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**Springtime for Obama and Afghanistan
Sidetracked
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During his stay at the White House, George W. Bush accomplished what Adolph Hitler could only dream about doing - bringing the American economy to a standstill. My friend Bob just told me that there are now actual tent cities forming up outside of Sacramento, CA, and that the people there call them "Bushvilles".

If you could pick through the ruins of the American economy, one of the main artifacts you would find would be the pork barrels left over from the invasion of Afghanistan. It's gonna be interesting to see what Obama is going to do with the Afghanistan disaster he has inherited from Bush, Cheney and a Republican Congress full of Dittoheads.

Obama is now sending 17,000 additional troops to Afghanistan - but will that strategy work? Here's my opinion on the subject: It's all going to depend on how those troops are used.

When the Marines in Anbar province in Iraq finally stopped shooting everything in sight and went to work helping the locals to rebuild Anbar's infrastructure, economy, healthcare and educational systems instead, the results were immediate and obvious. This policy worked.

Yesterday on TV, the video footage that accompanied a news segment on our withdrawal from Iraq showed U.S. soldiers firing away at miscreants. That's bad reporting. The TV station must have just sent some page down to get this out-of-date footage from their storage vaults. They shoulda' shown the current reality instead, wherein the U.S. military's main task right now is to help get Iraq's schools, hospitals, power lines, agricultural programs and water systems back on line after Bush and his Dittoheads wantonly destroyed them.

And that's what should be going on in Afghanistan right now as well. In fact, that's what should

have been going on in Afghanistan (and Iraq) all along. When I was in Kabul a while ago, I talked with both Afghans and Americans - and they all agreed with me on this point. "We offered the Bush administration a series of workable plans and ideas for community-building in Afghanistan and they told us no," said one US-AID worker, speaking off the record. "The Bush people told us flat-out that they wanted the American money supply in Afghanistan to go for weapons and roads only." Why only weapons and roads? Because that's where the pork for all Bush's friends comes from.

One Afghan I talked with told me that, "The U.S. used to pay me to perform my job as a road-repair specialist - and I did it well. But then the U.S. policy switched around 2005 and they started hiring American contractors only to do my type of job. But then the contractor turns around and hires ME to do the exact same job - only he pays me half of what I was getting before and pockets the rest for himself."

Another Afghan told me that he was forced to grow opium poppies because "the Americans support the warlords and the warlords want us to grow poppies - and so we grow them. We would rather grow other crops if we had protection from the warlords and markets to sell them in. But we don't." Where's the pork in disarming the warlords and growing tomatoes instead? There isn't any.

Many Afghans I spoke with are hungry for education for their children. Education is highly respected in Afghanistan. But there has been very little money channeled toward schools in Afghanistan for the same reason there has been very little money channeled toward schools in America. Where's the pork in paying teachers decent salaries? There is none.

"We hate the Taliban," said another Afghan I met, "but we have no choice but to do what they say or to chose them. The Americans are not offering us any alternative except for military solutions. If we were stronger economically, people would willingly turn the Taliban away. As it is now, however, we cannot afford to do that."

So. Bush had his "Springtime for Afghanistan" - and now it's Obama's turn. How can Obama succeed where Bush failed? It is my opinion that perhaps Afghanistan can still be turned around - by the same methods that helped stabilize Iraq. Sure Iraq is a different story because of the oil money the Iraqi government has to work with, but the principal is the same. Fewer guns, more butter.

By putting the emphasis on community-building in Afghanistan and with an eye on stabilizing the country and then getting the hell out rather than continuing to stage an endless string of pointless shoot-em-ups, America might just stand a chance of defeating the Taliban.

Anyway, these are my recommendations and I would hope that Obama might consider following them. As things stand now, it might not be such a hot idea to send even more foreign troops into a country where its citizens truly resent foreign occupation. But. If you ARE going to send in the troops, you owe it to the Afghan population, the troops themselves and the American people to maximize their effectiveness.

And if the President doesn't know how to begin to establish successful community-building mechanisms in Afghanistan, I happen to know a few Marine lieutenant-colonels, some State Department agricultural experts and a couple of Marine battalions in Iraq who do. I have seen them in action and these men and women do a good job. So. Mr. President. Please let me know if you want me to send you their names and e-mail addresses so that you can punch them into your BlackBerry.

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