

Silver linings in Iraq clouds

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BAGHDAD Iraq. — During a recent mortar attack on the main U.S. compound in Baghdad, which formerly was Saddam's grand palace, an optimistic chief of logistics explained how the expanding flow of \$18.4 billion of U.S. aid would produce long-term change. He also thinks things had already improved in the 12 months he had been there.

In an earlier interview, Ambassador John Negroponte said correctly that, without security, the other facets of economic, sociopolitical change could not occur. Accordingly, these points were further amplified by his comments that Iraq's future must be viewed not in the short term but "a longer view" and that there is important traction. He saw Iraq filled with promise.

The Defense Department puts out daily reports on some 2,000 successful projects based on information accumulated from civilian and military sources on the ground. However, most of the American media have diligently avoided reporting on this plethora of good news, negatively flavoring the worldwide impression of our efforts. Furthermore, historical perspectives like comparisons of American efforts under Democratic administrations in Japan, Germany and Korea have also been avoided. Therefore, our altruism is downplayed while the combat mission supporting the Iraqi government is highlighted.

Day after day, these media reports on a narrow band of dissident combatants that include outside agitators color perceptions while affecting both our military and civilian morale. Meanwhile, a mixed group of committed coalition people are working hard and risking their lives to bring Iraq from ruin to future stability and prosperity.

In the U.S. Military Hospital in Baghdad, as Medevac helicopters fly in from Najaf, the staff works feverishly trying to save a critically wounded Iraqi soldier — who lies next to an American soldier from the 1st Cavalry. This while another group of medics attend to a accidentally burned child, as her traditionally garbed mother fingers prayer beads beside her bed.

In another part of the city, coalition elements work on clean water and electricity generation, and how to rejuvenate cash-making oil production amidst turmoil. They are addressing some basic

infrastructure issues for the first time since before the Iran-Iraq war. As one British consultant said: "The faster we help the Iraqis, the faster they get a better life, the faster people quit fighting." For America, that means the faster we get out of there.

A first lieutenant in the 10th Mountain Division, caked in dust, said, "Our helping Iraqis makes sense." When told he was a long way from the West Point parade grounds, he said: "This was what I was meant to do, help people." This statement, as we pass 1,000 American military killed in action, illustrates the deep seriousness, selflessness and intent of our cause.

So, while there are fainthearted, non-Trumansque types running for the door to abandon a John Kennedy-like noble effort, remember that the patient and earnest helping of Iraq will prove correct even if it takes 10 years. In the short term, it may look ugly but President Bush's political heroism will only become evident after the current election, as success in Iraq starts kicking in. Admittedly, as a side benefit, this may give America access to much needed oil to keep our economy going. This, while radical environmentalists slam the door on development of oil in our own Alaskan Arctic Wildlife Reserve.

Even amid our mistakes and blunders, Iraqis are becoming better off, receptive and appreciative. It can be hoped this will later be reflected in the Arab world, relieving pressure on Israel.

Last, we must make atonement, in the collective, cosmic sense, to our forefathers, our American military dead and those almost 3 million innocents killed after we abandoned Indochina in 1975. America must not repeat that history. This atonement comes by helping Iraqis and as many others as we can, people yearning to be free. Otherwise, we will be condemned to a spiral of expanding warfare unprecedented in human history, as "evildoers" take charge and flourish.

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