



SPIRIT
of **AMERICA**

PATRIOTIC ASSISTANCE
IN THE WORLD'S TOUGHEST
PLACES, OUR MISSION IS
HIS SAFETY AND SUCCESS.



Spirit of America is the only way American citizens can directly support the safety and success of deployed US troops and diplomats.

No endorsement of Spirit of America by the US Department of Defense or its personnel is intended or implied.

WHAT WE DO

Spirit of America provides flexible, private assistance in response to local needs identified by deployed American troops and diplomats. We provide humanitarian and economic assistance, as well as equipment needed by US partner forces, in support of US missions and the local people American troops and diplomats seek to help.

PROJECT EXAMPLES

COUNTERING ISIS IN NORTHERN IRAQ



METAL DETECTORS FOR PESHMERGA

To help stop ISIS, SoA responded to needs identified by US Special Operations Forces by providing metal detectors to their Kurdish Peshmerga partners. The metal detectors are being used to find roadside bombs, save lives and limbs of Peshmerga, civilians, and American soldiers.



BOOTS FOR CHILDREN WHO ESCAPED ISIS

In response to needs identified by US diplomats, SoA provided rubber boots to help the most vulnerable refugee children who fled ISIS survive the harsh northern Iraqi winter.

PREVENTING WAR IN WEST AFRICA



SUPPORT FOR LIVESTOCK HEALTH IN NIGER

To help US Special Operations Forces stop al Qaeda in Niger, SoA addressed livestock health and youth employment needs in key tribal areas. We funded veterinary school scholarships for youths, and provided veterinarians and dirt bikes for a vaccination campaign.

COUNTERING RUSSIAN AGGRESSION AND PROPAGANDA



RADIO STATION FOR UKRAINIAN SOLDIERS

In response to needs identified by US Army Europe and the US Ambassador to Ukraine, SoA funded a radio station which meets the information and entertainment needs of Ukrainian soldiers fighting on the front lines of a war launched by Russia.

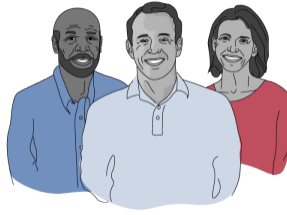
HOW IT WORKS



US TROOPS AND DIPLOMATS

Identify critical local needs that can't be met by the government

+



AMERICAN CITIZENS

Give, so we can provide fast and flexible support

+



SPIRIT OF AMERICA

Works side by side with US personnel to deliver needed assistance

WHO WE ARE

Spirit of America is a privately-funded 501c3 nonprofit charity founded in 2003. Through a groundbreaking partnership with the US military, our all-veteran field team works alongside deployed American troops to provide private-sector resources and know-how in support of their missions. Our mission is to support the safety and success of US troops and diplomats and the local people they want to help.

“Spirit of America allows our troops to deliver on the promise that America represents.”

Hon. George P. Shultz
Former US Secretary of State

“Think of Spirit of America as a philanthropic rapid response team, providing humanitarian and economic assistance in response to US troops and diplomats and in support of our nation’s interests.”

General Stanley McChrystal
US Army, *Retired*

ADVISORY BOARD*

Hon. George P. Shultz
Former Secretary of State

General Stanley McChrystal
US Army, Retired

Admiral Eric Olson
US Navy, Retired

General Jack Keane
US Army, Retired

General Gordon Sullivan
US Army, Retired

General James Jones
US Marine Corps, Retired

General Phil Breedlove
US Air Force, Retired

Ambassador Nancy Soderberg

Lt. General Charles Cleveland
US Army, Retired

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Colonel Stu Bradin
US Army, Retired

Lt. Colonel Scott Mann
US Army, Retired

Dr. James Carafano

Michèle Flournoy

Richard Fontaine

Dr. Kimberly Kagan

Dr. David Kilcullen

James Locher III

Clare Lockhart

Nicco Mele

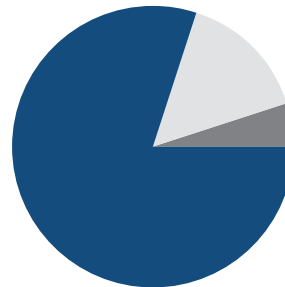
Linda Robinson

Dr. Kori Schake

**partial list*

FINANCIALS

We are funded entirely by private contributions from individuals, foundations, and businesses. Since our inception, 80% of our expenditures have gone to program expenses. With our “100% Promise,” donors may earmark their donations, and 100% of their gift will be used for the direct costs of the project they choose. Our finances are audited annually.



**PROGRAMS,
PROJECTS: 80%**

**MANAGEMENT &
GENERAL: 15%**

FUNDRAISING: 5%

www.spiritofamerica.org



Spirit of America Founder Jim Hake was honored by the U.S. Marine Corps at the Marines Evening Parade. Hake was invited to be the Marines Guest of Honor by Lieutenant General Joseph Dunford. The event took place at the Marines Barracks in Washington, DC on Memorial Day weekend 2009.

Hake first met General Dunford in December 2003 at Camp Pendleton. Over six years General Dunford saw Spirit of America provide a broad range of support to his Marines, providing everything from sandals, medical and school supplies to sewing machines, construction tools and farming equipment.



In presenting the Marines award to Hake General Dunford said, "It would be hard to describe a more patriotic American than Jim Hake or someone more dedicated to the values that we hold dear. After 9/11 Jim's mission in life became to give something back to our country. In 2003 he started Spirit of America and since that time has raised millions of dollars in support of our efforts overseas in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa. It has had an extraordinary impact as we try to offer a competing narrative to the narrative of extremism. As importantly is what it has meant to Marines. One of the biggest reasons we are so honored to have Jim here tonight is because of the contribution he's made to the will and spirit of our Marines in harms' way."



In his remarks, Hake said, "To be able to support the Marines, Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen on the front lines is the privilege of a lifetime." Hake added, "In working with the Marines I've never known men and women that more embody the initiative and can-do spirit that truly is the spirit of America."

After the Parade, Hake wrote to Spirit of America supporters, "The most moving moment of the evening - and there were many - was at the end when we were reviewing the Marines. Most of the Marines were young: 18 - 21 years old. As they marched by, turning their heads toward us, the band began playing the Marines Corps Hymn ("From the halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli") I was overwhelmed by appreciation for the profound sacrifice these young Marines make for us."



SPIRIT of AMERICA

A small civil military support element is operating out of the embassy. They see a need, but they have no funding to meet that need. What do they do? Since 2005, they have had the ability to turn to Spirit of America, a non-profit organization whose mission is to support the “safety and success of Americans serving abroad and the local people and partners they seek to help.” Retired Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal, the former commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, calls the group a “philanthropic rapid response team.”

The organization’s advisory board, a veritable who’s who in the Department of Defense, boasts members like Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Charles Cleveland, Gen. (Ret.) Jack Keane, Dr. David Kilcullen, Adm. (Ret.) Eric Olsen and Gen. (Ret.) James Mattis, who said he buys into the idea of Spirit of America because it opens “a whole new vista for direct support when U.S. Government money is not the answer.”

Founded by Jim Hake — a technology entrepreneur, who started one of the first Internet media companies — following the attacks of 9/11, Spirit of America provides private assistance in direct response to needs identified by American military and civilian personnel. Support comes in a variety of ways. For some, support is given through project funding. Working with a unit, Spirit of America can develop and fund solutions for U.S. civil-military teams, which include employment and job training, education, livestock health and small business assistance and village stability.

Help can also come in the form of know-how. Working with GLG Research, Spirit of America offers U.S. civil military teams access to more than 300,000 private-sector subject-matter experts. Of course, sometimes needs are more pressing and that’s when Spirit of America steps in and provides a variety of materiel goods from blankets and clothing to computers and school supplies. They also have access to wheelchairs and water purification, as well as sewing machines and playground equipment. The list really has no bounds, and when the need is made known, Spirit of America staffers find a way to make it happen, which includes delivering the supplies to the team.

In Georgia, a Civil Affairs team assigned to the 97th Civil Affairs Battalion recently put Spirit of America to work to support displaced children in a contested area of the country. In 2008, armed conflict broke out in Georgia when the Russian Army started peacekeeping operations in South Ossetia

and Abkhazia. During the five-day conflict, 170 servicemen, 14 policemen and 228 civilians from Georgia were killed and 1,747 wounded. Sixty-seven Russian servicemen were killed, 283 were wounded and 365 South Ossetian servicemen and civilians (combined) were killed, according to an official EU fact-finding report about the conflict. Georgian citizens fleeing from the ongoing tensions have found home in an Internally Displaced Persons Camp.

In the camp, a large number of families live in small homes. Each camp has its own school and community center. The schools are not well funded and are heated by wood heaters. In an effort to improve the living conditions and the efforts of the school, the CA team partnered with Spirit of America to provide books and toys to the children as well as a more efficient means of heating the center, where the children spend their days and nap.

Traveling with the CA team was Isaac Egan, a former Soldier who now works with Spirit of America and the staff of *Special Warfare*. Spirit of America’s goal isn’t just to help the military, it also puts former Soldiers to work. Egan’s job is to facilitate the organization’s work with the military. He gets to know the teams, he sees what they are doing and what they need. And then, as in this case, he helps them meet a need and in doing so, builds rapport with the Georgian people.

Members of the CA team speak easily with Egan. He understands them. He understands their limitations and he helps them build on their previous successes. During the day-long trip, the team visited two internally displaced persons camps and brought smiles not only to the children, who lined up to play with the toys and flip through the books, but also their teachers who work so hard to ensure the children have a safe place to learn. The team members are quick to point out that they couldn’t do what they were doing without the assistance of Spirit America. For Spirit of America, the goal is making U.S. troops and diplomats safer and more successful in their missions by helping local people who are not reached by large-scale aid programs. **SW**

**Maj. Gen. Pat White, 1st
AD and Fort Bliss
Commanding General**
Fort Bliss, Texas



This is Fort Bliss
Home of America's Armored
Division

1st AD civil affairs works on real-world relationships

By Abigail Meyer, Fort Bliss Bugle Staff:

(El Paso, Texas, Jan 5, 2017) Military units train to stay ready for any mission they're given. The 1st Armored Division headquarters staff recently conducted a full-scale field exercise called Iron Forge 17.1 to test their command post capabilities here Dec. 3 through Dec. 7, 2016.

The U.S. has missions around the globe, and the role the U.S. military plays in each of those missions varies. On the ground, the military often works with other entities. In the spirit of training as they fight, the 1st Armored Division civil affairs team invited a nongovernmental organization, Spirit of America, and representatives from the U.S. State Department to participate in the exercise and simulate how they would work together on real-world missions.



Christopher VanJohnson, center, project manager-Africa, Spirit of America, works with local nationals in Niger in 2015. Courtesy Photos.

"Exercising our relationships, exercising how we would interact, how we would plan to do things here state-side is certainly beneficial for muscle memory for when we do deploy to different areas of the world," said Maj. Christopher Evans, 1st Armored Division civil affairs. "That really is primarily the relationship here in this type of exercise."

The Army interacts with many different intragovernmental and nongovernmental organizations. Spirit of America, an Arlington, Virginia-based, privately-funded organization has worked with the U.S. in more than 40 countries.

"Our sole mission as an organization is to fill in the mission-critical gaps where government resources cannot be applied in order to get after specific effects on the battlefield," said Isaac Eagan, vice president-operations, Spirit of America. "So we provide some measure of humanitarian economic development and or nonlethal assistance in response to local needs that have been identified by deployed personnel."

The NGO works with the military to apply pinpoint assistance to achieve specific effects.



From left, Brig. Gen. Frazer Lawrence, deputy commanding general-operations, 1st Armored Division and Fort Bliss, speaks with Isaac Eagan, vice president-operations, Spirit of America, and Christopher VanJohnson, project manager-Africa, Spirit of America, during exercise Iron Forge 17.1 here Dec. 5, 2016.

"What's unique about this organization is the agility and flexibility of funding," Evans said. "A lot of times government organizations program funding for certain things for years out and budget for it and then contingency operations will often find us without the authority to spend money that we haven't budgeted for."

The U.S. has been involved in significant global missions for decades, and Evans said over the course of this time, they've learned that better integration, more coordination and collaboration early on often results in a more seamless approach to many of the problem sets. Iron Forge provided a time to exercise how that type of interaction works. This is the first time the division brought in an NGO such as Spirit of America to participate in an exercise.

"The idea here is that we talk with the division as they go through their initial planning to figure out if down the road there are ways that we can be mutually supportive in a global environment," Evans said. "That relationship piece has already been developed and in one another's thought processes so that troops as they go downrange have an additional tool in their toolkit."

Iron Forge 17.1 validated the division staff's function, ensuring they are ready for any future missions.



Short URL: <http://fortblissbugle.com/?p=40191>



EUROPE

American Charity Backs Military Radio Station In Ukraine

By David Welna | August 1, 2016

An information war is underway on Ukraine's troubled eastern flank, with pro-Russia radio and TV dominating the airwaves. But with key help from an American charity that makes no claim to neutrality, Ukraine's military now has its own FM radio station for its troops on the front. The reach of Army FM is limited, but Spirit of America's Jim Hake is determined to change that.



A Ukrainian officer explains the placement of, and security for, one of the radio transmitters provided by Spirit of America.

Transcript

AUDIE CORNISH, HOST:

Even though there's an official cease-fire, Russian-backed separatists in Ukraine are still at war with forces loyal to Kiev. Mortar shells explode daily along a 300-mile line that separates the country from eastern Ukraine's break-away regions. An information war also rages in the former Soviet state. Its latest combatant is a military radio station that's backed by an American charity. NPR's David Welna traveled to Ukraine and brings us this story.

DAVID WELNA, BYLINE: Above a musty old officer's club in downtown Kiev, battle flags and rocket launchers decorate the walls of a brand-new radio studio. It's home to a hit talk show called "Polygraph."

(SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED RECORDING)

UNIDENTIFIED MAN #1: (Speaking Ukrainian).

UNIDENTIFIED MAN #2: (Speaking Ukrainian).

WELNA: The show's featured guest - the American ambassador to Ukraine, Geoffrey Pyatt.

(SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED RECORDING)

GEOFFREY PYATT: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak directly to some of the brave Ukrainian men and women who are defending your country in the east.

WELNA: Since March, this radio station, Army FM, has been broadcasting to troops along Ukraine's eastern front. Ambassador Pyatt warns them their worst enemy may be pro-Russian propaganda.

(SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED RECORDING)

PYATT: The objective of this Russian informational warfare is not to win the argument. It's to win the war. As we say, they have weaponized information.

WELNA: Ever since fighting broke out in eastern Ukraine two years ago, pro-Russian radio and TV stations have dominated the airwaves here. Ruslan Kavatsuk is a top adviser at Ukraine's Defense Ministry. In the war of words, he says, his country is badly outgunned.

RUSLAN KAVATSUK: If we had enough resources, we would have launched TV, radios, beautiful magazines. But we don't have as much money as Russians do.

WELNA: But there was the memory of this.

(SOUNDBITE OF FILM, "GOOD MORNING, VIETNAM")

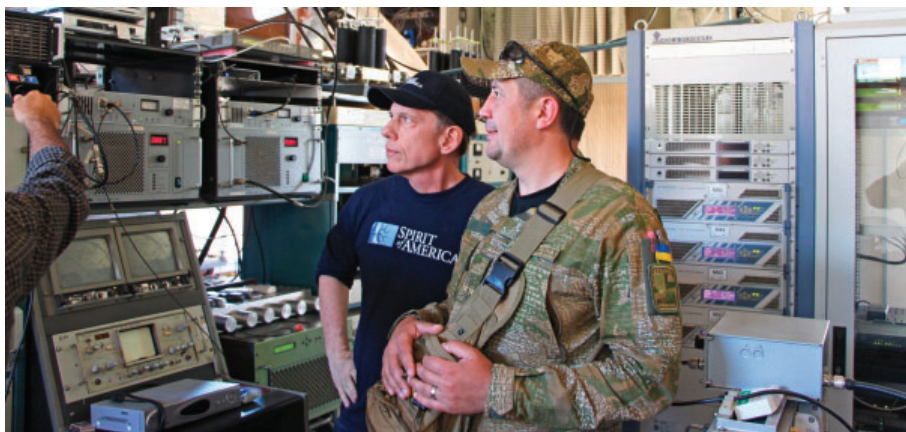
ROBIN WILLIAMS: (As Adrian Cronauer) Good morning, Vietnam. Hey, this is not a test. This is rock 'n' roll.

WELNA: Robyn Williams' screen portrayal of an unbridled radio deejay entertaining the troops is what inspired Army FM, a station to inform troops on the front lines with uncensored news and only in the Ukrainian language - no Russian - and entertain them with music, half of it Ukrainian. But who could pay for it? Enter Internet entrepreneur Jim Hake and Spirit of America.

JIM HAKE: We're a non-governmental organization, but we're a unique one in that we are not neutral.

WELNA: Hake founded Spirit of America after 9/11 to support the work of U.S. troops and diplomats in hotspots around the world. So why back Army FM? Hake says the decision to do so was ultimately about keeping American troops safe.

HAKE: Russia has aggressive tendencies in this part of the world. And the worst thing that could happen is to have American troops have to take up the fight because the Ukrainians failed.



SoA's Jim Hake with a Ukrainian officer at an ArmyFM broadcast facility.

UNIDENTIFIED MAN #3: Is it right expression for us break a leg?

HAKE: Yes, I think so.

WELNA: In downtown Kiev, Hake teams up with a Ukrainian military interpreter, an army engineer and me. And we head east, to the front line near Russia. Spirit of America has sunk \$76,000 into Army FM. For Hake, who's sporting a Spirit of America ball cap and T-shirt, this is his first chance to see how it's playing in the war zone. About nine hours into the bone-jarring road trip, Hake pulls out a portable radio. He tries tuning in Army FM.

(SOUNDBITE OF STATIC)

WELNA: No luck. Army FM's signal, Hake says, still has limited reach.

HAKE: We funded three transmitters out on the front-line war zone to reach the soldiers who are closest to the fight with Russia and Russian-backed separatists. What we're traveling to the frontlines right now to see is how effective those three transmitters have been, what traction Army FM is getting, and the effect that it's having on the soldiers.

WELNA: Inside the conflict zone, we stop at an army base near the city of Kramatorsk. Ukrainian music plays over a loudspeaker.

(SOUNDBITE OF MUSIC)

WELNA: Turns out this is a live broadcast of Army FM. The 81st Airborne Brigade that's based here just lost two of its men to enemy shelling and had eight others wounded. Chief Sergeant Konstantin Tatargan says the new radio station is good for troop morale.

KONSTANTIN TATARGAN: Three times a day - morning, supper and dinner - we turn on Army FM here on this loudspeaker.

WELNA: And do the soldiers like it?

TATARGAN: Yeah. We can just go and ask any soldier if you want.

WELNA: Here's what a soldier who goes by Sergeant Dima tells me.

SERGEANT DIMA: I think it's nice. Guys have a new idea to help army in information war. I think it's good. Yeah.

WELNA: Who do you think is winning the information war right now?

SERGEANT DIMA: I think Ukraine is winner (laughter).

(SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED RECORDING)

UNIDENTIFIED MAN #4: (Speaking Ukrainian).

WELNA: Here in the conflict zone, both sides speak Russian. But on Army FM, it's all Ukrainian. Sergeant Tatargan likes that. Ukrainians, he says, should be using their own language.

TATARGAN: Because all of soldiers of Ukraine, all of people of Ukraine understand Ukrainian language. But they don't want to speak them. It's very easy to speak Russian because our parents - my parents speak Russian.

WELNA: And you speak Russian, too.

TATARGAN: Yeah, and I speak Russian, too, because I grew up in a family that speaks Russian.



ArmyFM live on the air in Kiev, Ukraine.

WELNA: And Russian is what you hear anywhere else on the radio dial.

(SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED RECORDING)

UNIDENTIFIED MAN #5: (Speaking Russian).

WELNA: Radio Komsomolskaya Pravda (ph), quite literally Radio Truth of the Young Communists, is beamed into eastern Ukraine from Moscow. Back in Ukraine's capital, Kiev, the Defense Ministry's Kavatsuk says broadcasts like these can fill Ukrainian soldiers with doubts.

KAVATSUK: Even if you don't believe it, you start hesitating after some point of listening to that crap. And then you start being less active, less passionate, less convinced.

WELNA: Army FM, says morning talk show host Philip Boiko, has just the opposite effect.

PHILIP BOIKO: Just good, optimistic information, just good, optimistic music. Maybe some jokes - only positive.

WELNA: This Spirit of America-backed military radio station is winning praise, but not financing from American officials. General Ben Hodges commands the U.S. Army in Europe.

COMMANDER BEN HODGES: I thought it was a wonderful idea that Ukraine wants to find a way to communicate to their soldiers about what's going on because they are getting bombarded all day long, every day.

WELNA: But Army FM's signal still only reaches about a quarter of the soldiers stationed on the eastern front. Spirit of America is buying five more transmitters to expand coverage. And while Kiev is home to the military's high command, the station has not yet been granted a frequency to broadcast there. That's no surprise to U.S. Ambassador Pyatt.

PYATT: What it says to me is that there are still big sectors of the Ukrainian government that have still to be reformed.

WELNA: For Jim Hake, all this is simply growing pains.

HAKE: By proving the results of Army FM, the right things will happen. And it just takes persistence.

WELNA: And likely more help from Spirit of America, an unabashedly partisan charity that's joined the fight in Ukraine's information war. David Welna, NPR News, Kiev.

War, Peace, and



Philanthropy

Bringing the spirit of America to combat zones

By James Carafano

General Jim Mattis, who commanded the First Marine Division during the 2003 invasion of Iraq, had just returned to the U.S. with his troops for a much-needed break. His marines were resting, buying presents, and getting ready for Christmas leave. Then to everyone's surprise an order from the Pentagon arrived: they were heading back to the land of the Tigris and Euphrates.

An insurgency had broken out in Iraq, and Mattis knew that in this next stage of war they would be fighting a different way—without front lines or conventional opponents. In the heart of the Sunni Triangle they would have to quell a violent combination of foreign fighters, Saddam loyalists, terrorists, spies, quislings, tribal chiefs, and smugglers, all hidden amid innocent families in a densely populated area northwest of Baghdad. The First Division's motto is "No better friend, no worse enemy." The marines would need to emphasize the "friend" part more in this next tour of duty.

As Mattis raced to prepare, his chief of staff interrupted him. "Sir, there is a guy out here I think you need to talk to." It's not every day that a civilian with no credentials and no introduction can talk his way through a Marine base and into the commanding general's office. But Jim Hake is not an everyday civilian.

In terms of background, the two Jims could not have been more different. Commissioned in 1972, Mattis was a grizzled Marine Corps "lifer" who had fought two wars in Iraq and one in Afghanistan. Hake was a Silicon Valley entrepreneur who had co-founded and sold one of the first Internet media companies, then co-founded

another firm that paved the way for today's mobile apps. Mattis was a no-nonsense master of military virtues; Hake was an experimental business builder.

What united the two was 9/11. The attacks had profoundly disturbed Hake, and he shared the general's view that "we are in the middle of a violent global argument between the voices of intimidation and inspiration." Both men anticipated that U.S. troops would face difficult obstacles in the Sunni Triangle. Mattis's marines were first-class fighters, but his mission required much more than combat. Winning the battle of competing values would require building community services, working markets, and a vibrant civil society.

Hake told Mattis his idea: He would create an entrepreneurial, philanthropic organization that would help U.S. military forces achieve their non-combat objectives. It would raise money online and hire retired military men who would accompany active troops and diplomats into disputed neighborhoods to help them identify needed goods and services. After an ultra-quick review process, the nonprofit would deliver the desired commodities for distribution by the troops. It would be a decentralized, fast, targeted effort, focused on solving problems and building goodwill. Structured like a well-run business, this charitable effort could speed its assistance to the battlefield faster than any cumbersome government entity could. In more ways than one it would represent the Spirit of America—which is what Hake called the group.

Mattis left for Iraq with Hake's number on his speed dial—and put it to good use. One of the more unusual calls came in 2006, at the height of

AFGHANISTAN

\$3,087 to buy first-aid gear for a Special Forces medic offering lifesaving training to police in Kandahar

PHILIPPINES

\$3,426 for repairing a school destroyed by terrorists

James Carafano is vice president of national security and foreign policy research at the Heritage Foundation.

the Anbar Awakening. The local tribes were beginning to reject al-Qaeda and Mattis knew it was a moment brimming with opportunity. He had a chance to win the support of the local community, but he needed a powerful gesture to help bridge the distrust between his commanders and the Sunni chiefs. He knew that in the local culture a sword has deep symbolic meaning. When a sword is exchanged, disagreements and retribution are put aside. Accepting a sword is a signal of trust and friendship. It was exactly what he needed.

Mattis had plenty of armor, but swords were another matter. He couldn't use taxpayer funds to buy gifts, let alone \$600 Marine officer ceremonial swords. But he knew someone who could get them if asked. He contacted Hake, who raised the funds through Spirit of America to buy and deliver a dozen swords.

Two kinds of vets to the rescue

Since 2003, Spirit of America has embodied the initiative, generosity, and helpfulness of the American people. Following U.S. forces and State Department officers into some of the toughest areas of the world, it delivers private assistance intended to complement their work and advance U.S. interests. Field personnel work alongside deployed troops to understand local conditions, identify high-priority needs, and decide what kinds of specialized aid could be brought in to help achieve security objectives. The non-profit keeps a cadre of cultural and technical experts on call for whenever specialized advice is needed. It coordinates all final actions with U.S. military and diplomatic officials.

"The skills of our field representatives are key," notes manager Isaac Eagan. All of Spirit of America's field representatives are U.S. military veterans who previously served on the ground in Iraq or Afghanistan, giving them the experience, skill, and maturity to act safely in risky places. "They have to be able to assess and develop relationships, think about problems from an entrepreneurial perspective, leverage local resources, and, above all, be flexible."

Field reps are authorized to commit to some projects on the spot. Other proposals are submitted to Spirit headquarters for 24-hour review. Yet others are posted on the group's website and carried out if and when they get crowdfunded.

As the examples mapped and described suggest, some of the projects are very simple: books for a school, blankets for a hospital. Other efforts are quite complex. For example, in the west African Islamic nation of Mauritania, the U.S. government was frantically working to contain extremist influence as 30,000 refugees poured over its border from a civil war in adjoining Mali. To protect Mauritania's precarious herding economy, the U.S. government built holding pens to vaccinate livestock. Nice gesture, but it provided little help because there

were no veterinarians to wield the syringes. A U.S. Army team in the area saw the problem and asked its Spirit of America representative for help.

Spirit provided funding and equipment to bring in 11 African veterinarians to diagnose and treat livestock problems at the newly built holding pens. It also partnered with the Mauritanian national veterinary center and the French pharmaceutical company Merial to underwrite a regional deworming program. Within just a few months the healthier animals were yielding substantially more milk and meat, and to top it off the new vets were making money. Prosperity and security have improved across the region, and the extremism and violence seen in Mali have not flared up in Mauritania.

Helping the needy, our soldiers, and the nation

Spirit's projects are funded entirely by private donors: 18,000 individuals and a number of foundations have provided \$24 million since the program began. This has allowed the group to invest in humanitarian projects directly aligned with U.S. security objectives in places like Afghanistan, Colombia, Djibouti, Guyana, Honduras, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, the Maldives, Pakistan, Peru, Syria, Tajikistan, and Yemen.

Spirit of America uses a tiered-giving model that mixes major gifts from philanthropists, foundation grants, and donations raised for specific projects from grassroots supporters. Website project pages detail what is needed and how much it costs. For the work in Mauritania, for example, the site showed that \$86 bought deworming medication for 50 cattle, \$318 bought startup equipment for one veterinarian, and \$1,121 paid for two weeks of training.

Recently, hundreds of donors contributed over \$140,000 to provide rubber boots for children who had escaped the horrors of the Islamic State by fleeing through the desert. Just \$2 would protect a youngster's feet from the winter cold and the raw sewage in refugee camps. Initiated at the request of U.S. soldiers in Iraqi Kurdistan, the gift had a humane impact while also demonstrating to the Kurds that America valued them as allies.

Jill Fagerstrom, one of the boot donors, has supported dozens of Spirit of America projects since 2010. Each one's very specific purpose, requested by service-members on the scene, "gives me a concrete idea of what the gift accomplishes," she notes. Donating makes her "feel connected to the world," she says, but also "links the people helped and the U.S. It's a way of saying, 'You're there and we're here but we haven't forgotten you.'"

Spirit of America guarantees that gifts will be used exactly as specified. If a project doesn't come together, the gifts are refunded. "People should know where their



An Afghan girl pulls on a **water pump installed by Spirit of America** at the request of Navy SEALs working near her remote mountain village.

money goes,” argues Hake. “It builds trust and it’s the right thing to do.”

This guarantee was put to an early test. In April 2004, Mattis’s marines sought help to establish several television stations in Anbar Province that would be owned and programmed by Iraqi citizens. The idea was to provide a local alternative to Al Jazeera, whose views were fueling anti-American resentment that endangered U.S. troops. Spirit of America agreed to provide the needed video production and editing gear. After the project was written up by the *Wall Street Journal*, there was an enormous donor response: \$2.4 million poured in for the project. But the gear needed cost only \$100,000.

“We offered \$2.3 million in refunds to 1,000 donors. We also let people reallocate their gifts to other projects, if they wanted,” Hake explains. “Almost everyone—99.6 percent—chose to reallocate their funds. One supporter told me he had been giving to charities for 30 years but this was the first time anyone ever offered him a refund.”

Spirit of America also accepts less restricted donations through topical funds, such as one for counterbalancing ISIS. And field representatives are authorized to commit immediately to time-sensitive projects if they are judged to be vital and cost less than \$2,500. This has been done for things like a \$1,500 water pump for a mountain village in Afghanistan and a \$300 dinner bringing together tribal leaders in west Africa to discuss security problems created by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.

Philanthropists who support the organization’s larger mission of advancing America’s security and values fund Spirit of America’s field operations and organizational expenses. Home Depot co-founder Bernie Marcus,

for instance, recently made a \$1 million gift to cover operating expenses.

John Phelan, a managing partner at MSD Capital, is a regular contributor to Spirit of America. “My grandfather was a Marine in World War II who landed at Normandy,” Phelan reports, and “my dad fought in Korea.” He views his spending on Spirit of America as a way to back America’s volunteer soldiers “while they are in harm’s way.” He thinks it also serves the national interest. “The future of war,” he says, “is about winning people, not territory.”

Taking sides

Traditional humanitarian groups hold that non-governmental organizations operating in conflict zones should stay scrupulously independent. The Red Cross established this concept in 1921 as one of its core principles. The United Nations later insisted that all of its humanitarian missions would be characterized by neutrality, impartiality, and operational independence. The idea is that aid should never be distributed with political, economic, or military objectives in mind. “These principles are not primarily moral values, but rather a means to secure access to those who suffer the brunt of conflict and violence and to enhance the effectiveness of aid,” said Angelo Gnaedinger, director-general of the International Committee of the Red Cross, in 2007.

The Spirit of America model is intentionally different. “This is not conventional charity. It is not neutral. Everything is done in support of U.S. troops,” says Hake. “We advance human security and well-being. But taking a side breaks new ground in international assistance.”

Jenny McAvoy of the humanitarian coalition InterAction argues that non-neutral charitable work can have undesirable effects in conflict zones: “Punishment of vulnerable people, widespread suspicion of humanitarian organizations, denial of access to affected populations, targeted attacks on humanitarian workers, manipulation and diversion of aid to serve political goals.” Alas, all those issues already bedevil even the most “neutral” aid efforts today. From ISIS to the Lord’s Resistance Army, militant groups refuse to tolerate even adamantly “impartial” humanitarian intervention.

Nadia Schadlow, who directs foreign-policy giving at the Smith Richardson Foundation (one of Spirit of America’s supporters), argues that the space for “neutral” aid is actually relatively narrow. “Once any long-term effort to alleviate suffering begins, it becomes political,” she points out, so “not taking sides” is often more a theory than a practical reality.

Spirit of America isn’t the only private organization that takes America’s side in conflict zones around the world. America Abroad Media is a nonprofit supported by numerous donors like the Carnegie Corporation and the Stuart, Diana Davis Spencer, and Starr foundations. It produces for broadcasting partners in conflict zones programming that encourages free inquiry and

for “improper solicitation of gifts,” Mattis, the Army chief of staff, the commandant of the Marine Corps, and the head of Special Operations Command appealed to Defense Secretary Leon Panetta. Panetta signed off on a new rule that legalized private support of military operations around the world. Since then, Spirit of America has expanded into Asia, Africa, and Central America, where it works alongside Army Green Berets to offer humanitarian assistance in “pre-counter insurgency” situations.

Small interventions are beautiful

While Spirit of America claims it both produces humanitarian results and increases the success of U.S. troops overseas, its long-term effects, like all “nation-building” efforts today, are still uncertain. Some observers see its savvy technical aid as a vast improvement over traditional foreign assistance. Others wonder whether giving rubber boots to refugees can really counteract ideologies of terror and extremism.

With the U.S. facing the most complex and volatile security situation it has seen since the end of the Cold War, and U.S. Special Operations troops now working quietly at the village level in 81 countries (exactly the scenario Spirit of America is built to help with), this is far from an academic issue. America’s opponents

“This is not conventional charity. It is not neutral. Everything is done in support of U.S. troops.”

alternatives to extremism. The 501(c)(3) National Strategy Information Center promotes democratic processes in poor countries. For instance, its anti-corruption programs teach practical ways of reducing bribery of police officers and soldiers, treating citizens respectfully, and building community bonds.

Traditional humanitarian boundaries can’t safeguard relief workers today, argues Hake, citing recent beheadings of aid workers by ISIS. “Terrorists put us all at risk. By helping our troops defeat them, Spirit of America makes it safer for neutral organizations to do their work,” he asserts.

Certainly the leaders of American interventions abroad appreciate the group’s accomplishments. General Mattis recently described Spirit of America in the *Wall Street Journal*. “It is agile. It is responsive. It has truly saved lives. It has been worth its weight in gold to us.”

Mattis and several other generals had to take action in 2012 to protect the charity from bureaucratic threats to its operation. After Centcom lawyers told Hake that “what you’ve been doing since 2003 is actually a violation of military ethics regulation” and could get soldiers prosecuted

understand the importance of public opinion, and groups like the Taliban, the Islamic State, and Latin drug lords use combinations of aid, propaganda, and public services to try to cement their power.

It is likely that our future security challenges will be bottom-up, community-oriented problems in tribal societies with weak governments. Local solutions instigated by small actors can be very effective in such situations. A nimble philanthropic organization like Spirit of America that operates at the “retail” level with careful attention to detail can often be more effective than a government-run entity.

Meanwhile, Spirit offers everyday American donors who care about the U.S. and its place in the world a direct and immediate way to help. “As Americans,” General Mattis notes, “we have never accepted that government has all the answers.” This is true even in areas like security and foreign policy.

Philanthropists concerned about the war of ideas raging overseas today needn’t be bashful; there are now places where they can play a crucial role in expressing the values of freedom and fair play in a tumultuous world. **P**

MAGAZINE

Radio-Free Syria

By ELIZA GRISWOLD DEC. 4, 2014

The overhead light in the blue Mazda 626 wasn't working. Raed Fares, a Syrian activist whose video protests skewer ISIS and President Bashar al-Assad alike, reached up to fiddle with the light bulb before squeezing himself out of the driver's side door. The street was in darkness. In the last few years, the Assad government cut most of the electricity (along with running water and mobile-phone service) to Kafranbel, the town in northwestern Syria where Fares lives. The only light came from an LED strip in his neighbor's front doorway that was hooked up to a car battery. It was 12:45 a.m. on Jan. 29, 2014, and Fares, who often works until 4 a.m., had left the office early. As he fumbled to fit his key into the car's lock, he heard the slap-slap of feet running toward him.

Here they come, he thought.

The feet stopped just in front of his car. The Czech pistol he usually carries was in his house, 15 feet away. In the watery glow of the light behind him, Fares could make out two ISIS soldiers. One, clad in a woolen mask, ammunition vest, windbreaker and unlaced boots, opened fire, spraying the car, the mud wall and Fares with bullets. Fares felt their heat sear through his canvas jacket and jean shirt and into the right side of his chest and shoulder. When he collapsed to the ground, a childhood nightmare returned: three black dogs, chasing him.

"There is no God but God, and Mohammad is his prophet," he said as loudly as he could. He hoped this statement of faith would send him to heaven.

As a pool of his own blood spread around him, Fares lay in the road. He

tried to stifle his groans, in fear that his attackers would return. Minutes later, his elder brother, who heard the shots from his home nearby, dragged Fares out of the street and into a car to race to the hospital.

“Who shot him?” a friend in the car asked his brother.

Raed struggled to repeat what he had seen.

“Stop talking,” his brother said.

“I’m dying,” he said. Then he slipped from consciousness.

Eight months later, Fares, 42, was in the back seat of a pewter-colored Kia, driving through southern Turkey and chain-smoking Lebanese cigarettes. In all, the would-be assassins fired at Fares 46 times. Twenty-seven bullets struck the wall behind him; 17 hit his car. Only two struck him. They shattered seven bones in his shoulder and ribs and punctured his right lung. From his hospital bed, he continued to orchestrate protests, posting them on Facebook and YouTube. Many used the block-lettered banners for which he’s known, broadcasting messages like: “OBAMA! YOUR ROLE IN SYRIA WILL NEVER BE ACCEPTED AS A MISTAKE LIKE CLINTON’S IN RWANDA, BUT IT WILL BE A PREMEDITATED CRIME.” Others relied on cartoons, like one of a Trojan horse with ISIS inside and “Made in U.S.A.” on its side.

“I still have trouble breathing,” Fares said. “My doctor says my lungs should be no problem because of the size of my nose.” (Fares does have a big nose.) The two Americans in the front seat laughed. One, a 57-year-old named Jim Hake, is the founder and chief executive of Spirit of America, a nongovernmental organization with the explicit mission to support U.S. military and diplomatic efforts. (He relentlessly asks “What do you need?” The first time he asked it of Fares, Fares answered with withering dryness, “A new country.”) The driver, Isaac Eagan, 33, is a U.S. Army veteran who works for Hake. Earlier that week, Fares had slipped over the Turkish-Syrian border to meet Hake and Eagan and collect 500 solar-powered and hand-crank radios that Spirit of America, working with the State Department, was giving to his radio station, Radio Fresh. A prototype, about the size of a man’s fist, was sitting in the Kia’s back seat, festooned with a Radio Fresh sticker. Now they needed to find the truck carrying the 500 radios that Eagan had spent the last

couple of months procuring from a manufacturer in China.

Fares was planning to put these radios in hair salons, tea shops, hospitals and other places people gather to listen to what little news there is. Since 2012, when the Free Syrian Army, an armed rebel group, helped liberate Kafranbel from Assad, the town has been essentially cut off and under constant attack from government forces. Fares reports mostly about surviving day to day. He tells people which streets are closed because of snipers, when to expect airstrikes and how to keep children warm when the windows are blown out. But Fares has another mission too: to tell the world about the horrors of a war he calls “Obama’s Rwanda.” Most Fridays, he films his band of activists holding banners on which he has scrawled caustic and sometimes shocking messages, and he later posts the results on YouTube. Using felt-tip pens, bedsheets and messages of generally less than 140 characters, Fares figured out how to tweet to a world that wasn’t following him.

On the far side of an olive grove, a few hundred feet away, Syria began. At the edge of a field dotted with white tufts of cotton, near a laundry line hung with red peppers drying in the sun, a yellow bulldozer chewed a nine-foot-deep trench into the hillside. The trench was an attempt to secure the notoriously porous 500-mile border between Turkey and Syria, now a spillover zone for Syria’s civil war, where all manner of fighters coexist uneasily: moderate members of the Free Syrian Army, ISIS fighters and other freelance jihadis.

“What do you think of fighters coming from other countries?” asked Hake, who had been poring over news reports about the “jihadi highway.”

“I hate them,” Fares said. “They’re fighting us.”

“What attracts them?” Hake asked. He studied the Kia’s route along a satellite map on his iPhone.

“They’ve watched too many Rambo movies,” Fares said. “They have nothing to do with Islam.”

Hake asked Fares whether he thought Assad or ISIS was worse. That was complicated: Each wanted Fares dead. Although Fares feared the immediate threat of ISIS (the group was still trying to kill him), for him the first enemy of the Syrian people remained Assad. “Whenever we get rid of the regime, it’s

going to be easy to get rid of ISIS, Al Qaeda and the Nusra Front,” he said. The jihadis justified their presence by saying to the local people, “We’re here to help you topple the regime.” Once the regime was gone, he said, people would see the foreign fighters for what they were: carpetbaggers.

The Kia hurtled past a line of cypresses that snaked through a dry wadi, a streambed where blue tarps, strung up in the shade, served as shelters for Syrian refugees. A few sheep grazed on the border’s scrubby badland. Hake asked how the jihadis got across the border. Fares, laconic, leaned forward from the back seat to answer him. “Like Mexicans,” he answered. “They find an illegal way.”

Eagan leaned his forearms against the steering wheel. They were inked with tattoos: phrases in Arabic and a Celtic cross. He scanned the roadside for the small white truck parked somewhere near Bab al-Hawa, the border crossing commanded by the Free Syrian Army. Most of the border, including this stretch, was in the hands of the Qaeda-linked Nusra Front. “Nusra controls all of this,” Fares said. He pointed to the hillside where Syria began. “Watch out for snipers.” He grinned. Three and a half miles out from the official crossing, dusty trucks lined up to enter Syria. Some drivers squatted by the road; they had been waiting for days. Along the highway’s edge, what looked like white ant hills were actually drifts of cigarette butts.

“The needs are so great, the line of trucks is getting longer,” Fares said. The flatbeds were loaded with cement. “They’ll have to rebuild what’s being destroyed.”

Because Kafranbel has no mobile-phone service, Hake wondered aloud whether Assad had cut broadband access too. No, Fares said, the town never had broadband. Instead, private satellite companies provided access by subscription. The system was patchy and hard to maintain. Hake had an idea for a wide-area network, developed at M.I.T., that he had seen in Jalalabad, Afghanistan. Maybe it could work in rural Syria.

Hake, a Silicon Valley entrepreneur who made a tidy profit in the early days of the Internet, used his money to help start Spirit of America in 2003. But instead of operating under the principle of neutrality like most NGOs, his

organization explicitly takes sides. Hake believes private citizens have a role to play in supporting U.S. policy, and Fares's messages appealed to him. "Our enemies use private funding to fight everything America and our allies stand for," Hake said. "Why can't we use private assistance to help the good guys like Fares win?"

Hake asked Fares again what he needed. Now Fares understood that he meant it. "A siren," he said. Since Kafranbel drove out the Assad government with the help of the Free Syrian Army in 2012, the city had been under near-constant attack by airstrikes and shelling. With two scanners provided by a Free Syrian Army commander, Fares devised a warning system. A Radio Fresh employee stood on a hill and monitored bomber pilots talking to the government's air-traffic-control tower. The employee then relayed that information to the disc jockey, who interrupted the broadcast: "Breaking news. There's a plane coming now." After the strikes, when the pilot said, "I'm on my way back," the D.J. announced, "All clear." Fares said, "They always change frequency, but we find them." He needed a siren to reach those not listening to the radio. The one Fares had was puny. "My car horn is louder," he joked. (Eagan has since found five World War II-style air-raid sirens for Kafranbel. Powered by hand-crank, they don't require electricity.)

Kafranbel's biggest problem was schools. An estimated 50 percent of Syria's children are not enrolled; because schools are often targets of attack, no parents want to send their children to them. Refugees or groups like the Nusra Front now squat in the empty buildings. (Kafranbel's population has swelled to 30,000 from 15,000 as Syrians fled to the liberated town for safety.) "We made this revolution for our children," Fares said. "Now they're in the streets. Any armed group can come and make them terrorists."

There was silence as the Kia ticked over the joins in the highway.

"You must get so tired after so long," Hake said.

Fares said nothing. He had no joke to make. He, his wife and three teenage boys survived by fighting in their separate ways. While Fares directed protests on Facebook and worked with fellow citizens to rebuild his town, his wife, Montaha, struggled to feed their family, because food now costs five

times its pre-revolution price. “My wife struggles with me,” Fares said, trying to make a joke, then turning serious. “She does everything for every one of us. She lives the worst life of all. I am so sad for her, but I can do nothing to make the situation better.” Fares’s two older sons joined the media wing of the Free Syrian Army; their job was to document the battles the group was waging against ISIS and Assad. “I’ve tried to send my sons to the U.S., but they don’t have passports,” he said. Because the Assad government controls all official documents, those who oppose it become stateless. Their only option is to join the 3.5 million Syrians who have left the country as refugees.

Eagan spotted a gas station painted purple and turned in. “There’s the truck,” he said. The three men piled out of the Kia and stood in the gravel lot. “This smells like my summer jobs,” Hake said to Fares, who wasn’t listening. “Grease. I used to work with tractors.” On his iPhone, Hake dropped a pin on his world map. The border across which 200,000 people had fled ISIS five months earlier was a half-mile away.

Eagan had papers for Fares to sign. One read, in English and Arabic, “I have not provided and will not provide support or resources to any individual or organization that advocates, sponsors, engages in or has committed an act of terrorism.” The radios cost \$25 apiece. The price tag wasn’t why the State Department wanted Spirit of America involved. The organization could do a project more quickly and on a smaller scale than the government could. “If this works, we’ll know that pushing radios out into Syrian communities can actually broaden the reach of independent media,” said Rick Barton, who created the program as assistant secretary of state for the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization. Hake, who uses business metaphors to define almost everything, described the effort as “outsourcing risk” for the United States government. As he put it, “Fares is an entrepreneur whose competitors are trying to kill him.”

Fares was 7 when he and his family watched from their window as government forces assassinated a man in the street below. This was when Hafez al-Assad, the father of the current president, massacred thousands in an effort to quell an uprising by the Muslim Brotherhood that began in the 1970s.

After Assad brutally crushed the Islamists, the town of Kafranbel, a hub of the rebellion, was effectively blacklisted. Unless you were an Assad apparatchik, there were few ways to succeed. Some young men turned to drugs, among them, Fares's older brother. Fares was 12 when he found his brother high on diazepam, his finger on the trigger of a Kalashnikov that the family kept for protection. Fares watched his brother balance the muzzle against his cheek and commit suicide.

Five years later, Fares also started taking diazepam, then snorting and finally injecting heroin. (Eventually, he quit cold turkey.) To please his father, he enrolled in medical school, although he preferred writing poetry (and later took up the oud), but soon dropped out and eventually moved to Lebanon to work for a refrigeration company. In 2009, after he returned to Syria to sell real estate, he was caught forging a document trying to help a man cut through red tape and get his land back from the government. During the two months he spent in prison, he was disturbed by the torture to which political prisoners — although not common criminals like him — were subjected.

Once he got out, Fares kept his head down and dreamed of a time when the corruption of the Assad government would no longer drive daily life. Then came the Arab Spring. After a Tunisian fruit seller set himself on fire in December 2010, Fares watched gleefully as one corrupt leader after another fell from power. With friends, he decided to protest against Assad. On a Friday in April 2011, one of them raised the chant in a mosque: "God, Syria, freedom!" The hair on Fares's neck stood on end. The 150 security officers standing around them did little but watch and take names.

The mullah shouted: "Catch them! Arrest them!"

A man in the crowd shouted back, "Catch the mullah by his beard!"

Within months, the protests in Kafranbel swelled to 6,000 from a few dozen. Each week, Fares filmed the protests on his Nokia phone and sent them to a friend in Saudi Arabia, who forwarded them to Arab TV stations. The Assad government claimed these masses of people weren't actually in Syria, so Fares began using banners that named Kafranbel, his little town that no one had heard of. His videos went viral, and the regime retaliated.

On July 4, 2011, Assad's forces surrounded the town, then they invaded, looting stores and burning homes. During the yearlong occupation that followed, Fares and his friends continued to protest using YouTube and social media. Because it was impossible to gather for more than 30 seconds, they deployed a kind of flash mob, and Fares, the director, tried to make the short films funny.

He once wrapped his friends in shrouds and had them stumble out of graves to show that even the dead wanted Assad to step down. Another time, he procured human hair from the town's beautician to make wigs and beards to transform his actors-protesters into cave men, whom Assad gassed as the international community looked on impassively. (The grunting solved the problem of translation.) While Fares was filming, a family of four on a motorcycle rode past. Dumbstruck by the hirsute and half-naked actors, they nearly crashed. The video, titled "Kafranbel: The Syrian Revolution in Three Minutes," has more than 100,000 views on YouTube.

"From the beginning, I've used humor," Fares said. "We wanted to be special. There were thousands of people demonstrating, and we were, like, 50 people in a field, and we wanted to be on Al Jazeera." Fares decided to write in English "to try to get the whole world to pay attention." With his own Syrian-American "spies" in the United States, he wrote messages that he hoped Americans would listen to. On Dec. 16, 2011, he first voiced his frustration with U.S. inaction: "Obama's procrastination kills us. We miss Bush's audacity. The world is better with America's Republicans." (A former ambassador to Syria, Robert Ford, sent a picture of this banner to the White House.) The banner that elicited the greatest international response, with 17,000 Facebook shares over two nights, was the message of compassion he offered the families of the Boston Marathon victims: "Boston bombings represent a sorrowful scene of what happens every day in Syria. Do accept our condolences." The families in Boston responded: "Friends in Syria — we too hope for the safety of your families and for peace."

During the fall of 2012, after Kafranbel was liberated, Fares sneaked over the Turkish border to attend a media workshop in Turkey, where he met the

United States government official who was identifying activists who might receive American support. Fares's station became one of nine Syrian radio and two TV stations financed by the U.S. State Department. (So far, \$25 million has been disbursed.) On the surface, this funding is reminiscent of Cold War strategies: using Potemkin media to broadcast America's messaging inside a hostile regime. But the programming is 100 percent Syrian. "It's not traditional psy-ops where the U.S. controls the radio," Barton, the State Department official, said. "It's about finding local people who are truly capable."

The 11 activists whom the United States finances, including Fares, aren't strictly journalists. They fill an unusual role in the conflict: Via social media, they informally monitor more than \$2 billion of aid in a country to which the United States government has little direct access. They report which projects are working and which aren't. As dangerous as Syria is for journalists — 72 have been killed since 1992, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists — it can be even more so for activists. To mitigate those risks, the United States provides training in austere media environments. "We try to make the best, latest little gizmos for their laptops available to them, but we do worry about them," a senior U.S. official said. (Those supplies include software for secure communications.) Recently the official met all of the Syrian activists in person to thank them and to urge caution. "You guys are tremendously important in monitoring this aid," he said. "Don't think you have to tell us what we want to hear. . . . None of you is Superman. Please be careful."

Not long after Fares began receiving recording, editing and broadcast equipment from the United States, the Free Syrian Army helped the residents of Kafranbel retake their town in a four-day battle that began on Aug. 6, 2012. When it was clear that Assad's forces were fleeing, Fares ran to the mosque and shouted over the speakers, "People of Kafranbel, you are free!"

Since then, amid airstrikes, the citizens of Kafranbel have tried to rebuild civil society on their own; Fares is one of their leaders. It has been more difficult than he imagined. "We've had seven different local councils, but we did nothing, just made promises," he said. So Fares started an organization,

the Union of Revolutionary Bureaus, which employs 365 people and is paid for by a number of NGOs. In addition to Radio Fresh and a media center, the bureau runs a women's center, three day care centers and human rights training for lawyers and has nearly completed a project to once again provide running water for the town and three villages.

All of these activities have made him a target for ISIS. On Dec. 28, 2013, when ISIS tried to seize Kafranbel, they destroyed everything inside his media center, including transmitters and Fares's oud. (The fighters knew Fares was in the United States trying to raise awareness about the war.) "The funny thing is, those idiots took the generator first," Fares said. He laughed at the image of ISIS thugs scrambling around to rob and destroy in the dark. But the messages they sent Fares weren't amusing: He would be beheaded when he returned from America.

Fares decided it was time to protest ISIS. He directed his team to draw his now-famous "Aliens" poster, in which Syria is an alien and the monster exploding out of its chest is named ISIS. (He knew the risks: For the first time, he asked his protesters to cover their faces.) The same day, the Free Syrian Army drove the militants out of town. "They were planning to take the city, and I was the first target," Fares said.

ISIS sends Fares regular death threats on Facebook: "We will find you and kill you even if you are already with God." Ask Fares what will happen to the revolution if ISIS or Assad returns to kill him, and he says simply, "I have sons."

"I haven't started using the radio how I want to yet," Fares told Hake as we drove past the main roundabout in the border town of Reyhanli, where a suicide bomber struck last year. At Radio Fresh, winning an audience with prize giveaways and trivia quizzes was only the first step. Because there are no phones in Kafranbel, Fares devised a system to communicate with listeners: He nailed 21 metal boxes on posts around the countryside into which listeners could drop quiz-show answers, song requests and suggestions. Sometimes people slipped in death threats. Now he wanted to develop a new radio program to remind people that the revolution began as a peaceful one, a noble

fight for freedom. But what freedom meant, that required determining what kind of government might take the regime's place.

One of Fares's closest friends, Lt. Col. Fares al-Bayyoush, a moderate commander of nearly 1,000 members of the Free Syrian Army, is among the community leaders helping to rebuild infrastructure in Kafranbel. Bayyoush is based in Reyhanli. Fares wanted Hake and Eagan to meet the commander but warned that he could be annoying. "I have to tell him, 'Please don't try to make me laugh, I don't find you funny,'" Fares said. He directed the Americans toward the city's center, where he pointed out a yellow building on a quiet street next to the Eysel Tower perfume shop. At the end of a hall in the second-floor flat that served as the political office, past a bedroom where young men in fatigues lounged in front of a TV, two commanders sat on couches. Fares knew and trusted both of them, which he couldn't say of every Free Syrian Army member. The group is deeply fractured, in part because individual donors back individual brigades. This helps explain the challenges for the United States in identifying whom to support among the rebel commanders. "I'm Syrian, and I don't know who to trust in the F.S.A. beyond these two commanders," Fares said. Recently he reported one commander to Bayyoush for selling his weapons to ISIS. He also rallied fellow Syrians to support the rebels: One drawing featured Free Syrian Army leaders in a mock movie poster from the Tom Cruise film, "The Last Samurai." He made introductions.

Bayyoush, wearing a gray suit and with a MacBook Air open on his lap, rose to shake Hake's hand. He had a joke: "An F.S.A. commander and government commander meet in heaven," he began. Startled to see each other, they peer down to see who is in hell: "All the Syrian people we put there." Bayyoush laughed. Fares looked on blankly. Next to Bayyoush sat his boss, Col. Hasan Hamada, who defected in 2012 from the Assad regime via fighter plane to Jordan. Over the past year and a half, Hamada and Bayyoush have been among the recipients of nearly \$100 million of U.S. aid, mostly in the form of food, medical supplies and trucks funneled along shifting supply routes. He has also received covert support, including light weaponry.

Bayyoush has been shot three times in battles with ISIS and government

forces. “He’s only been shot once,” he said, pointing at Fares and laughing. Bayyoush and Hamada sent troops to participate in the U.S. government’s covert-training program in Jordan, which began in 2013. “I can’t fight anymore,” he said. “I can’t even open a water bottle.”

Nonetheless, from his computer in Turkey, he commanded his troops through Skype and WhatsApp. He uses Facebook to issue statements for the Free Syrian Army. While Bayyoush has worked alongside the Nusra Front in the fight against Assad, the Free Syrian Army and Nusra are on opposite sides when it comes to building a civil society. Sitting quietly on a couch, Fares said: “Some want a democracy, others want an Islamic state. The differences between us weaken us.” He urged Bayyoush to tell the story of the latest civil dispute — over cigarette smoking. Recently, the Nusra Front circulated a paper in Kafranbel’s tobacco shops saying that smoking was against Islam. Bayyoush, who, like Fares, smokes with the relish of a man who faces a death more immediate than cancer, published a treatise against the Qaeda-linked group on Facebook, saying that the Free Syrian Army was the only legitimate authority in Kafranbel. It worked, Bayyoush claimed. I asked how he knew. “I have spies inside Nusra, and they told me,” he said. Supposing this was another joke, I laughed. “No,” he looked puzzled. “I really have spies.”

“Three years ago, America could have saved thousands of lives,” Bayyoush went on. To them, what they needed seemed simple in hindsight: anti-aircraft missiles, airstrikes against Assad, a no-fly zone. All of these options would have offered potential solutions. Their model for U.S. intervention was Libya, where airstrikes in support of the opposition helped to depose Qaddafi. Later the country descended into civil war. Fares acknowledged that Libya was hardly a success story, yet at least, he said, the United States had intervened to protect the Libyan people. In Syria, Assad was free to systematically imprison and kill the moderate leaders the United States was now looking for. “One by one, they were disappeared,” he said.

“Can I speak?” said Hamada, who is with the Fifth Regiment of the Free Syrian Army. “I told the Americans I met in Jordan: ‘If you help us, there will be no extremism in Syria at all. If you’re too late, there will be a time when

neither you nor we will have any control.' ” According to a senior retired U.S. military leader, who asked not to be named because he is no longer in the service, the delay in backing the Free Syrian Army led to the death of moderate military leaders. “If we had helped those people earlier, it could’ve gone differently,” he said. “A lot of the good leaders are dead now. They’ve been caught between rocks and hard places and ground into dust.”

The recent strikes against ISIS in Syria frustrated the Free Syrian Army commanders on two counts. First, unlike that of the United States, the F.S.A.'s primary foe was the regime. “The regime has launched chemical attacks and many more massacres than ISIS has,” Bayyoush said. Second, they had been warning the United States against the growth of ISIS for more than a year. “A year and a half ago, ISIS started activating cells,” Hamada said. “If America had helped us in the beginning, there would be no ISIS.” But the growth of ISIS wasn’t simply America’s fault. The Free Syrian Army bore its own responsibility. “These extremist groups formed because we were weak within the Free Syrian Army,” he said.

The question of whether and when to arm the Syrian opposition has emerged as a politically charged debate between President Obama and Hillary Rodham Clinton, the former secretary of state. Clinton claims that she pushed for intervention and that Obama refused; Obama denies this. (Early in the Syrian conflict, the White House decided against military intervention, in part for fear that weapons supplied to “reliable” Free Syrian Army commanders might fall into the hands of other militias not vetted by the United States.) Although the private conversation between Obama and Clinton remains contested, Obama’s public remarks about the opposition being “former farmers or teachers or pharmacists” didn’t improve relations between the United States and their potential allies within the Free Syrian Army. “The opposition can’t be dismissed because they’re all a bunch of farmers and accountants and bookkeepers,” the retired U.S. military official said. “You ought to read what the French generals, including Lafayette, wrote back home about Americans they had to turn into soldiers to beat the redcoats.”

At the same time, extremist groups like ISIS were buoyed by money as

much by ideology. “If you have money, you can create any group you want,” Bayyoush said, “No one can match salaries from \$600 a month. If I could pay that, ISIS fighters would join me.”

Many Syrian activists work out of Turkey, using teahouses in the Turkish border town of Gaziantep as offices. Fares comes to town only every few months to poke his head into the headquarters of the NGOs that support him and to check on friends struggling in exile. One evening, Fares held court at Karanfil, a Kurdish teahouse in Gaziantep’s old city. In the courtyard, the tiled floors and walls magnified the sound of water running through a small fountain and the clack of backgammon checkers moving against a board.

At one cloth-covered table, Fares greeted his friend Wassim Mukdad, a 29-year-old Syrian doctor wearing Texas and board shorts, his long hair pulled back in a ponytail and fastened with a yellow baby clip. Fares wanted to hear how he was faring in Turkey, but the real point of the meeting was to listen to Mukdad play the oud. Fares played, too, but not, he said, “like Wassim.” (After ISIS destroyed Fares’s oud during the attack on the radio station, Syrian-American friends bought him a new one.)

Mukdad picked up the oud and began to sing: “How do you like to die citizens? By sniper or by bomb?”

Fares laughed. This is the *comedia sauda* — in Arabic, the black comedy — that he loves. The two friends compared tactics to outwit interrogators. “I was tortured just like every other person in every other story,” Mukdad said. In prison, the other prisoners taught him to survive: Make up a complicated story with lots of erroneous details and stick to it no matter what. The second you change, they’ll keep you inside forever.

Mukdad and his Kurdish girlfriend, Berivan Ahmad, 24, lived among 150,000 people in the besieged refugee camp of Yarmouk, on the edge of Damascus, where the Free Syrian Army had battled government forces. Hundreds of people starved to death around them. “One kilo of rice cost \$70,” he said. As one of nine doctors, he shared a plate of rice with four people each day. In Yarmouk, he watched ISIS mushroom from eight men to more than 250 fighters as army defectors and others joined the well-funded jihadis in

exchange for money and food. About a year ago, ISIS arrested Mukdad because he was Ismaili, a branch of Shia. While waiting for them to carry out his sentence of beheading, he had an idea. Without arguing over who was a true believer and who wasn't, he simply repeated, "There is no God but God, and Mohammed is his prophet" — the statement of faith that declared him a Muslim. The low-level ISIS fighters, confounded, weren't sure that they could kill this believer. When staff members — doctors, nurses and even laundry women — at the hospital inside the camp threatened to strike if he wasn't released, ISIS complied.

"They saved me," he said.

After ISIS released him, Mukdad decided to give a concert in the camp, singing: "I'm not an infidel. Starvation is the infidel. I'm not an infidel. War is the infidel."

Days after the concert, his patients came to him and said, "Doctor, flee."

As he finished talking, Fares said, "You need to record these songs."

"I've called radio stations here, but they're not interested," Mukdad said.

"Come to Syria and record it in my studio."

Mukdad shook his head. "It says Shia on my ID card," he said. "It's no joke. Too many people want me dead."

By the time Fares slumped in a beige chair in his Turkish hotel room and logged onto his Facebook page, it was 1 a.m. Within seconds, a list of chats from fellow activists, dumb jokes and interview requests appeared.

Many Syrian activists have several online identities: Having a pro-Assad page and a pro- ISIS page is a way to stay safe. If you're stopped at a checkpoint, for example, you can prove your allegiance by showing the right ID. Fares's email address is a fake American name, but he didn't choose it for security. "I was naughty," he said. "I did it to meet girls." Fares learned English before the revolution began by posing online as a man from Indiana. His Skype avatar is a flaming skull. (Beneath the image on Skype, a tagline reads, "I have a dream.")

Over the past four years, Fares has met many journalists who have come through Syria, including James Foley, the American freelance journalist

captured and beheaded by ISIS. After Foley was murdered, Fares dedicated a banner to him. It read: “James Foley’s will to expose Assad and ISIS pushed him to sacrifice his blood to enlighten Obama’s vague vision. Humanity is proud of James.”

Among the photos in his Facebook archive, three snapshots stand out. They belong to three medical students who were among 21 boys from Kafranbel studying at the University of Aleppo until earlier this year. “The regime arrested all 21 in January because they were from our town,” Fares said. The three in the school photos were tortured to death. On April 23, he told me, their mutilated bodies were sent back to their families with a warning: “If you publish photos of these bodies on Facebook, we will kill the other 18.”

Fares’s banners often try to link people all over the world in similarly impossible situations. One was addressed to the family of Trayvon Martin: “Martin family! The Syrians are the best who know what it’s like to lose loved ones by immune criminals.” Another, written in Arabic and marked XXX, includes a drawing of what looks like a sperm. “This one is about the impotence of the coalition,” Fares said. “It’s for adults.” Still another, on the occasion of Robin Williams’s death, quoted the actor playing the genie in the film “Aladdin”: “To be free. Such a thing would be greater than all the magic and all the treasures in all the world. RIP Robin Williams.”

“I always wanted to go to America,” Fares said. “Now I have a two-year visa, and I want to stay in Syria.”

Eliza Griswold translated “I Am the Beggar of the World: Landays From Contemporary Afghanistan.”

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