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Wonder Land/By Daniel Henninger

Here's a Way You Can Help The Cause in Iraq

Thus spake George W. Bush this week: "The people of our country are united behind our men and women in uniform, and this government will do all that is necessary to assure the success of their historic mission." Still, many Americans who support the war don't much like sitting on their hands doing little more than watch it on TV. Some have written here, asking what they can do to help. This column will describe a real project that lets the folks at home lend a hand to the soldiers in Iraq.

Over the past year, a successful technology entrepreneur named Jim Hake has been working with the Marine Corps to help their reconstruction projects in Iraq. The Marines identify local equipment needs, and Mr. Hake's organization, Spirit of America, after raising the money, acquires the stuff, typically for schools and medical clinics. It flies directly out of Camp Pendleton in California. Jim Hake and the Marines are a coalition of the can-do, bypassing the slow U.S. procurement bureaucracy. More on that effort in a moment. Here's where you come in:

The First Marine Expeditionary Force and U.S. Army in Iraq want to equip and upgrade seven defunct, Iraqi-owned TV stations in Al Anbar province—west of Baghdad—so that average Iraqis have better televised information than the propaganda they get from the notorious Al-Jazeera. If Jim Hake can raise \$100,000, his Spirit of America will buy the equipment in the U.S., ship it to the Marines in Iraq and get Iraqi-run TV on the air before the June 30 handover.

Now we are getting somewhere. Since day one, the Coalition Provisional Authority's weakest suit has been the war of ideas, images and public relations. Into

this use-it-or-lose-it void stepped Al-Jazeera, the Qatar-based TV operation that somehow has wires running to every camcorder in the Arab terrorist world. Punch in english.aljazeera.net for a look at "news" from Iraq spun tirelessly against the coalition. Its photos of "Falluja after the siege" are preposterous, depicting nothing but "destroyed homes" and ominous GIs. The text: "As we drive through the back roads on the way to Falluja, U.S. jets are pounding the area around the tiny village of Garma."

If this hooley is what they feed to the English-language audience, imagine the daily TV diet Al-Jazeera trowels on for Iraqis. Al-Jazeera's Web site Wednesday said it wouldn't air the video of an Italian hostage's murder "in order not to upset viewers' sensitivities." Hours later, I heard an all-news radio in New York recite verbatim Al-Jazeera's tender account.

If the Marines can get these moribund stations back on the air, the coverage area would include Fallujah and Ramadi. The VHF/UHF stations are owned as cooperatives by TV-competent Iraqis already vetted by the Army. Some broadcast Al-Jazeera for lack of other content. In return for the upgrades, the Iraqi operators would be asked two things: Criticism is fine, but don't run anti-coalition propaganda; and let the Marines buy air time to broadcast public-service announcements, such as the reopening of schools or clinics—or indeed, pending military operations.

I can hear the chorus of lamentations about "independence" and "objectivity." Get real. We're in Iraq, not Kansas, Toto. These Iraqis, aided by American soldiers, are manifestly engaged in a death-struggle for their nation. Anyone who has

the courage to produce daily television at odds with the goals of the homicidal "insurgents" doesn't need tutorials on journalistic piety from us.

Jim Hake's organizational insight is to deploy the best practices of the modern U.S. economy—efficiency and speed—around the margins of the Iraqi war effort. The Amazons, Best Buys, FedExes and DHLs can get anything anywhere—fast. Why not use the same all-American skill at procurement efficiency and quick distribution to get the soldiers in Iraq (and Afghanistan) the stuff that government red tape will never provide in time?

His operation, in Los Angeles, is wholly New Economy. For past projects he's gotten the word out via Web loggers such as Glenn Reynolds' InstaPundit.com, windsofchange.net and hughhewitt.com. Mr. Hake finds low-cost suppliers on the Internet and negotiates prices. His donor network also suggests suppliers.

Earlier projects for the Marines flew over cargo planes of school supplies, basic medical equipment and toys (turns out Iraqi children love Frisbees). One anecdote: The day before the school equipment was to ship, they found that all the pencils broke easily. On a hunch, Mr. Hake made a morning call to a Staples manager in southern California. By mid-afternoon the Staples man lined up sources for 120,000 pencils—cheaper than the original buy. Mr. Hake bought and shipped them. Spirit of America is all-volunteer. The accounting for its projects, down to the penny, is listed on the Web site.

Spirit of America's buy-list for the Marines' TV-stations project includes: digital video camcorders, desktop PCs for video editing, video editing software, televisions, 21-inch satellite dishes, KU-band

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universal transponders, satellite decoder/receivers, Philips audio/video selectors (4-in/2-out), VCRs (PAL and NTSC compatible), DVD players (multi-region compatible), step-down voltage converters (220 to 110) and lighting sets. The cost of this equipment is about \$100,000.

Mr. Hake, incidentally, insists on paying for all the goods in his projects. He says donor relationships with big companies waste time getting sign-offs by senior management. I asked if he thought they could get the TV stations under way by the June 30 handover: "Absolutely. My goal is to have the gear at Pendleton by May 7. The Marines will fly it over and they are ready to get going on this. Needless to say, plans can always change in a combat zone but this is an undertaking to help turn the tide there." If this works, the Marines and Spirit of America hope to rebuild TV stations elsewhere around Iraq.

Want a piece of the action? Spirit of America's project with the 1st Marine Division, and how to donate, is at www.spiritofamerica.net, or directly at www.spiritofamerica.net/req_12/request.html or 800-691-2209. It's brand extension of the Marines' now-famous saying: "No better friend, no worse enemy."



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