

CONTRACTOR COMBATANTS: TALES OF AN IMBEDDED CAPITALIST¹

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*“The United States this year will have spent \$100 billion on contractors in Iraq since the invasion in 2003, a milestone that reflects the Bush administration’s unprecedented level of dependence on private firms for help in the war. . . .”*³

I. Introduction

Security contractors in Iraq are a dime a dozen. It is therefore disappointing that Mr. Address hides his valuable insight into the commercial challenges of operating a successful business in a combat zone and attempts to portray himself as one of these “gunslingers”⁴ rather than the skilled entrepreneur that he actually is. The book’s main theme of building positive relationships with the Iraqis and the author’s dedication to reversing the economic “degradation that Saddam brought on the country”⁵ is frequently pushed aside when he muses about how Iraq would become *his* war, where he could serve “not as a soldier but as an armed businessman, a contractor combatant.”⁶

The author’s self-aggrandizing style only distracts from his message about the business challenges contractors face in Iraq, the tragedy of losing friends, and the value of using local nationals to help resupply and rebuild their own country. Throughout *Contractor Combatants*, Address continually and incorrectly refers to himself as a “combatant,”⁷ even though his company’s primary mission is to provide life support to the local Iraqi police and security forces.⁸ Address chooses to highlight the danger of the job and habitually refers to his military and security credentials in an attempt to either bolster his credibility or to impress the reader.

II. Background

Mr. Address received his Bachelor of Arts from the University of the South (Sewanee, Tennessee)⁹ and holds a master’s degree in history from American University, Washington D.C.¹⁰ He briefly served as a U.S. Army infantry officer and graduated from the U.S. Army Ranger School.¹¹ Mr. Address left the Army in 1990¹² and spent the next decade as an entrepreneur importing designer vodka from the Ukraine.¹³ He began working for the defense contractor Custer Battles in January 2004,¹⁴ but a mere two months after his arrival in Iraq, the company was investigated for fraud.¹⁵ Several employees,

¹ CARTER ADDRESS, *CONTRACTOR COMBATANTS: TALES OF AN IMBEDDED CAPITALIST* (2007).

² U.S. Army. Student, 57th Judge Advocate Officer Graduate Course, The Judge Advocate General’s Legal Ctr. & Sch., U.S. Army, Charlottesville, Va.

³ James Risen, *Use of Iraq Contractors Costs Billions, Report Says*, N.Y. TIMES, Aug. 11, 2008, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/12/washington/12contractors.html>.

⁴ ADDRESS, *supra* note 1, at 65.

⁵ *Id.* at 92.

⁶ *Id.* at 75.

⁷ Contractor employees are neither combatants nor noncombatants. Under international agreement, they are considered civilians authorized to accompany the force in the field. U.S. DEP’T OF ARMY, FIELD MANUAL 3-100.21, CONTRACTORS ON THE BATTLEFIELD para. 1-6 (Jan. 2003); see also JENNIFER K. ELSEA ET AL., CONG. RESEARCH SERV. REPORT, PRIVATE SECURITY CONTRACTORS IN IRAQ: BACKGROUND, LEGAL STATUS, AND OTHER ISSUES, RL32419 (2008), available at <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL32419.pdf>.

⁸ ADDRESS, *supra* note 1, at 208. The author defines life support as “meals, kitchens, sewage and refuse collection and disposal, electrical power, water supply, latrines, and possibly—depending on the contract—housing, armory operations and supply, barbershops, road maintenance, a bakery, and laundry ops. *Id.*”

⁹ American-Iraqi Solutions Group, Carter Address, Chief Executive & Principal Owner, <http://www.aisiraq.com/index.php?id=51> (last visited Jan. 14, 2009) [hereinafter American-Iraqi Solutions Group].

¹⁰ ADDRESS, *supra* note 1, at inside back cover.

¹¹ *Id.* at 12, 292, inside back cover.

¹² *Id.* at 292.

¹³ *Id.* at 35, inside back cover. See generally Heather Solerno, *Spicing Up U.S. Vodka Sales in the Spirit of Ukraine*, WASH. POST, June 16, 1997, available at <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P2-723902.html>.

¹⁴ ADDRESS, *supra* note 1, at 7.

including the author, left Custer Battles during the investigation to create the American-Iraqi Solutions Group (AISG).¹⁶ Mr. Andress spent the next eighteen months working for AISG in Iraq, helping it to grow from a small start-up into a prime contractor specializing in construction and logistical support for the Iraqi security services.¹⁷

III. Analysis

Contractor Combatants is written as a memoir and opens with Andress's initial arrival into Iraq in January 2004 and ends with him until his departure a year and a half later. Many of his observations relate to the challenges common to any international business. He deals with the hardships of working with a multinational workforce, overcoming foreign language obstacles, operating within the confines of a foreign legal system, and experiencing different cultures.¹⁸ Andress supplements his story with other aspects unique to a combat zone, like insurgent violence and the occasional threat of friendly fire from Allied military forces.¹⁹

The author presents a favorable opinion of working with different sects of the Iraqi population, and he has an atypical perspective to draw from because ninety percent of AISG's work force is comprised of Iraqi citizens.²⁰ He personalizes one particular relationship when he introduces the reader to his first Iraqi friend, Namir, one of the founders of AISG. The most poignantly written portion of the book is when the author recounts their memorable "seven-month long discussion about democracy"²¹ which is tragically cut short when Namir is killed by a car bomb.²²

Andress presents several professional principles during this portion of the book. First, he seeks to understand both the culture and a foreign viewpoint on developing a democracy in Iraq. He tactfully respects Namir's opinions during their discussions, even when the Namir unwisely suggests that the United States should just install an authoritarian leader to replace Saddam Hussein because Iraqi people are not "ready" for democracy.²³ Second, he refuses to allow tragedy to be manipulated by opportunists. For example, while Andress is grieving Namir's death, he is forced to refute unsubstantiated rumors among his workforce that the Iraqi contractor was killed by American bullets.²⁴ He decisively tackles these rumors and quells the growing anti-U.S. sentiment among his employees, which could have predictably undermined the company.²⁵ Diffusing this particular situation illustrates the complex reality that few managers working outside the combat zone will ever encounter. It was a powerful example of Andress's leadership as he worked to preserve Namir's memory and ultimately step up to run the company.²⁶

The strongest part of this book was certainly the author's main theme of Iraqis being capable of rebuilding their own country.²⁷ Andress fairly contrasts overall the success of using local sub-contractors with plenty of examples of their shortcomings and the frustrating challenges that he encountered along the way. Yet in the end, the reader is left with an optimistic message. Andress's reasons for supporting a local workforce are practical-minded, and they go beyond the usual public policy rationale of allowing them to take ownership of their country. For example, in a country where maps are often outdated or useless,²⁸ the local workers' first-hand knowledge of the area made the difference between success and failure when getting to a project site or trying to avoid the danger of the insurgency.

¹⁵ *Id.* at 35; American-Iraqi Solutions Group, *supra* note 9. *But see* Dana Hegpeth, *Judge Clears Contractor of Fraud in Iraq Case*, WASH. POST, Feb. 9, 2007, at D1.

¹⁶ ANDRESS, *supra* note 1, at 38–39.

¹⁷ *Id.* at 42, 206, 277.

¹⁸ *Id.* at 278.

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ *Id.* at 130; *see also* American-Iraqi Solutions Group, <http://www.aisgiraq.com/index.php> (last visited Jan. 14, 2009).

²¹ ANDRESS, *supra* note 1, at 149.

²² *Id.* at 151.

²³ *Id.* at 50.

²⁴ *Id.* at 151.

²⁵ *Id.* at 155.

²⁶ *Id.* at 156.

²⁷ *Id.* at 287.

²⁸ *Id.* at 220.

The author also responsibly portrays some of the inherent pitfalls of employing a local workforce. He explains how he was forced to double order time-sensitive key items so AISG would not end up defaulting on its contracts whenever the Iraqi subcontractors were unable to perform.²⁹ He also faced incredible challenges finding relatively basic, but essential construction equipment on the local economy.³⁰ In the end though, the reader is left with the message that while the predictability of supplies and manpower might fall below what we would normally expect from a business operating within the United States, the benefits for the local economy and pride of the Iraqi people outweigh these challenges.

Throughout this memoir, Andress presents a chronological account of his time in Iraq. This helps to show his personal progression and mistakes, as well as the growth of AISG. However, in nearly every chapter Andress attempts to portray himself as the infallible hero whose expertise will save the day.

Most notably, Andress frequently and needlessly mentions his military training as a former Army infantry officer and Ranger.³¹ His use of military jargon within the narrative is not surprising in itself, especially given the amount of time he spent in Iraq or the number of former military personnel employed by AISG. However, his qualifications are not as strong as he would like the reader to believe, and he assumes that the reader will simply accept that he is a skilled tactician among the myriad of former career Special Forces personnel working in Iraq. To further his ruse, the author uses several methods. He focuses the reader on the strong military resumes of the security men around him,³² he tries to draw parallels between himself and a cavalry squadron commander by pointing out that they each have similar dates of commissioning,³³ and he brazenly claims that his experience “seasoned” the young soldiers in Iraq.³⁴

Throughout the book, it almost appears as if the author is hiding the real extent and length of his military experience to mislead the reader into thinking that he is a battle hardened warrior, rather than a strong, forward-thinking businessman. His pretext of toughness begins with the cover of the book³⁵ and continues as he inanely boasts about his marksmanship skills³⁶ and how he drew on his “training as a field officer planning military maneuvers.”³⁷ If the author was a seasoned military officer or had any combat experience, these examples and references would not sound so pretentious. Instead, the author waits until the last twelve pages of the book to admit that he left the military in 1990, after only a few years of service.³⁸

There are number of other obvious contradictions within the book, many of which seem to similarly derive from the author’s self-assuredness and ego. Despite touting his own very limited military experience, the author passes up no opportunity to refer to current Army officers as “some of the most ill-trained for their mission in Iraq.”³⁹ He blames their lack of training, specifically on Ranger tactics, for his friend Namir’s death.⁴⁰ In one situation, he willingly sidles up close to Army vehicles and uses them for protection when he is stopped in traffic waiting for the military to detonate an improvised

²⁹ *Id.* at 189.

³⁰ *Id.* at 199.

³¹ *Id.* at 2, 7, 12, 74–75, 175, 213, 266.

³² *Id.* at 227; *see also id.* at 236 (describing Tony’s experience); *id.* at 279 (describing Van’s resume).

³³ *Id.* at 245–46. Of course, the obvious difference between his credentials and those of the commander is that the military officer actually served on continuous active duty developing his military skills, while the author spent the prior decade importing vodka. *Id.* at inside back cover.

³⁴ *Id.* at 278.

Most of the Pentagon contractors out on the ground were old enough to be the fathers of the soldiers patrolling the country and manning the checkpoints. So the contractor combatants provided the kind of “seasoning” essential to the success of the overall mission of our troops, which was to subdue the insurgency and reconstruct Iraq.”

Id. The author’s argument about age automatically equaling “seasoned” experience would only seem to hold true for those contractors who actually possess extensive military experience, not just any contractor old enough to have fathered a servicemember in Iraq.

³⁵ In the title the author declares himself a “combatant” and he poses on the cover wearing a bulletproof vest and holding an AK-47. *Id.* at front cover,

³⁶ *Id.* at 113.

³⁷ *Id.* at 213.

³⁸ *Id.* at 292.

³⁹ *Id.* at 150.

⁴⁰ In the book, the author admits that Namir got out of his vehicle to find out why the military stopped traffic on the bridge and he was subsequently killed as a taxi approaching the military vehicle exploded. *Id.* Had Namir stayed inside the vehicle, like his driver did, he would have likely escaped unscathed—regardless of whether Ranger tactics were being used by the Soldiers targeted in the attack.

explosive device.⁴¹ But he later faults Namir for doing the same thing, even alleging that Namir misplaced his faith in the Army before he was killed.⁴²

Although not uncommon in memoirs, the author's objectivity is generally lacking throughout the book. He devotes different chapters to a number of important issues in Iraq, including corrupt contractors, the need to blend into his surroundings for survival, and developing associates and local allies. Unfortunately, each of these various situations just seems to serve as a backdrop for the author to try to subjectively portray himself as more skilled, more adept, or more intelligent than everyone else around him. It is unclear throughout the book, what audience the author is hoping his message will reach. The most logical demographic with interest in this subject matter is naturally going to be servicemembers or other contractors serving and working in Iraq. However, because of the author's impudent tone, that particular audience is more likely to perceive the book as a critical attack upon of their professionalism, rather than an opportunity to glean from the author's business or leadership lessons.

As expected with a memoir, the author uses very few outside resources to support his main points. He lightly sprinkles the book with citations to newspaper articles, but they generally restate the underlying factual events,⁴³ and do not add any insight to his observations. In the twelfth and final chapter, however, the author significantly departs from that style.

In the last chapter the author states his personal political views on the war. He strongly supports a continued U.S. presence in Iraq, and provides numerous citations that provide legal justification for the initial invasion and occupation of Iraq.⁴⁴ He alleges that journalists covering the war are biased and intentionally misrepresenting the progress in Iraq.⁴⁵ He further claims that terrorists are exploiting the media broadcasts of car bombs and carnage, merely to manipulate American fear and motivate a troop withdrawal.⁴⁶ Of course, it's important to note that the author returned to Iraq in November 2006 and is now the CEO and principal owner of AISG,⁴⁷ so his arguments supporting a continued U.S. presence in Iraq certainly are not without their own underlying bias.

One final stylistic criticism of this book is that Andress fails to present any supplementary materials. Most memoirs contain photos to give the reader a flavor for the people or the environment. The author may have deliberately refrained from publishing pictures to protect people who are still working in Iraq from becoming targets. However, it certainly would be helpful if he included at least one general map of Iraq in the book as a reference. More than once, the author described the difficulty of getting to remote job sites and the tactical decision to use detours or avoid certain areas of Iraq.⁴⁸ A reader who has not visited Iraq will have a more difficult time envisioning the impact of these detours without a frame of reference.

IV. Conclusion

Overall, the author's first-hand account of building business in a combat zone is noteworthy because it focuses on a different topic than most recently published books on Iraq. If the author had concentrated his focus on the business aspects of his Iraqi experience, and abstained from portraying himself as a paramilitary commando, it certainly would be a far more enjoyable book to read. Instead, his memoir is interspersed with enough egotistical musings and attempts to bolster his credentials that the substance of his message is frequently lost. In light of his relatively limited military and security experience, the author should have more narrowly focused the book on his primary theme of developing a thriving commercial business dedicated to utilizing the Iraqi citizens and rebuilding Iraq.

⁴¹ *Id.* at 71–73.

⁴² *Id.* at 150.

⁴³ *Id.* at 34, 37, 53–55, 261.

⁴⁴ *Id.* at 296–300.

⁴⁵ *Id.* at 285.

⁴⁶ *Id.* at 285, 288–89.

⁴⁷ American-Iraqi Solutions Group, *supra* note 9.

⁴⁸ ANDRESS, *supra* note 1, at 212.