

Kurdish people sacrificed

by Chad Clouse
Opinion Editor

Zakhu, Iraq, sits in the north a mile from the border to Turkey. The town itself sits on a piece of land the size of the Millcreek mall. The city streets are dirt and the dust from the few cars and trucks settles heavy on everything and hangs precariously in the air. It's not the town that is so important but the check point on the one major highway to the west of town. There on the edge of the town, running past the mud brick homes, a four lane highway appears and runs south and north promising those who can cross the check point a chance at a new life in Turkey.

The fleeing masses are Kurds. They are hunted by the Iraqi government as a nuisance; the Kurds want a free Kurdish state.

Fleeing to Turkey is not always a legitimate escape for these people. The Turkish government hates the Kurds as much as the Iraqi government and uses every opportunity they have to bomb known Kurdish settlements in Iraq and southern Turkey. They are our allies in protecting the no-fly zone. It gives them every opportunity to fly in northern Iraq.

Also important in the town is an old cement pad that the U.S. Army uses to land its UH-60 Blackhawks on. These helicopters are the main supply line for the American Colonel and British officers staying in Zakhu. The helicopters are also their main transportation.

This operation is called "Provide Comfort." The mission of the U.S. soldiers in northern Iraq is to set up talks with the Kurdish leaders.

The question is, "As Americans where do our loyalties lie?"

Zakhu is held by the KDP (Kurdish Democratic Party). However, the KDP is now backed by Saddam Hussien. The Democratic tendencies proclaimed in their name is lost when they choose to affiliate themselves with the Dictator. Yet we must understand their frustration. The U.S. government has in the past refused to help. Even now the U.S. is refusing to arm the other faction of Kurds fighting the KDP and Iraqi soldiers. The faction, PKK, can only depend on Iran for arms.

How are we protecting our interests in Iraq when we have done nothing but shoot

off a few missiles in the defense of these peoples. We have forced one side to affiliate itself with the most prominent power in the region in hopes of protecting their people. In the process they have moved with Iraqi forces against their own. The Kurds are now killing Kurds. Everyone in the Middle East should be happy. Iraq has

into the dirt near shanty towns; I helped in disaster relief when the cold snow in the mountain broke loose and covered those towns; I pulled the blue and stiffened bodies out of the snow and wrapped them with care in the thick black plastic of a body bag so reminiscent of a trash bag; I've met the Kurdish leaders on a few occasions



armed a faction to kill half of his enemy. Do not be surprised if Iraq attacks the KDP in the near future in an attempt to finish the job.

Through all this our Colonel sits on his ass in Zakhu, sipping imported coffees and eating well in a town owned by our supposed enemy. This is a town where children in the street bare the scars of the nation. A young boy no more than five wears heavy white scars across his face and chest. It seems that his body is melting away. When asked what happened an adult near him replies that a grenade blew up in his face.

The President has sanctioned military action against Iraq. The coincidence that this is an election year seems minor. The claims from the White House remain the same. "We are protecting our interests in the Middle East."

I spent six months in southern Turkey and northern Iraq as part of operation "Provide Comfort." In that year I dropped flour and sugar from helicopters like bombs

and found them fat and well clothed while the children around them are dressed in rags; I've tried at night to block out the faces.

I am no longer prepared for war. Going back to Iraq is not an option for me. There is no endgame in the Middle East. We are there and will remain there. Again the young of our country will set foot on Iraqi soil to take part in something they can not believe in. "Who cares about the Kurds?" they'll ask and be right in their assumption that no one does.

Our interests in the Middle East are all economic. We are not humanitarians; we are pirates. Oil is money. We are protecting our oil trade.

There is a photo that goes along with this article. That's me in the middle of a sea of children. They came to gawk at the helicopters that sit out of frame to the photographer's rear. These are the faces I see when I close my eyes. Stare at them a while and see if you care.

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