

Letter from L. Paul Bremer to George W. Bush, May 22, 2003

This letter was drafted on May 20, 2003 and sent to the president on May 22 through Donald H. Rumsfeld, then secretary of defense.

May 22, 2003

From: Paul Bremer

To: The President of the United States

Through: The Secretary of Defense

Mr. President:

After a week on the ground, I thought it might be useful to give you my first impressions of the situation here. We have two important goals in this immediate period. We must make it clear to everyone that we mean business: that Saddam and the Baathists are finished. And we must show the average Iraqi that his life will be better.

I have now visited cities in the North and South and have traveled around Baghdad every day, speaking often to Iraqis on the streets or in stores. As I have moved around, there has been an almost universal expression of thanks to the US and to you in particular for freeing Iraq from Saddam's tyranny. In the northern town of Mosul yesterday, an old man, under the impression that I was President Bush (he apparently has poor TV reception), rushed up and planted two very wet and hairy kisses on my cheeks. (Such events confirm the wisdom of the ancient custom of sending emissaries to far away lands).

No doubt you have seen reports of demonstrations criticizing America. But these relate almost entirely to the continued lack of order (which is largely a Baghdad phenomenon) and basic services. No one publicly supports Saddam.

The dissolution of his chosen instrument of political domination, the Baath Party, has been very well received. Several Iraqis have told me, literally with tears in their eyes, that they have waited 30 years for this moment. While the resulting dismissal of public servants has caused some inefficiencies and griping, in most cases younger civil servants have expressed pleasure, even joy, at the measure. (At a minimum they are attracted to the prospect of promotion opportunities.) I will parallel this step with an even more robust measure dissolving Saddam's military and intelligence structures to emphasize that we mean business. We are seeing signs that the outlawed organizations are behind some of the street violence here.

We will combine these declaratory policies with vigorous steps to impose law and order on the streets of Baghdad. This, far more than the much-discussed evolution of political structures, is what dominates the life of the average urban resident. General McKiernan and I are cooperating closely to increase the visible presence of police and armed forces on the streets. People must no longer fear to send their children to school or their wives to work.

Restoring law and order is a necessary but insufficient condition for success. We face a series of

urgent issues involving the restoration of basic services. We have made great progress under Jay Garner's leadership. Iraqis in the north and south have more electricity, and residents of Basra have more water, than they had before the war. In Baghdad our priority remains getting electricity back to prewar levels, for on it also depend the water and sewer systems.

I have relaunched the political dialogue with Iraqi leaders. My message is that full sovereignty under an Iraqi government can come after democratic elections, which themselves must be based on a constitution agreed by all the people. This process will take time. Patience will be a virtue (though evidence of it is thus far lacking). At the same time, I am stressing that we are prepared to move that process as quickly as the Iraqis provided it is one that leads to a representative government at peace with its neighbors.

Our immediate goal will be to arrange a National Conference this summer which will set in motion the writing of a constitution, and reform of the judicial, legal and economic systems. As the Iraqis are progressively more prepared to assume responsibility, we would be prepared to give it to them. But we must be firm and clear: a legitimate sovereign Iraqi government must be built on a well-prepared base.

Respectfully,

Jerry Bremer
Baghdad
May 20, 2003