

Publisher
Pason Gaddis
pgaddis@florida-weekly.com

Executive Editor
Jeffrey Cull
jcull@florida-weekly.com

Creative Director
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jdickerson@florida-weekly.com

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Production
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Circulation Manager
Penny Kennedy
pkennedy@florida-weekly.com

Circulation
David Anderson
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Account Executives
Shelley Lund
slund@florida-weekly.com
Lyndsey Walsh
lwalsh@florida-weekly.com
Doug Rosburg
drosburg@florida-weekly.com

Business Office Manager
Kelli Carico

Street Address:
Florida Weekly
4300 Ford Street, Suite 106
Fort Myers, Florida 33916
Phone 239.333.2135
Fax: 239.333.2140



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EDITORIAL

Re-Liberators

BY RICH LOWRY

BAGHDAD, IRAQ —“Greeted as liberators” has become one of the most scoffed-at phrases of the Iraq War. But a top U.S. general here plays on the phrase in describing security gains during the past year. “In some ways,” he says, “our soldiers have come to be seen as re-liberators.”

The neologism seems apt in the crisp, cool dusk of a Saturday evening in a Sunni neighborhood here in the Dora section of this city.

American soldiers, who a few months ago couldn't venture here without being shot at, are mobbed by clamoring children as soon as they leave their vehicles. Stores are open on a street that was deserted just months ago. An American captain -- “the mayor” of the neighborhood -- is greeted by name by an Iraqi boy who runs up to shake his hand, and two women approach him to ask about being hired by the Iraqi government as teachers.

The neighborhood is a showcase of a counterinsurgency campaign that has emphasized securing the population and getting to know local players. “We live in the neighborhood,”

explains Col. Ricky Gibbs. “How did we get there? We moved to the sound of the guns.” It took months of combat for his troops to roust al-Qaida and establish outposts in his section of the city. Once it became clear that the Americans weren't going anywhere, “the people came out in droves.”

The Army has contracted with an influential (and very brave) local doctor-turned-businessman in the neighborhood for road repairs, trash pickup and electricity generation. All of which means local jobs.

The question now is whether the enhanced security will harden into -- in a phrase the U.S. military uses often now -- “irreversible momentum” that will make the second liberation more enduring than the first, even as the U.S. begins to draw down the additional brigades of the surge.

It should be the Shia-dominated Iraqi central government contracting with people like the doctor. It can't (out of incompetence) or won't (out of sectarian motives). “We've had an American awakening and a Sunni awakening,” he says, referring to the surge and the Sunni turn away from the insurgency. “Now we need a government awakening.”

The central government hasn't attempted to consolidate change bubbling from below. There are 80,000 mostly Sunni security volunteers seeking integration into official security forces or transition into civilian jobs. There are volunteer teachers -- like those petitioning the American captain -- who await government salaries. Yet the government has left billions of dollars in revenue unspent.

In the meantime, we fill the gap, in keeping with the military's axiom that “money is ammunition.” Commanders use discretionary funds at their disposal to contract for services and provide seed money for businesses.

“I can't spend it fast enough,” Col. Gibbs says. This so-called CERP funding will run out in the summer, and Gen. Petraeus is asking for \$480 million more of it. Congress would be scandalously foolish to reject him.

Everyone acknowledges that Iraq's progress is fragile. The country is still violent, al-Qaida hasn't been totally vanquished, and the Shia south has its own alarming problems. But we have to try to capitalize on the opportunities created by the surge. There's not going to be a third liberation. ■

— Rich Lowry is editor of the *National Review*.

OPINION

Not Che Obama

BY ROGER E. HERNANDEZ

I got an e-mail urging me to check out the talk on the Internet about a Che Guevara image hanging on the wall in a Barack Obama campaign office. So I plunged into the blogosphere to find out what it was all about.

It started with a television station in Houston that ran a story showing a local Obama volunteer office with a Cuban flag adorned with the famous image of Che, long hair flowing beneath the beret with the star, looking off dreamily into some distant epic.

He was probably contemplating his next murder. After all, he once said it was imperative for his followers to become “an effective, violent, selective, cold killing machine.” Those followers needed only follow his example. In Cuba, Guevara was in charge of sham trials that sentenced hundreds to execution by firing squad.

Worse, it apparently wasn't a case of naive Che chic from some kid who knows nothing about the man but thinks he looks cool on a T-shirt. The middle-aged Obama supporter who hung the flag was inter-

viewed by the same television station and said she was Cuban-American. It is pretty much guaranteed that when a politically active adult of Cuban origin hangs a Guevara picture, it's a consciously pro-Castro political testimonial.

She wouldn't own up to it, telling the reporter several times that she did not have time to talk about it.

Plenty of people, though, found time to blog about it. On the right, there's an effort to make Che Obama go viral, into a new Swift Boat.

“Obama won't wear flag pin but displays Cuban Flag in his Houston Office,” screams AmericanThinker.com, which describes itself as “devoted to the thoughtful exploration of issues.”

Over at Babalublog.com, an anti-Castro blog with which I am often in agreement, there are no less than two photoshopped morphs of Che and Obama.

Journalistically, it's all reprehensible. And as to promoting democracy in Cuba, it's counterproductive.

Obama had nothing, zero, to do with the Guevara flag. The campaign ordered it taken down and issued a statement on its Web site that said, “The office featured in this video is funded by volunteers of the Obama Campaign and is not an official

headquarters for his campaign.”

I called Obama's press people. Was there concern that anti-Castro Cuban-American voters considering support for Obama in the fall will be turned off?

He first wrote about that in an op-ed some months ago for *The Miami Herald*. Obama said he would use the trade embargo to “bargain on behalf of democracy with a post-Fidel government,” but also said he would lift restrictions now in place and “grant Cuban Americans unrestricted rights to visit family and send remittances to the island.”

Would that make Cubans “less dependent on the Castro regime” and more able to “advance peaceful political and economic reform” as Obama claims, or simply enrich the dictatorship, like critics insist?

It's a legitimately debatable issue. What's not justifiable is to paint Obama as an admirer of Che and Fidel. That makes anti-Castro activists look like right-wing slime merchants -- thereby giving ammunition to the left-wing smear merchants who want the embargo lifted because they truly are admirers of Che and Fidel. ■

— Roger Hernandez is a syndicated columnist and writer-in-residence at *New Jersey Institute of Technology*.

MOMENTS IN TIME

- On Feb. 28, 1983, “M*A*S*H,” the cynical situation comedy about doctors behind the front lines during the Korean War, airs its final episode after 11 seasons. The last episode drew 77 percent of the television viewing audience, the largest audience ever to watch a single TV show up to that time.

- On Feb. 29, 1928, director and screenwriter William DeMille, brother of director Cecil B. DeMille, hires Beth Brown to write jokes for the film “Tenth Avenue.” Brown was the first woman on record to work as a Hollywood comedy writer.

- On March 1, 1961, President John F. Kennedy establishes the Peace Corps, which would send American men and

women to foreign nations to assist in development efforts. Since 1961, more than 180,000 Americans have joined the Peace Corps, serving in 134 nations.

- On March 2, 1904, Theodor Geisel, better known to the world as Dr. Seuss, author of such children's books as “The Cat in the Hat,” is born in Springfield, Mass. Geisel's first book, “And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street,” was rejected by more than two dozen publishers before making it into print in 1937.

- On March 3, 1931, President Herbert Hoover signs a congressional act making “The Star-Spangled Banner” the official national anthem of the United States. Francis Scott Key composed the lyrics to

“The Star-Spangled Banner” in 1814.

- On March 4, 1952, Ernest Hemingway completes his short novel “The Old Man and the Sea.” He wrote his publisher the same day, saying he had finished the book and that it was the best writing he had ever done. The critics agreed, and the book won the Pulitzer Prize in 1953.

- On March 5, 1963, the Hula-Hoop, a hip-swiveling toy that became a huge fad across America when it was first marketed by Wham-O in 1958, is patented by the company's co-founder, Arthur “Spud” Melin. An estimated 25 million Hula-Hoops were sold in its first four months of production alone. ■