believe what they hear from the Bush administration regarding what is actually happening in Iraq and they suspect Western media's reporting on the crisis. So last August he joined the Global Exchange/CodePink Peace Delegation which met with a slate of Iraqis in Amman, Jordan. Then, the day after the November election he returned to Amman with Congressman Jim McDermott to hear voices from throughout the Middle East including Iraqis. Both times Members of Iraq's Parliament were interviewed. He video-taped these meetings and so he could share the interviews with the rest of us through power point presentations. His mission was to put Members of Congress and Americans in the room with these people.

I interviewed Dal recently and he took me and Linda Schade, the executive director of VotersForPeace.US, through a power point presentation of August trip to Jordan. You can view the interview at <http://democracyrising.us/content/view/731/151/>.

Regarding the greatest misconceptions people have about Iraq he sees the biggest misconception is that Iraq is viewed as an uncivilized country where the people are uneducated, and live in poverty. In reality these are sophisticated people many of whom speak Arabic and English, who attend some of the best schools in the Middle East and throughout the West. They had a strong infrastructure and excellent health care.

Another important misconception is that they hate each other when in fact they have lived together for thousands of years. They have intermarried, live in integrated communities and work together. Iraqis told him they had never been asked whether they were Sunni or Shia before the U.S. occupation but now they are constantly asked. More than one person made the observation – My wife is a Sunni and I am a Shiite (or the reverse). Jabir Habir Jabir a Member of the Iraq Parliament who represented 70 other Shia members said: “My wife is a Sunni. I do not need the American soldiers to protect me from my wife.”

Regarding oil, one of the reasons he heard that makes sense as to why we are there was explained by Jerry Kiser, someone he and Rep. McDermott met on the flight out to Amman. Jerry is a contractor protecting Kurdish oil wells. Kiser said – “... the issue is the destiny of the oil profits: are the oil revenues going to fund terrorism or democracy?” It is not access to Iraq’s oil that is the issue, the oil gets sold on the international oil markets and can be purchased by anyone willing to pay, it is what happens to the profits from the oil. Does it finance terrorism or building a democratic society favorable to the West?

Also if you completely read the Baker Hamilton Report you saw the push to award to Western Oil companies the production supply agreements, the job of taking the oil out of the ground and processing it. Will it be U.S./western countries or someone else who profit from this job?

During both trips LaMagna heard Iraqis want one Iraq State. They are opposed to partitioning Iraq into three parts: Sunni, Shia, and Kurdish. One screen in the power point shows a map produced by the U.S. government titled “The New Middle East Project,” which shows Iraq divided into three countries, including some land taken from Turkey and Iran. This division is seen by some Iraqi’s as a Zionist plan to weaken break up the Middle East. Part of an effort to get Sunni’s fighting Shia throughout the Arab world so they cannot be united against Israel.

LaMagna was still working on his PowerPoint from his visit with Congressman McDermott. But he did report to us that he heard mostly the same things as he heard on the first trip plus points about the Middle East in general. He heard people say that it is important to differentiate Zionists from Israelis. The Israeli-Palestinian question is seen by people in the Middle East to be at the core of the problem in the region. And, the U.S. is criticized by Arabs for having a double standard when it comes to Israel and Palestine behavior, for instance. One complaint heard over and over is that the U.S. has never allowed a UN resolution to condemn an Israeli action – even the recent use of cluster bombs in Southern Lebanon – bombs which, by the way, they purchased from the U.S.

A main complaint he and Congressman McDermott heard in the November meetings was that Iraqis don’t want al Qaeda and particularly Iranians in their country. If the Americans were not in Iraq the foreign invaders would be exposed and removed from the country. Currently, Iran is a big part of the problem as they are getting involved in Iraq, hiring former Iraqi military and others to work in the resistance. Under the U.S. occupation, Iraqi’s see their country as having been handed over to Iran on a silver platter.

Out of the interviews in August came a ten point, “Iraq Reconciliation Plan” that would be a framework for ending the current conflict. The ten points include:

1. End the occupation of Iraq.
2. Create a timetable for the withdrawal of American troops that is synchronized with the implementation of the Iraq reconciliation plan.

3. Disband the militias created after the occupation.
4. Revise Bremer's Orders and allow the Iraqis to rebuild their army.
5. Rewrite the Iraqi Constitution.
6. Keep Iraq as one state and do not partition into multiple states.
7. Begin the promised reconstruction of Iraq. Employ Iraqis and not foreign workers or contractors.
8. Acknowledge Iraqis' right to resist the U.S. occupation, negotiate with the resistance, and give amnesty to Iraqis resisting the occupation.
9. Investigate all the crimes that were committed by the new Iraqi Government and by the occupation forces in Iraq
10. Make a fair distribution of oil income and natural resources.

On the Progressive Government website you can see more details about this ten point plan including video's where Iraqi's discuss each point. See: <http://www.progressivegovernment.org/page.php?name=reconciliation>. These issues are also discussed in the video interview I conducted with LaMagna.

LaMagna sees the failure in Iraq as part of an old paradigm collapsing – a paradigm of violence, and taking of other people's resources by force. He believes we are at a "The Great Turning" quoting the title of David Korten's new book *The Great Turning, From Empire to Earth Community*. The world is changing and we as individuals are empowered by having access to the truth and most importantly each other. LaMagna says "the people of the world are more and more interconnected through TV, Internet, blogging, cell phones – when information is able to flow that way then the people win, not the rulers, they lose." As a result he concludes: "I'm very optimistic. I think the world community will figure out how to resolve this mess and I'm doing what I can to facilitate it."

Note: \*Dal LaMagna is a founder of the Progressive Government Institute as well as the founder and CEO of TWEEZERMAN Corporation which he founded in 1980 and sold in 2004. Dal has also been active in the Social Venture Network, Business Leaders for Sensible Priorities, The Positive Future Network, and the publisher of Yes Magazine. He serves on the Dean's Council for the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard. Dal ran for U.S. Congress in the 3rd Congressional District, New York as the Democratic and Independent candidate in 1996. In 2000 he ran for U.S. Congress again as the Democratic, Working Families, and Green Party Candidate. In the most recent election he served as a Chair of Senator Maria Cantwell's re-election campaign. Dal received his MBA from Harvard in 1971. In 2002 Dal graduated from the MPA-Mid-Career program at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard. He is an Executor Producer of three Iraq War Movies: "The War Tapes", "The Ground Truth" and "Iraq for Sale".

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