

Winning in slow motion

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An open secret among the military is that the operational plan to invade Iraq was remiss in outlining an effective and robust program of civic action and civil affairs.

This would have brought the populace off its knees by providing organization and assets, establishing the sincerity and benevolence of the occupying forces. Besides failing to do this, the blanket disbanding of the Iraqi security forces made recovery a costly and protracted affair. Accordingly, saying that we had a slow start is being extremely polite. As we move toward \$500 billion spent and 2,500 of our valuable soldiers killed in action (KIA), the race is on to see if the American people will hang onto the notion America can push democracy into a void, regardless of the weapons of mass destruction issue.

Many military briefers use Vietnam-era jargon like "body counts" to describe the situation, albeit with modern PowerPoint. But one general radically departs from that. The 3rd Infantry Division commander, Maj. Gen. William G. "Fuzzy" Webster interlaces his comments with quotes from psychologists Abraham Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs" and B.F. Skinner's behavioral concepts, highlighting how providing clean water and sewage systems reduces violence. He states that in more than a year in Iraq, he has not fired artillery or called in air strikes in his area of operation. His division has taken to heart the concept "make no more enemies" in a constituency that encompasses more than 7 million people.

He segues into how his combat ready troopers will be aiding newly trained Iraqi Security Forces to ensure a safe election. This is a positive departure from the ideas espoused in our military schools, such as "we are here to just break things," that a gullible and naive U.S. Congress incorporated into military training in past decades. This metamorphosis reflects a seminal change in military thinking about warfare in the 21st century. One officer says, "It seems that the military is the only part of our government on a war footing," which could explain why an infantry commander has had to become sensitive to the situation, and is wearing multiple hats. The result of this new thinking is, as one Marine officer involved in civic action in Fallujah says, "progress is slow, but we have progress. It isn't all about killing bad guys."

Despite this progress, some of the American military retains its antiquated thinking. The new Iraqi military is being trained to mirror our conventional forces, complete with "infantry combat divisions" designed mainly to break things. While security is paramount, it will require more than just a hard fist - it will also require a helping open hand.

In El Salvador, where our military influence succeeded in the 1980s, we spent a major proportion of our time instructing the military, and later the police, on human rights, civic action and civil affairs. The dividend was enormous and led to a diminution of conflict. Fortunately, other segments of the Coalition

effort and Iraqi citizens' own initiatives are picking up the pace in Iraq, with thousands of helpful projects completed and thousands more being planned and implemented. The combined effort has led to lower unemployment, the expansion of education and health services, and the growth of basic security. However, much of this effort is in slow motion, some barely visible to the naked eye, mixed in with a few clear failures to learn from. The administration's efforts to inform the American public, as the Reagan administration did on the controversial Contra movement, will be an important measure of progress in Iraq.

Initially it appeared the Iraq effort was akin to putting a size 13 foot into a size 7 shoe, but the energy and resources being put into this fledgling democracy, is in effect, reducing the disparity in size. Our flag-draped caskets prove the sincerity of our physical and intellectual effort. Furthermore, reduction in forces need not be viewed as a lessening of American commitment - providing quantity of effort is matched by quality of effort - as Iraq transitions into a self-sustaining mode.

The political investment by President Bush may yet make him the Abraham Lincoln of the 21st century, if he can convince the American public to hang tough. Failure to do so will trigger a cascade of turmoil costing a hundred times more than our current investment, with "evil doers" running unfettered.

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